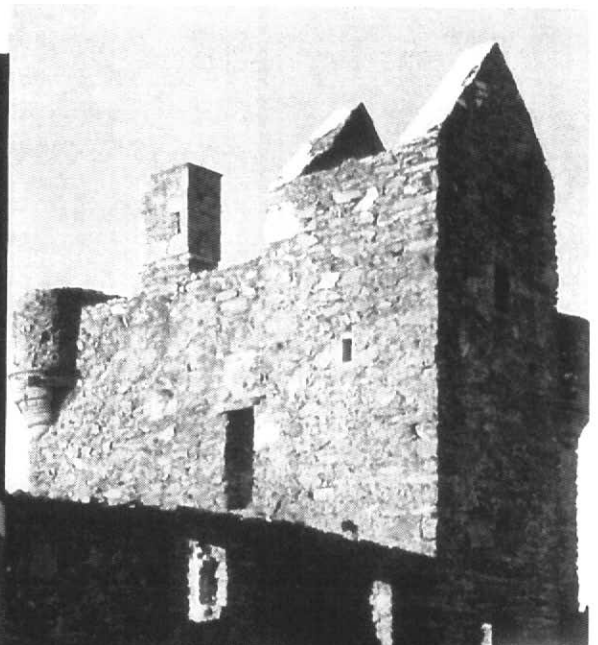
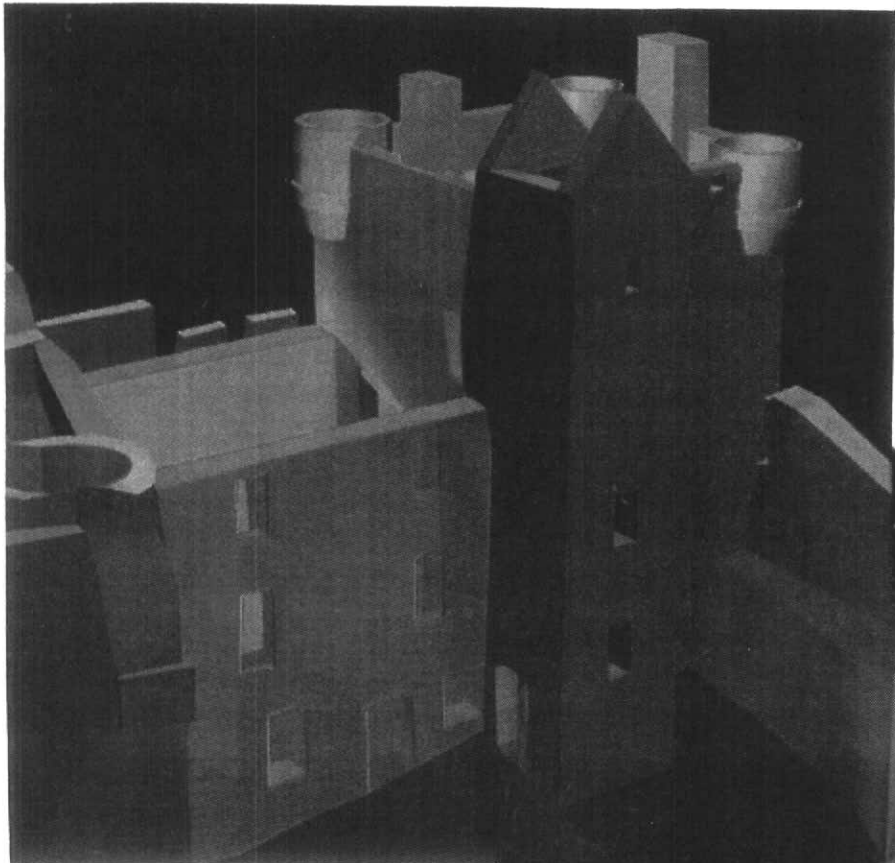

