

ECOLOGY AND LANDSCAPE-USE WITHIN THE  
PRE-MODERN LORDSHIP OF FORBES:  
INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS AT DRUMINNOR CASTLE,  
2012 AND 2013

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INTRODUCTION

As with most Scottish estates, the boundaries of the Forbes Estate have altered with the changing fortunes of almost every generation of incumbent lord. It is presumed that the original focus was centred upon the Braes of Forbes (Forbes, 2009, 10) overlooking the Don from the south-west corner of the Correen Hills - the western extension of the ridge of Bennachie.

As the Forbes family grew in political importance and new lands were added to the estate, sections were devolved upon cadet branches of the family. This study limits itself to the core lands of the estate noted in the Forbes and Keig rentals of the mid 16th century (MS 588 and GD44/31/1/2), both surviving as later transcripts. These lands extend from the Bogie at Rhynie in the north, right across the western extension of the Bennachie massif to the Don in the south, as far east as Glenton, glowered over by Bennachie itself. To the west the estate was bounded by the Mossat Burn separating the uplands of Bennachie and the Correen Hills from the Cairngorms to the west. The area, therefore, existed as a discrete political unit encompassing the entire range of ecologies required to support its own economy. Its survival as a discrete entity for the five hundred years from its first recorded existence in the 1270s until its partial division at the very end of the 18th century permits the study of ecological and cultural development in the North-east within the confines of a single lordship. That the lordship remained (and partly still remains) in the hands of a single family increases its potential importance through that continuity of management and seigneurial control. As a means of unlocking the pre-modern history of Bennachie and its hinterland, it is unrivalled.

## LANDSCAPE AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Colin Shepherd

*History*

Estate plans covering most of the study area survive from the 1770s, though there are some unfortunate gaps, namely the original 'core' area of the Braes of Forbes. Rentals dating from the mid 16th century furnish important data concerning agricultural and tenurial practices, land-use and relative land values and how these vary through time prior to their complete replanning and re-ordering around the end of the 1700s. The Barony Court Book of Forbes (Scottish History Society, 1919, hereafter SHS) gives important insights as to how the estate was managed and how society functioned during the inhospitable period of the mid 1600s. The relative rarity of crime in the area is somewhat surprising but, it should be noted, these courts were limited to judging offences valued at less than £2 Sterling (*ibid.*, 220). But, as will be seen, this period is of major importance as regards the development of the castle.

Mythologically, the Forbes family claim descent in the area as far back as the 9th century. Historically, they are first attested in a charter of King Alexander II granting Duncan Lord of Forbeys the barony of Forbeys, possibly leading to the construction of the Old Tower at Druminnor (Forbes, 2009). If this is correct, along with the supposition of the earliest core area lying on the Braes of Forbes, the much earlier establishment of the Forbeses in the area cannot be in doubt. Tradition also alludes to an earlier, probably earthwork, castle predating the Old Tower. Where it was - and a range of sites have been plausibly suggested - is still a mystery remaining to be solved.

Political rivalry forms the backdrop to much of medieval lordly life throughout Britain. In the case of the Forbeses, their rivalry involved a life and death struggle with the Gordons that ultimately bankrupted them. Though, it must be added, the Gordons hardly walked away unscathed and, at times, both found themselves on the same side on the battlefield. A favourite pastime of the late Medieval seems to have been a delight in setting fire to one another's residences, frequently with rivals still inside. All seemed to have partaken in this noble sport at one time or another (and, doubtless, kept the local building trade buoyant). Druminnor saw its share of action: attacked by the Gordons in 1449, sacked by the Douglasses in 1452, refortified in 1456, captured and partly demolished by the Gordons in 1571-3, rebuilt in 1577, seized by the government in 1584, raided

by Lord Forbes's own sons in 1592, captured by Royalists and held against attacks by the Forbes from 1645 to 1647, repaired and remodelled in 1660-1, attacked by Jacobites in 1689-90, besieged by them in 1746, partly burnt by accident in the 1750s and largely demolished in 1800 (Forbes, 2009, 7). It was even almost bombed by a German Zeppelin in 1917! (*ibid.*, 19). The foregoing gives a heavy hint that the excavations were always going to be rather complicated! Though, on the plus side, such fixed dates for traumatic disruptions to the fabric of the castle can be useful.

The surviving lower floors of the present castle contain mason's marks identical to some found at Strathbogie and dated to c.1430-40. This date is supported by a receipt for work done (*ibid.*, 24). In other words, from this date onwards, it is possible to gain a clearer indication of the exciting life of Druminnor between the mid 15th and 19th centuries. Until 2011 the existence of a groundplan and two rough sketches of the castle prior to its extensive demolition in 1800 were not widely appreciated. Upon their discovery, it was deemed possible to test their veracity and to try to understand that part of the developmental history of the castle left unstated in the documentary and architectural record. Furthermore, it was hoped to be able to push that story back prior to the early 15th century.

Consideration of the dates mentioned above combined with what is known of the financial situation of the Forbeses might suggest that serious rebuilding work occurring after the destruction by the Gordon's are likely to predate (or even to be partly the cause of) the debt to creditors recorded as being in the order of 68,000 merks c.1600. In 1644 Lord Forbes was in prison for his debts (whence he protested to Cromwell against the execution of Charles I) (*ibid.*, 17), though his son, the Master of Forbes, was made Sheriff of Aberdeen in 1646 (*ibid.*, 26). On the other hand, after working abroad for the restoration of Charles II, it is not impossible that on the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, funds from a grateful monarch headed their way and extensive work to the castle undertaken. This is likely to have been the last time that the grand old fortress, in its entirety, was given a makeover. From then till its partial demolition in 1800 money problems will have militated against such investment.

#### *Barony Court Book of Forbes: 1659 - 1678*

*"The said day ye bailzie ordaines the haill croftis yat belongs to the Maines of Druminnor yat they sall be oblieged to carie the holl malt yat is brewin within ye hous of Castell Forbes to ye mill and frome the mill to ye said place*

*of Druminnore, wnder the pain of tuall shilling Scottis for ewry boll of malt yat in uncarried within term of law, wnder the paine of poynding”.*

This excerpt from November 1663 gives some interesting details concerning the roll of the castle in the mid 17th century. It suggests that grain was steeped and germinated at the castle and, possibly, kiln-dried there before being sent to the mill. The drying may have occurred at the mill but dry grain would be easier to transport than wet. The miller would then have crushed the grain and returned the malt to the castle for mashing and brewing. A further entry for 1675 refers to ‘the girnell of Castle Forbes’. Within the plan of the 17th century castle, therefore, accommodation was required for: a grain store, a malting floor, possibly a kiln and a brewhouse. The Book also tells us that ‘the great hall of the old tower’ was often the meeting place for the court and it was generally presided over by the Master of Forbes.

