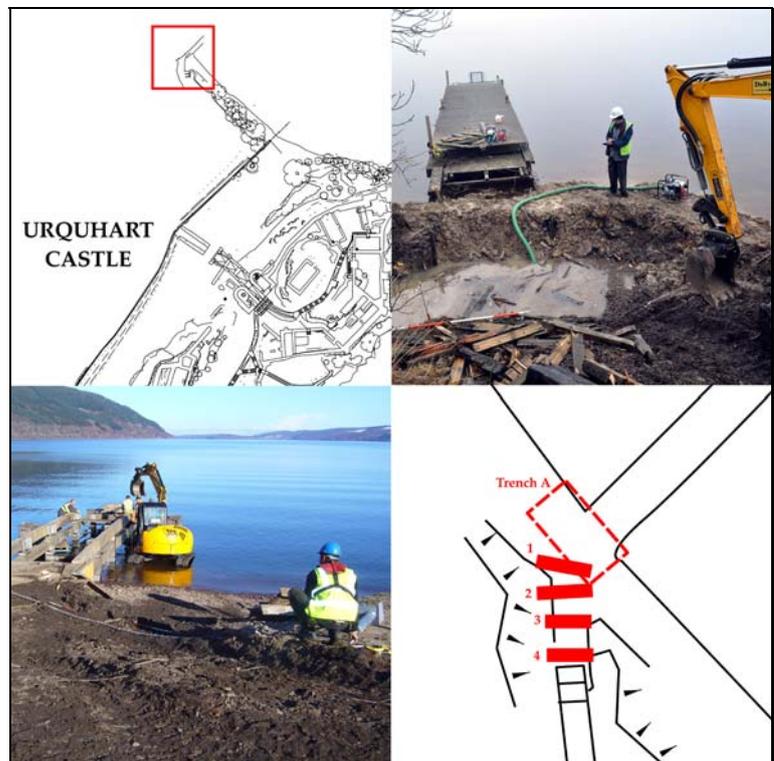


Historic Scotland
Properties in Care
Minor Archaeological Works 2009-10

Urquhart Castle: Archaeological excavation and monitoring, December 2009 & February 2010

HS PIC Index number: 90309
Project code: HSCO-90309-2009-04



26 March 2010
Kirkdale Archaeology

<u>Site</u>	Urquhart Castle
<u>N.G.R</u>	NH 5302 2870
<u>Project Description</u>	Archaeological excavation and monitoring
<u>Project code</u>	HSCO-90309-2009-04

Contents

Summary	1
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Description	1
3.0 Interpretation and observations	4
A1.0 Appendix 1: Context register	4
A2.0 Appendix 2: Photographic register	6
Fig. 1: Location plan	8

SUMMARY: Five trenches were excavated in advance of the installation of a new pier and access ramp on the shore to the north of Urquhart Castle. There were no finds or features of archaeological significance.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to monitor the excavation of five trenches in advance of the installation of a new pier on the shore to the north of Urquhart Castle.

The site was on the shore to the E side of the level ground between the castle rock and the rising slope to the N of the site. The requirement was to hand dig the first trench on the loch shore at the landward end of the existing disused pier. Although some distance from the castle ruins the possibility of waterlogged deposits surviving meant that hand excavation by archaeologists was required. After the initial deposits were removed it became clear that there were no features of archaeological significance and most of the trench was excavated to the required depth by mechanical digger under supervision

A further four trenches were excavated running from the S limit of the first trench up to the far NE end of the existing access path and steps. As with the first trench, it was soon established that there were no significant archaeological features and the bulk of the material was removed by mechanical digger.

The first trench (A) was excavated on 10& 11 December 2009 and the rest (1-4) on 22& 23 February 2010.

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Trench A

After the removal of the uppermost deposit **001**, comprising driftwood and leaves up to 300 mm thick at the W end of the trench a compact deposit **002** was encountered. This comprised *c* 70% sub angular gravel typically smaller than 50 mm but reaching a maximum length of 250 mm and 30% reddish brown silty clay. As only a few modern fragments of modern bottle glass (not retained) were recovered,

and due to the incredibly compacted nature of **002**, the decision was taken to excavate the rest of the trench using the mechanical digger. This was carefully monitored at every stage and removed in spits to allow a thorough archaeological assessment of the deposits removed.