CASTLE TIORAM

PART 7 -

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH
STRATEGY



G♦U♦A♦R♦D

519

An archaeological appraisal prepared for Anta Estates for
Eilean Tioram

by

Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division

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by

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
RESEARCH STRATEGY
FOR
EILEAN TIORAM,
LOCH MOIDART

by

Stephen T Driscoll

and

Allan G Rutherford

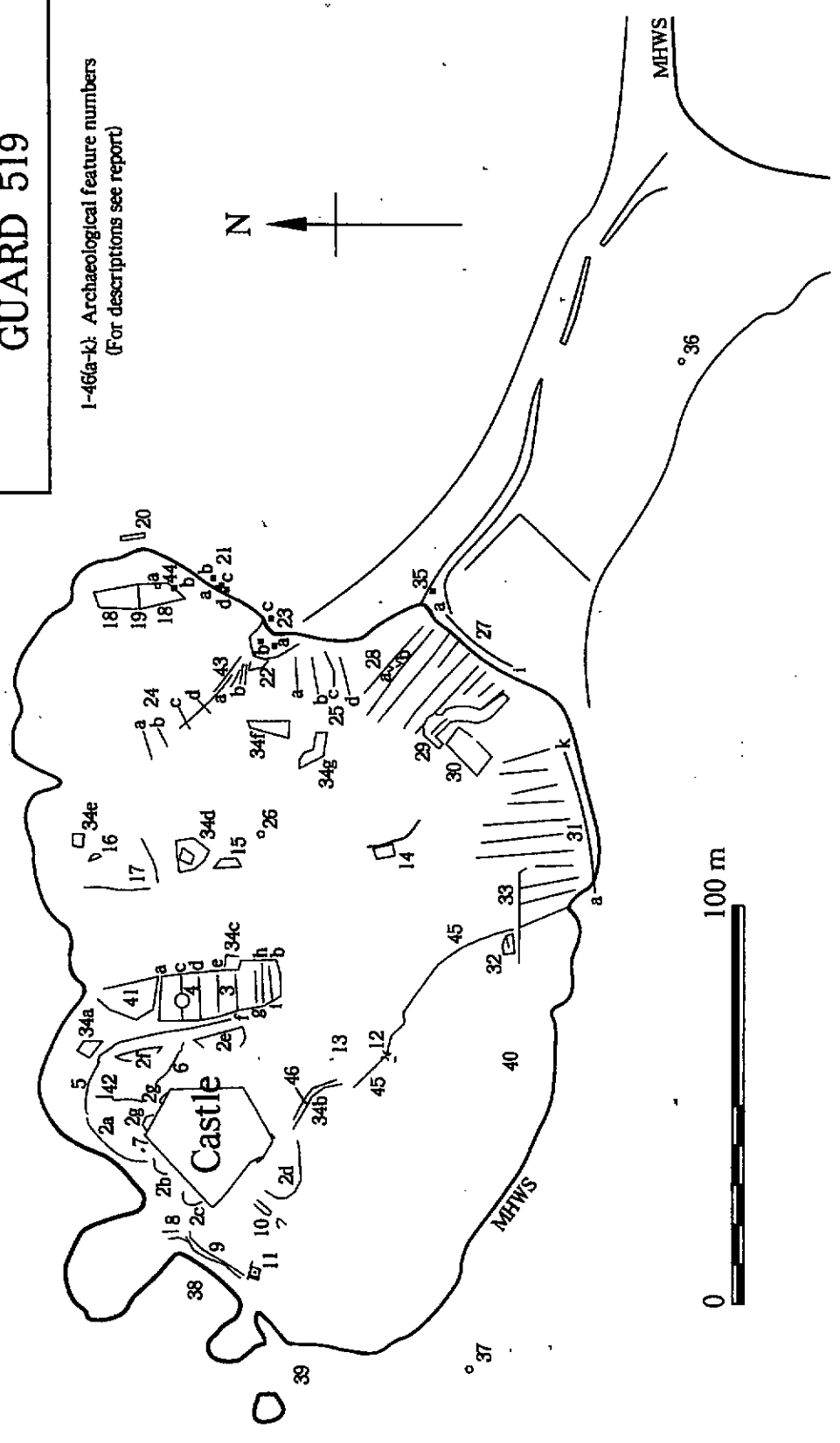
1999

Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division

Glasgow

Archaeological Features - Eilean Tioram
GUARD 519

1-46(a-k): Archaeological feature numbers
 (For descriptions see report)



Map Compilation from Original Topographic Survey Data by Gary Tompsett, December 1987

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1.0 Introduction

This research strategy arises as a consequence of detailed non-intrusive investigations conducted between 1997-8 at Eilean Tioram (NGR NM 662 724). The programme of research described here pursues a range of themes and questions which have arisen through the architectural, archaeological (both on land and underwater) and historical surveys. The castle, and its associated families, have a relatively full historical record, especially for the later medieval period, while the architecture and the archaeology of the castle are in a good state of preservation. On the basis of these studies it is clear that the site has an unrivalled potential amongst West Highland castles to inform us about Gaelic medieval lordship.