### *The Wider Landscape Setting*

Figure 1 shows the landscape setting for Druminnor Castle as given by an estate plan drawn c.1771. Documentary evidence indicates that certain settlements noted on this plan had not been in existence for very long. Of particular relevance are the cases of Boggieside and Cot-toun. Castle Hill, the Mains of Druminnor and Barflat - mill and toun - were present in 1552. But, that was all in this northern part of the estate. Cot-toun and Boggieside appear in the 1696 poll return, though the former is absent from the 1740 rental. The Barony Book also reveals, through identifying a witness in a case, that Cot-toun was in existence in 1665 and Boggieside, a little earlier, in 1660. We are told, moreover, that Boggieside was tenanted rather than being a simple settlement of cottars or grassmen. This distinguishes it from Cot-toun which, as its name implies, was an abode of cottars. Further detail revealed by the 16th century rental notes that the Mains of Druminnor were ‘in my lords hand’ and that there were a number of ‘croiftis maid furth of the Mains’. What this seems to be saying is that c.1550 the Mains was being managed as ‘demesne’, that is, directly managed by the estate rather than being leased out ‘on farm’. The ‘croiftis’ are said to have been carved out of the lands pertaining to the Mains, though whether this was recently or at some unknown period in the past is not stated. Most of these were held for the desultory sum of six poultry. Comparison with other rents paid on the estate suggest that their value could never have paid for an area of land capable of sustaining anything. In other words, these people must have been receiving their ‘living space’ in return

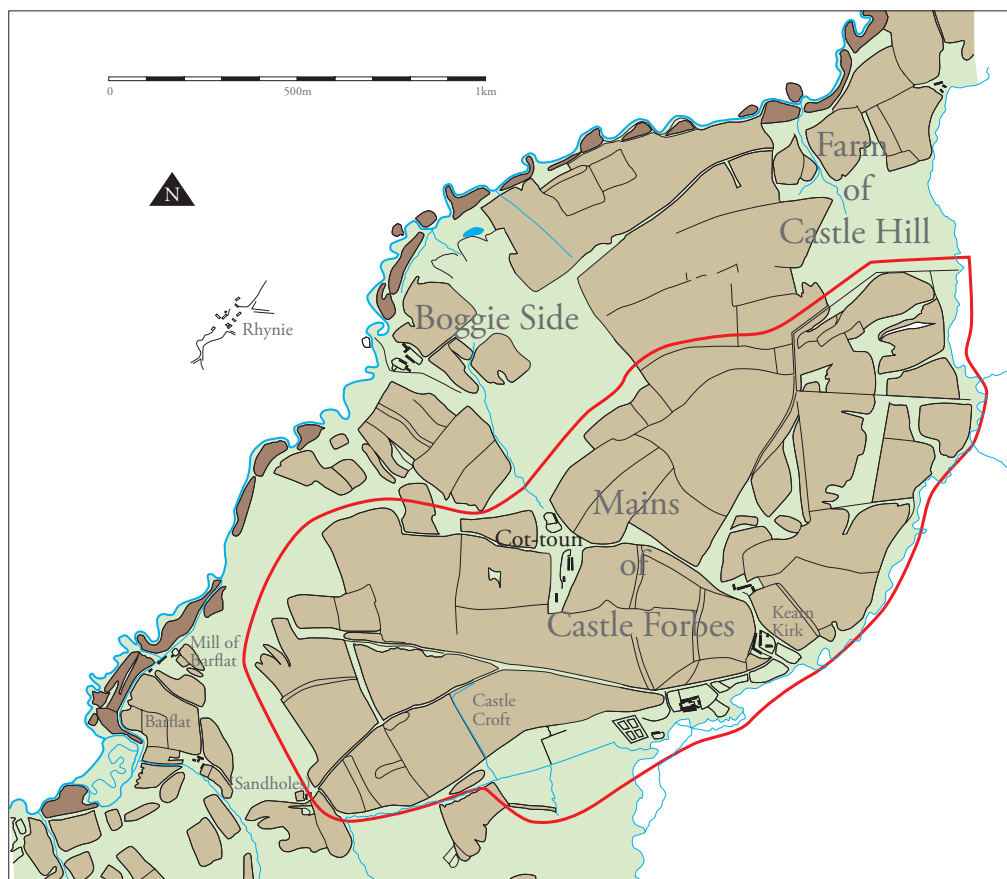


Figure 1. Estate plan of 1771 showing Druminnor and its surroundings (RHP 260-1).

for something other than 'rent'. The situation suggests that they were receiving land in return for services. They will have supplied the manpower for working the Mains lands that were kept 'in my lords hand'.

It should also be noted that the term 'croft' is here being used in an earlier terminological sense than occurs with 19th century 'crofts'. This should be remembered when coming across this term in all pre-modern situations. 'Croft' refers to an area of enclosed land for the sole use of the 'crofter'. This person is also likely also to have held strips of land in the open fields. It is worth questioning where these 'crofts' were situated. Two possibilities present themselves. One is that the cot-toun as marked on the estate plan (Figure 1) had not changed position and the crofts lay about it. This would be fine if there were mention of Boggieside in the c.1550 rental. The pattern of the fields at Boggieside suggests a layout that relates

to a much earlier period of development than the 1660s, which is when Boggieside first enters the records - and, at that time, as a tenanted farm. The second suggestion would see the fields of Boggieside as pertaining to the crofts of the cottars, derived from the lands of the Mains. If so, this suggests that the original site of the cot-toun should lie adjacent to the lands of Boggieside and that Boggieside was a creation of the mid 17th century. At this point the cottars would have received new cottages, possibly strips of land in the open fields and, possibly, wages as well. It is interesting that one of the cottars in 1696 (Elizabeth Chein) was noted as having her own servant and that the person who appears to have been her husband (John Gilchrist - women retained their maiden names at this time in the North-east) is not listed in the Cot-toun but as a wage earner on the estate. This also demonstrates that pre-modern working arrangements are not necessarily the simple affairs that are so often suggested. The similarity in numbers of cottars listed in the 1696 poll tax with the number of 'crofters' in the c.1550 rental is also worth noting.

In attempting to understand the rationale behind the construction and development of the castle, it is important to try to understand how it articulates and has articulated with its surrounding environment. The methods employed in the management of the land, commented on above, help in piecing together this working landscape. Cartographic and documentary evidence can operate together to tease out these issues.

### *Comparative Castle Analysis*

Limited excavation and study has occurred in the North-east and so the number of comparative sites is fairly limited. Work at Fyvie (Cameron, 2012) has noted the possible provision of a private chapel, though the case is still open. Referring to an earlier intervention (*ibid.*, 7), the presumed curtain wall is said to have had footing 2.9m thick. This ties in with an eye-witness accounts of the footings of the Old Tower at Druminnor noting it to be 9 feet thick (Leyden, 1903, 229). Of greater interest for this work is the description of the wall of the presumed chapel at Fyvie. The foundation was "1m wide and constructed of large boulders with small angular infill hearting" (Cameron, 2012, 23). The post holes noted within the cobbled floor, though larger than possibly similar features at Druminnor deserve comparison (*ibid.*, 24). The date is assumed to be around c.1600.

Craigievar was built in the early 17th century and so may be considered contemporary with aspects of the later remodelling at Druminnor. William Forbes of Menie completed the castle in 1626. For present purposes, it is the construction

of the barmkin wall that is of most interest. The basal course is said to have comprised an inner and outer row of facing stones set into orange clay and with a core of orange clay and small stones (Greig, 1993, 387). An 18th century plan had shown a building lying against this wall. Excavation revealed only post holes which led to the conclusion that this range had been a simple wooden lean-to structure (*ibid.*, 391). This appears to have been removed by 1791.

Drum Castle, assessed by Slade (1985), is also worthy of note. The ground floor walls of the east range where they abut the tower are little more than a metre wide (*ibid.*, illus. 3) but supported two further storeys. They are noted as being built between 1619 and 1627. The tower comprises walls approximating to the '9 feet thick' of the Old Tower at Druminnor and it is presumed that the tower at Drum formed part of a larger complex, mostly removed by the early 17th century remodelling (*ibid.*, 318). Drum and its probable contemporary at Hallforest are both oblong towers, reminiscent of the description of Druminnor as a 'square and half a square' (Leyden, 1903, 229), a footprint replicated at Pitsligo (see below). Though two periods of construction can be considered for the tower of Drum, there is general agreement that it was built between the start of the second half of the 13th century and the end of the first quarter of the 14th (Slade, 1985, 314). Recent work (Greig, 2004) has not refined this conclusion.

Pitsligo is important for comparative purposes owing to the familial links to the Forbeses of Druminnor, being the earliest cadet branch of that house (McKean, 1991, 371). A charter was received for the lands in 1428 and it has been presumed that the tower was modelled on that at Castle Forbes (*ibid.*). The edifice was transformed in the 17th century to create an example of what McKean describes as "a gracious Renaissance equivalent of a chateau" (*ibid.*, 370). The 'defensive' measures are cogently argued to be anachronistic. McKean notes a tendency for red sandstone dressings giving way to grey over time (*ibid.*, 377). This may be of consequence for Druminnor.

