Scottish Medieval Castles & Chapels C14 Project.

Site	Borve Castle, Benbecula.
NGR	NF 77336 50519
Document reference	SC14/BCB/PRE/02
Document type	Preliminary report
Subject	Sampling strategy and methodology.
Previous reports	Yes, BCB/PRE/01 forthcoming.
Literature search	Ongoing
Fao	Historic Environment Scotland, Stòras Uibhist
Compiled	M Thacker 15/10/2015

Details of proposed mortar archaeology at Borve Castle.

Sampling Strategy

The mortar archaeology of Borve Castle has been inspected by the applicant on a number of occasions, the last being in April 2015 (SC14/BCB/PRE/01; Thacker, in prep). At least two contrasting historic shell-lime mortars have been noted here, included within which is a generally high concentration of peat and peat charcoal relic-fuel. Also noted on this last visit, however, were two very small pyrolised fibrous relics or inclusions, and these require closer microscopic examination to determine if this is charred plant material with radiocarbon dating potential.

The Castle is characterised by large areas of exposed eroding core at ground level (figure 1). If these two fibrous fragments are still available, then the recording of their positions and subsequent removal will be the focus of the work on site. The sampling strategy will, however, have to respond to whatever is available on the day, and if other similar fragments are available then these shall be removed also, wherever that is possible without further damage to the monument.

Fixed mortar samples from each phase will also be recorded and removed, and again sample quantity will respond to the survey, but is likely to include 2 mortar samples of approximately 150g per sample. Fallen stone samples may also be sampled where identified.

Initial Sampling Methodology

Access: from ground Preparation: surface cleaning with a hand-brush in some contexts.

Method of removal: by hand, with a knife.

Context measurement: by hand, tape measured and levelled from fixed building features (wall faces, jambs or lintels etc.), to within 10mm.

Context recording: In elevation by photograph; in plan by Autocad annotation of plan; contexts listed by measured X, Y and Z coordinates from fixed building features.

Sample storage: in foil, in sealed and labeled plastic bags, in hard plastic container.

Time on site: one day.

Health and safety

Most of the masonry at Borve Castle is stable and poses no significant risk of falls. Masonry will be assessed before sampling such that no sampling from vulnerable masonry contexts will be undertaken.

Sample Analysis

Sampling, thick-sectioning, characterization of the mortars, and assessment of charcoal taxonomy will be undertaken by Mark Thacker (University of Edinburgh).

Carbon Dating by Prof. Gordon Cook (SUERC, Glasgow University).

Proposed date of Completion: TBC.

Possible Further work

Any further work at the site will respond to initial results and will only be undertaken with the full agreement of all stakeholders.

Funding

The work proposed at Borve Castle is to be undertaken as part of the ‘Scottish Medieval Castle and Chapels C14 Project’. A pilot phase of the project has been funded by HS/HES for the financial year 2015-16 and it is hoped that the work proposed in this document will be included within that.

Depending on the outcome of negotiations for ongoing part-funding of the project from 2016 onwards, however, further work at this site may also be included in later budgets.

Figures

Figure 1 – Castle Borve, Benbecula showing large areas of masonry core at ground level.

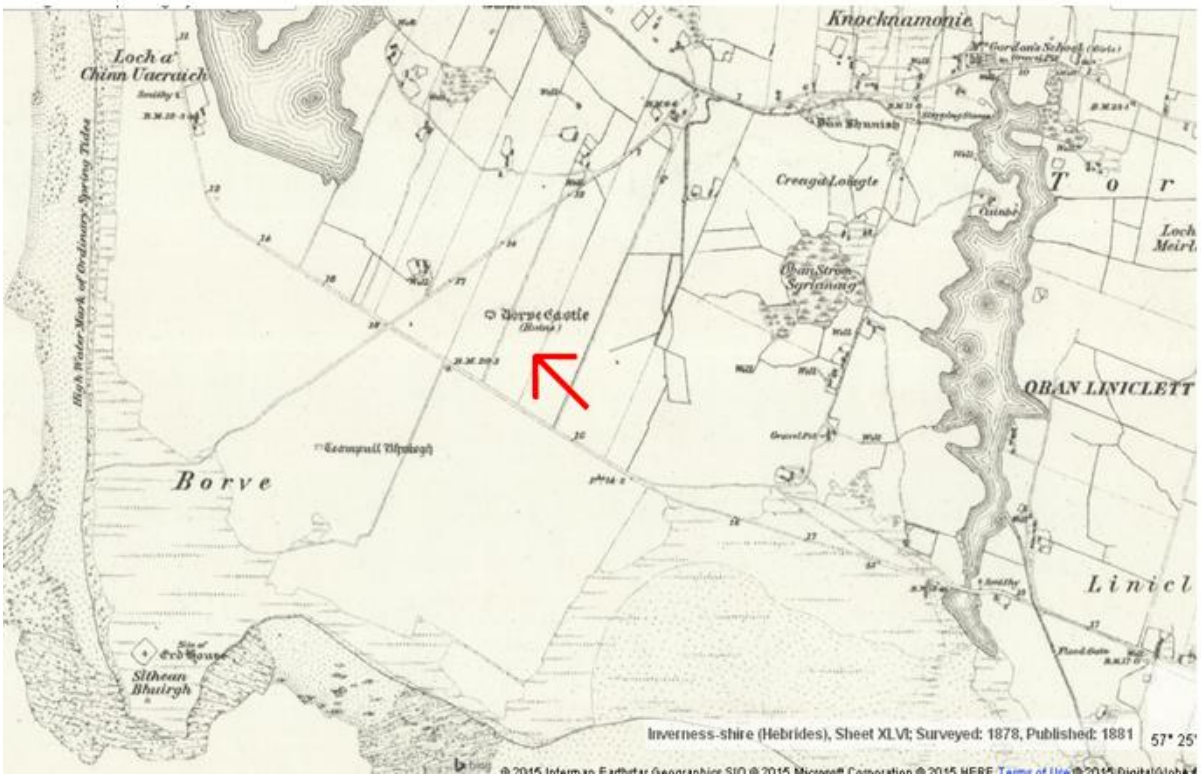

Figure 2 – Site of Borve Castle on south-west coast of Benbecula. Site indicated by red arrow.