Site Edinburgh Castle Queen Anne Building

N.G.R NT 2515 7340

Project Description Excavation in advance of service installation and renovations

Report

Kirkdale Archaeology were asked to excavate a trench by hand within the Queen Anne Building (NT 2515 7340), a barracks block of 1708. This structure was known to overlie vaults, probably constructed in the fifteenth century to provide a level surface for the Crown Square, at the summit of the castle rock. Survey had shown there to be a gap of some 2.3 m between the floor of the Queen Anne Building, and the vaults below, and it was hoped that evidence might survive of superstructures earlier than the 1708 block, resting on the fifteenth century substructure. The Queen Anne Building has, until recently, served as the United Services Museum, as it was to be abandoned for this purpose, it was thought that excavation might suggest an appropriate use for a building in such a prominent location in the castle.

The area to be excavated had already had its' concrete removed when the archaeologists arrived, and had been selected for two main reasons: firstly it had to be in the central courtyard of the Queen Anne Building, as there is asbestos to be removed within the building; secondly the presence of both water and gas pipes within the courtyard restricted the available space. A spot in the SW corner of this courtyard had been selected, backing on to both S and W walls, the trench measured some 310 cm N-S, by 240 cm E-W

Prior to excavation a number of phases of construction were evident in both the S and the W walls (see Fig. 1). The S wall (001) has a doorway (004), which has been blocked up by (005), this door was itself a narrowing of arched doorway (002), blocked by (003), which had originally run from the W end of wall (001) (although its' E end was obscured by replacement door (004)), probably matching the wide arched doorway seen in the N wall of the courtyard. These alterations meant that the trench had no relationships with the original wall (001), and its' original door (002). The W wall (008) had a similar, but smaller, arched doorway (021), at the N end of the trench, which had been blocked by (010). Further alterations are visible in these walls, but only those directly affecting the trench have been described.

Concrete surface (012) proved to be 7-8 cm thick, with a layer of underlay 10-15 cm thick, with Tarmac and brick fragments throughout. This overlay three service pipes: (013) an iron pipe running over much of the trench; (014) four lead pipes, cut just

after entering the trench (W end of N section) but with a cut still evident running down W wall (008); and (015) a large iron pipe only just appearing in the E section of the trench, but turning W (into the trench) at its' S end to feed through (006), a crude repair in the S wall just below door blocking (005). These were all cut through (016), a layer of grey- green clay covering the whole trench and some 90 cm thick. As the pipe trenches had generally been backfilled with this material they were often hard to discern, only being apparent due to the presence of brick fragments, contrasting with the lack of finds from (016). This clay deposit evidently sat in a cut (022), with the edges of this cut being apparent against the W, wall, which was shown to have footings (011) below (008), but on a slightly different alignment, stepping out some 20 cm from (008) at its E end, while running under (008) by 5 cm at its' N end. To the S this bonded into wall (007), footings for wall (001), which appeared to be on the same alignment as each other, although at the E end this was obscured by cut (006) taking a service pipe through the wall. While clay (016) and its' cut (022) clearly post-date lower walls (007) and (011), no relationship could be determined between the upper W wall (008) and this clay, due to disturbance by pipe trench (014). To the S (003), the blocking of arch (002), and (004) the replacement doorway overlay (016), showing these alterations to post date this deposit. The material this clay was cut against was (019) a rich midden deposit full of bone, charcoal, shell etc., and producing a small ceramic assemblage, post dating both walls (007) and (011). This material averaged 10 cm thick, but was up to 20 cm, reflecting the deposit below. This proved to be a cobbled surface (020), constructed of irregular basalt chunks, firmly set in a reddish brown clay. An E-W gully runs across this surface, and it was here that midden (019) had reached its' greatest thickness. To both W and S a cut (018) was visible, truncating this surface, some 40 cm wide against the W, wall, 70 cm wide against the S wall, and reaching a maximum of 120 cm wide at the junction of the two. This was filled with (017), a very loose deposit with much stone (both sandstone and basalt), charcoal, shell, mortar, clay etc. throughout. The whole of this feature was taken down some 20 cm, but only on its' S side was it fully excavated, revealing a very steep sided cut, some 80 cm deep which runs under wall (007). This would appear to be a construction trench for the wall, post dating cobbled surface (020), but predating midden deposit (019). An examination of the side of cut (018) showed (020) to consist of cobbles with clay, some 12- 13 cm thick, set in a layer of pure clay 22- 23 cm thick. This then overlay (023), a moderately compact layer of dark brown silt, with basalt chunks and chips, coal, shell charcoal and mortar throughout, averaging some 35 cm thick. This in turn was over (024), a loose deposit consisting mostly of shattered basalt, but with some fine grey silt throughout. Cut (018) bottomed on this

deposit, but a sondage was dug down through this to try and find the upper surface of the vaults below, showing (024) to be some 25 cm thick, and above (026) a compact layer consisting mostly of light-mid brown silty sand, but with some basalt, mortar and charcoal throughout. A maximum depth of 30 cm was excavated before hitting (025)- the roof of the vaults. This was constructed of irregularly shaped basalt blocks bonded with a coarse pale yellow mortar, and it was evident that we had hit the edge of an arch, being flat for the eastern 100 cm and rising by 40 cm in a regular curve to the W. At this end wall (007) rested directly on the vaults, whereas to the E (024) and (026) ran under this wall.

Interpretation

(026), (024) and (023) represent infill over the top of vaults (025), and are very unlikely to be disturbed, but presumably represents levelling material contemporary with the construction of (025). This has been used to produce a flat surface to take (020), the cobbled yard, again likely to be contemporary with the vaults construction. Indeed this surface, some 110 cm below the present floor level of the Queen Anne Building seems to match the height of the floor level of the Great Hall to the E. Although only a small area was excavated, the implication of this is that originally the Crown Square was designed to be open on its' W side, with the E-W gully noted in (020) serving to carry rain water off this square to the W

Construction cut (018), to take walls (007) and (011) therefore represents a major change in use for this area. It seems likely that these walls are just the footings for walls (001) and (008), but it is possible that they are from an earlier structure, which has been reused as footings by the 1708 Queen Anne Building. Certainly (011) and (008) seem to diverge, but only further excavation could demonstrate whether this is significant. (019), the rich black midden, which sealed (017), the fill of (018), presumably represents infill of this structure, levelling material to provide a flat surface for the floor levels of this building. This had been cut away by (022), and replaced by (016), the thick layer of clay, presumably a waterproofing layer inserted due to the dampness of the vaults below. Although few relationships could be determined between the upstanding walls and the below ground level archaeology, it was evident that this clay layer predated the blocking of arch (002) by (003) in the S wall, and its' replacement doorway (004). This clay layer had then been dug through by the three service pipes, one of which, (013), continued through the S wall of the Queen Anne Building. These pipes were then all sealed by concrete (012).