Finally, to turn north and to the site of Innes House in Moray. Again, this appears to have been a 17th century remodelling of an earlier site with the later ground floor wall thicknesses ranging between .9m and 1.4m thick to support five storeys (McKean, 2003, 326). Of possible relevance to Druminnor is the observation that the latter 17th century saw the relegation of 'service operations' to a back court in order to keep them out of the view of guests to the house (*ibid.*, 321).

The pattern that emerges from across the North-east in the 17th century, therefore is one of earlier defensive sites being 'made over' in order to produce

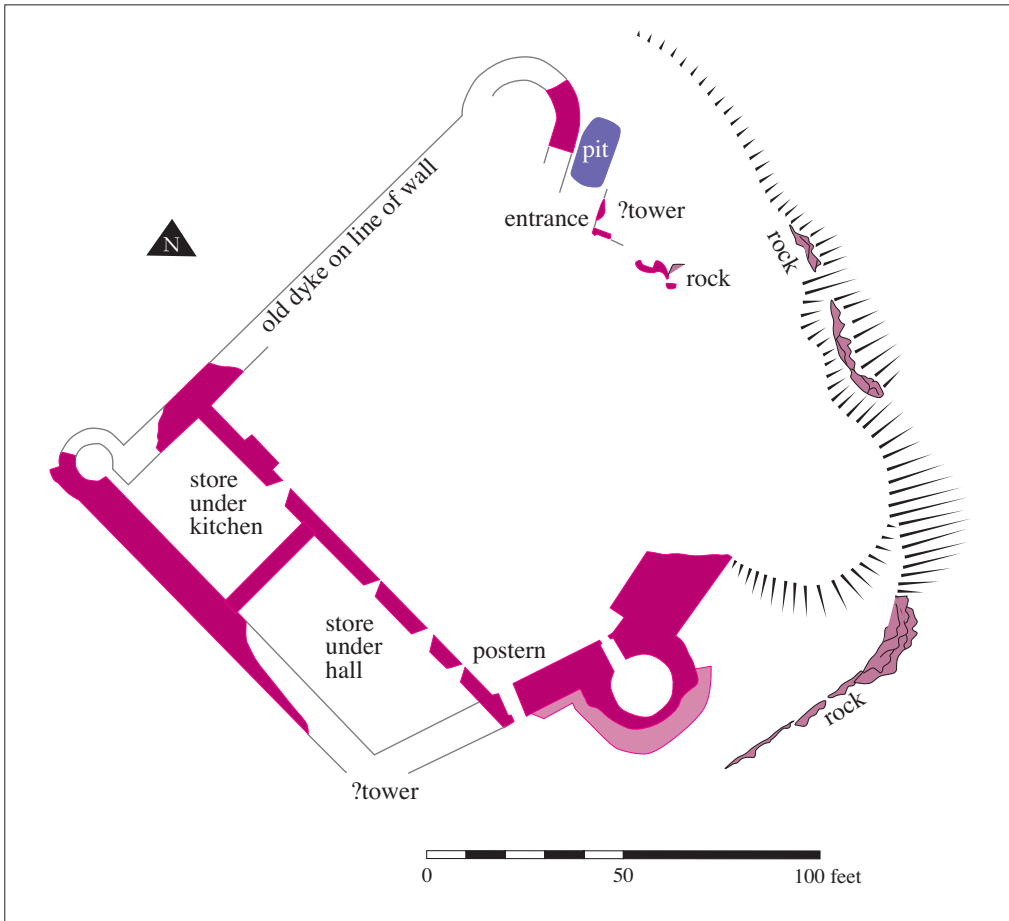


Figure 2. Coull Castle, redrawn from Simpson, 1924.

refined accommodation. The retention of the towers - possibly the oldest features - demonstrated a sense of permanence within the landscape without compromising the comfort of the living quarters. The Old Tower at Druminnor was retained as the sitting for the Baronial Court throughout that century.

If the foregoing presents a picture of developmental processes in castle construction in the 17th century, what can be said about earlier periods. As noted above, the 17th century appears to have been a time of remodelling and removal of earlier structures. The exception being, possibly, the original core of the site, the tower. It may, therefore, be necessary to turn to abandoned castles to try to sketch in the missing pieces. Sadly, those of the appropriate date are hard to come by in the area. It might be noteworthy that there are a plethora of earlier castle sites



(possibly including one at Druminnor) that fell out of use but that many of their replacements appear to have remained largely intact. Castles of still later vintage, also frequently failed. This might imply that the political consolidation of power blocks during the later 12th century survived fairly intact through to the 17th. Subsequent desertions of castle sites occurring largely as the result of cosmetic imperatives. One site stands out as an interesting comparison for Druminnor - Coull Castle, near Tarland. Kildrummy would fit the date but is politically much higher in status. Coull although held by the powerful Durwards appears not to have been used directly by themselves and is, in scale, closer to Druminnor. In fact, as Druminnor ultimately derived by gift from an earlier native Earl of Mar to be held on his behalf by the Forbeses, Coull might well have had a similar subsequent history were it not for the vicissitudes of fate.

Topographically, Coull has more in common with Druminnor than the earlier group of abandoned, low-lying earthwork castles of motte and bailey or ringwork form. It sits on a projecting rocky outcrop overlooking the steep gully of the Tarland Burn. Nearby is its mill, demesne farm, gallows hill and early church site dedicated to St. Nathalan. The curtain wall of this castle was over 8' thick with the great tower - in this instance circular - measuring 15' in internal diameter with walls 7' thick. The living accommodation was housed in a hall block along the south-west side (see Figure 2) (Simpson, 1924). It must be remembered that Coull castle was not occupied beyond the early part of the 14th century. The present hall block of Druminnor dates to the mid 15th century.

In considering the possible developmental phases of Druminnor, the character of the plan and layout of Coull may represent a notional idea of what may have been expected at Druminnor at the start of the 14th century to complement its great tower. Drum's tower may stand as a reasonable exemplar for this as is reflected in contemporary drawings (such as those appended to the estate plans RHP 260; RHP 44705), though Druminnor's tower appears to have stood higher at six storeys.

#### THE EXCAVATIONS David Irving and Colin Shepherd

The key aims of the 2012-13 excavations were: first, to see whether there were any remaining traces of the 'footprint' of the castle as recorded on an estate plan of the 1780s (Figure 3); second, to understand their location in relation

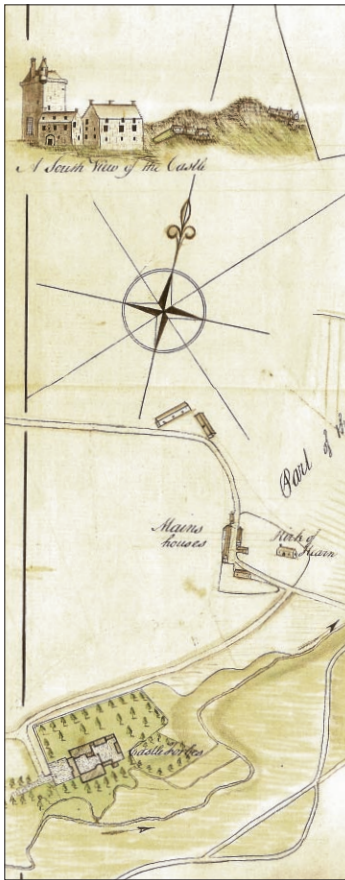


Figure 3. Portion of an estate plan (RHP 44705) showing footprint of castle in bottom left and visual depiction in the top left corner. (Reproduced by kind permission of Lord Forbes).