The middle ages of the West Highlands, despite the emblematic castles of the region, have not been well served by the archaeologist. There is a need for a modern, large scale and environmentally sophisticated investigation of a castle, the structures which surrounded it and the forms of communication which linked it to its wider context.

Eilean Tioram, the island on which Castle Tioram stands, offers a multitude of possible archaeological resources, investigation of which would illuminate the history of the island. The archaeology on the island widely differs in nature and date. The earliest evidence of possible occupation is a stray find of a bronze hanging bowl, dated to the seventh or eighth century and recovered from a kitchen-midden at Tioram sometime before 1928 (Kilbride-Jones 1937). However, the nature of the site suggests that the island could have been occupied at an even earlier date. With an occupation history stretching from the thirteenth to the early eighteenth century, the castle itself is the most significant archaeological resource on the island. Its primary importance derives from the historical integrity of the standing fabric but the castle also offers the possibility of significant sealed archaeological deposits and there are associated middens surrounding the castle. Other features on the island, such as a possible 'gatehouse' structure, boat noosts, and building stances, may be contemporary with the castle. However, some of these features, particularly indications of cultivation, probably date to after its abandonment.

To produce a coherent history of the island, an inclusive strategy embracing all periods of occupation will be proposed here. A fundamental feature of our strategy is that the excavations should be reasonably sized open areas, rather than small trenches, to satisfy the demands of consolidation and restoration work on the castle. This pro-active, research-driven approach will yield much more coherent results than piecemeal excavations. The goal from the outset will be to inform and educate through the exploration of a series of explicit research themes, rather than pursue a salvage tactic, which merely attempts to mitigate the erosion of the archaeological record by building works and visitor pressures.

2.0 *Research Themes*

The overarching aim of the investigations will be to create a coherent history of Eilean Tioram which will contribute to the cultural history of the north-west seaboard. The overall strategy has been informed by several specific aims:

1. To clarify and augment the architectural history of the castle, including those internal structures which were swept away or modified by later rebuilding. To answer specific questions of chronology and structural relationships generated by the standing building survey.
2. To explore the occupational history of the castle site. This will attempt to establish the origins of the site before the castle. It is presumed that the site had earlier high status occupation because of the discovery of the bronze hanging bowl and the natural defensive strength of the island. The excavation would chart the changes in the nature of occupation of the castle, how this occupation ended, and its post-abandonment use.
3. To examine the wider use of the island and the relationships between the castle and the ancillary structures situated on the island. This will primarily attempt to link the probable house or building stances with particular phases of the castle's history.
4. To elucidate the approaches to the castle by land and sea, and to examine the water routes around the island and the beaching sites. To examine pathways controlling movement around the island.
5. To examine the domestic economy of the castle. To establish what was being consumed and where it came from in order to reveal the nature of the household and to unravel the wider economic links of a great West Highland lord.
6. To clarify the post-abandonment history of the island. There appear to have been several episodes of occupation before the island became a picturesque element of a designed landscape in the mid-nineteenth century.

3.0 Research Objectives and Methods

Various areas identified within the castle and around the island will contribute to fulfilling the research aims. Many of these features are described in the topographic and archaeological survey report and the same labelling system has been followed here (see Figures 1 and 2).

3.1 The Interior of the Castle

Method - The complete excavation to expose all interior features and structures, followed by modern consolidation

It will be necessary to excavate the whole of the interior of the castle to clarify the building and occupational history. This dramatic suggestion provides the best way of understanding the archaeology of the castle and avoids the piecemeal results of a 'rescue' strategy. As the underlying geology is particularly close to the surface, it is not expected that the archaeological deposits will be very deep. The mid-nineteenth century document describing the clearance of '*a large mass of debris which blocked the entrance, and which filled the court to a depth of several feet*' (Mackenzie 1886, 409-10) may indicate that the interior of the castle is relatively sterile. However, it seems possible that the clearance of the castle may only have removed post-medieval debris from the period of abandonment, leaving the archaeological remains of earlier periods intact. Localised areas within the castle, such as the courtyard, are potentially rich in archaeological deposits. There are a number of areas where even scant structural remains will help to solve specific problems relating to the building's development.

