

Historic Scotland's Properties in  
Care -  
Minor Archaeological Works 1999

Edinburgh Castle  
Hospital Square

3<sup>rd</sup> August 1998



ARCHAEOLOGY

**Site** Edinburgh Castle, Hospital Square

**N.G.R** NT 251 7355

**Project Description** Watching Brief

**Report**

Attached

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Throughout 1998, and into 1999, Kirkdale Archaeology have been maintaining a watching brief during ground disturbing work, caused by renovations within Edinburgh Castle's Hospital Square, in the NW of the castle (NT 251 7355). Hospital Square is formed by two rectangular ordnance stores, orientated E-W, with a gap between them of some 27.5m, now cobbled over. The ordnance stores were both constructed in 1753, but in 1897 they were converted into hospitals, with the southern block retaining much of its' original character, while that to the N saw more drastic alterations, such as the addition of two towers projecting S from its' S face. Contemporary with these two structures was a powder magazine, built at the W end of the square, running N-S, between the two stores, but only physically connected to the S one. A protective blast wall ran N-S to the E of this magazine, connecting both the stores. In 1897 this was demolished and levelled over to provide the present day square.

## **2.0 EXCAVATIONS**

During December 1998 and January 1999 a trench was hand dug to take a water sprinkler pipe. The trench ran from the tower at the E end of the S face of the N ordnance store W for a distance of some 12m, before turning S for 14m, then angling to the SE for around 12m and running into the S ordnance store. The depth of the trench was fairly constant at 1.10m, while the width was more variable, but averaged c.1.00m wide.

Work at the extreme W end of the square had shown the survival of massive foundations associated with the powder magazine. Although often badly mutilated by service pipes four E-W walls were identified: (049), (050), (051) and (055). 19<sup>th</sup>-century plans of this part of the castle show the powder magazine as a rectangular structure, with four internal rows of E-W pillars. Two of these were close together, either side of the entrance, with the other two either side of these, equidistant from the end walls of the structure and this central arrangement. Wall (055), some 2.30ms N of the N wall of the S ordnance store, corresponds with the S wall of the magazine, while (049) carried the S row of pillars, and (050) and (051) carried the N and S rows respectively of the two central sets of pillars. All these had been reduced to foundation level, there being no sign of the pillars that sat on these walls, and no other features were built into them, except for footings stepping out 150-250m either side of them. They were all of massive construction, some 1.20m thick, constructed of massive blocks of sandstone and whin firmly bonded by a fine yellow- white lime mortar.

The survival of such remains meant that it was very likely that the trench under

consideration would also run into parts of the magazine, and this proved to be the case. The first stretch to be excavated, along the S side of the N ordnance store produced three walls: (1010), (1013) and (1014). (1013) and (1014) ran N-S across the trench, separated by 1.80m, with (1014), the easternmost, being 2.85ms W of the E tower of the ordnance store. (1010) ran E-W, and connected these two walls at the N side of the trench. (1013) and (1014) were both 700mms wide and continued to both N and S, while only 200mms of the width of (1010) was seen before it ran outside the trench. The full length of (1010) was seen. All three were similar in construction to the walls described previously, except for the absence of footings for (1013) and (1014), and would fit with the position of a tank shown on an 1852 plan of the castle, built against the NE corner of the blast wall. If this interpretation is correct then (1013) represents the blast wall itself, with (1010) and (1014) forming the N and E sides of the tank. Much disturbance had taken place during the laying of cobbles, and the insertion of service pipes, but (1006), a dark grey clay rich soil infilled these walls. To the W of (1013) was (1007), a whin and sandstone rubble deposit at the very base of the trench, below (1006), possibly associated with the 1897 demolition of the magazine.

The trench continued W, along the S side of the N ordnance store, then turned S. At this point, 2.35m S of the wall of the store another wall, (1015), was found. This measured 1.70m wide, with footings to N and S projecting some 250mm, and was again solidly built of whin and sandstone, with a white-yellow lime mortar bonding it. This would fit with being the N wall of the magazine. Some 15.4m S of this the trench ran across (1016), a 1.20m thick E-W wall, of by now familiar build, separated by 900mms from (1017), a similar E-W wall. Both of these had footings around 150mm wide, and correspond with the central row of pillars, represented by (050) and (051) in the earlier trench.

Just beyond the E side of the trench the S side of (1017) had a N-S wall (1018) apparently butted onto it. This wall could be traced for around 6.5m (although not within the trench for all this length), and was 1.20mm thick. This wall was of the same massive build as before, and footings were noted on its' face. It is interpreted as the E wall of the powder magazine. At the extreme S end of the trench a part of the W face of a N-S wall (1019) was noted 2.20m to the E of (1018). This would correspond with the S end of the blast wall, with (1013) as its' N end.

Apart from the frequent disturbances caused by service trenches no deposits were noted below the level of the cobbles, apart from (1006), the dark, clay rich soil with mortar and rubble throughout, which produced occasional sherds of white china. This seems most likely to be a deposit which was introduced as levelling material after the 1897 demolition of the magazine.

### 3.0 DISCUSSION

Excavations within Hospital Square have demonstrated the survival of substantial remains of the 1753 powder magazine which was demolished in 1897. These would appear to be exclusively below floor foundations, and show the massive nature of the masonry required for a structure housing such dangerous materials. In no place were the bottom of these foundations revealed. While survival is generally good, it should be noted that no trace was found of the most northerly of the four rows of pillars between (1015) and (1016), where it would be expected. Many of the walls encountered have been damaged by service trenches cutting across the courtyard, and it seems likely that very localised conditions such as this removed the wall at this point, and therefore it is likely to survive elsewhere.

The remarkably homogenous soil deposit (1006), which was also seen at the W end of the courtyard, seems likely to represent the infilling of a demolished structure to provide a level surface for the courtyard, presumably in 1897. While little was found connected with the use of the powder magazine, it was possible to confirm that the massive foundations of this structure survive substantially intact.

### 4.0 DISCOVERY & EXCAVATION ENTRY

District : Edinburgh (City of Edinburgh)

Parish : Edinburgh

Edinburgh Castle, Hospital Square : Watching Brief

David Murray

NT 251 7355 Throughout 1998, and into 1999, Kirkdale Archaeology maintained a watching brief during renovations within Edinburgh Castle's Hospital Square, in the NW of the castle. Hospital Square is formed by two rectangular ordnance stores, orientated E-W, with a gap between them of some 27.5m, now cobbled over. The ordnance stores were both constructed in 1753, but in 1897 they were converted into hospitals, with the southern block retaining much of its' original character, while that to the N saw more drastic alterations, such as the addition of two towers projecting S from its' S face. Contemporary with these two structures was a powder magazine, built at the W end of the square, running N-S, between the two stores, but only physically connected to the S one. A protective blast wall ran N-S to the E of this magazine, connecting both the stores. In 1897 this was demolished and levelled over to provide the present day square.

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housing such dangerous materials. In no place were the bottom of these foundations revealed. While survival was generally good, many of the walls encountered had been damaged by service trenches cutting across the courtyard, although it seems likely that walls will survive elsewhere.

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Sponsor : Historic Scotland