

Crookston Castle – new interpretation signage

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

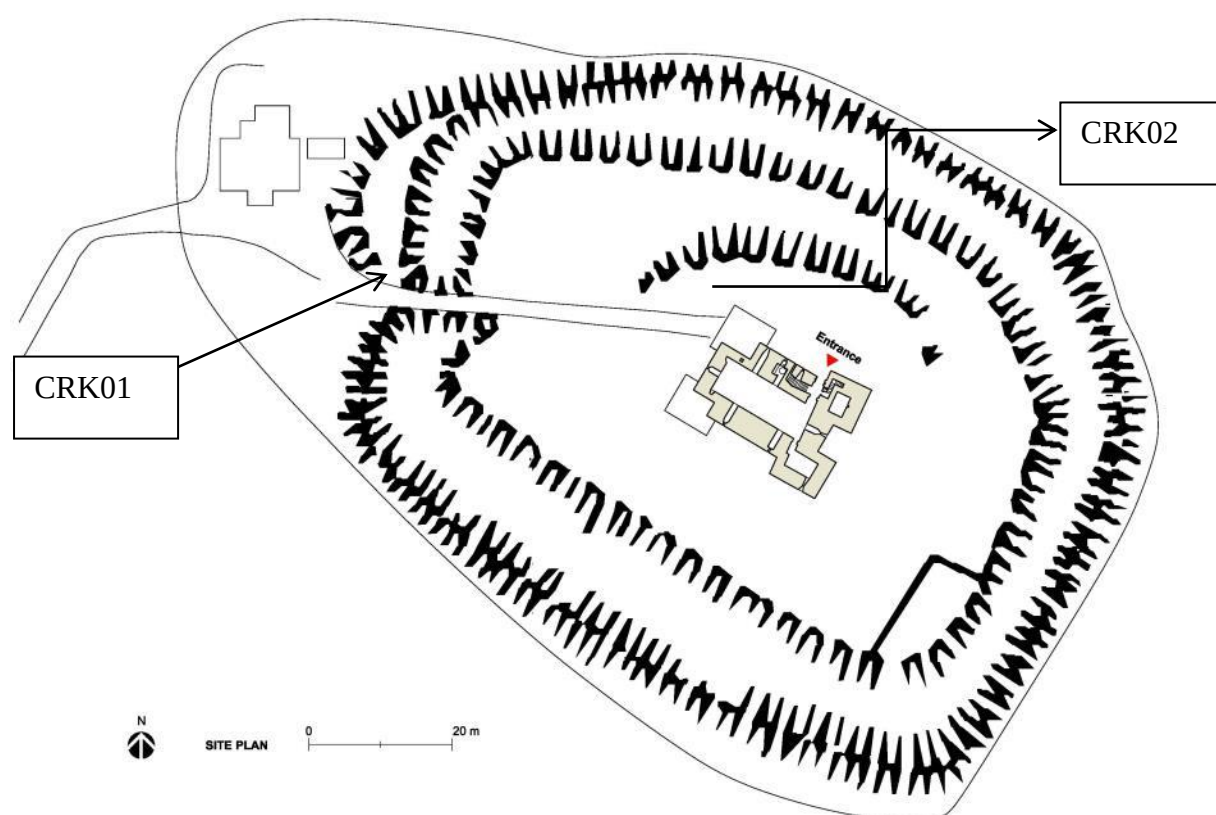
Historical background

Occupying the western part of a hilltop, Crookston Castle was a strategic stronghold and manorial residence throughout its long history. The monument comprises an upstanding stone towerhouse built by the Stewarts of Darnley about 1400, enclosed by the earthworks of the late 12th-century original castle, built for Sir Robert Croc, a vassal of the High Steward.

The 15th-century tower house has an unconventional design, although it exhibits an unusually well-integrated plan.