- a) The courtyard is potentially the richest area of archaeological deposits within the castle, although it is not clear to what degree the courtyard was landscaped in the nineteenth century. Excavation of the courtyard, especially immediately behind the northern stretch of curtain wall, may provide evidence of the initial occupation of the castle. At the present, the only remains of this phase comprise the lower portion of curtain wall, but the interior of the curtain wall would have originally had ranges of lean-to buildings built against it. Other buildings, such as the original kitchen, may have been free standing within the courtyard. Excavation of the courtyard should also reveal the site of the original staircase which served the wall head.
- b) The courtyard offers the possibility that relatively deep deposits have survived in places, such as in fissures in the rock, which have escaped disturbance by extensive building work. As this area occupies the summit of the island, it is possible that evidence for occupation which pre-dates the building of the castle may survive here.

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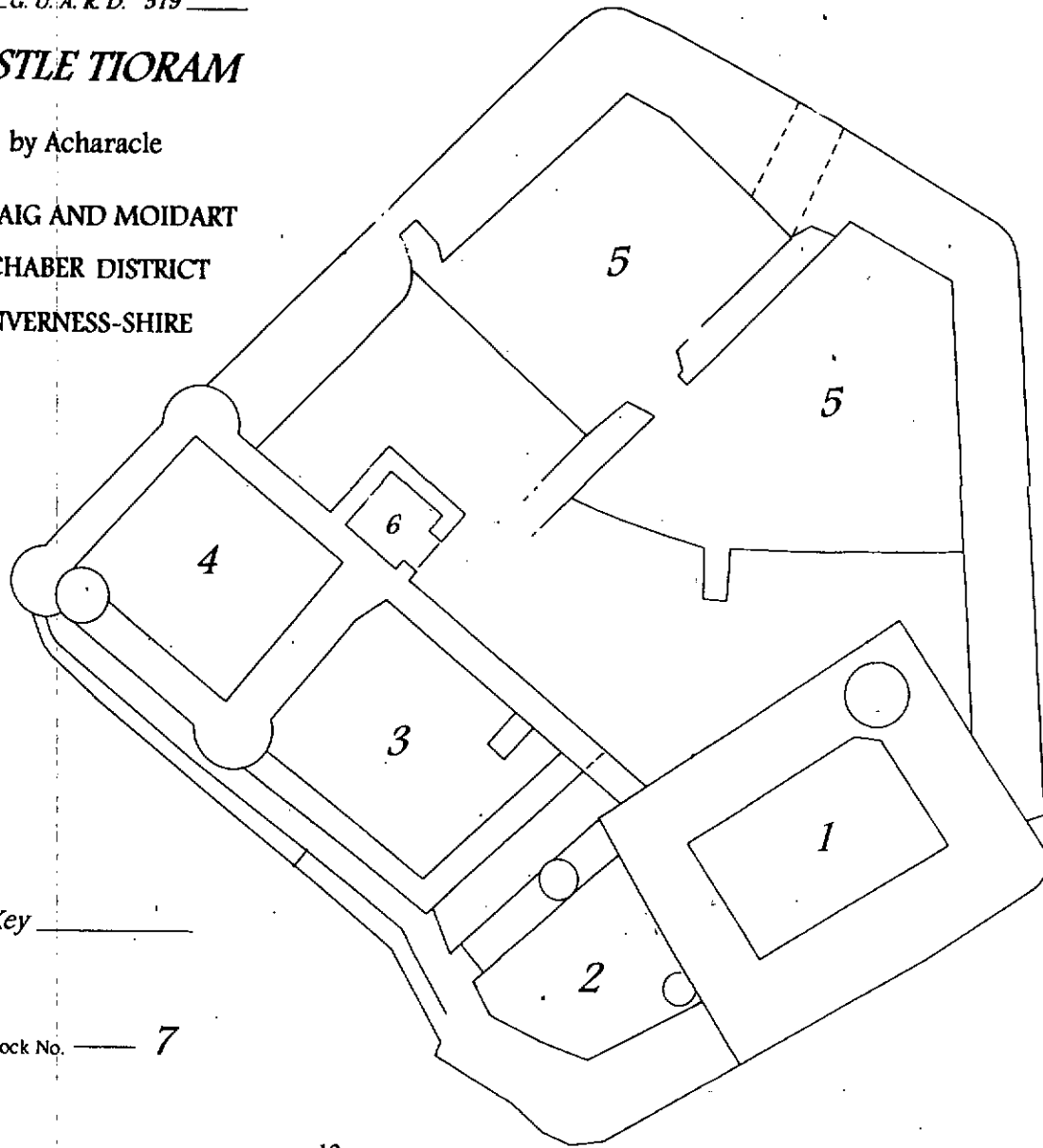
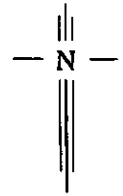
CASTLE TIORAM

