

Bishop's & Earl's Palaces, Kirkwall

Replacement Interpretation Panels: Desk-Based Assessment of Archaeological Sensitivity

Introduction

This document outlines the historical background and assesses the archaeological sensitivity at the Bishop's and Earl's Palaces in Kirkwall. It determines the archaeological and aesthetic impact of the replacement of existing signage and installation of new additional signage at the site, and the proposed mitigation. These are two separate properties in care but once formed part of a whole complex and should be treated as one entity, the interpretation refresh covers both sites and they are assessed jointly in this document.

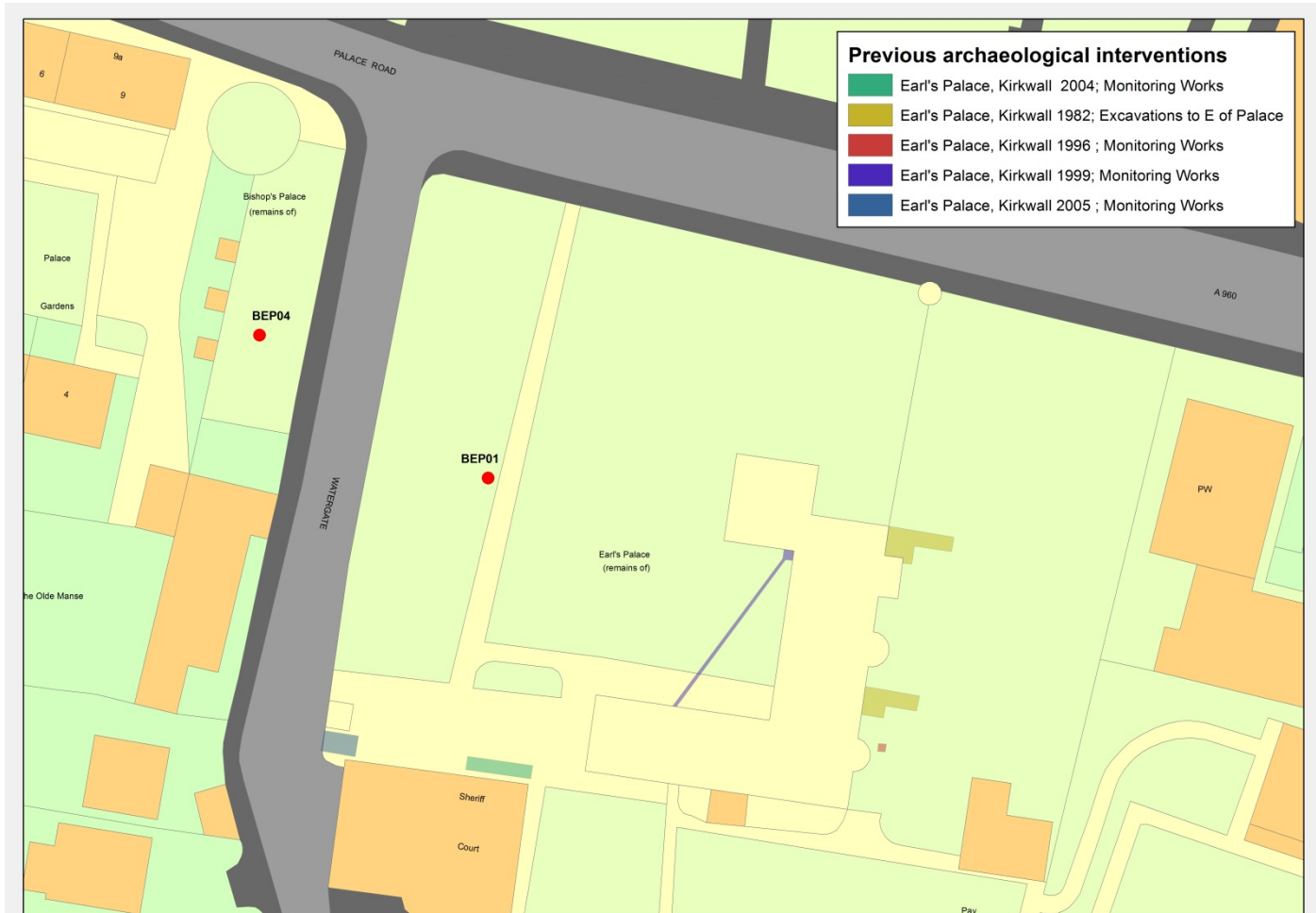


Figure 1. Plan showing previous archaeological investigations at Earl's Palace and the proposed location of two new lectern panels.

