

Scottish Medieval Castles & Chapels C-14 Project

Preliminary mortar & masonry Survey of Castle Roy, Strathspey



SC14-CRS-PRE-01

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Introduction to SMCCCP

The Scottish Medieval Castles & Chapels C-14 Project (SMCCCP) is an archaeological research project investigating the palaeoenvironmental potential of Scottish medieval building materials. The project is joint-funded by Historic Environment Scotland and the University of Stirling, directed by Mark Thacker (Research Fellow, University of Stirling), and is scheduled for completion in 2019.

Document & Site Details

Site	Castle Roy, Strathspey
NGR	NJ 0065 2192
Document reference	SC14-CRS-PRE-01
Document type	Preliminary report
Subject	Preliminary mortar and masonry survey
Survey Date	05/09/2016
Previous reports	No
Literature search	Ongoing
Fao	Historic Environment Scotland, XXXXXXXXXX
Compiled/last revision	M Thacker 09/11/2016

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Part One: SITE SURVEY

A rapid survey of Castle Roy was undertaken in order to establish the potential of further mortar survey and material analysis at the site. Access was from ground level only and was non-intrusive.

Castle Roy is located on a prominent mound approximately 1.1km north of Nethy Bridge and 1.0km south-east of the River Spey (see figures). The main structure is comprised of a ruinous quadrangular masonry enclosure, with a quadrangular tower protruding from the north corner. The enclosure walls still stand to over 5m high in places, and the general wall faces have been constructed of rounded to angular irregular blocks of schist and granites, although the primary quoins appear to have been robbed-out. The masonry is raised in rough courses, and horizontal course levels clearly pass through the whole thickness of the wall core from the external to the internal faces.

The building presents an excellent mixture of visible and accessible masonry contexts including: largely complete areas of stone facing; deep core rubble where facing stone has been lost; and full face-core-face cross-sections of masonry (across the width of upstanding walls adjacent to areas of collapse). Access to some core contexts is restricted by the recent re-facing of some areas of masonry as part of an ongoing consolidation project, but at present bedding mortar visibility in general wall faces also remains excellent.

The visible masonry is fully lime-bonded, and although no coating mortars were noted during this brief survey, the primary constructional mortar appears consistent and contiguous in all visible core and bedding contexts. General description: The primary mortar at Castle Roy is a buff-coloured, coherent and very hard lime mortar.

Carbonate kiln-relicts: The primary mortar at castle Roy is a limestone-lime which contains a very high concentration of blue-grey to yellow, angular to rounded, polycrystalline, probable limestone kiln-relicts to 40 x 30 x 20 and larger.

Added temper: This mortar is lithic tempered and includes a mixture of rounded to subangular quartz and schist sands and gravels, generally to 3-5mm and occasionally to 20mm+.

Fuel kiln-relicts: This mortar was wood-fired and contains a very high concentration of wood charcoal fragments. These fragments appear to display similar textures and are often fissile lenses which exhibit large vessels.

Although much more work is clearly required, in interim the lack of apparent compositional contrasts in the visible mortar noted during rapid survey may support a generally single phase interpretation for these low-level contexts.

Part Two: PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

Castle Roy is often suggested to have been constructed in the 13th-century castle (MacGibbon and Ross 63, 65-67), although Dunbar ascribes a late 12th to early 13th-century date to the site (1966). The simple quadrilateral design of the surviving masonry structure, however, has also been compared to a number of west coast buildings (such as the castles of Skipness, Ardchnonnell and Achanduin) which represent a wide range of 13th to 15th-century dates (Cruden 1960. 49).

In a discussion of the documentary evidence, Barrow suggests ‘it is reasonable to suppose that Castle Roy, either as an earthwork and timber construction or possibly in the stone curtain form that still survives’ was established before 1226, and so may be the ‘earliest castle of Badenoch and Strathspey’ (1988, 7). Although not mentioned by Young (2005), persistent reports have identified the place with the Comyn Lords of Badenoch (MacGibbon and Ross 1887), and Barrow has suggested that the site can be identified as *an caisteal ruadh* – the ‘Gartenrode’ where Edward 1st stayed in late 1303 (1988, 8).

Part Three: SIGNIFICANCE & FURTHER WORK

Castle Roy is clearly a nationally significant monument, as the site is associated with various historical events and high status personalities of the 13th and early 14th-century, and also contains a substantially surviving medieval castle. That the early 14th-century upper terminus for the site suggested by Barrow might apply to the surviving masonry building may be supported by comparison with other quadrilateral castles across Scotland, and it is possible the structure is significantly earlier. At present, however, the evidence only allows for a very broad chronology for the surviving structure.

