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Minor Archaeological Services Call-Off Contract Ravenscraig Castle, Kirkcaldy

Installation of a new timber staircase. Watching
Brief, March 2019

Report No. [HES-PIC032-2019-01](#)

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Minor Archaeological Services Call-Off Contract

Ravensraig Castle, Kirkcaldy

**Installation of a new timber staircase,
Watching brief, March 2019**

Report No. HES-PIC032-2019-01

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out by CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA) in March 2019 during ground-works associated with the installation of a new timber staircase at Ravenscraig Castle, Kirkcaldy (NGR: NT 29051 92499) (Fig. 1), a Property in Care in the Guardianship of Historic Environment Scotland (HES). The work was commissioned by Historic Environment Scotland as part of the Minor Archaeological Services Call-off Contract.

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) dated 10th April 2014 was produced by Kirkdale Archaeology for this programme of works. The WSI was designed to fulfil the terms of the Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) (Case ID 201307095, Index No. SM 90244) and was agreed with Historic Environment Scotland (HES) in advance of the work taking place.

1.2 Background

HES were proposing to replace a previous wooden staircase giving access to the base of a rock-cut ditch (Fig. 2) along the northern side of Ravenscraig Castle, with a new wooden staircase set on re-excavated and enlarged versions of the original six footings. This programme of works required the removal of the existing concrete-set steel footings along with minor enlargement works where required in order to accommodate the replacement footings.

Ravenscraig Castle dates to the mid-15th and is located on a narrow promontory above the Firth of Forth. This promontory has steep rocky cliffs protecting the castle to the south, east and west, while on the northern side a deep rock-cut ditch separates the castle from the adjoining ground. The castle itself consists of two D-plan towers linked by a lower two storey block. An entrance in the centre of the linking block leads through a vaulted entrance passage to a courtyard where the foundations of a number of ancillary buildings extend seaward along the top of the promontory. It is thought to be the first Castle in Scotland to be systematically planned for fire-arm defence.

Work on the construction of this castle was initially undertaken in c.1460 on behalf of Mary of Gueldres (wife of James II), but was halted following her death in 1463. The castle was then granted by James III to William Sinclair (Earl of Orkney and Caithness) in 1470 in partial recompense for him quitclaiming his rights to the Earldom of Orkney. Following further construction work, the castle was to become the principal residence of the Sinclair family in Fife, later passing on to the Sinclair-Erskine family through marriage before being sold in 1898. More recently, it served as a munitions store during the First World War before being passed into state care in 1955. It was originally scheduled in 1935, with rescheduling taking place in 1999 to clarify the extent of the protected area.

Previous work relating to the rock-cut ditch into which the stairs will give access was carried out in 1949 (note AMH/90244/13) when the ditch was cleared to bedrock and a bridge installed to give access to the castle. A detailed sketch by MacGibbon and

Ross dating to the late 19th century suggests that prior to the ditch being cleared, access to the castle had been via a solid causeway (where the ditch had been backfilled) approaching the entrance at an angle from the north-west. A further programme of stone clearance appears to have been carried out in 1964, and a note (AMH/90244/13) from 1973 makes reference to a flight of timber stairs within the ditch.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of the programme of archaeological works were:

- To conduct an archaeological watching brief during the removal of the original six staircase footings and on any enlargement works required for the replacement footings within the same locations.
- To report on the results of the fieldwork.

2. WORKING METHODS

2.1 General

All work was conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) 'Code of Conduct' (CIfA 2014), and other relevant CIfA Standards and Guidance.

2.2 Watching Brief

Six foundation holes each measuring c.0.6m by 0.6m were excavated to the surface of the bedrock (Fig. 3) at a depth of c.0.4m in order to remove the existing footings and to accommodate the replacement footings. This programme of works was carried out using hand tools and under the constant supervision of the watching brief archaeologist.

All excavation and on-site recording was carried out according to standard CFA procedures and by completing standard CFA record forms.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

When this watching brief was undertaken in March 2019, the previous wooden stairs had been removed, leaving just six steel footings set in concrete. Two of these footings were set at the top of the rock-cut ditch on its northern side, with the remaining four located at the base of the ditch. These footings were largely concealed by a layer of grass which was present at the base of the ditch and along much of its northern side.

