

# GUARD ARCHAEOLOGY



**Earlstoun Castle, St. John's Town of Dalry  
Data Structure Report  
Project 3285**

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## **Earlstoun Castle, St. John's Town of Dalry**

### **Data Structure Report**

**On behalf of:** ARPL Architects Ltd

**NGR:** NX 61268 84022

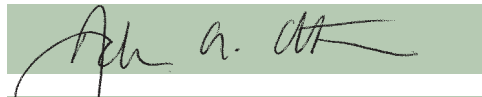
**Project Number:** 3285

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**Approved by:**



24/05/2011

**Date:**

*This document has been prepared in accordance  
with GUARD Archaeology Limited standard operating procedures.*

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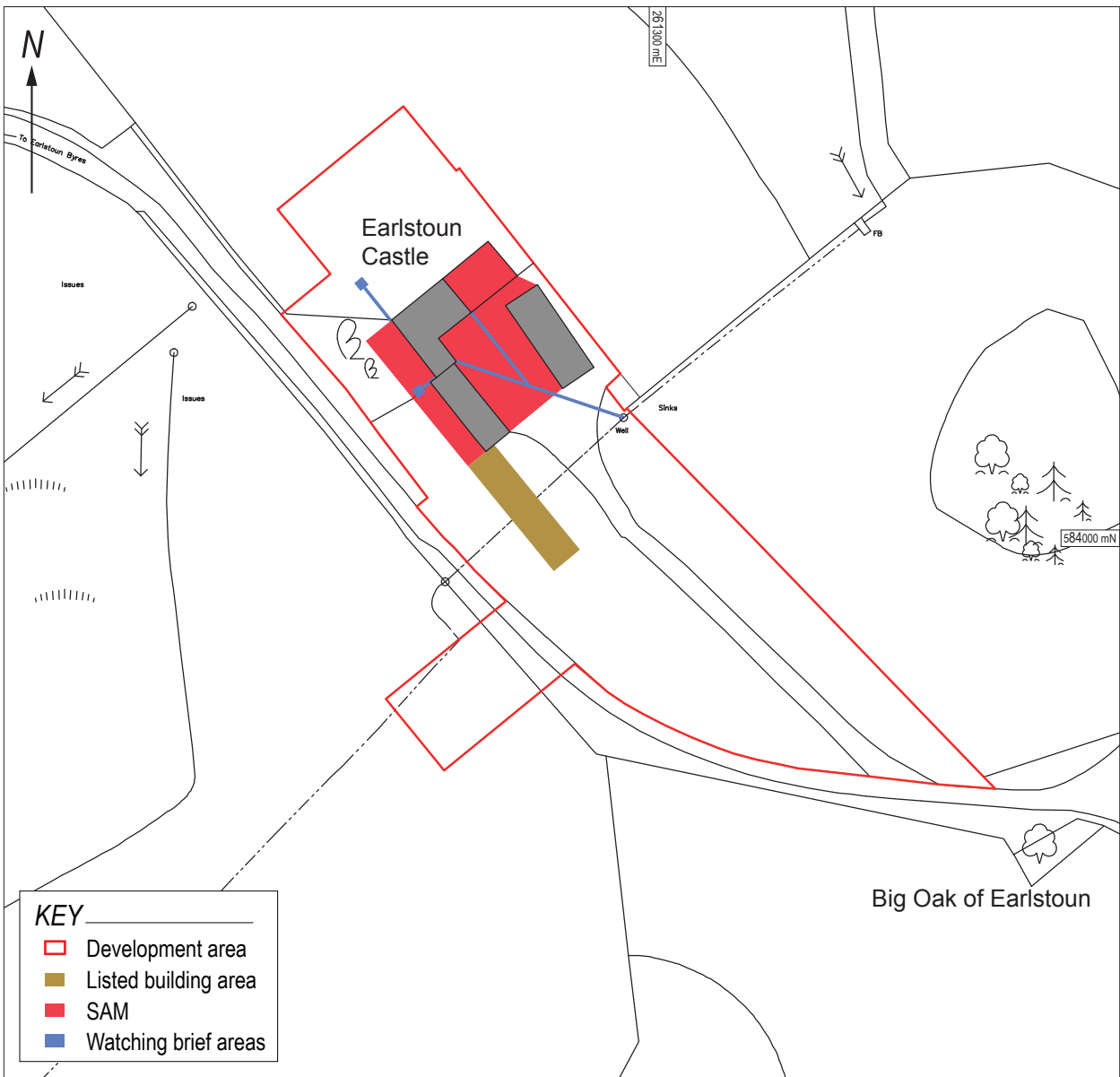
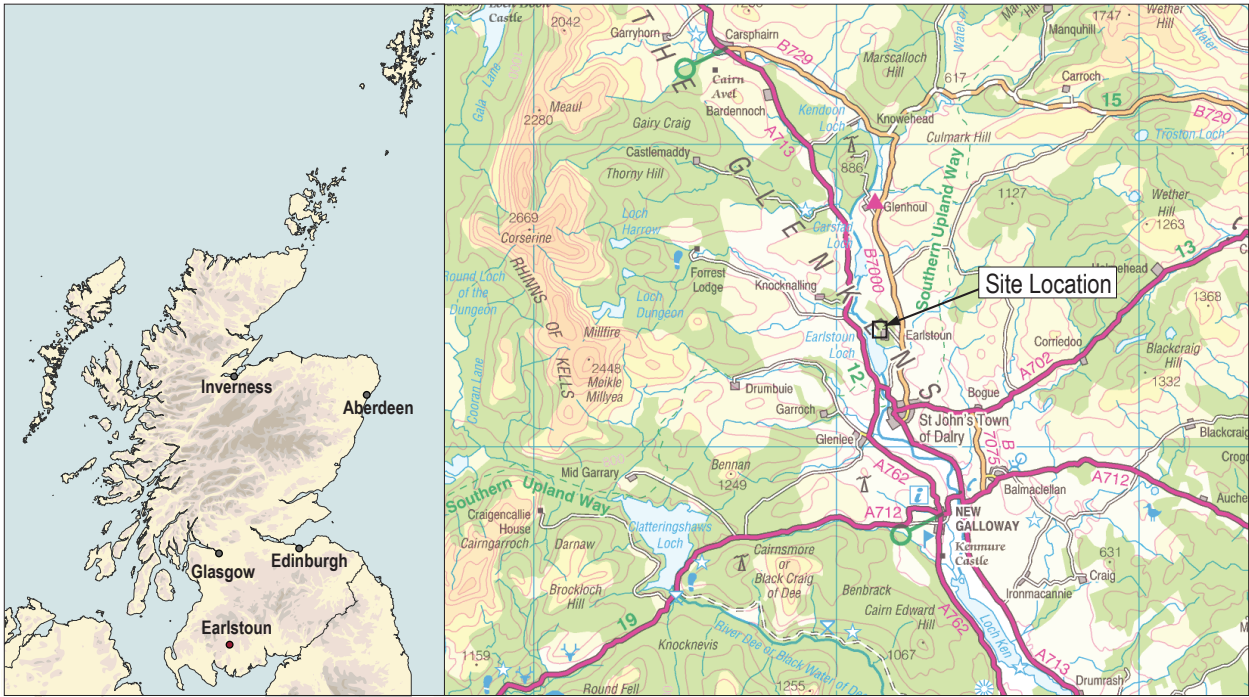
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*Figure 1:*  
Site location.

