

**Site**        **Edinburgh Castle : Palace - King's Dining Room**

**N.G.R**

**Project Description**

In advance of the restoration work on the interior of the King's Dining Room at Edinburgh Castle, a desk-based study was made of the surviving plans kept at Historic Scotland and the National Library of Scotland, Map Annexe. It was hoped that cartographic evidence could be used to infer the former positions and relative dates of internal features. In addition, the Accounts of the Masters of Works was consulted, providing general information relating to the building works undertaken after 1615.

**Report**

The Palace block, in which the King's Dining Room is located, was erected during the 15th and 16th centuries, replacing David's Tower as the main royal residence within the castle. The building was much modified during the early 17th century, in advance of the homecoming of King James VI, in 1617. The Accounts of the Masters of Works states that:

The lower portion of the [palace], dating from the 15th and 16th centuries, was allowed to remain, but above ground level the structure was almost entirely rebuilt, the work evidently being finished in time for the Royal visit of 1617. (vol. i; 354)

The new build is clearly distinguishable in the external E elevation, being of fine ashlar build from first floor level upwards (i.e. over the King's Dining Room). It is possible however that some of the stonework within the King's Dining Room relates to the earlier Palace. The interior of Palace, as it would have appeared in 1617 during the royal visit, does not survive in any substantial form today. Indeed:

The interior...has been virtually gutted, and apart from a few stone fireplaces and some fragments of painted decoration, it now retains almost none of the elaborate fittings to which the accounts bear witness. (vol. i; 354)

However, despite the lack of direct surviving internal details, the general character of the Palace interior can be partly inferred from the Accounts, and from comparisons with other buildings of a similar date, where internal features have fared somewhat better.

***1.1***

***17TH-CENTURY TIMBERWORK***

Timber panelling along internal walls is characteristic of the early 17th century, and survives at numerous buildings of that date in Scotland. Specifically for the Palace at Edinburgh Castle, the Accounts of the Masters of Works feature payments for large amounts of nails,

most of which would have been used in the roof, but a large number of which would also have been required for the internal timber panelling.

The frequent payments made in the accounts for the provision of knappald and wainscot suggest the installation of timber linings covering all or part of the wall surface. These might vary a good deal in character, often comprising no more than simple close boarding or panels set within moulded frames, but occasionally incorporating ornamental detail... (vol. i; lxxiii)

An account for wrightwork carried out at Edinburgh Castle in 1623-4...may be taken as typical of those submitted to the master of works...and illustrates the care that was lavished upon such fittings as cupboards, beds, doors and window "broddies". These latter commonly took the form of half-shutters covering the lower and unglazed portion of a window opening; the shutter boards were frequently decorated, and those carved by William Wallace for the Palace..but now destroyed, no doubt resembled recorded examples from other Edinburgh buildings (vol. i; lxxiii - lxxiv)

A sample entry, one of several similar, is given below:

*28th Aprile 1617*

*Provisiounis*

*Item to Williame Wallace carver for making the haill muldis to the plaisterers  
and for carveing of dyvers window brodis      £8 (vol. i; 8)*

The 17th-century panelling has left virtually no archaeological trace, although the confusion of dooks visible in the internal elevations today may belong in part to the original panelling (most date to the 18th century and later, however).

## **1.2 17TH-CENTURY PLASTERWORK**

Also typical of the earlier 17th century were moulded plaster ceilings and details (e.g. heraldic devices). The Accounts record that:

It is known....that plaster ceilings were erected in the principle apartments within the Palace at Edinburgh Castle in 1617, but nothing of them remains today. Some of the moulds employed at the Palace, however, were brought from Kellie Castle, Fife, where they had evidently been used in the construction of a contemporary ceiling, and this fortunately survives to give at least some impression of the lost plasterwork at Edinburgh (vol. i; lxxiv)

It is very unlikely that any archaeological evidence will survive of the former plaster ceiling within the King's Dining Room, but it is reasonably clear that such a ceiling would indeed have been in place for the royal visit.



## 2.0 *THE CARTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE*

Plans featuring Edinburgh Castle are known from the 16th-century, but those with enough detail to reveal internal features within the buildings are less numerous.