002 proved to be up to 230 mm thick, and covered **003**. This was similar to **002**, but incorporated a larger percentage (*c* 60%) of reddish brown silty clay, and incorporated larger sub angular stones. This was again heavily compacted and was some 400 mm thick. Below this **004** was dark yellow silty clay with occasional small sub angular stones throughout it. This was excavated to a depth of some 700 mm without bottoming it.

The final dimensions of the trench were 2.7 m E-W by 5.1 m N S and it was up to 1.60 m deep at its W end, with all deposits sloping down from W to E towards the shore. No finds were noted except for a few modern glass fragments from the upper surface of **002**.

2.2 Trench 1

Up to 1.45 m deep, 75 mm N-S x 3.0 m E-W

The upper 450 mm of the trench comprised **101**, a compacted, tracked-in overburden of silt and pebbles containing wood and other working debris. This was an artificially-emplaced working surface sealing the deposits below. The remains of a compact truncated root-rich mid-brown topsoil **102** 100 mm thick sat below this. This in turn covered a layer 100 mm thick of voided loose yellowish brown sub-rounded pebbles **103** <20 mm which had been constantly displaced by the cyclical action of the water at the shoreline. This sealed a layer of slightly larger pebbles <50 mm in a compact matrix of mid-brown silt **104**, 300 mm thick. Below this was **105**, an extremely compact layer of the same pebbles in a yellowish brown sandy clay matrix 400 mm thick. The excavation reached its depth by exposing 100 mm of **106**, a layer of compact natural yellowish brown sandy clay of indeterminate depth. The action of the loch had created a clean upper pebble layer, a mixed pebble and silt central layer, a mixed pebble and clay central layer and a clean clay lower layer. There were no features of archaeological significance encountered.

2.3 Trench 2

Up to 1.25 m deep, 75 mm N-S x 3.0 m E-W

The upper 250 mm of the trench comprised **201**, a compacted, tracked-in overburden of silt and pebbles containing wood and other working debris. This was an artificially-emplaced working surface sealing the deposits below. The remains of a compact truncated root-rich mid-brown topsoil **202** 100 mm thick sat below this. This in turn covered a layer 100 mm thick of voided loose yellowish brown sub-rounded pebbles **203** <20 mm which had been constantly displaced by the cyclical action of the water at the shoreline. This sealed a layer of slightly larger pebbles <50 mm in a compact matrix of mid-brown silt **204**, 350 mm thick. Below this was **205**, an extremely compact layer of the same pebbles in a yellowish brown sandy clay matrix 250 mm thick. The excavation reached its depth by exposing 100 mm of **206**, a layer of compact natural yellowish brown sandy clay of indeterminate depth. There were no features of archaeological significance encountered.

2.4 Trench 3

Up to 1.25 m deep, 75 mm N-S x 2.5 m E-W

The upper 250 mm of the trench comprised **301**, a compacted, tracked-in overburden of silt and pebbles containing wood and other working debris. This was an artificially-emplaced working surface sealing the deposits below. The remains of a compact truncated root-rich mid-brown topsoil **302** 150 mm thick sat below this. This in turn covered a layer 50 mm thick of compact grey whin dust and gravel **303**, possibly the remains of the original track to the older jetty. This sealed a layer of slightly larger pebbles <50 mm in a compact matrix of mid-brown silt **304**, 400 mm thick. Below this was **305**, an extremely compact layer of the same pebbles in a yellowish brown sandy clay matrix 400 mm thick. The excavation reached its depth at this point. There were no features of archaeological significance encountered.

2.5 Trench 4

Up to 1.15 m deep, 75 mm N-S x 2.5 m E-W

The upper 150 mm of the trench comprised **401**, a compacted, tracked-in overburden of silt and pebbles containing wood and other working debris. This was an

artificially-emplaced working surface sealing the deposits below. This in turn covered a layer 100 mm thick of compact grey whin dust and gravel **402**, possibly the remains of the original track to the now removed previous jetty. This sat on a 150 mm thick base of 'Type 2' gravel, **403**. **402** and **403** represented the earlier 20th-century jetty path. This had truncated layer **405** via an undulating cut **404**. This sealed a layer of slightly larger pebbles <50 mm in a compact matrix of mid-brown silt **405**, 400 mm thick. Below this was **406**, an extremely compact layer of the same pebbles in a yellowish brown sandy clay matrix 400 mm thick. The excavation reached its depth at this point. There were no features of archaeological significance encountered.