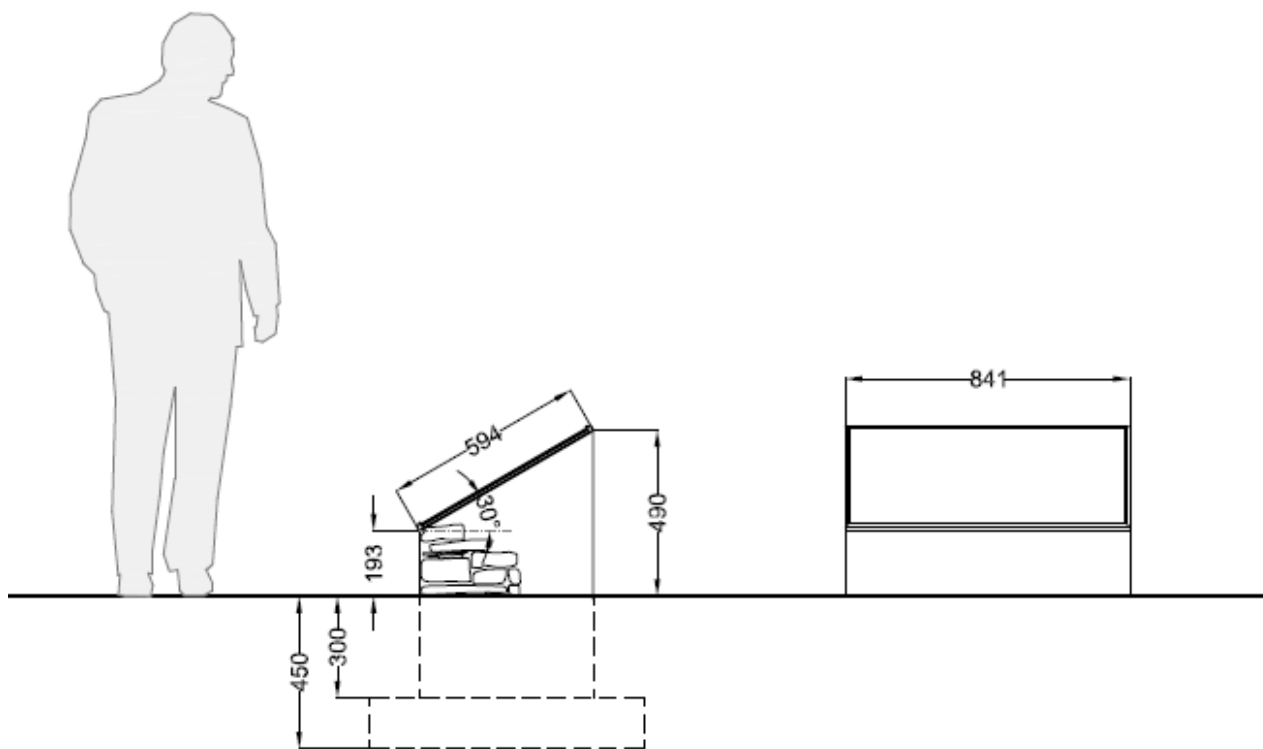
Proposed works

The works involve the moving of an existing plinth (CRK01) to a new location, the installation of a new cairn (CRK02) and the installation of a series of wall-mounted and rail-mounted panels within the tower house itself (CRK03-CRK07c). Only one of these (CRK02) involves the possibility of an archaeological impact (see below).



1: Locations of CRK01 and 02

The proposed signage, some of which is in new locations, has been briefly assessed during a site visit in terms of its likely visual impact. CRK02, located to the NW of the tower house, has been set back from the building with a view to reducing its likely impact on views towards the castle as visitors approach from the West. The remaining signage has also been assessed with a view to avoiding adverse visual impacts. CRK06, a rail-mounted panel on the roof of the NE tower, will be of shallow depth and incorporate a recessive backing colour in order to mitigate any impact on views of this tower from the surrounding grounds.



2: Cairn design showing foundation depth

Assessment of archaeological sensitivity

Crookston Castle was subject to fairly comprehensive archaeological investigations in the 1970s, although not on the site proposed for the new cairn CRK02. The trenches were not excavated to natural and archaeological features were left in-situ. The results of the excavations were not published and the site records are incomplete. Although the results have since been combined into a report, vital information such as sections, depths etc is lacking. Ancillary ranges out-with the main tower to the East and West were investigated, along with the two demolished West corner towers. This work highlighted the good archaeological potential of the site. A building on the East side of the enclosure was investigated, and an area of the counterscarp bank top was excavated and found to have been cobbled, as was an area lower down towards the ditch, to create a stepped arrangement. Evidence of a structure was investigated on the North side of the entrance, set over the slighted bank of the 12th-century ringwork.

The installation of CRK01, to the West of the crossing point of the enclosure ditch will require only the removal of the turf layer and topsoil to create a level surface. This is a small plinth which will not require a foundation. It has been set quite close to the access path into the site and will be located in a zone in which there is likely to have been some build-up of the ground in order to support this path.

Installation of the cairn-mounted panel CRK02, to the NW of the tower house, will require a foundation of 300mm as detailed above. Archaeological excavations in the near vicinity (on and near the site of the missing NW tower) revealed deposits of rubble and mortar deposits up to 1.3m in depth below the topsoil. This contained 19th-century artefacts, indicating recent deposition and possible landscaping works in this area.

Installation of CRK03 in the tower's cellar will improve the presentation of interpretative information here and allow existing cast metal plates to be removed from significant blocked features. CRK04 and CRK05, in the hall above and in the Lord's chamber in the NE tower, will add to visitor interpretation of these spaces. CRK06 will help to interpret the tower house's surroundings, and is rail-mounted, avoiding any physical impact on the monument. CRK07a-CRK07c present important health and safety messages, improving the existing arrangements. The wall-mounted panels will be fixed into mortar joints or will re-use existing backing boards, so there will be no impact on historic masonry.

Proposed mitigation

CRK01 will require only the removal of turf and topsoil. Provided excavation does not proceed any deeper than this, no archaeological support will be required for this work since there is unlikely to be an impact on archaeological deposits. The installation of cairn CRK02 will require a 300mm foundation in a location where no archaeological investigation has previously been recorded. An archaeologist will monitor the excavation of the trench for this foundation. Excavation will proceed no deeper than the top of the first archaeological layer. Upon reaching this layer work will stop and the significance of the identified deposits determined as far as is possible within the restricted size of the intervention. If sufficient depth cannot be achieved without impacting on archaeological deposits work will stop and an alternative strategy will be determined. If the significance of the deposits cannot be determined within the trench, we may consider extending the trench by no more than its footprint again to characterise the deposits and to relocate the panel slightly if possible/necessary. The purpose of this is to ensure that no significant archaeological deposits are impacted on by these works. No archaeological deposits will be removed to facilitate the installation of this cairn.

The archaeological works will be undertaken by Kirkdale Archaeology under the terms of the Minor Works to Properties in Care Call-off contract.

Adrian Cox
Cultural Resources Advisor
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