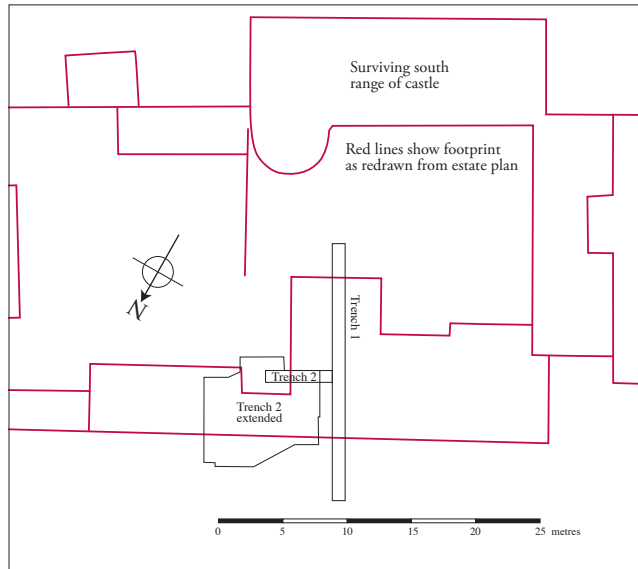


Figure 4. Site showing trenches 1 and 2 in relation to the extrapolated castle footprint related to existing structures

to each other within the context of that overall plan; third, to discover any traces of the activities carried out within these elements; and, finally, to understand the chronological relationship of these features to the overall development of the castle from its earliest conception.

The excavation in the first season began in the north-west corner of the courtyard where two trial trenches were dug in areas thought most likely to cut structures identifiable from the estate plan (See Figure 4). Two trenches were opened in order to gauge the potential likelihood of achieving the aims stated and, if the results were

as hoped, to provide data for future and more extensive examination during the second season.

Trench 1 (see Figure 5) was cut 1m wide and 20m long. It crossed the courtyard perpendicular to the tower of the palace building, over the car parking area and into the grass bank beyond. Excavation involved removing the surface layer of the trench until the upper level of the context below was revealed. The northernmost

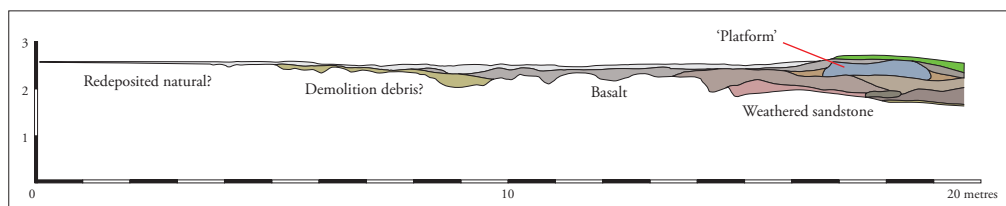


Figure 5. Section drawn of Trench 1.

zone of the trench revealed an unexpected and unusual rubble platform at a depth of around 20cm. This was composed of freshly quarried granodiorite packed into a dense matrix. Stratigraphically it overlaid almost everything and appeared to be associated with nothing other than 19th century material and demolition debris. It was sealed by a dense, gritty layer that appears to have been a levelling layer occurring extensively across the site. One possible explanation might be that it provided a platform on which cranes and winching gear could have stood when the castle was being taken down at the beginning of the 19th century. Much of the stone is likely to have been sold off. Across the remainder of the trench, just a few centimetres below the current ground level, it appeared that natural rock was encountered. No occupation debris was apparent throughout this trench apart from within a topmost levelling layer of waste material and hardcore. The finds included glazed pottery and earthenware, clay pipe stem and bowl, bone, brick and glass, all of which are of 19th century origin. The lack of stratigraphy and surviving deposits appeared to indicate that the area had been scoured, either when the castle was being demolished or in the twentieth century when the courtyard was being developed as a car park. Beneath the platform at the northern end of the trench, the natural subsoil fell steeply and a greater depth of potential stratigraphy was noted. This area is now under investigation and the findings will be published in due course.

Trench 2 (see Figure 6) was initially cut 1m wide and 5m long in an east-west direction. It revealed a clear stratigraphy with several contexts. Of particular note was a very heavily compacted burnt, deposited layer (04) and a deeper and also

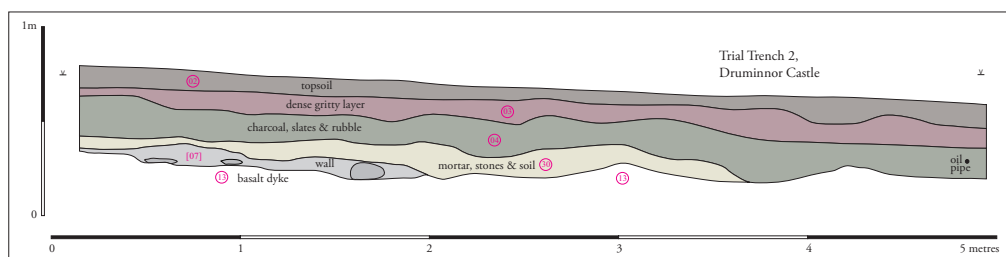


Figure 6. Section drawn of trial Trench 2.

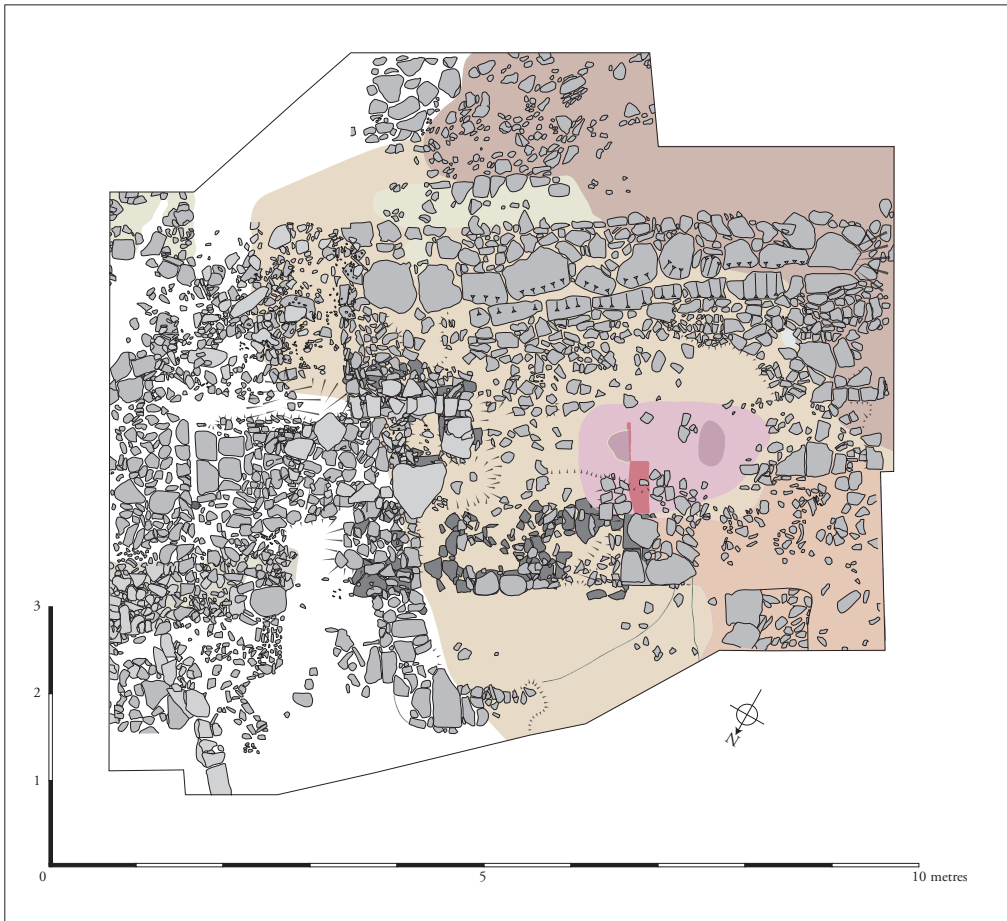


Figure 7. Trench 2 showing all remains.

compacted deposit of building rubble (030) which included iron nails and broken slate. This is believed to have been deliberately scattered and levelled over the site during the construction of the Victorian wing. Finds from the deposits above the the wall structure [07] were all of nineteenth century origin, consisting of bone, glazed pottery, earthenware and shards of glass. At a depth of approximately half a metre, trowelling revealed evidence for a mortar-bonded wall and cobbling, both of which were at a similar depth to the basalt dyke material (13). Both appeared to be embedded into it. The dating of the wall and cobbles remained problematic at this point as no artefacts were found from *in situ* deposits. The structure was presumed to be of eighteenth century date owing to its method of construction. It was considered that it may be one of the courtyard structures shown on the estate plan.