3.0 INTERPRETATION AND OBSERVATIONS

The layers encountered in Trench A are likely to be the product of natural processes, principally the action of the water in sorting stones by size and with the colour changes noted likely to be the result of mineral deposition and leaching.

The layers seen in Trenches 1-4 also appear to be natural deposits with upper portions affected by the motion of the waters of the loch and modern disturbance associated with the original installation of the pier, path and steps.

There were no finds or features of archaeological significance encountered during these excavations.

Trench A

#	Description
001	Overburden
002	Gravel and silty clay below 001
003	Larger stones and silty clay below 002
004	Dark yellow silty clay below 003

Trenches 1-4

#	Description
101	Imported Overburden
102	Mid-Brown Topsoil
103	Voided Loose Yellowish-Brown Sub-Rounded Pebbles
104	Pebbles in Mid-Brown Silt
105	Pebbles in Yellowish-Brown Sandy Clay
106	Compact Natural Yellowish-Brown Sandy Clay
201	Imported Overburden
202	Mid-Brown Topsoil
203	Voided Loose Yellowish-Brown Sub-Rounded Pebbles
204	Pebbles in Mid-Brown Silt
205	Pebbles in Yellowish-Brown Sandy Clay
206	Compact Natural Yellowish-Brown Sandy Clay
301	Imported Overburden
302	Mid-Brown Topsoil
303	Whin Dust & Gravel
304	Pebbles in Mid-Brown Silt
305	Pebbles in Yellowish-Brown Sandy Clay
401	Imported Overburden
402	Whin Dust & Gravel
403	Type 2 base for 402
404	Cut to Insert Original Path

#	Description
405	Pebbles in Mid-Brown Silt
406	Pebbles in Yellowish-Brown Sandy Clay

A2.0

APPENDIX 2: PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

#	Description	From	Date
1	Old pier being removed	W	11/12/2009
2	General view	SW	11/12/2009
3	General view work in progress	W	11/12/2009
4	General view	W	11/12/2009
5	General view	S	11/12/2009
6	General view	S	11/12/2009
7	Trench A, S facing section	S	11/12/2009
8	Trench A, E facing section	E	11/12/2009
9	Trench A, E end	SW	11/12/2009
10	Trench A, E facing section	E	11/12/2009
11	Trench A, E facing section	E	11/12/2009
12	Trench A, W facing section	W	11/12/2009
13	Trench A, general view	W	11/12/2009
14	Pre-Ex Shot of Jetty from S	N	22/2/2010
15	Pre-Ex Shot of Jetty from S	N	22/2/2010
16	Laying Out Trenches from S	N	22/2/2010
17	Laying Out Trenches from SW	NE	22/2/2010
18	General Pre-Ex Shot from SSW	NNE	22/2/2010
19	General Pre-Ex Shot from	SE	22/2/2010
20	General Shot of Shuttering Being Removed From Jetty	NW	22/2/2010
21	Laying Out Trenches from S	N	22/2/2010
22	Laying Out Trenches from S	N	22/2/2010
23	Post-Ex Shot N-Facing Section Trench 1	S	22/2/2010
24	Post-Ex Shot N-Facing Section Trench 1	S	22/2/2010
25	Post-Ex Shot E-Facing Section Trench 1	W	22/2/2010
26	Post-Ex Shot E-Facing Section Trench 1	W	22/2/2010
27	Post-Ex Shot of Trench 1 from NW	SE	22/2/2010
28	Post-Ex Shot N-Facing Section Trench 2	S	23/2/2010
29	Post-Ex Shot of Trench 2	S	23/2/2010
30	Post-Ex Shot E-Facing Section Trench 2	W	23/2/2010

#	Description	From	Date
31	Work in Progress	N	23/2/2010
32	Work in Progress	NNW	23/2/2010
33	Machine Struggling to Break Surface Deposits	N	23/2/2010
34	Post-Ex Shot N-Facing Section Trench 3 (W Side)	S	23/2/2010
35	Post-Ex Shot N-Facing Section Trench 3 (E Side)	S	23/2/2010
36	Post-Ex Shot E-Facing Section Trench 3	W	23/2/2010
37	Post-Ex Shot E-Facing Section Trench 3	W	23/2/2010
38	General Shot of Trenches 1-3	N	23/2/2010
39	Work in Progress, Cutting Trench 4	S	23/2/2010
40	Work in Progress	W	23/2/2010
41	General Shot of New Jetty	WNW	23/2/2010
42	General Shot from E	W	23/2/2010
43	Machine Struggling to Break Surface Deposits at Trench 4	W	23/2/2010
44	Post-Ex Shot N-Facing Section Trench 4	S	23/2/2010
45	Post-Ex Shot N-Facing Section Trench 4	SE	23/2/2010
46	Post-Ex Shot of Trench 4 from NE	SW	23/2/2010
47	Post-Ex Shot of Site	S	23/2/2010
48	Post-Ex Shot of Site	N	23/2/2010