0 50 m

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## Executive Summary

- 1.1 GUARD Archaeology Limited were commissioned by ARPL Architects Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the installation of services at Earlstoun Castle, St John's Town of Dalry, Dumfries and Galloway (NGR: NX 61268 84022). The work was undertaken between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> March 2011 and revealed no features or artefacts of archaeological significance.

## Introduction

- 2.1 This report sets out the results of a phase of watching brief undertaken by GUARD Archaeology Limited, on behalf of ARPL Architects Ltd acting for the Vivat Trust. The work focused on three areas of service installation at Earlstoun Castle where minor ground-breaking works were to be archaeologically monitored. During the course of the watching brief no features of archaeological significance were encountered. GUARD Archaeology Limited undertook this programme of work between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

## Site Location and Description

- 3.1 Earlstoun Castle lies to the west of Earlstoun, 1km north-east of St John Town of Dalry in Dumfries and Galloway at NGR NX 61268 84022 . It is bounded by tree plantations and fields used for grazing livestock to the north, south and east while Water of Ken and the north side of Earlstoun Loch (the modern reservoir and dam) limit the site to the west.
- 3.2 Currently the watching brief area consists of a building under renovation works lying on top of undulating fields part of the Glenken Valley. A private road which links Earlstoun Castle to the farm situated to its north-west, runs to its west.