Historical Background

The Bishop's Palace dates from the 12th century, though much of what is upstanding today dates to the substantial rebuilding work undertaken first in the mid-16th and early 17th centuries. The oldest surviving part dates to c. 1137 when the bishopric and cathedral transferred from Birsay to Kirkwall. The early bishop's palace was extensively remodelled in the mid-16th century by Bishop Robert Reid; the prominent round tower at north end was constructed at this time. The building is one part of the original palace complex, a single defensible enclosure immediately to the south of the cathedral which dates back to the early 12th century.

In 1568 the palace was acquired by Earl Robert Stewart and in the early 17th century his son, Earl Patrick Stewart, undertook further alterations to the Bishop's Palace. Patrick Stewart constructed the Earl's Palace on the eastern part of this enclosed area, the grand and imposing renaissance residence was constructed between 1601 and 1607. The Earl's palace is an L-shaped two-storey arrangement of buildings, set around the east and south sides of a courtyard. Following Earl Patrick Stewart's downfall the palace was besieged and slighted, and between 1638 – 60 the site was largely unoccupied. Other than occupation by the Earl of Morton c. 1653 and further episcopal use between 1671 and 1688 the complex remained unused and by the 18th century it had fallen into ruin. In 1877, part of the Watergate (an original entrance into the enclosed site) was removed and rebuilt into the eastern wall of the Bishop's Palace to allow for widening of the public road. Both the Bishop's and Earl's Palace came into state care in 1921.

Archaeological Background

Nothing is known of the sub-surface archaeology within the footprint of the Bishop's Palace. Buildings associated with the Palace might be expected to survive around it, in the area that was known as Laverock.

Since the 1980s there has been limited archaeological work around the Earl's Palace, particularly in the courtyard and around the east range in advance of the introduction of services and improved visitor facilities. Remains associated with the earlier Bishop's Palace phase have been encountered beneath the visible remains: a subsurface ditch and associated waterlogged deposits to the immediate east of the east range which may have formed the boundary of the ecclesiastical residence and was back-filled between mid-14th and early 15th century; sub-surface clay- and mortar-bonded walls exposed in excavations to the immediate east of the east range which may be contemporary with walls exposed by earlier clearance at the north end of the east range. These were probably outbuildings and provide evidence for domestic and craft activities.

Archaeological discoveries in the west courtyard have largely been limited to recovery of information relating to the gardens shown in a plan of 1836. Around the east side of the east range the present ground level was found to differ little from that which existed when the palace was built. Beneath garden soil, well-preserved medieval deposits were found. Nothing is known of the area to the south occupied by the bowling green, although the head of a stone cross was found there in 1928. The ground is built up in this area and does not appear to have been significantly landscaped when the bowling green was constructed which suggests good potential for important undisturbed archaeological deposits.

There have been a number of small scale investigations, largely in the form of evaluation or monitoring work, around the Earl's Palace over recent years alongside installation of services, conservation work and improvements to access. In 1998, two short phases of archaeological fieldwork were undertaken in connection with the construction of a new sales point for the Earl's Palace. Excavation of trenches for services and foundations revealed paths that formed part of an early 19th-century garden in front of the palace ruins. No medieval or early post-medieval deposits were encountered, suggesting either their survival at greater depth, or that these earlier deposits were swept away by later landscaping and clearance. In 1999 excavations within the courtyard for a cable trench running diagonally between kitchen and re-entrant angle of Great Hall range revealed evidence for disturbance due to modern interventions, but also the presence of sensitive archaeological deposits at relatively shallow depths. Features encountered included a possible stone drain of some age and a flagstone courtyard surface possibly of 17th century date. Excavations carried out by ORCA in 2012 at the site of the proposed disabled access ramp to Kirkwall Sheriff Court revealed segments of medieval mortared wall associated with the Earl's Palace. It is possible this was the remains of north-facing wall of brewhouse/bakehouse which would have extended west from the upstanding Palace building.

