

# WRITTEN STATEMENT OF INVESTIGATION

*In respect of*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
MONITORING & RECORDING

*At*

**URQUHART CASTLE**

*For*

Historic Environment Scotland

*By*

Kirkdale Archaeology



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## INTRODUCTION

OS Grid Reference: NH 530 286

HS Index Number: 90309

A programme of archaeological works conducted by Kirkdale Archaeology is required in order to monitor the proposed works to address the erosion of path-side turf, flanking the approach to the Urquhart Castle jetty (Fig. 1). The turf either side of the present footpath is very susceptible to erosion, caused in particular by visitor footfall from tour groups approaching from Loch Ness. The denuded turf is unsightly and can become rutted and uneven.

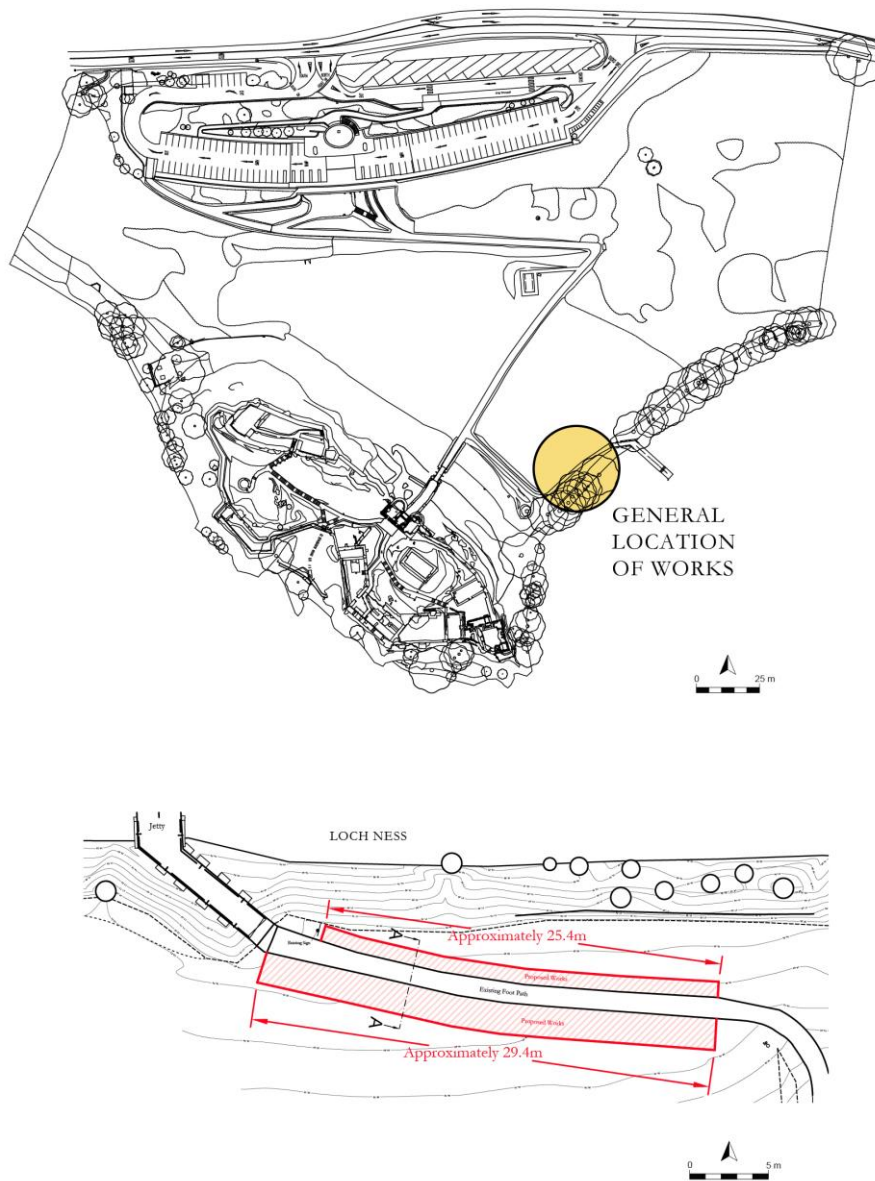


Figure 1: Location plans of the proposed works.