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ARISAIG AND MOIDART

LOCHABER DISTRICT

INVERNESS-SHIRE



Key _____

Block No. — 7

0 ————— 10m

- c) The entrance to the castle is flanked by two low walls in the courtyard. The function of these walls is unclear, but it has been suggested that they are the remains of an entrance structure or pend. Excavation would reveal the nature of these features and clarify their relationship to the entrance of the castle.
- d) The basement of the tower house (block 1) may have little archaeological potential, as earlier remains would probably have been destroyed by the construction of the tower. However, excavation would confirm that the vault of the cellar is indeed an insertion.
- e) The south-east corner (block 2) has several structural peculiarities, which observation of the fabric alone cannot fully explain. Two possible explanations have been suggested: this corner of castle may have suffered structural collapse and been rebuilt or it may have been the site of an earlier building, perhaps a round tower or even a donjon as at Dunstaffnage. Excavation would clear up the ambiguities of the structural history of this area of the castle. Excavation would also provide information on the nature of the later kitchen and the sequence of events which saw the breaking through and then closing up of the postern through the south wall.
- f) The bedrock is especially close to the surface in the basement of block 3. Despite this, this area would be an important area to excavate in order to investigate the relationship of the sleeper wall with the rest of the hall. It seems likely that this wall represents the original extent of the great hall of the castle, but this requires confirmation.
- g) Block 4 offers the possibility of quite deep archaeological deposits: the exterior wall has several features in it, including a possible blocked opening, which are below the present floor level. They also do not correspond to any feature in the interior of the structure because the wall appears to have been considerably reduced in thickness. Again excavation could confirm these suggestions and reveal the nature of these blocked openings. It may also reveal something more of the rather confused building sequence of this part of the castle. Of the standing structures this probably has the greatest potential of providing evidence of a long sequence of occupation.

3.2 Entrances to the Castle

Method - Area excavations of the entrances, followed by modern consolidation

The main entrance to the castle is approached across a relatively level platform which is particularly lush and green and may be partly composed of midden material. It may also be partly artificial, with soil dumped to create a level entrance platform and an easy road way up to this platform. The entrance was one of the major focal points of the castle, an area charged with symbolism where some of the most important activities of lordship would have taken place. One could expect this area to have been modified over time. There is a strong possibility that a sequence of pavings is present below the turf.

There were two other entrances to the castle (posterns) which were opened and closed at different phases in the castle's building history. The first of these entrances was pierced through the southern wall of the castle - situated where the kitchen fireplace was later built - and approached via a timber fore-stair (the joist holes for the postern still exist, one with a beam *in situ*). The precise location of the second postern has still to be confirmed, but it is thought to be situated at the end of the pend between blocks 2 and 3; this would have led to an opening high up on the south-west wall, above a number of rock-cut steps, but it is now obscured by unsympathetic modern repointing.