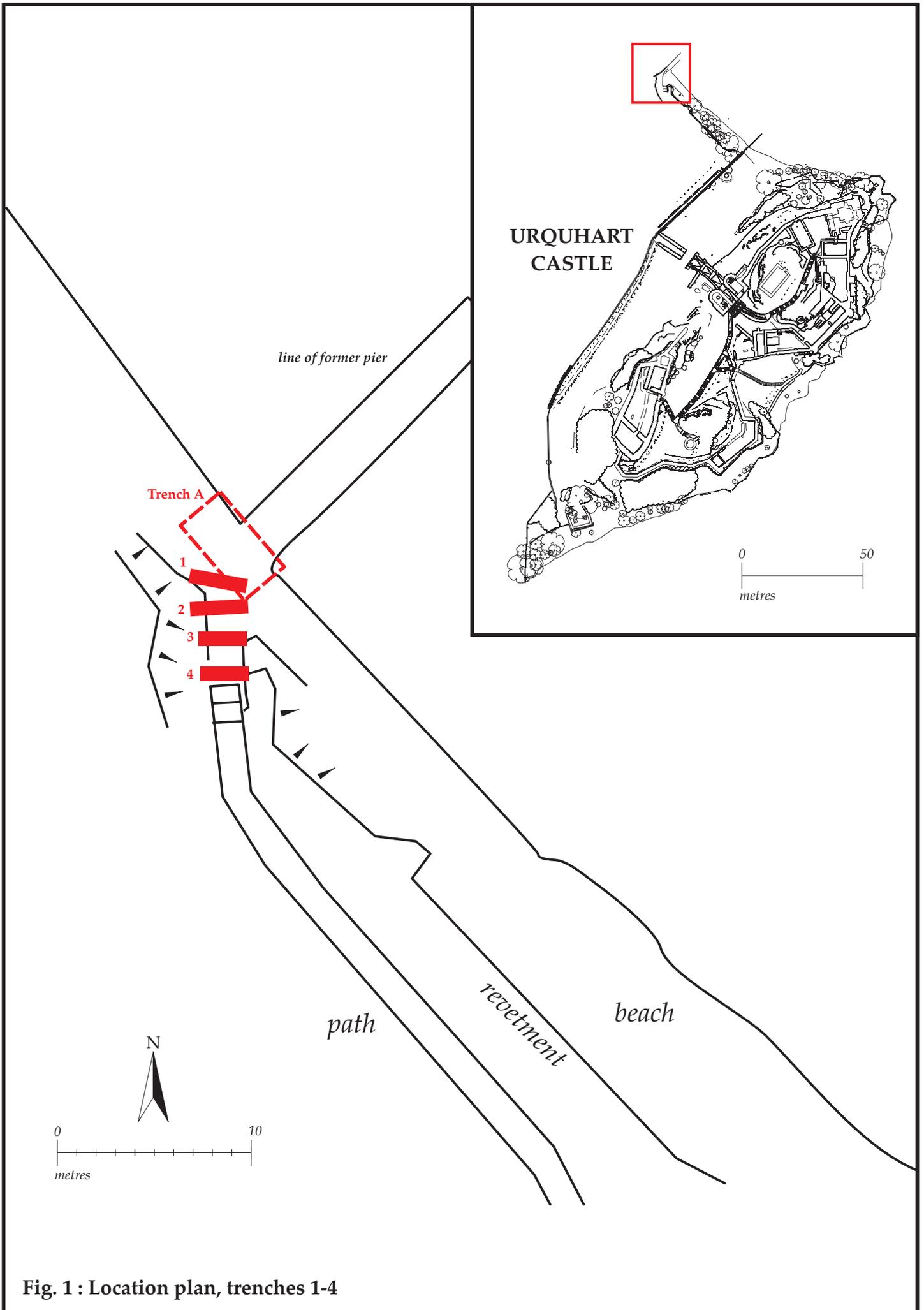


Fig. 1 : Location plan, trenches 1-4