

**Site**        **Dumbarton Castle**

**N.G.R**        NS 4000 7446

**Project Description**        Watching Brief & Excavation

A watching brief and small excavation were conducted at Dumbarton Castle over five days from 16-20.12.96. The works involved the clearance of 300 mm of floor deposits in the 18th-century powder magazine, in advance of the installation of a new floor, and the opening of the magazine exhibition to the public. In addition, a small trench 600 x 600 mm was excavated to the W of the 18th-century Governor's House, in advance of the installation of a moveable gate-post.

### **Report**

Initially the smaller trench was opened (Trench 1), 900 mm to the W of the Governor's House. The current surface deposit of sand and gravel (001) removed after 50 mm onto a darker bedding material with larger gravel inclusions (002). Both 001 and 002 represented levelling to form the modern surface. Beneath 002 was a thick deposit of light brown silt and sand with inclusions of weathered dolerite and gravels. This deposit (003) extended to the maximum depth of the trench (700-750 mm), and represented the original back-filling and levelling of the area after the building of the Governor's House and the King George Battery (1735). Into 003 was cut a lead pipe, some 60-80 mm in diameter at a depth of 450 mm. No cut was visible, but 001 and 002 were undisturbed over this feature, and post-dated its installation. Beneath 003 the remains of a capped drain (004-006) were revealed, running approx. N-S through the trench. This feature ran parallel to, and may have formerly served the Governor's House. No datable finds were revealed, however. The drain comprised well-mortared dolerite blocks on the E side and a single red sandstone slab on the W, with an irregular flattened dolerite slab collapsing into the channel so defined.

Concurrent with the excavation of the small trench to the W of the Governor's House, clearance work began in the Powder Magazine (Trench 2), situated at the second highest point of the rock, known as 'The Beak'. The building measured 4.4 x 5.2 m internally, and was erected in 1748, replacing an earlier magazine on the site. The in situ floor deposit (007) comprised random brick rubble and mortar-rich sand. The bricks were relatively modern, being frogged and uniformly sized, and may have derived from the demolition of a brick structure within the castle, or from the large expanse of demolished brick buildings on Victoria Road, running to the Rock from the town itself. The deposit represents relatively modern levelling within the powder magazine to create a surface commensurate with the level of the threshold in the entrance doorway. The original sprung timber floor would have lain some 200 mm below the present surface, resting on slight ledges protruding from the bases of the interior long walls, which were founded directly on the bedrock. Deposit 007 represents a

period post-dating the use of the building to store explosives, as it blocks the vents in the long walls necessary to maintain a damp-free environment internally. Finds included occasional Fe nails, and three larger Fe bars. None of the finds were removed from the site

### **Interpretation**

The drain feature (004-006) in Trench 1 indicates that such features may survive beneath the 1735 levelling material (003). It is of particular interest that the levelling medium may even overlie the remains of the medieval gatehouse and nether bailey.

The brick infill (007) of the powder magazine may relate to the demolition of a brick structure on the castle rock, possibly a wartime installation - the magazine currently supports the transmitter for Radio Festival Dumbarton, and would have been a useful location for a radar mast during wartime.

### **Contexts**

- 001 Sand & gravel surface
- 002 Bedding for 001
- 003 Levelling for 1735 King George Battery
- 004 N-S stretch of mortared masonry, drain side
- 005 Single sandstone slab set on edge, drain side
- 006 Single dolerite slab collapsing into the drain channel
- 007 Brick infill of powder magazine

### **Finds**

No finds were removed from the site