Assessment of Archaeological Sensitivity and Visual Impact

The proposed interpretation refresh at Bishop's and Earl's Palaces involves a minimal number of new panels to the site. The style of these panels and the locations have been carefully chosen so as not to obscure key views to or from the site. Equally the locations of the wall-mounted panels have been chosen so as not to obscure any significant features or evidence for different phases of construction. All of the panels have been designed using recessive colours to reduce visual impact as much as possible. The majority of the replacement panels are like-for-like and will be in the same size and location as previous panels, they will also use the existing fittings and fixings where possible, as such their replacement will result in no archaeological impact and no additional visual impact. Only one of the proposed panels will require ground disturbance for its installation – BEP01. Following discussions with HS Cultural & Natural Resources Team the decision was taken to replace the existing lectern panel within the cellar of the Bishop's Palace with a new freestanding lectern panel in a new location. The existing panel will be cut off at ground level, thus ensuring no ground disturbance for removal and installation of BEP04.

There has been limited archaeological investigation at this site. The interior of the Bishop's Palace was cleared by HM Office of Works at the time the monument came into care, but the nature and extent of this clearance work is unknown. The photographs below give an indication of the level of clearance. From the limited investigations around the Earl's Palace there is evidence for the survival of significant medieval deposits, particularly to the east and south of the Palace. Within the courtyard area the deposits may be more disturbed due to the installation of modern services and 19th century landscaping, though there is still high archaeological potential within this area.



Figure 2 & 3. Photographs taken at the time the monument came into care c. 1920. The interior is covered with vegetation and the ground level is considerably higher than the present day level.



Figure 4. Photograph showing interior of Bishop's Palace after clearance.



Figure 5. The interior of the Bishop's Palace at present and the existing interpretation panel, to be cut off at ground level.

BEP01 – the location of this new lectern panel is close to the ticket office, immediately adjacent to the modern footpath. It is likely that this area has been disturbed in the past, with the construction of the footpath and earlier landscaping activity. Excavations in advance of construction of the nearby ticket office revealed paths and evidence of a 19th century garden in this area, but no evidence for medieval deposits. From limited excavations elsewhere in the courtyard we can expect turf and topsoil to a depth of at least 150mm, though we cannot be sure of the exact nature of the underlying deposits in this area.

BEP03 – removal of both wall-mounted panels on southwest interior wall of Bishop's Palace, one of which will be replaced with an updated panel. The replacement will be fixed into existing mortar joints and will not obscure any significant architectural features. Overall this will reduce the visual impact to the interior of the Bishop's Palace and will not result in any additional impact to the historic fabric.

BEP04 – the existing lectern within the Bishop's Palace will be cut off at ground level. A freestanding lectern will be placed in a new location within the cellar as shown in figure 1 above. This decision was taken in light of the uncertainty of the archaeological potential within the Bishop's Palace interior. Removal of the existing lectern panel and its relocation should reduce visual impact within the interior as it will provide a clearer view within the cellar looking towards the tower and St Magnus' Cathedral beyond.

Proposed Mitigation

BEP01 – a new lectern is proposed for installation at this location. The required foundation for the new lectern panel will be up to 450mm deep. While this area is close to a modern footpath and is likely to have suffered modern disturbance, it is still in an archaeologically sensitive area within the courtyard of the palace complex. As such, it is recommended that the foundations for the new panel are excavated under an archaeological watching brief. If archaeological material is encountered during excavation of the foundations then work should stop and the significance of the finds should be discussed with a member of CNR before deciding whether or not to continue.

BEP04 – following discussions with HS Cultural and Natural Resources Team the relocation of this lectern panel will result in no ground disturbance. As such no further mitigation is required

No archaeological mitigation is necessary for the installation of the wall-mounted panels or the replacement of panels on existing lectern stands. Removal of the existing wall-mounted panels on the bakehouse and within the Bishop's Palace will not have any additional impact upon the monument. The archaeological works for BEP01 will be undertaken by Kirkdale Archaeology under the terms of the Minor Works to Properties in Care Call-off contract. All works will be undertaken as per WSI.

Rachel Pickering
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