### 2.1 *THE 1719 BOARD OF ORDNANCE SURVEY*

The first detailed record was made during the 1719 survey undertaken by the Board of Ordnance (Fig. 2). These plans are now held at the National Library of Scotland and at Historic Scotland. As these plans post-date the royal visit by more than a century, it is likely that the interior ground floor of the Palace had seen at least some alteration over the intervening period, and the plans of 1719 represent a composite of all changes enacted from 1615 until the early 18th century. That said, the 1719 survey of the King's Dining Room and Ante Chamber reveals that the internal space was further subdivided, with a 'Barrack Master's Store Room' at the NW end of the room, separated from the entrance passage by a thin screen wall, or a timber partition. This room was accessed from the east via a doorway in the eastern screen/wall. Window W3 is not shown on the 1719 survey, and may have been panelled over at ground floor level at this time (it is likely that the brick build at the base of this window was not intended to be seen, in any case). Door D2 was in place, however, providing access to the Lion's Den and David's Tower. At the end of the entrance passage, leading southwards from door D1 was a further room, indicated on the 1719 plans as being empty, defined to the north by the south screen/wall of the Barrack Master's Store Room and to the south by the present cross-wall separating the King's Dining Room from the Ante Chamber. The central chamber features the 15th-century fireplace (FP1), and window W4 is shown in place. The third and final room in the 1719 layout was 'The King's Lodgings', occupying the present-day Ante Chamber. This was accessed from the north via a doorway (D4) at the west end of the cross-wall, and featured two further perpendicular timber screens at its western end. Door D5 is not indicated on the 1719 plans, and may have been blocked off at this time. Fireplace FP2 is also absent from the 1719 survey, probably due to survey inaccuracy, rather than to its actual absence, however. The former external wall at the south end of the Ante Chamber appears to have retained its original thickness in the 1719 plans, and is breached by a single door at its eastern end (D8). D7 is not indicated on the plan, and may post-date the 1719 survey, as does D6 linking the Ante Chamber with the rooms to the west, and also absent from the plan.

### 2.2 *THE 1745 TARRANT SURVEY*

The next detailed survey for which records survive is the 1745 conducted by Tarrant (Fig. 3). In the 26 years since the first survey, it is apparent that numerous changes had been enacted on the ground floor interior. Firstly, the subdivisions to the north of the King's Dining Room were removed, and the entire west and south walls were panelled to take storage racks for military equipment, as depicted on a cross-section of 1745, showing the south wall with its timber shelving extending from floor to ceiling. The room was still accessed via doorway D1, but the door in the south wall (D4) had by now been blocked, and ground floor

communication between the King's Dining Room and the Ante Chamber was no longer possible. This is perhaps unsurprising when one considers the relative rôles of the two chambers. The King's Dining Room functioned as a 'Storeroom for Small Arms', whereas the Ante Chamber was given over to 'Sutler's Rooms'. The latter also featured a north-south screen at its western end, and doorway D6 was by now open, linking the Sutlery with the rooms to the west. Alongside the panelling in the arms store, windows W1 and W3, and door D2 appear to have been panelled over, or screened in some way, to produce an enclosed space in the King's Dining Room.

### 2.3 *CHANGES IN THE 19TH CENTURY*

Two plans of 1836 (Figs. 4 and 5) indicate proposed changes to be made to the internal ground floor of the Palace at that time. The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (1852, Fig. 6) indicates which of these proposals were taken up by the middle of the century. With the exception of doorways D3, D4 and D7 the access and fenestration of the ground floor of 1852 is similar to that of today. The site of doorway D3 is shown as an aumbry or shallow closet space, and it seems likely that this feature was later reworked to form the extant door. The south wall of the Ante Chamber retains its original thickness in the 1852 plans, and is still provided with only one door (D8). The cross wall separating the two chambers has a central doorway (D9) on the 1852 survey, the doors at either end having been blocked (although doorway D5 is not shown on any of the previous surveys). The entire internal arrangement of the Palace ground floor is described as a 'Canteen' on the 1852 survey, and the King's Dining Room and Ante Chambers feature internal partitions and furniture appropriate to this function. At the north-west corner of the interior, the screening reflects that which was in place in the 1719 survey, although the enclosed space is now entered from the south, rather than the west, as was the case in the 1719 arrangement.

