

Excavations at Bishop's Castle, Scrabster

The following report has been received from Mr. E. Talbot of the Department of Archaeology, Glasgow University who directed the excavations at the above site.

Excavations at the above-mentioned site in 1970 left many questions unanswered and so a second season, carried out on behalf of the Department of the Environment, was undertaken. Work took place from August 6th to the 24th, 1973.

In 1970 an area in the middle of the site revealed courtyard cobbling with twelfth/thirteenth century pottery on the lowest cobble level. This was removed in August to show what lay beneath. A spread of tumbled stone was found and it proved to lie on the natural sandy soil.

A small 1m x 0.75m) cist-like arrangement of stones (with capstone) amongst this spread suggested that the latter could represent a flattened prehistoric structure perhaps a broch. A small amount of what appears to be pottery of the broch period (ex. inf. Dr. H. Fairhurst cf. material from Crosskirk) was found amongst the stone spread. Stone tanks are frequently encountered in broch excavations and have been interpreted as containers for shell fish.

A cut 5m x 12.5m was made running N from the presumed entrance into the interior of the site. A range of three small and crudely constructed rooms was located and finds of pottery suggested a fifteenth century date possibly as a late addition to the main range of the castle's buildings. There was much evidence for the relatively recent disturbance of the area. A stone finial (?) was found on the floor of one room.

The SW corner of this cut, together a 5m square close to it brought to light some structural evidence to aid the interpretation of the entrance features. A number of phases, represented by blocking, culminated in a flanked approach to the site. Disturbance in the past brought almost to the surface in this area pottery shards seemingly of the broch period. A quern of possibly thirteenth century date was also found here together with the fragment of a bone comb and a bone 'prodder'.

Further investigation is needed in the area of the entrance but as in other areas of the site a decision must be made concerning the future of the castle before more vulnerable stretches of walling are revealed.

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