- a) Excavation will explore the nature of the threshold between the exterior space of the island and the interior of the castle. Thus, it is proposed to excavate both the entrance platform and the area around the so-called postern. The excavation of the latter may demonstrate that this entrance was not so much a postern but a less formal entrance used by those approaching the castle from across the causeway, perhaps servants.
- b) The beam in the joist hole below the block postern should be removed and dated by dendrochronology. This should provide a date for when the postern was open.
- c) Access to the entrance platform is by a series of rock-cut steps (No 6 in the topographic survey), but these are unsuitable for regular traffic. Excavation may reveal other approaches to the entrance platform, which may themselves demonstrate the main approach to the castle: was the main approach from the sea or from the land?
- d) As the entrance platform may have the deepest deposits and is toward the island's summit, excavation may reveal early occupation pre-dating that of the castle itself. However, due to the amount of traffic around this area of the island, the archaeology may be extensively eroded.

3.3 *Subsidiary Buildings on the Island*

Methodology - Area excavations of selected stances and trial trenching of others, followed by modern consolidation

A number of level stances, possibly building platforms, are scattered over the island. The nature and date of these structures is unclear and can only be advanced through excavation. It is possible that these sites predominately belong to the post-abandonment phase of the castle's history; however, when the castle was occupied, its courtyard could not have contained all the ancillary structures which were required to accommodate and serve the household of a great lord. It is therefore probable that there were ancillary buildings which provided additional services, storage and accommodation -- smithies, stables, granaries, perhaps an outer hall, a chapel and the dwellings of retainers and servants.

- a) Structures No 29 and No 30 are the most substantial building remains apart from the castle itself. They are situated to the south of the island, near the causeway which links the island to the mainland. Feature No 29 is an irregularly shaped earth and stone bank with some evidence of stone revetting. Feature No 30, partly enclosed by the bank (No 29) on the eastern side, is a substantial (12 m by 7 m) dry stone building. The position and scale of these structures and their interconnectedness suggests that they may have served together as a 'gate' complex contemporary with the castle itself, although it is equally possible that the structure is a small post-medieval chapel or substantial cottage with a surrounding wall. As the island is tidal and at low tide can be approached from other directions apart from the causeway, such a gatehouse could not serve as a defensive structure but as a reception area where those approaching the castle could be challenged and where horses could be stabled.
- b) Immediately east of the castle is a large (35 m by 12 m) revetted level area (feature No 3) with linear furrows. This may just be the remains of post-medieval cultivation; however, such a large area of relatively flat land close to the castle may originally have been a building stance. This area will be trial trenched to reveal its nature, and full-scale area excavation may follow.
- c) A building stance north-east of the castle (34a) may have been the site of a substantial stone building. Evidence for this suggestion comes from a tumble of possible building stone lying underwater beneath the cliff on which the building stance is situated. This site requires area and underwater excavation.
- d) Other building stances on the island, which are not as large or in such prominent situations (Nos 14, 15, 18, 34b-g), are perhaps most likely to represent stances of minor or impermanent buildings. All of these areas will be trial trenched to reveal their nature and full-scale area excavation may follow in some instances.

3.4 *The Approaches to the Castle*

Method - Area excavations, geophysical survey of pathways and beaching sites and underwater survey and excavation

The approach to the castle has always been by land and by sea. Each method of communication would have left particular traces. Access across the strand created a single route past the 'gatehouse' structure (Nos 29 and 30), while maritime traffic was less focused. Boats would have been landed at several sites, perhaps depending upon weather conditions, the type of ship and changing naval technology. From these landing sites one would expect boat noosts and metalled pathways leading to the castle and to other important buildings on the island. Such a network of paths has been excavated at Finlaggan, Islay, the caput of the Lordship of the Isles. Specific areas (including the 'gatehouse' structure, Nos 29 and 30) have been identified as providing the potential to explore this poorly understood aspect of castle life.

- a) The areas immediately before the entrances to the castle (main gateway and postern) and the approaches to these areas, especially the staircase to the entrance platform (No 6).
- b) Pathway No 5 and causeway No 46 appear to be the most significant routes of access around the island. Initial trial trenching would establish the value of larger scale excavations.
- c) Possible landing areas for small boats have been identified as Nos 38, 39, 40 and 41. Nos 39 and 40 are too large to be excavated, although geophysical survey may uncover more promising and limited candidates for excavation.
- d) Nos 38 and 41 are far smaller and may have been used as landing and beaching areas. The small bay No 38 is rather exposed and may only have been used occasionally, as the speediest approach to the castle.
- e) Features 9 and 10 are earth and stone banks which may be boundary or sea walls, establishing a formal approach to the castle from the landing site (No 38). Alternatively, they may represent the remains of revetments for buildings or borders of cultivation plots. Excavation will establish the function of these walls.
- f) Feature No 22 is the only probable boat noost identified on the island and as such is of archaeological interest. It is possible that there are other, less well preserved, boat noosts close to the landing sites. The general area around the boat noost has been identified as one of the most potentially significant areas for the harbouring and beaching of galleys. As a result, underwater exploration will occur alongside excavation on land.