The proposed works comprise turf reinforcement and drainage works adjacent to the existing hard surfaced approach to the jetty. Two strips will be excavated, one either side of the path to a maximum depth of 175mm, allowing the installation of a separating membrane beneath free-draining material, topped by an upper layer of turf reinforced by 'Netpave 25' permeable paving system.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The monument comprises the remains of a complex medieval castle on a promontory on the north shore of Loch Ness. The northern end is marked by the remains of a mostly 16th-century tower, with lesser-preserved buildings including the great hall and kitchens, a chapel, gatehouse, smithy, dovecote and other buildings of unidentified purpose. A ditch formerly crossed by a drawbridge protects the landward side of the castle. At the north end of this ditch is a large kiln which suggests that there was once a small settlement beyond the walls of the castle. The proposed works lie beyond the castle ditch to the north west, where a jetty provides access to Loch Ness.

## **SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS & ASSESSMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY**

There have been a number of archaeological investigations of varying scale within Urquhart Castle and its surrounding area.

Excavations within the castle in 1983 revealed a dense layer of kitchen midden, deposits of pottery and other artefacts, and indications of earlier fortifications. In 2011, 'key-hole' investigation for the installation of 22 permanent survey markers within the castle precinct revealed limited structural remains: within the trench associated with Marker 5 on the inner lip of the ditch, to the north east of the entrance path, and Marker 10 at the base of a stepped buttress at the easternmost point of the Castle wall (see Figure 2). Excavation of the remaining trenches revealed only disturbed topsoil.

Beyond the castle enclosure, archaeological evaluation and watching briefs relating to the improvement of visitor facilities between 1995-1999, were largely archaeologically sterile. Associated geophysical survey revealed little, due to the presence of boulder clay across much of the site.

Further investigation in advance of the development of a visitor centre and car park in 2000 exposed timber buildings dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries plus evidence of light industrial activity, confirming the existence of occupation beyond the castle ditch. However, as these remains were located at some distance from the proposed works, it is unlikely that material associated with such occupation will be encountered.

Prior intervention associated with nearby jetty works found little of archaeological significance in the area neighbouring area. Following structural concerns over the existing wooden jetty, a watching brief and small excavation were carried out December 2008 in a sheet-piled cofferdam, prior to the insertion of a concrete base for a temporary floating pontoon (see Figure 3). In 2009 three core samples were extracted from the area of the proposed fixed jetty (see Figure 3), with five trenches excavated in 2010 in advance of the eventual installation of a new pier and access ramp (see Figure 4). No finds or features of archaeological significance were revealed during any of these works, with the upper layers of topsoil, tracked-in overburden and turf heavily cut through with roots (excavated to a maximum depth of 550mm in 2010 Trench 1). It is likely that similar disturbance will have occurred in the area of the proposed works.

There are no records for any previous interventions specifically in the area of the proposed works and the area lies beyond that covered in the geophysical survey in 1997. However, the works involve limited ground disturbance at a shallow depth (up to 175mm deep), and we would not expect significant archaeological deposits to be encountered within this depth. The affected area is out with the castle enclosure, to the northwest of the surrounding ditch, and to the northeast of the area where the castletown is thought to have been. Whilst there are no records for any previous interventions having targeted the specific area of the proposed works, the archaeological potential of the affected area is considered to be low given the nature of the deposits encountered during work on the adjacent pier, the likely bioturbation from roots of vegetation, and the previous disturbance as a result of installation of concrete foundations for the existing hard surfaced footpath. Furthermore, the area has previously been used for events, for tent pitching and the erection of crowd control barriers in the immediate vicinity, in an area considered to be of lower archaeological sensitivity than other parts of the castle grounds. This activity may also have led to further ground disturbance as a result of the insertion and removal of pegs and barrier poles (see Figure 5).

## **REFERENCES**

**Kirkdale Archaeology**, 2009. DSR: Urquhart Castle: Archaeological excavation and monitoring, December 2008 and February 2009: HSCO- 90309- 2008- 01 and HSCO- 90309- 2009- 02 (respectively). Unpublished Report.

**Kirkdale Archaeology**, 2010. DSR: Urquhart Castle: Archaeological excavation and monitoring, December 2009 and February 2010. HSCO- 90309- 2009- 04. Unpublished Report.

**Kirkdale Archaeology**, 2012. DSR: Urquhart Castle: Watching Brief, November 2011. HSCO-90309-2012-01. Unpublished Report.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL MITIGATION**

While the works involve minimal ground disturbance, and they are not in an area of high archaeological sensitivity, we do not have any previous record of the extent and nature of deposits in this area. Furthermore, there may be potential for recovery of stray finds. The work will therefore be carried out under archaeological supervision. An archaeological watching brief will provide information on topsoil depths and will allow us to record the nature of disturbance in this area, it will also ensure that any finds encountered during the works are accurately identified and recorded.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESPONSE**

### **FIELDWORK**

The archaeological work will be carried out under the terms of the HES archaeology call-off contract. If significant archaeological deposits are encountered, work should stop immediately and HES Cultural Resources Team and Heritage Management Directorate will be contacted; excavation will be adjourned and the findings (to date) recorded.

