

Site **Dundonald Castle**

N.G.R NS 3636 3451

Project Description

Monitoring of excavation of floodlight cable trenches along S and E of Castle and Barmkin exterior, and within parts of the Barmkin.

Report

The results of the excavation are described in terms of the following trench portions:

A-C This proved to be the most interesting stretch of trench, as it covered parts of the pronounced artificially enhanced earthwork/building platform immediately W of the Tower House and S Annex complex, running to a point on the earthwork immediately S of the S Annex, suspected to be buried evidence for the 13th-century Castle complex. Where the trench cut the S wall of one of the buildings lying on or near the W earthwork, evidence of demolished drystone masonry was revealed. The wall appears to have been of earth, timber and rubble construction, now flattened and graded, showing today as a low bank up to 2.5m wide, standing to a height of 30-40cm max. The required depth for the cable trench was only 30cm, and so little damage was incurred by this feature. An iron arrowhead was recovered close to the S edge of the wall. Elsewhere, topsoil was removed, with no indication at this depth of the true nature of the prominent earthwork to the S of the S Annex (point A).

A-B This section of trench ran roughly parallel to the exterior S Barmkin wall. Topsoil was revealed to a depth of 30cm. However, at point B there were indications of a drystone structure - a probable wall, extending from the S face of the S Barmkin wall and crossing the cable trench in a N-S alignment.

B-G A substantial depth of topsoil and humic material was revealed, extending below the required 30cm depth. No features were revealed.

G-F, F-E-D, E-J The cable trench cut older archaeological trench backfills in these areas.

H-IA short length of the cable trench lay to the N of the N Barmkin wall, featuring mainly topsoil and humus to a depth of 30cm, but with burnt debris at its base in some areas, particularly shale fragments (see finds).

For the vast majority of this exercise, only disturbed ground was affected. However, it is now clear that suspected buildings/wall-lines associated with earlier occupation of the hill survive to a large extent on at least the S elements of the pronounced earthwork to the W of the present tower. The evidence thus far suggests non mortar-bonded construction, and provisionally resembles earth and timber fabric, with drystone revetment, a form which could equally relate to the Prehistoric or Early Christian settlement, or the first 12th-century

fortification. It would be worthwhile to survey this area of the castle in some detail, as many features are now visible now the security fence and scaffold have been removed. The likelihood exists that the defences were augmented by later occupants, and that they are of some antiquity, infilling a natural scarp in the bedrock itself. The potential for archaeological survival may be constrained by the area available for occupation, but the archaeological remains may survive to a substantial depth away the top of the slope. The short trench to the N of the Barmkin wall revealed probable redeposited evidence of Prehistoric/Early Christian activity, in the form of industrial debris from the working of shale for artefact manufacture. The recent larger-scale excavations (Kirkdale Archaeology 1988 onwards) retrieved numerous shale artefacts, including bracelet fragments etc.

Finds

Socketed Iron Arrowhead / Projectile Point / blade, measuring 106mm long + 34mm shaft (recovered separately) (section A-C)

Iron file, measuring 300mm in length, max width at shoulder = 28mm, tapering to a blunt point 14mm wide (section A-B)

3 fragments of worked lignite (section H-I)