The upstanding evidence examined during the preliminary masonry survey described above suggests that mortar analysis has potential to enable the first direct scientific dating of materials related to the buildings construction. Microscopic analysis may also increase our understanding of the materials from which the castle was constructed, and provide some further evidence for the composition of the local historic woodland environment. This clearly increases the significance of the surviving primary mortar materials, especially as the structure is currently being consolidated. The archaeological potential of this material is also increased by its proposed inclusion in the Scottish Medieval Castles & Chapels C-14 Project, as this nationwide project enables further comparative interpretation, and so greater understanding of any results.

A comprehensive programme of mortar sampling is therefore recommended at Castle Roy, to inform various research questions about the building and its environment. The removal of currently accessible mortar samples from the masonry will have very little negative effect on the significance of the monument, as the proposed samples are of very small size (SC14-CRS-PRE-02), and constructional mortar survives here in very large volumes. Indeed, the results may increase the significance of the monument and the surviving mortar materials overall.

Part four: BIBLIOGRAPHY & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Many thanks to [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] for permission to survey at the site, and to [REDACTED] of SNH for discussion of the sites environmental status.

Part five: FIGURES

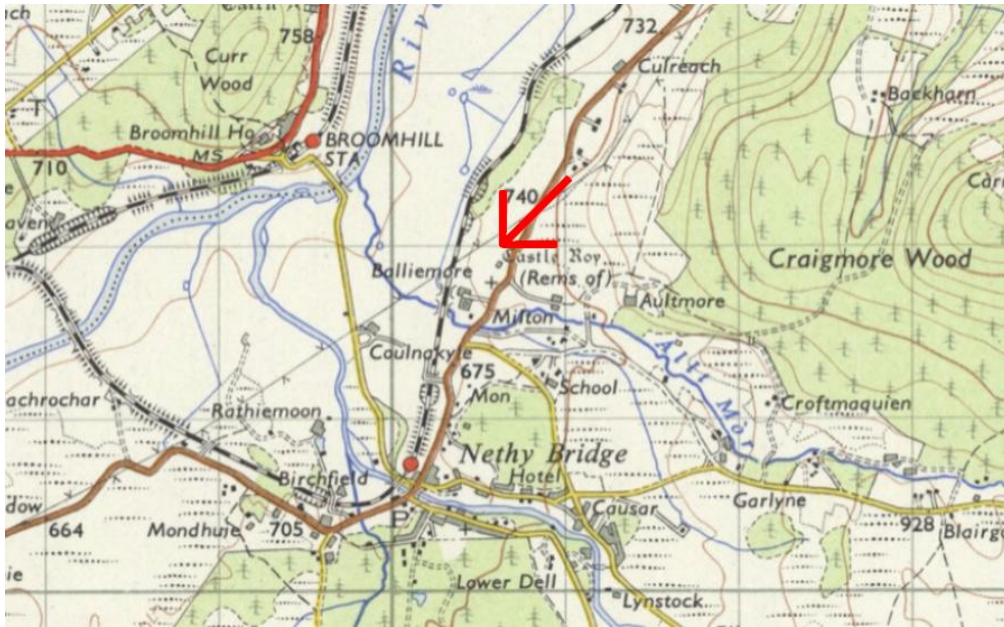


Figure 1 – Castle Roy is located 1.1km north of Nethy Bridge and approximately 1.0km south-east of the River Spey (Annotated detail from Ordnance Survey (1957), used with kind permission of National Library of Scotland).