### **MONITORING**

This will entail:

- The presence on site of at least one site archaeologist during all ground breaking works.
- The archaeologist should be able to direct rate, location and method of excavation employed by contractor.
- The archaeologist should suspend excavation if necessary, in order to examine / clean / retrieve any archaeological features, surfaces, structures or artefacts that may be exposed during excavation.
- All spoil will be suitably stored for examination before backfill/reinstatement.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING**

This will entail:

### *Drawing*

- Confirmation of site plan as supplied by the Client.
- Location plan of all interventions at a suitable scale, 1:50/1:100.
- Detailed, individual area plans of all interventions – at significant stages of excavation if appropriate and on completion of excavation, drawn at a scale of 1:20.
- All sections, or a representative selection, will be drawn in detail at a scale of 1:10.

- All drawing will be annotated with site feature numbers, site code, scale, date and name(s) of staff.

#### *Photography*

- Still photographs will be colour digital and will record general location of works, plus detailed coverage during, and on completion of, excavation.
- All photographs will have a suitable scale visible.
- All photographs will be listed in a full photo register (describing content, orientation and date).
- 'Documentary' photographs will also be taken in order to represent site conditions, constraints and resources.
- If appropriate, digital moving coverage will be taken for further illustration of site conditions, constraints and resources.

#### *Site Recording: Buried Archaeology*

- Description of all excavated material will be expressed in terms of archaeological features, each of which will be assigned a unique three digit number. The numbering will also reference the site code and any individual trench number.
- Each discrete feature will be described on site *pro forma* which will cover stratigraphic relationships, finds, physical description, location, drawing references and interpretation.
- Each feature will also be listed in a feature register – comprising a brief description, date, and feature number.

#### *Sampling*

When required, three levels of sampling are proposed for above and below ground investigations:

- **General:** Bulk sample per context removed.
- **Special:** Specific sample identified for later specialist study (charcoal, industrial waste, environmental, infestations, organics).
- **Specialist:** Monitoring of any independent sampling strategy from external specialists (dendrochronological, mortar, paint, *etc.*)

## GENERAL ISSUES

In the event of the discovery of significant remains and/or artefacts, which may be impacted by the proposed works, excavation should be suspended until further instruction is received from relevant agencies. At this point the Historic Environment Scotland CRT and Heritage Management should also be informed and consulted.

All artefacts, faunal remains and samples will be processed off-site. Disposal and/or examination/ conservation of this material will be assessed in the light of results of fieldwork. Any programme of specialist post-excavation work on finds, faunal remains and analysis of samples will be assessed on completion of the fieldwork

Any human remains revealed during the excavation will remain *in situ*. All discoveries of human remains will be reported to the local police and Historic Environment Scotland CRT.

If human remains are to be excavated during any subsequent work, this will be completed in line with Historic Scotland policy on the treatment of human remains.

## REPORTING

The results of the Fieldwork and DBA will be presented in an illustrated Data Structures Report (DSR) with accompanying digital documentation as specified by the Historic Environment Scotland CRT.

Copies of the report and digital files will be produced as specified. Typically this comprises:

- Four bound paper copies.
- Two digital versions on CD including all photographs (the latter in .tiff or jpeg format).

This will include an assessment of all assemblages and recommendations for any further specialist work.

A costed programme for the full sample analysis towards publication of the findings will be included if appropriate.

A short note will be submitted to 'Discovery and Excavation in Scotland'.

The position of all trenches, excavation areas *etc.*, will be supplied on CD disk, as a georeferenced .dxf file.

Reports will be submitted within 20 working days of completion of the fieldwork.

## **ARCHIVE**

If there is no further requirement for reporting beyond the DSR and D&E entry, the report and site records will be compiled in a suitable archive comprising primary data and digital documentation as appropriate, suitable for submission to local and national archives.

The archive will follow current guidelines for archival standards set by the Archaeology Data Service and RCAHMS.

The project archive will be deposited with the NMRS within six months of completion of fieldwork and relevant post-excavation analyses. Finds will be subject to the Scots laws of Treasure Trove and *Bona Vacantia*, and will be reported to the Crown Agent for disposal. Appropriate conservation of finds will be conducted before disposal.

**Gordon Ewart**  
**4<sup>th</sup> October, 2016**