Figure 8. Early 19th century features.

As trench 2 had revealed structures pertaining to the castle, this became the main focus of the investigation in the second season. Further excavation was carried out creating an irregularly-shaped trench of approximately 9m by 8m, positioned to avoid the driveway and a rare small-leaved beech tree. Similar superficial stratigraphy along with several phases of construction were revealed to be present. Below these, numerous features were encountered (see Figure 7) and it soon became obvious that, contrary to fears concerning lack of survival owing to early-modern landscaping and construction, extensive remains had survived, albeit badly truncated and intercut. What follows is simply an interim interpretation of a possible sequence. Further analysis is required before the following suggestions can be confirmed as completely accurate.

*Early 19th Century (Figure 8)*

The stratigraphically latest features lay immediately under demolition debris that has been assumed to be a product of the mid 19th century construction of the Victorian ‘mansion’ sited at the west end of the existing 15th century hall range. The finds were consistent with a mid century date and not, therefore, deposited during the demolition of the castle that occurred at the beginning of the century. The cobbled surfaces appeared to have been edged by small stones that could not have surrounded a cultivated area. It is suggested that these paths ran through lawns. At its eastern projection a well-constructed gulley suggests an entranceway with timber threshold. No evidence of a stone super-structure was apparent and this may, therefore, indicate a simple timber garden structure.

*Late 18th Century (Figure 9)*

This is the period whence the estate plan derives and the remains illustrated in Figure 9 suggest a successful completion of the project’s initial aim. The features shown would appear to be those present on the estate plan prior to the demolition of large parts of the castle. The wall at the top of the figure was strongly bonded with mortar. The same applied to the small section remaining on the same alignment in the top left of the plan. This wall would have faced onto the courtyard of the castle. Abutting this on its north side was a kerbed area of well-laid cobbles. Only a portion of this survived, although it sealed an earlier beaten-earth floor and hearth beneath. The alignment of the drain may be slightly askew when compared to the wall and it is suggested that this may have been a re-used feature. There also seems little point in having a drain on the inside of a building and this type of structure would appear to be more suited to removing rainwater from the exterior of a structure. Suggestions regarding an internal drain for animal waste does not seem workable in this instance.

North of the cobbling was a further wall with a possible entrance way that was, presumably, the main external wall of the castle enclosure. This wall was not mortared in the same way as the one to the south and its construction was, in fact, quite flimsy in comparison. Its construction is not, however, out of keeping with that noted for the barmkin wall at Craigievar where the wall was placed upon the original ground surface with no foundation trench and no evidence for bonding (Greig, 1993, 388; 391). Craigievar was completed c.1626 and this date would not be out of keeping for the remains noted here.

A number of pieces of 17th century German ‘Frechenware’ were discovered

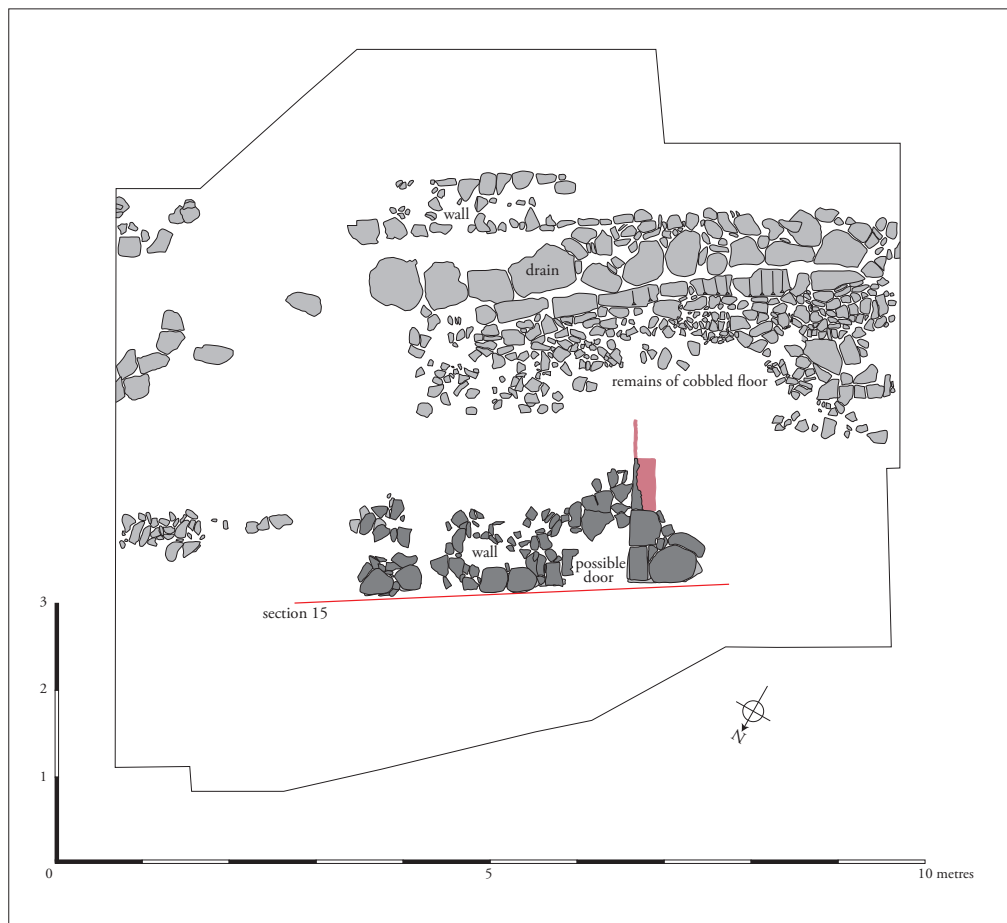


Figure 9. Late 18th c. features.

at the interface of the site clearance layers associated with the 19th century re-ordering of the site and the beaten earth floor. Also within this context were two pieces of window glass showing the characteristic ‘nibbled’ edges where the glass had been made to fit a frame. It is suggested that a thin accumulation of rubbish associated with the abandonment of the castle in the 18th century contained these sherds but that this layer became compressed by later compaction during the mid 19th century levelling. It is noteworthy that there appears to be little evidence of debris dating to when the castle was demolished at the beginning of the 19th century suggesting it was carried out in a very ordered fashion. The earlier suggestion made for the construction of a purpose-built crane platform (see above) to help in that matter gives further credence to that proposal.