The original staircase footings had been cut into the underlying bedrock to a depth varying between 0.1m at the base of the ditch (Figs. 5 and 6) to 0.3m at the top of the ditch (Fig. 4) where the topsoil was shallower. Two drill-holes were identified at the base of each hole (Figs. 5 and 6) where the retaining bolts for the steelwork had been located. Each of these drill-holes had a depth of c.0.1m. The excavation of the foundation holes was terminated when bedrock was reached, giving each hole a depth of c.0.4m.

The deposits within the base of the ditch consisted of c.0.25-0.35m of turf and topsoil **(001)** directly overlying bedrock **(002)**, while on the bank at the top of the ditch they consisted of 0.1-0.2m of turf and topsoil **(001)** directly overlying bedrock **(002)**.

There were no features, deposits or artefacts of archaeological significance identified.

Numbers in bold refer to contexts, a full list of which is contained in Appendix 2.

4. CONCLUSION

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by CFA Archaeology Ltd during ground-works for a replacement wooden staircase within a rock-cut ditch at Ravenscraig Castle (SM 90244), Kirkcaldy. No features, deposits or artefacts of archaeological significance were identified.

The project archive, comprising all CFA record sheets, maps and reports, will be deposited with the National Record for the Historic Environment (NRHE) and copies of reports will be lodged with Fife Council Sites and Monuments Record.

A summary statement will be submitted for publication in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland* (Appendix 3) and will also be reported on through *OASIS Scotland*.

APPENDIX 1: Photographic Register

Photo Number	Contexts/Description	Facing
1	Pre-excavation shot of staircase location	North
2	Working shot showing turf removed	South
3	Working shot showing turf removed	North
4	General shot of castle	SW
5	Rock-cut ditch looking towards staircase location	West
6	Footing for previous staircase following removal	N/A
7	Staircase footings following excavation	North
8	Staircase footings at base of ditch	North
9	NW foundation hole following excavation	North
10	NE foundation hole following excavation	North
11	Central western foundation hole following excavation	North
12	Central eastern foundation hole following excavation	North
13	SW foundation hole following excavation	North
14	SE foundation hole following excavation	North
15	Staircase footings following excavation	South
16	Staircase footings at base of ditch	South
17-22	Various general shots of castle and surrounding area	Various

APPENDIX 2: Context Register

Context No.	Type	Description
001	Topsoil	Grey-brown sandy-silt 0.1-0.35m deep
002	Bedrock	Orangey/white beige sandstone

APPENDIX 3: Discovery and Excavation in Scotland Entry

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Fife Council
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Ravenscraig Castle, Kirkcaldy
PROJECT CODE:	MINA17
PARISH:	Kirkcaldy and Dysart
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Magnus Kirby
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	CFA Archaeology Ltd
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Archaeological Watching Brief
NMRS NO(S):	NT29SE 11
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Castle (15 th Century)
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	N/A
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NT 29051 92499
START DATE (this season)	March 2019
END DATE (this season)	March 2019
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)	None
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	An archaeological watching brief was carried out by CFA Archaeology Ltd during ground-works for a replacement wooden staircase within a rock-cut ditch at Ravenscraig Castle (SM 90244), Kirkcaldy. No features, deposits or artefacts of archaeological significance were identified.
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	None
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Historic Environment Scotland
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	CFA Archaeology Ltd, Old Engine House, Eskmills Park, Musselburgh, EH21 7PQ.
EMAIL ADDRESS:	cfa@cfa-archaeology.co.uk
ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	Archive to be deposited with NRHE, reports lodged with SMR.



Key:

- PIC 032 Boundary
- Watching Brief Area

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Title:
Location map and site plan

Project:
Ravensraig Castle

Client:
Historic Environment Scotland

Scale at A3:
1:400

Drawn by: SW	Checked: MJ	Date: 12/07/2019
Report No: 3848	Fig. No: 1	



Fig. 2: General location shot showing rock-cut ditch



Fig. 3: Post-excitation shot showing foundation holes for staircase footings

Project:
Ravenscraig Castle



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Fig. 4: NW foundation hole at top of rock-cut ditch



Fig. 5: Central eastern foundation hole at base of rock-cut ditch

Project:
Ravenscraig Castle



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Report No: 3848		Fig. No: 4 - 5



Fig. 6: SE foundation hole at base of rock-cut ditch

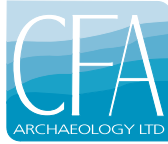
Project:
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Report No: 3848		Fig. No: 6



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