

Stirling Castle

Assessment of cultural significance and proposed archaeological response

Queen Anne Gardens, Protective barrier at steps from Outer Close

(Please refer to Drawing No 348/291/U/90)

Introduction

This assessment outlines the archaeological issues associated with the proposed installation of a new protective barrier at the steps from the Outer Close, in the NE corner of the Queen Anne Gardens. The proposed railings are in response to a recent Visitor Safety Risk Assessment and their form and design will be 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 fixing into mortar joints and (for the snake stay) into a modern Caithness slab are proposed as part of the installation, the main archaeological issue concerns the foundations required to secure the main uprights of the railings into the ground.

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 15th 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-16th century. References to the maintenance of the castle's gardens begin in the 15th century and continue into the 17th 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. The proposed railings will be situated at the truncated W tower of the castle's medieval forework.

Assessment of archaeological sensitivity

As indicated in Drawing No 348/291/U/90, fixings for the new railings will all be into existing mortar joints, with the decorative 'snake' stay (see View A) fixed to a modern

Caithness slab. The main uprights will be secured into the underlying ground via a series of new concrete pad foundations.

These fairly shallow foundations may impact entirely upon made-up deposits, but 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 foundations for the uprights will impact on archaeological deposits, we propose that the excavations are monitored by an archaeologist. Each foundation 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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