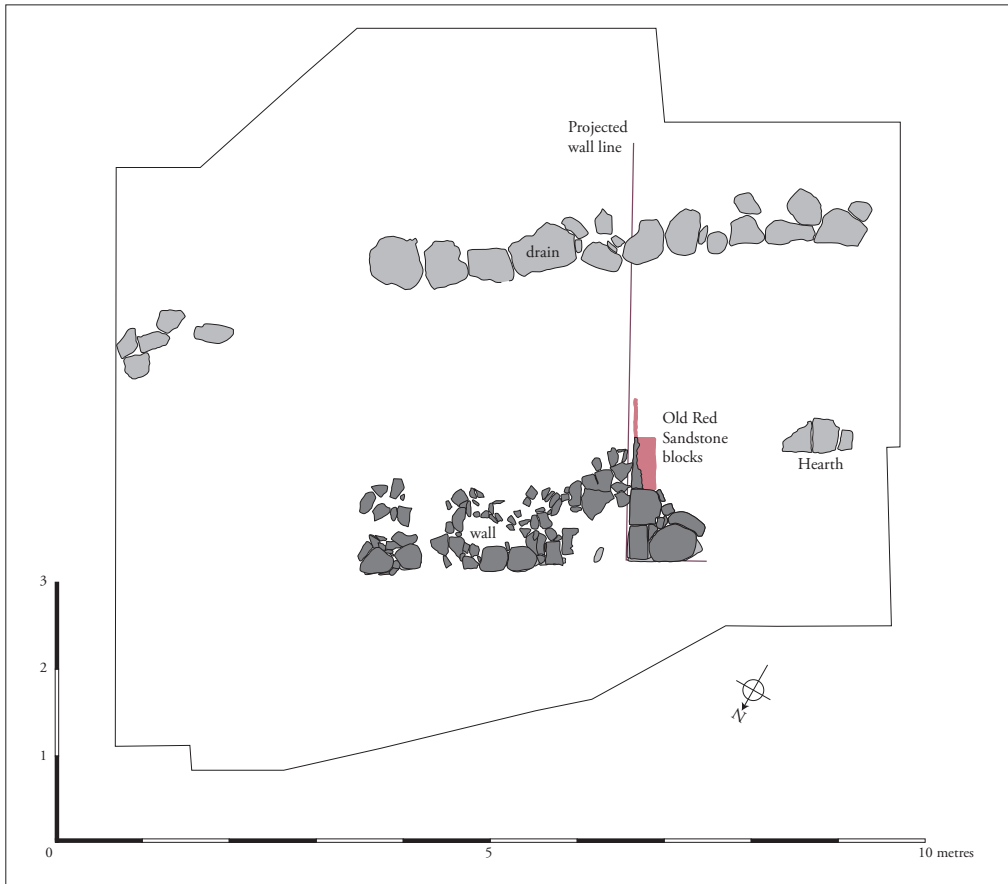


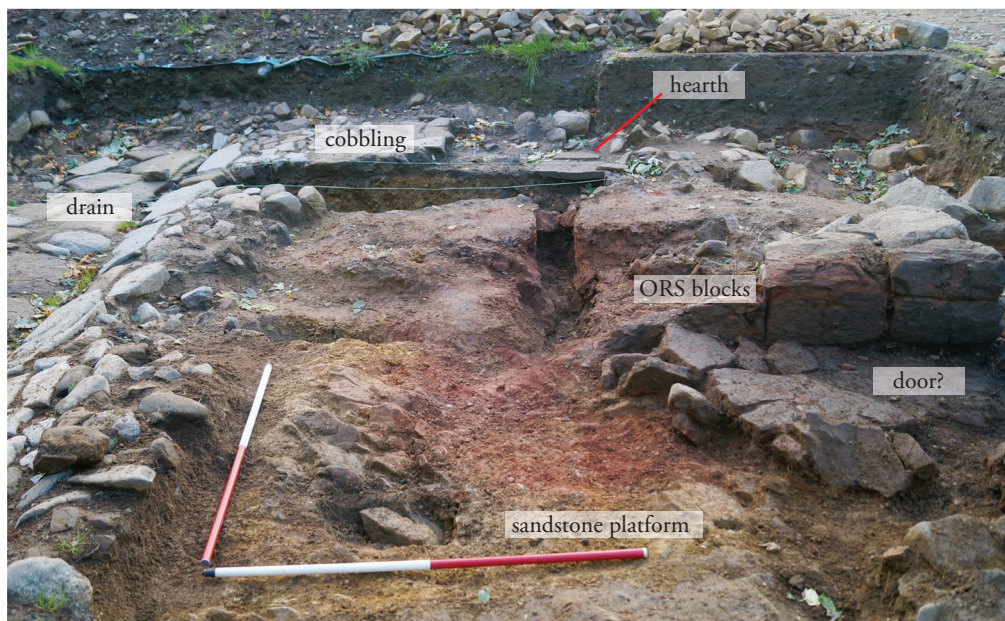
Figure 10. 17th century and late Medieval features.

### 17th Century and Late Medieval (Figure 10)

Beneath the, proposed, 18th century cobbled area lay a floor of beaten earth associated with a small hearth. Its association with the 'drain' could not be ascertained. It is suggested that this hearth may have served as a heat source in a lean-to building with the drain collecting water from the eaves drip. With the construction of the later mortared wall (see above) the 'drain' would have become an internal feature. Such lean-to structures can also be evidenced from Craigievar (*ibid.*, 391). One sherd of redware dated roughly to the 15th/16th century was found upon the beaten floor in the area of the red staining whilst a small post hole with a sharpened piece of wood *in situ* possibly formed part of a wattle structure forced into the ground, possibly as part of an internal facing or partition.

Evidence for an earlier groundplan of the castle comes from large red





Photographs 1&2. General site views showing some of the features described. (I. Ralston)

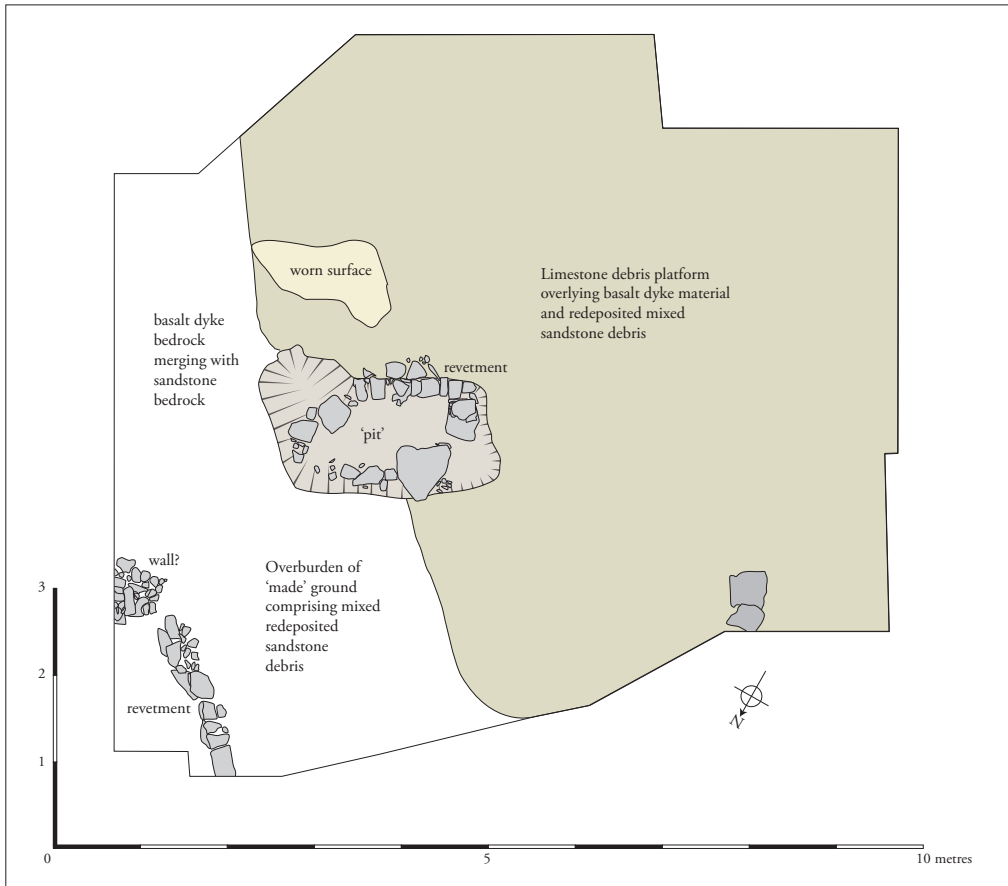


Figure 11. Earliest (undated) features.

sandstone blocks appearing to form an earlier corner, overlain at this point by the later, probably, 17th century wall. A large patch of red staining had been a puzzle during the excavation until it became clear that this was formed as a result of the degradation of former well-cut Old Red Sandstone (ORS) blocks. The southernmost (seen on the plan) survived only as a stain in the underlying matrix. If projected, this line would have run directly to the eastern end of the present tower at the end of the 15th century south range. It should be noted that the surviving 15th century castle structure utilises such ORS blocks extensively.