- g) Feature No 20 is a nineteenth or twentieth century pier constructed of narrow gauge railway track. However, it is possible that it may have replaced an earlier pier or landing site.

3.5 *The Domestic Economy of the Castle*

Method - A sampling strategy to retrieve midden material for scientific analysis, followed by midden consolidation

The castle is surrounded by a series of middens. It seems clear that these were formed under different circumstances, at different times and have distinct compositions. Each has the potential to provide unique information about consumption, wider economic links and periods of building, rebuilding and clearance. The middens would be sampled to recover micro botanical remains, primarily pollen, which would inform us on the local vegetation of the island and its cultivation history, and to recover macro botanical remains of seeds and fruits would inform us directly about diet and the processing of food stuffs. Charcoal remains would also be expected and could be analysed to identify the wood types used in the construction of the castle. The environmental studies would also be directed at faunal remains. Bone fragments can be analysed to reveal the species consumed and the preferred cuts of meat. Such analysis can provide evidence of social differences between the occupants of the castle and those outside it, as well as examining the castle's role as a feasting centre. It would also reveal if the occupants relied upon cultivated species such as cattle and sheep, or if game was more important to the domestic economy of the castle. Comparisons can be made with bone assemblages from other castles.

- a) A large midden (2d) lies directly south of the postern which pierces the south wall of the castle. It seems unlikely that this midden relates to the clearance of the castle. Instead, it probably relates to a relatively limited time period when the postern was open and thus is the least likely to be contaminated by later material. The excavation of this midden may give some idea of the use of the postern. If it does relate to the castle's occupation, it suggests that this entrance was rather more than a simple escape route and possibly a servants' entrance where goods were brought in and refuse was taken out.

- b) A prominent midden (2a) stretches downslope in a north-west direction from the entrance platform. The visible components of this midden appear to relate to the mid-nineteenth century clearance of the castle. Although not in its original context, this material will provide information on the nature of the castle's occupation just before it was abandoned and should provide information on the process of consolidation at this time. Moreover, the site of the midden, not far from the castle's entrance but clear of the entrance platform and away from the approach to the castle, would have made it the ideal place for rubbish disposal during the castle's occupation. Thus, primary waste from the castle may lie sealed below the cleared material from the nineteenth century. The size of the midden and its situation on a steep slope would make full-scale excavation difficult. Here a combination of underwater excavation and extensive sampling on land would be worthwhile rather than full-scale excavation of the feature. Following excavation, steps to consolidate the midden would be required.
- c) A small fan of soil (2b) lies beneath a large gap in the north-west face of the curtain wall; this may be the outflow from a garderobe. Questions remain about this gap in the curtain wall, the proposed garderobe. If not related to a garderobe, it is possible that this midden may relate to an earlier phase of occupation of the island. Early midden material may have collected in rock fissures. Extensive excavation would help to confirm the presence or absence of the garderobe, while also providing a valuable set of environmental samples.
- d) A small fan of soil (2c) lies beneath a probable garderobe to the south of feature No 2b. This midden is likely to contain primary waste materials relating to the occupation of the castle and as a result is of high importance.
- e) The entrance platform to the castle appears to be partly constructed of midden material and middens are situated nearby. Thus, excavation of the entrance apron will contribute to the picture of the domestic economy of the castle.
- f) A low mound of possible midden material (2e) lies some distance to the east of the castle. This midden may relate to buildings outside the confines of the castle and its sampling may provide a contrast with the environmental remains from the castle itself.

- g) There are two wells on the island, one within the castle in block 2 and one lying immediately east of the castle. Wells can be valuable sources of environmental information, as the damp conditions often preserve organic material that would otherwise have perished. In addition, wells were often used as a handy dump during an abandonment phase and as a result can be rich in finds. It is uncertain whether or not the wells have been cleared in the past. Both wells today are only a few feet deep, and while the exterior well may never have been deeper, and indeed may be the remains of a post-medieval flax retting pond, the castle well was surely deeper and offers the possibility of undisturbed organic deposits.

