

Site Craigmillar Castle Trenches 1-3, August 1996

N.G.R NT 2882 7088

Project Description Site investigation prior to septic tank and services installation

Three trial pits were excavated by hand within the walled area immediately north of the northern limits of the castle, from 5 - 6th August 1996. This area was generally towards the north-west of the castle complex, and was characterised by a line of six sycamores, planted on a low artificial terrace, roughly parallel to the north façade of the castle.

The three trenches were located in order to characterise the archaeological potential of the area in general, as well as to investigate the state and extent of the present waste-disposal system. The latter comprised a manhole with service pipes running approx. north-south, running through the North Enclosure Wall of the castle, serving the present toilet block (now removed).

Report

TRENCH 1

The trench was dug over an area 12m north-south x 0.5m max. east-west, and was located to cut across a concrete and brick cistern/collection tank, with a small inspection hole on its surface. The tank itself emptied via an iron pipe, which ran for approx. 1m before turning north-eastwards, running out of the trench. For most of its length, the trench was dug to a maximum depth of 0.5-1m (deepest beside the tank), and due to the construction of the sewage services, the ground was disturbed for up to 8m of the overall length. The exceptions to this general profile were discovered at the extreme north and south ends of the trench respectively. At the north end, evidence for a low drystone wall was revealed (F107), comprising a low structure aligned east-west, apparently revetting the terrace to the south, and standing to a maximum height of 15cm, being 0.5m wide. At the southern end of the trench, a small area of clay and sandstone was noted, lying against the north castle wall, truncated by modern services to the south, and by the cut for the present septic tank. This feature (F104) appears to represent a pad - arguably the earliest feature in Trench I, which may reveal traces of the construction cut for the north wall of the castle itself.

TRENCH 2

This trench lay to the west of Trench 1, on the highest point of the terrace, towards the external north-west corner of the castle enclosure (as defined by the post-Reformation Kirk [1687]). The trench measured 1 x 2m, with the longest axis lying north-south, and was intended to establish the depth of the bedrock below the present ground surface. The area in general showed clear signs of having been levelled up, obscuring the lower elements of the north face of the Kirk north wall. A linear feature, comprising whin/sandstone blocks (up to 30 x 20cm in size) was revealed (F202) running east-west through the middle of the trench.

This proved to be a dump of rubble laid in immediately before the terrace was constructed. This was in turn associated with a metallated surface of concrete and hardcore, lying immediately to the north (F203-4). Bedrock was revealed towards the south end of the trench at a depth of 70cm, displaying clear signs of weathering. Immediately to the north of this outcropping was a metallated surface, comprising set angular stones running off to the east and west (F205). F205 represents an undated phase of levelling over the uneven bedrock surface, which rises towards the north-west corner of the castle enclosure, and may represent access around the complex.

TRENCH 3

Trench 3 was located towards the eastern end of the area concerned, lying approx. 7m to the north of the outer north wall. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.2m, and comprised a series of dump deposits and levelling episodes associated with the construction of the terrace. Terrace construction was reflected best by two deposits (F301, F302) some 80cm deep, over a generally stone-free soil. This horizon appears to represent the limit of an old ground surface, pre-dating the terrace construction, and itself showing signs of A and B Horizon activity (F303 and F304 respectively). There is a possibility that these deepest deposits had been cultivated, and were part of the field-systems to the north of the castle.

Interpretation

The terrace with its sycamores is a modern feature, dating to some time after 1954 (based on the absence of these features in the guide book of that date). Trenches 2 and 3 revealed evidence, therefore of pre-terrace landscape elements in this area, and confirmed that the bedrock outcropping is highest towards the west of the castle complex. The evidence for metallating in Trench 1 suggests that the bedrock was exposed, and that attempts were made to fill cracks and vagaries in the rock to provide a useful surface, although the date for this is at present uncertain. It was notable that the bedrock is characterised on the northern side of the castle by relatively extensive terraces which drop approx. 1-1.5m gradually towards the north-east. Consequently an old ground surface was encountered in Trench 3 towards the eastern end of the area of investigation, and bedrock was arguably over 0.5m deeper than this. An impression was therefore gained of an area of exposed bedrock and levelling extending perhaps as far eastwards as the blocked door noted in the north enclosure wall of the castle, before dropping again to a terrace which has at some stage seen cultivation.

Finds

No finds were retained

Contexts

Context	Description
101	Turf and topsoil
102	Fill of cut for cistern
103	Cut for cistern
104	Possible clay pad
105	Fill of trench for modern pipe
106	Cut for modern pipe
107	Drystone structure
201	Turf and topsoil
202	Whin/s'stone dump
203	Levelling hardcore
204	Concrete platform
205	S'stone surface on bedrock
301	Turf and topsoil
302	Terrace levelling
303	A-Horizon of cultivated deposit
304	B-Horizon of cultivated deposit