It is possible that the original ground-plan was restricted to a smaller squarish area with the lower courtyard being a 17th century remodelling. The present south range was upgraded in the later 17th century and it is not impossible that the second courtyard was added at that time.

### *Earlier Features (Figure 11)*

The earliest features thus far recognised on the site were, understandably, badly disturbed and difficult to understand. Fundamentally, what was initially considered to be ‘natural’ eventually became recognised as a platform constructed of limestone debris that appears to have been laid to provide a ground surface on which the castle could be constructed. This would have involved the demolition of any protruding basalt ‘tor’ material and ‘making-up’ with imported material. Evidence of this process was, retrospectively, seen in the section of trial Trench 1. It is instructive that this platform does not continue beneath what is considered to be the 17th century enlargement of the castle, which was provisioned with the second courtyard, but to be restricted to the area covered by the proposed original area delimited on the east by the line of ORS material (as noted above). A deep section was dug to test this hypothesis and to try to gather a better understanding of the underlying geology (see Figure 12). Although a substantial depth of overburden survives between the obvious archaeological layers and the sandstone bedrock, it appears that none of this material can be attributed to glacial activity and must be presumed to be anthropogenic in origin (Thorn, this volume). This tends to lead to the conclusion noted above that the area on which the castle was positioned underwent a tremendous amount of site preparation prior to its initial construction.

Into this platform was cut an irregularly-shaped pit. Its southern side had been revetted and this stonework also made a ninety-degree corner, continuing northwards along part of the west side of the pit. A large boulder was positioned

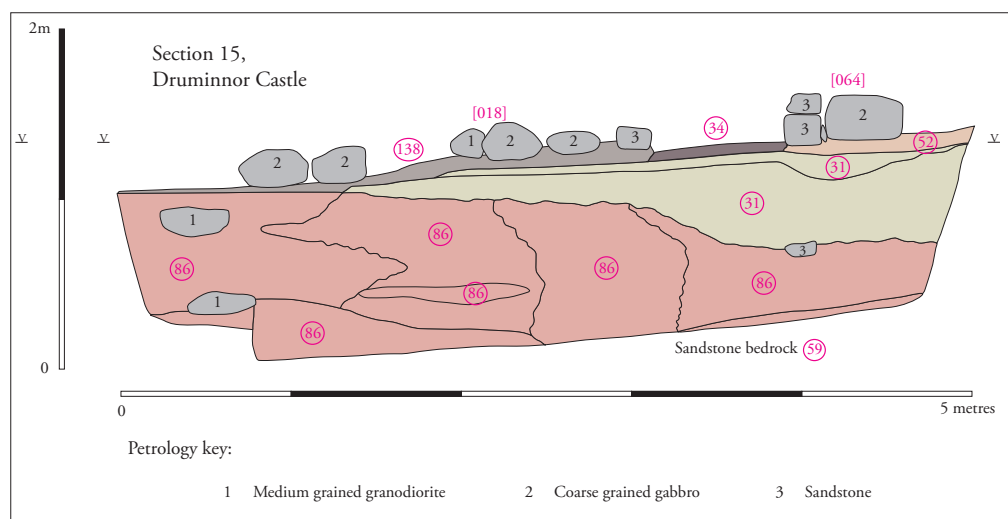


Figure 12. Section through site make-up material. (See Figure 9 for location of section).



*Photograph 3. Pit dug into sandstone platform with revetted edge and possible post-pad. (I. Ralston)*

along the northern edge of the pit and other stones within the pit may have been originally associated with this boulder and the revetment. A well-positioned combination of local slate and small stones formed what might have been a post-pad in the south-west corner (see Photo. 3). Whether this was contemporary with the revetment or a later opportunistic use of it is unknown. Within the south-east corner of the pit a deep hole dug down to meet the sandstone bedrock distorted the plan of the pit. Again, it is not known whether this hole was contemporary or later than the pit. A dense packing of stones within one half of this hole may suggest that it formerly held a post. The pit itself appears to have been deliberately back-filled with rubble containing no finds other than pieces of local slate and small pieces of charcoal. However, at

the bottom of the cut containing the possible post-hole was found a copper-alloy sheet metal fragment of unknown purpose.

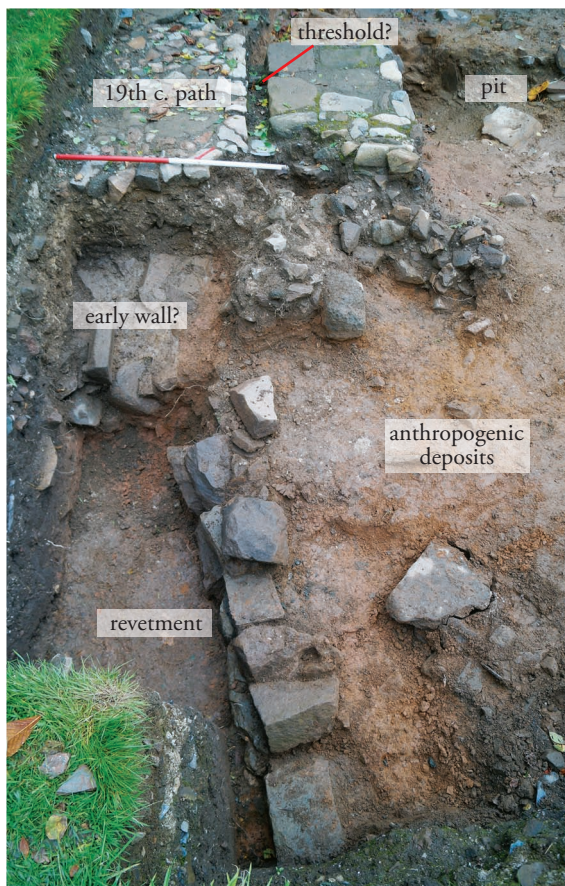
To the south of the pit was found an area of sandstone debris that had been worn so that the sandstone fragments were very rounded. This area formed a very distinctive patch within the otherwise homogenous, angular platform material. That all of these features articulate directly with the platform suggests they all relate to an early period of site use.

In the north-east corner of the site, beneath a deep overburden of mixed soils containing a good amount of 15th/16th century redware, a length of well-articulated revetment was found (see Photo. 4). It appears to have been built to

support the underlying sandstone debris noted above and shown in section 15 (Figure 12). As it was sealed by the soils containing the 15th/16th pottery, it is likely that it pre-dates that period. It is noteworthy in this respect that its orientation shares nothing in common with any of the 16th century or later features so far encountered. This also suggests it be an early feature. The revetment appears to be associated with a fragment of what appears to be surviving walling at its south end. Unfortunately, as the two are not bonded together, this potential association still remains to be proven.

#### THE FINDS Angela Groat

Over the period of digging reported on here, several hundred sherds of 19th century glazed ceramics have been catalogued. Also collected has been a wine cellar's worth of glass bottles along with the remains of several feasts. Unfortunately, these finds mainly derive from a context of site levelling and preparation. It cannot even be certain that any of these artefacts derive from the immediate vicinity. Though unlikely, material may have been brought to the site from elsewhere as part of the 19th century landscaping operations. What is notable, however, is the homogeneity of this material which appears to date to the mid 19th century with nothing recognisably earlier and few later objects. For the purposes of this interim report, only the finds that directly relate to providing evidence that can help in understanding the mechanics of the site will be considered.