3.6 *Post-abandonment Occupation of the Island*

Method - A combination of area excavation, trial trenching and underwater excavation, followed by consolidation

A significant part of the island's history post-dates the use of the castle as the chief message of the Clanranald. With the abandonment of the castle, it would appear that the island was used for small-scale cultivation and perhaps settlement. However, this occupation may have been of a limited duration, perhaps about a century, as it appears that as the owners of Dorlinn house took a greater interest in the castle the island was cleared of other buildings.

The post-abandonment phase is most clearly demonstrated by a number of cultivation features, most probably lazy beds for the cultivation of potatoes and perhaps barley on the island. These are concentrated to the south of the island, close to the causeway (feature Nos 24, 25a-d, 27a-i, 31a-k), although feature No 3 just east of the castle may also be the remains of cultivation. There is little point in excavating the large areas of cultivation such as features 27a-i and 31a-k, as it would provide little more information than has already been gained from the survey. However, it is possible that earlier structures were erected on these relatively flat areas of land and geophysical survey will guide any decisions to excavate this fragile and eroding part of the island. Other areas will be excavated in the course of the more general excavations that will have a direct impact on our knowledge of the post-abandonment phase of occupation.

- a) It is possible that the castle had some level of squatter occupation after it had been abandoned as the seat of the Clanranald. This would become apparent with the excavation of the castle courtyard.
- b) Many of the building stances already identified as possible sites of subsidiary buildings associated with the castle may in fact relate to a later phase of occupation or could have been re-used after the castle was abandoned (Nos 14, 15, 18, 30, 34a-g).

- c) Feature No 3 seems the probable site of an ancillary building to the castle, but the features on the ground seem to suggest a cultivation plot. Only through excavation will the nature of this site be revealed.
- d) The pier (feature No 20) is the most identifiable modern feature on the island. This will be investigated, on land and underwater, as it is an important feature in its own right, but also because it may be on the site of an earlier landing place or pier.

4.0 *Conclusions*

The strategy for the archaeological exploration of Eilean Tioram outlined above may appear excessive; after the excavation programme is completed, there will be little archaeology left on the island for future generations apart from that in the middens. However, only an ambitious strategy such as this will allow us to gain an insight into the past occupation of the island, not just during the castle's occupation (c thirteenth - eighteenth century) but that of the whole island and up to the present day. In recent years Historic Scotland has used consolidation programmes as an opportunity to explore the archaeology of various sites (Dundonald Castle, Threave Castle, Spynie Castle and Smailholm Tower) to great effect. The consolidation and restoration of Castle Tioram should be viewed as a similar opportunity. We should not produce mere 'keyholes' through which to glimpse the history of Eilean Tioram but rather seek to produce a coherent, accessible history of the islands occupation. As the excavation programme is so extensive, it is important that the account of the island is produced both quickly and in an accessible manner through publication at a range of levels from scholarly to populist.

5.0 *Timescale and Resource Implications*

Such an extensive programme of excavation will take place over a number of years. Some of the work would necessarily be planned to coincide with the conservation or restoration works, while other areas can be examined at greater leisure. It is important that the work not be rushed so that the results of one season's work can be used to guide the succeeding one. A notional program of eight years, consisting of five years of excavation and three years of post-excavation analysis and reporting would allow the programme to be completed.

Not only would this be a major opportunity to advance our knowledge, but it is also a significant educational opportunity. Ideally, some of the excavation and analysis would be undertaken by students.

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7.0 Appendix of Reports

Appendix of Reports

Anta Estates Ltd, Research Undertaken as part of the Tioram Conservation Project:

Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD), 1998.

- Part 1 *The Documentary Evidence.*
- Part 2 *Topographical and Archaeological Survey of Eilean Tioram.*
- Part 3 *An Underwater Survey at Castle Tioram in Loch Moidart.*
- Part 4 *Building Analysis and interpretation.*
- Part 5 *Survey Products.*

Murray, A, 1998, *Castle Tioram - The Historical Background.*