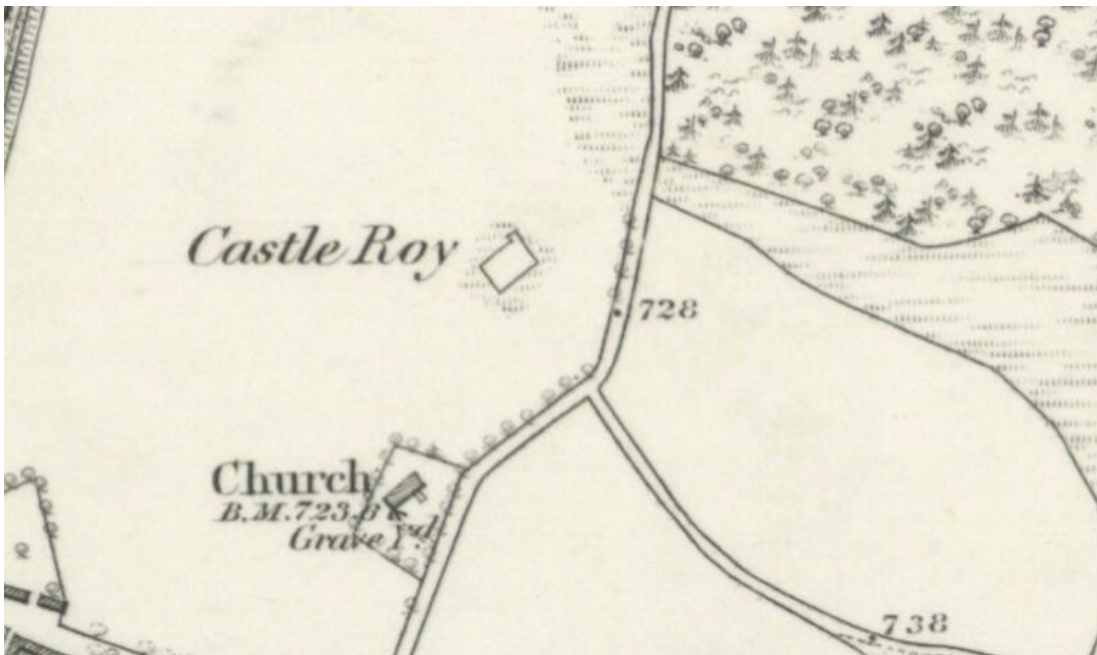


Figure 2 (above) – Detail from Ordnance Survey (1875), illustrating the quadrangular ruined enclosure with northern corner tower at Castle Roy. Note also the proximity of the adjacent church and mixed woodland (used with kind permission of National Library of Scotland).

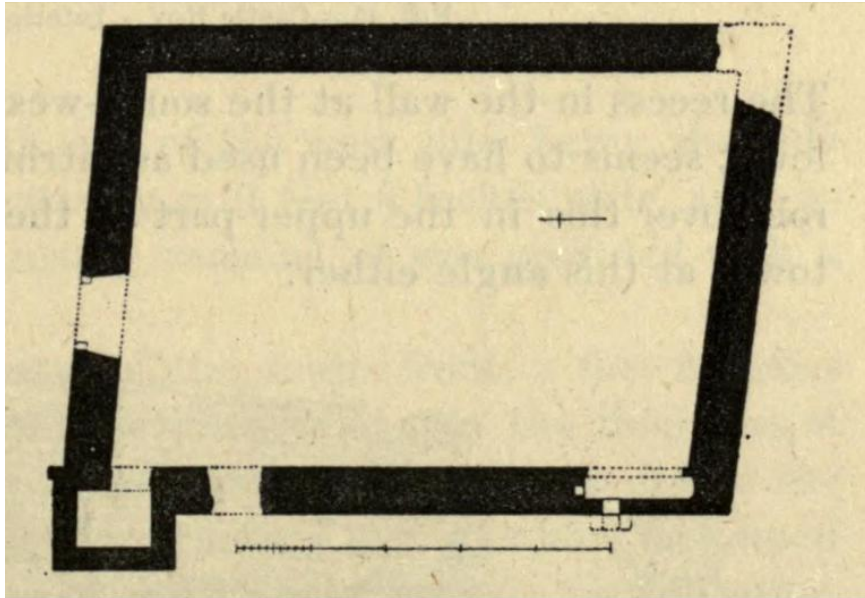


Figure 3 (above) – Scaled plan of Castle Roy from MacGibbon and Ross (1887, 65, fig. 44).

Whilst in interim this drawing serves to identify and orientate the main features of the structure, including some areas of wall core adjacent to collapse, going forward the project hopes to use more recent measured survey data commission by the Castle Roy Trust (Garner-Lahire 2013).



Figure 4 – From the south Castle Roy appears to be located atop a prominent mound. This view also shows the large breach and adjacent exposed wall cores at the south corner of the enclosure. No Scale; photograph M. Thacker.



Figure 5 – Full face-core-face cross-section of south-east wall visible and accessible from breach in south corner. Note large volumes of core mortar. Scale 500mm; photograph M. Thacker.



Figure 6 – Castle Roy from the north-north-west. Note north-east and north-west arch-headed entrances, exposed wall core at lower levels and around postern of the north-west wall, and some recent consolidation and temporary buttressing of northern tower. No Scale; photograph M. Thacker.



Figure 7 – Exposed primary core rubble of the north jamb of the north-west postern entrance, with some recent consolidation and re-facing of the internal face and jamb. Scale 500mm; photograph M. Thacker.



Figure 8 – Visible core rubble and constructional mortar exposed by missing face stone in external face of the north-west wall. Scale 500mm; photograph M. Thacker.



Figure 9 – Core mortar within the south-west wall of Castle Roy. Note high concentration of large angular probable heated limestone kiln-relicts. Scale 10mm; photograph M. Thacker.