## Archaeological Background

- 4.1 Earlstoun Castle (NMRS: NX68SW.1; SAM No: 1118), an L shaped planned structure dates to late 16<sup>th</sup>/early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and is a typical laird's house. Recorded as a Listed (A) building (No: 3624), it is built in greywacke rubble with sandstone dressings. The dressings sit proud of the rubble masonry, suggesting that the building was originally harled. The smaller wing of the castle comprises a turnpike stair and turret stair and two rooms. The principal wing has three stories and an attic. The interior walls are of rubble masonry and between 0.6m and 1.2m thick. The ground floor is barrel-vaulted and has two rooms. The first floor runs the entire length of the wing. This was the main hall and has 4 window openings, which have been enlarged at some point. Prior to renovation the building contained remains of finely-carved woodwork, including panelling, rails, skirting and a cornice. The interior panelling and design was changed on a number of occasions, including around 1660. The second floor is accessed through the turret stair through a panelled passageway, since destroyed. This floor is divided into two rooms by a timber-panelled partition. Evidence of much alteration work, including to the windows, which were enlarged, is evident from the interior wall faces. Another window has been filled in with rubble masonry. This floor has remnants of wooden panelling and had a plasterwork ceiling. The attic, which had no surviving floor was accessed through the turret stair. A worked stone with 1655 date on it was located by MacGibbon and Ross (1889) beneath the easternmost first-floor window on the south side of the main block.
- 4.2 In the 16th century Earlstoun belonged to the Sinclairs before passing to the Gordons for whom it became their ancestral home. The date of the castle suggests it was probably erected on the site of an earlier stronghold. Around 1663, the time when William Gordon of Earlstoun (1614-1679) was banished abroad for his support of the Covenanters, his wife who was pregnant at the time, was put out of the castle (<http://www.covenanter.org.uk/Earlstoun/>). It was returned to the family a few years later, however after supporting the Covenanters cause for the second time in 1679 it was lost again becoming a barrack for the government troops. In 1706 the Gordon family got their property back, however after few generations it was sold. Ever since acquiring

the property in 1784 it has belonged to the Forbes family. Nevertheless, no lairds have lived in the property since the Gordons, which lead to its 'ruinous stated' as described by McGibbon and Ross in 1887-1892.

## Aims and Objectives

- 5.1 The general aim of the watching brief was to identify any archaeological features encountered and record them fully. The specific objectives were:
- Establish the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may be encountered during ground breaking works,
  - Determine the character, extent and significance of any archaeological deposits encountered,
  - Excavate and record any significant archaeological features encountered during the watching brief at Earlstoun Castle and to ensure preservation through record

## Methodology *(Figure 1)*

- 6.1 Three areas at Earlstoun Castle were subject to minor ground-breaking works and as such were archaeologically monitored.
- 6.2 In the north-western area of the castle, two drains and a soak away were hand excavated to a depth of 0.45 m for the drains and 0.75 m for the soak away.
- 6.3 In the south-western area of the castle a single drain and soak away were hand excavated to a depth of 0.45 m for the drain and 1 m for the soak away.
- 6.4 In the north-eastern area of the castle, two drains were hand excavated to a depth of 0.45 m, merging into a single drain directed towards a well to the east of the scheduled area..
- 6.5 All on-site recording, written, drawn and photographic, was to the standards normally pertaining in archaeological fieldwork. Conditions were very wet with occasional sunny weather.

## Results

- 7.1 The north-western area of the site was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.75 m to reveal natural subsoil of orange silt with occasional stones (002). Topsoil was brown silt (001) containing occasional 20<sup>th</sup> century glass and pottery fragments (not retained). The area was heavily bioturbated by tree roots. During the course of the watching brief, no features of archaeological significance were encountered.
- 7.2 The south-western area of the site was excavated to a maximum depth of 1 m to reveal natural subsoil of grey silt with orange patches (004) containing frequent small stones. Topsoil was brown silt (003) and was heavily bioturbated by roots.
- 7.3 The north-eastern area of the site was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.45 m to reveal natural subsoil of grey silt with frequent small stones at west of excavation containing a pottery rim shred (SF 6) and occasional boulders at east end of excavation (006). This was overlain by a compact stone or gravel surface of unknown date with a thickness of 0.12 m at west and 0.35 m at west of excavation. This contained corroded iron objects (SF 2 and SF 5), 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery (SF6) and modern glass (not retained). Possible plaster (SF 4) was recovered though probably of modern date.

## Discussion

- 8.1 The three areas excavated identified no features of archaeological significance. It appears from the limited excavations conducted during this watching brief that little activity was carried out at the western side of the castle. The construction of the gravelled surface has heavily disturbed the courtyard on the eastern side. No indication was seen of the earlier structure known to have been in the north eastern section of the courtyard. However, the possibility remains that archaeological features may still survive of this structure further north of the limit of excavation.

