

# **Stirling Castle**

## **Assessment of cultural significance and proposed archaeological response**

### **New railings at steps to wall walk, Queen Anne Gardens**

#### **Introduction**

This assessment outlines the archaeological issues associated with the proposed installation of new railings at the steps to the wall walk, in the SW corner of the Queen Anne Gardens. The proposed railings are in response to a recent Visitor Safety Risk Assessment and are in keeping with those recently installed at stairs and wall-walks in the Douglas Gardens where there were unprotected drops. The proposed railings would match the 1920s Ministry of Works style already existing elsewhere at the castle, to achieve consistency across the site. Although some down-taking and rebuilding works are proposed as part of the installation, the main archaeological issue concerns the foundation required to secure the railings at the base of the steps.

#### **Historical background**

Stirling Castle is a strongly-fortified medieval and later royal castle occupying a volcanic outcrop commanding the upper Forth valley. Within the castle there are three main enclosures: the outer defences (on the main line of approach), the main enclosure (at the summit of the rock) bounded in the south by the forework and encircled by a defensive wall. The natural approach to the castle is along the gentle slope to the SE, so it was along this side that the chief defences were concentrated.

The Queen Anne Gardens are located at the SW corner of the castle complex. The area in front of the southern curtain wall may have been transformed into a garden as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, creating an elegant outdoor space, which is still appreciated by visitors. A terraced walk from the Palace overlooking the W end of the garden was created against the forework in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. References to the maintenance of the castle's gardens begin in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and continue into the 17<sup>th</sup> century when an English gardener was appointed to provide plants for Charles I. The Queen Anne Gardens were transformed into a bowling green in the 1620s.

#### **Assessment of archaeological sensitivity**

As indicated in Drawing No 348/291/U/91, fixings for the new railings will all be into existing mortar joints. Parts of the fabric of the stairs will need to be taken down and rebuilt in order for the fixings to be installed, and it is necessary for the wall core to be investigated to ensure stability. The relevant stones have been carefully numbered in advance of this process, and a photographic record will be made of these works.

At the base of the steps, the new railings will require a foundation to be installed. This will require a foundation measuring 325mm in depth and 550mm wide to be excavated into the edge of a surface of small, irregular stone blocks forming the ground surface to the S of the steps. Although this surface may seal made-up deposits, there is a possibility that the foundation will impact upon archaeological levels.

### **Proposed archaeological mitigation**

Because there is a possibility that the excavation of the foundation for the bottom post of the railings will impact on archaeological deposits, we propose that the excavation of the foundation trench is monitored by an archaeologist. The trench should be hand excavated to the required depth or to the top of the first archaeological layer, whichever is shallower. The excavation will be carried out by HES Monument Conservation Unit and will be monitored by Kirkdale Archaeology under the terms of the HES Archaeology Call Off Contract. If significant archaeological deposits are encountered, excavation will stop and the findings will be recorded. Kirkdale will report back to the HES Cultural Resources Advisor, who will discuss the implications of this with the District Architect and Heritage Management.

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16.11.16