### 2.4 *PROPOSALS OF 1920*

A plan of 1920 (Fig. 7) details proposed changes to the interior of the King's Dining Room and Ante Chamber. The features along the east wall of both chambers remain unchanged, and the two aumbrys in the east walls are now indicated on the more accurate survey. However, the west wall of the King's Dining Room was apparently to have undergone drastic remodelling, with the insertion of a doorway where the present fireplace now lies (FP1), and with the addition of a further doorway to the south, linking with a staircase to the first floor. Doorway D3 was to be blocked off as part of the remodelling. None of these proposals were enacted, although doorway D9 may have been enlarged at this point. The side doors of the cross-wall (D4 and D5) remained blocked, with only a central arch providing communication between the rooms. Similarly, the south wall of the Ante Chamber features doorway D8 at its eastern end, whereas doorway D7 is not indicated. The former external wall still retains its original thickness as late as 1920. All other internal features appear to have been removed by

1920, or were to be removed as part of the remodelling, and both rooms are shown bereft of any internal screening or partition.

## 2.5

### ***THE 1966 ADDITIONS***

The most recent use of the Ante Chamber was as a self-service canteen, as indicated on a plan of 1966 (Fig. 8). The self-service counter was constructed against the south face of the cross wall, necessitating (if it had not already been enacted) the blocking of the arched opening shown on the 1920 plan (Fig. 7). Access between the two rooms was now via the two side doors (D4 and D5). The King's Dining Room had by now reached its current internal arrangement. The final alterations appear to have been enacted on the original external wall at the south end of the Ante Chamber. All previous plans show this wall as having retained its original thickness, but by 1966 the wall had been narrowed considerably by the insertion of a new door at the west end (D7) and by the reworking of the doorway at the east end (D8). The reworking of D8 may have been an aesthetic consideration, undertaken to preserve symmetry after the insertion of D7. Whatever the intention, D7 appears to represent the latest insertion, dating to around the middle of the 20th century.

### **Interpretation**

The changes enacted on the interior of the King's Dining Room and its associated Ante Chamber relate to changes in use, ranging from a store for arms (18th century) to a soldiers canteen, and finally to a display room for tourists. The surviving internal features (dooks) are in all likelihood related to the later uses of the rooms (i.e. they are unlikely to relate, in any large number, to the original 17th-century panelling). Screening and shelving will have left its mark on the walls of the interior, as will the presence of timber skirting and cornice work. The instalment of modern services has further complicated internal elevations of both chambers. Apart from the numerous dooks, blockings and insertions can be broadly dated according to the first survey on which they appear. Unfortunately, none of the plans consulted were detailed enough to reveal the history of the small chamber at the south-east end of the Ante Chamber, blocked to form a slit window at some point in the past. It is apparent, however, that a door has been in place at the east end of the south wall since 1719 at least, and it may be that the narrow closet was blocked on the insertion of this door. The discover of a fragment from the oriel windows in the blocking material (dating the blocking to before the 1719 survey) supports this view, although the standard of the cartographic record is such that no definitive statement can be made.

### ***REFERENCES***

Imrie, J & Dunbar, J 1982 *Accounts of the Masters of Works for Building and Repairing Royal Castles & Palaces*

***A1.0      APPENDIX 1 : CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES***

Copies of the relevant plans are attached

***A2.0      APPENDIX 2 : SAMPLES OF BRICK RETRIEVED FROM THE KING'S DINGING ROOM***

A single brick was removed from the side of the arch of the cross-wall between the KDR and the ante chamber. A further brick was removed from the brickwork below window W3. It was hoped that specialist comment could be sought from the RCAHMS, and Miles Oglethorpe was approached with this in mind. Unfortunately due to time constraints, no specialist examination has been carried out thus far, and the samples remain in the care of Kirkdale Archaeology.