*Photograph 4. View showing site stratigraphy with 19th c. path on top and undated revetment below holding back man-made deposits (I. Ralston)*



Photographs 5&6. Frechenware from the north range. (All pottery images I Ralston)

### *Frechenware:*

Stoneware named after a famous production site near to Cologne (see Photos. 5 and 6). It is characterised by its iron-rich brown surface and salt glaze treatment producing a mottled 'tiger' effect. These are possibly the remains of two vessels, though the distinctive form of these jugs and bottles might well contain a broad range of thicknesses and surface treatment across a single vessel. These vessels are usually dated to between 1550 and 1800. Though presumably coincidental, it is interesting to speculate that Forbes of Menie (owner of Craigievar and known as 'Danzig Willie' or 'Willie the Merchant') was engaged in 17th century commerce in the Low Countries (Greig, 1993, 382). In all, seven fair-sized sherds of this material were found, all from the same context and geographical area within the remains of the north range.

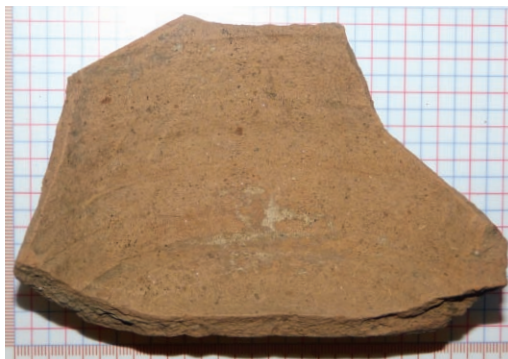
### *Late Medieval Wares:*

A number of sherds were found in a number of contexts. Sadly, as yet, little of this 'redware' pottery can be dated any more closely than to within a couple of centuries. The earliest material, dated to the 13th/14th centuries, does, however, put the material assemblage back to a proposed date for the Great Tower around the end of the 13th century. A small sherd containing a piece of surface decoration looks similar to Scarborough ware but would appear likely to have been produced more locally (Murray, pers. com) (see Photo. 7). This might be taken to suggest that local production was being influenced by incoming traditions.

Possibly the most important dating so far has been the collection of redware from the soils above the revetment in the north-east corner of the site and alluded to above (see Photo. 8). Considering the quantity of Victorian pottery across the site, it is significant that there was none found in association with these



*Photograph 7. Showing decoration resembling that found on Scarborough ware.*



*Photograph 8. Base from deposits sealing the 'revetment'.*

deposits. And, although the redware is presumably residual and the product of secondary deposition, a later product of landscape redesign, it is unlikely that the revetment post-dates this 15th/16th century material. As known major building work was carried out in the mid 15th century, when much of the existing castle was constructed (and evidenced by an extant mason's receipt), this might suggest an appropriate date for the re-landscaping in this portion of the site.

#### *Copper-alloy Sheet Metal Fragment:*

A copper-alloy fragment was found in the bottom of a cut into one of the earliest features on the site, the pit, as described above (see Photo. 9).

#### *Wooden Stake Point:*

Wooden stake point found sealed beneath debris beneath the north wall of the north range (see Photo. 10). The stake was made from a sharpened piece of round wood of indeterminate species.



*Photograph 9. Copper-alloy plate. (I Ralston)*



*Photograph 10. Sharpened stake sealed within the north range. (I Ralston)*

## DISCUSSION

As noted above, this is a short interim statement reporting upon ongoing excavations. As such, the discussion will be limited to a few observations related to specific characterising features of this site.

Attempts to understand the site were initially hindered by a set of complicated underlying geological components. These factors may, however, have been fundamental in the choice of location for the castle. The Great Tower appears to have been sited near the end of a ridge formed by a narrow (5m-20m) basaltic intrusion (dyke). When chosen, the landscape is likely to have comprised a distinct ridge with possible rocky outcrops overlooking, on its southern side, a deeply-gouged glacial valley. To the north, the land can be shown to have fallen away more steeply than is now apparent. In other words, the site would have commanded its surrounding landscape in a way that is no longer obvious.

Material that, at first, was considered to have been natural, revealed itself to have been a man-made platform providing a levelled area on which the castle could be built. That this platform extends eastwards of where the Great Tower can now be shown to have been sited, suggests that it was set within a larger, presumably defended, enclosure. Artefact evidence supports the notion that the formative structures were in place by the 13th/14th centuries.

Once the geological puzzle was resolved, the data could be used to shed further light upon the development of the site. There appears to have been differential usage of petrologically-distinct rocks within the elements of the castle. Visually-similar granodiorite and basalt from the dyke were found to have different magnetic qualities and could, with the use of a magnet and compass, be distinguished readily. The basalt derives from the immediate locality, whilst the granodiorite occurs closest on the south side of the glacial valley: this valley being the division between the Kennethmont intrusive complex and the Quarry Hill sandstone formation (see Thorn, this volume). The basalt appears, logically enough, to occur within the earliest structures, as, for instance, in the retting stones within the early pit. Old Red Sandstone appears to have been favoured during the 15th century, as the surviving castle fabric demonstrates. This would, presumably have been quarried from the hills to the east, beyond the Mossat Burn/Bogie watershed. The granodiorite components appear to occur more frequently in the later walls defining the north range. These, it has been suggested, may have been constructed during the 17th (external/'barmkin') and 18th (internal/courtyard) centuries. Clearly, locally-derived field stones will also have been used opportunistically. The final 19th century platform revealed in



Trench 1 is all granodiorite quarried for the purpose, presumably from the south side of the glacial valley. Quarry workings are still to be found along that scarp and this material may well have been derived from that source.

It would appear that some success has been enjoyed regarding the initial aims of the project. The 18th century estate plan has been vindicated and former assumptions, held until very recently, concerning the whereabouts of the Great Tower and the former plan of Druminnor Castle, have been shown to have been false. Druminnor can now demonstrably be seen to have been a sizable edifice appropriate to the political significance of the Forbes family in late medieval Scotland. The site can be demonstrated to have been being utilised in the 13th/14th centuries and that what is shown on the 18th century estate plan is but the final stage in a long and complicated developmental process. Some of these developments have been glimpsed in the archaeological record. On the debit side, severe truncation of the 18th century remains have denied the ability to try to ascertain the uses of these particular buildings in the north range. However, it can now be suggested that there is a good chance that the structures lying further to the east, away from the area of major 19th century levelling, may survive in a better condition and to offer the possibility of future more informative interrogation.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Alex Forbes, the owner of Druminnor Castle, we owe much for his ongoing forbearance as his car park and lawns are increasingly encroached upon and also for his wonderful hospitality. Few of us have ever had the opportunity to dig in such civilised conditions! But mostly, we would like to thank Alex for sharing his monumental store of historical knowledge regarding the Forbes family and their historical undertakings in the area. This has proven an immeasurably important resource in attempting to contextualise the archaeology. We would also like to extend especial thanks to Charlie Murray for kindly reviewing some of the pottery finds and for generously giving of his great knowledge and experience on such matters. Finally, to thank the volunteers who have turned up in all weathers to help in this project. In no particular order: Barry Foster, Brian Cornock, Alison Kennedy, Colin Miller, Vi Pietersen, Carys Thorn, Peter Thorn, Claire Smith and members of the Aberdeen Young Archaeologists Club, Jane Summers and members of the Aboyne Academy Archaeology Club, Tim Grundey, Ewen Rennie, Andy Wood, Andrew Wainwright, Alistair Stenhouse, Kate Campbell, Murdette Price-Davies, Andrew Sturdy, Iona Henderson and Marie Marsden. With the sincerest of apologies if we have left anybody out.

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