## Recommendations

- 9.1 The watching brief revealed no archaeologically sensitive deposits or features to the north west and south west of the castle. In consequence, it is recommended that no further archaeological work is required in these areas. However potential remains for archaeology to be encountered at the north-eastern end of the courtyard where drawings suggest a building. It is recommended that future work in this area be archaeologically monitored.
- 9.2 GUARD Archaeology Limited would stress that these recommendations are intended for guidance only. While the recommended mitigation strategy was developed following consultation with West of Scotland Archaeology Service and Historic Scotland, final decisions on the nature and extent of any future archaeological work rest with the relevant planning authorities.

## Acknowledgements

- 10.1 GUARD Archaeology Limited would like to thank Lynne Yuille of ARPL Architects Ltd and the Vivat Trust for their assistance. Technical support was from Aileen Maule and John Kiely. The illustrations were produced by Fiona Jackson. The report was desk top published by Gillian McSwan. The project was managed for GUARD Archaeology Limited by John Atkinson.

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**Section 2: Appendices**



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Bibliography

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<http://www.covenanter.org.uk/Earlstoun/>

### Appendix B: List of Contexts

Context No.	Area	Description	Interpretation
001	NW	Loose to moderately compact mid brown silt with frequent tree roots and cobbles. Modern disturbance to south and modern glass and plastic found throughout. 0.41m thick and hand excavated in dry weather.	topsoil
002	NW	Moderately compact orange silt with patches of grey silt. Frequent pebble and cobbles and occasional small boulders. 0.41m to limit of excavation (0.75m). Hand excavated.	natural subsoil
003	SW	Moderately compact brown silt with frequent angular cobbles and tree roots. 0.5m thick. Hand excavated in dry weather.	topsoil
004	SW	Moderately compact grey silt with frequent pebbles and cobbles. 0.5m to limit of excavation (1.0m). Hand excavated in heavy rain.	natural subsoil
005	NE	Very compact deposit of pebbles and cobbles with occasional boulders. 0.12m thick at east lowering to 0.35m thick at west. Hand excavated in both very wet and dry conditions.	cobbled/stone courtyard surfacing.
006	NE	Moderately compact grey silt with occasional pebbles. 0.12m to limit of excavation (0.45m). Occasional large boulders towards eastern edge. Hand excavated in very wet conditions.	natural subsoil.

### Appendix C: List of Finds

Find No.	Area	Context No.	No. of Pieces	Material	Description
1	Interior	-	6	ceramic	assorted 19th and 20th century pottery sherds
2	NE	005	1	Fe	corroded iron object approx. 12cm long
3	Interior	-	1	Animal bone	2 joined pig molars
4	NE	005	4	Plaster	fragments of thick plaster with red pigment, date unknown.
5	NE	005	1	Fe	Iron object approx.10cm long, bent at one end
6	NE	006	1	ceramic	19th century rim sherd
7	Interior	-	1	ceramic	pre-19th century floor tile with tin glaze.

## Appendix D: List of Photographs

Frame	Area	Context No.	Subject	Taken from	file name
1	-	-	ID shot	-	3285 Digital Image 001
2	NW	001 and 002	NW section of soak away	SE	3285 Digital Image 002
3	NW	002	Post excavation of soak away	E	3285 Digital Image 003
4	SW	003 and 004	Post excavation of soak away	NW	3285 Digital Image 004
5	NE	005 and 006	Post excavation of drain cut	SW	3285 Digital Image 005

## Appendix E: DES

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Dumfries and Galloway
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Earlstoun Castle, St. John's Town of Dalry
PROJECT CODE:	3285
PARISH:	Dalry
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR(S):	Iraia Arabaolaza and Rowena Thomson
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	GUARD Archaeology Limited
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Watching Brief
NMRS NO(S):	NX68SW.1
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Castle
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NX 61268 84022
START DATE (this season)	7 <sup>th</sup> March 2011
END DATE (this season)	17 <sup>th</sup> March 2011
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)	Standing building record
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	This report sets out the results of a phase of watching brief undertaken by GUARD Archaeology Limited, on behalf of ARPL Architects Ltd acting for the Vivat Trust. The work focused on three areas of service installation at Earlstoun Castle where minor ground-breaking works were to be archaeologically monitored. During the course of the watching brief no features of archaeological significance were encountered. GUARD Archaeology Limited undertook this programme of work between the 7 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> March 2011.
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	ARPL Architects Ltd
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	
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EMAIL ADDRESS:	Iraia.arabaolaza@guard-archaeology.co.uk
ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	NMRS and WoSAS

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