

Excavation at Lochleven Castle, 1982

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INTRODUCTION

Half a kilometre from the shore of Loch Leven and 1.5 km from the town of Kinross is a small island of approximately 3 ha upon which stand the ruins of the Castle of Lochleven (NGR NO 137 018).

The castle has been described elsewhere (RCAMS 1933, 296–9; Cruden 1960, 112–13) and these sources should be consulted for more detailed accounts of the monument's architecture and history than are printed here. Briefly: the late 14th- or early 15th-century tower (RCAMS 1933, 296) and a curtain wall, probably of secondary construction, surround an enclosure of approximately 1450 sq m within which are located the remains of several ancillary buildings (illus 2). Burns-Begg (1887, 17) ascribed names to some of these structures but most of his assumptions have yet to be confirmed; his descriptions often disagree with those of other writers. The lower courses of masonry in the south curtain wall bear traces of work earlier than that of the existing tower and main body of the enclosure walls and may have been part of the defences besieged by the English in 1335.

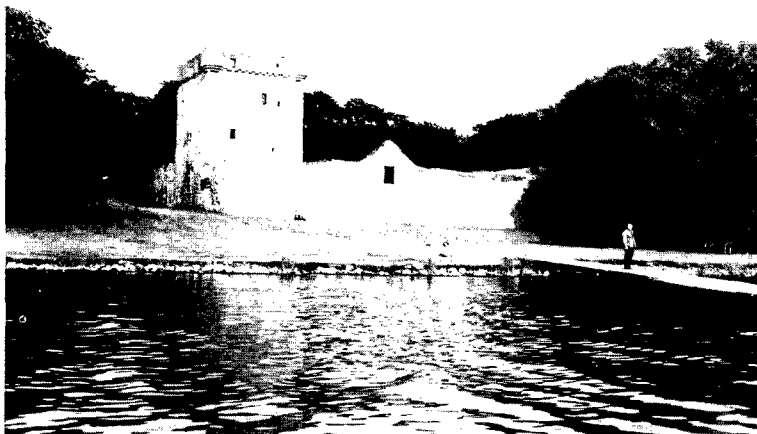
Outside the east end of the north curtain is another range of buildings shown in Burns-Begg's illustrations but not included in the RCAMS plan of the castle. The imminent collapse of some of the masonry of this range prompted a small excavation, undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Development Department (Ancient Monuments Division), in June 1982. Some work was also carried out within the partly ruined south-eastern tower where consolidation of the masonry was preceded by an investigation of existing floor levels.

EXCAVATION

NORTH-EAST RANGE

Prior to excavation, the masonry of the east end of the range stood to a height of about 2 m although the standing remains of both the east and north walls were in danger of collapse. Time did

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ILLUS 1 Lochleven Castle: the castle from the north-west

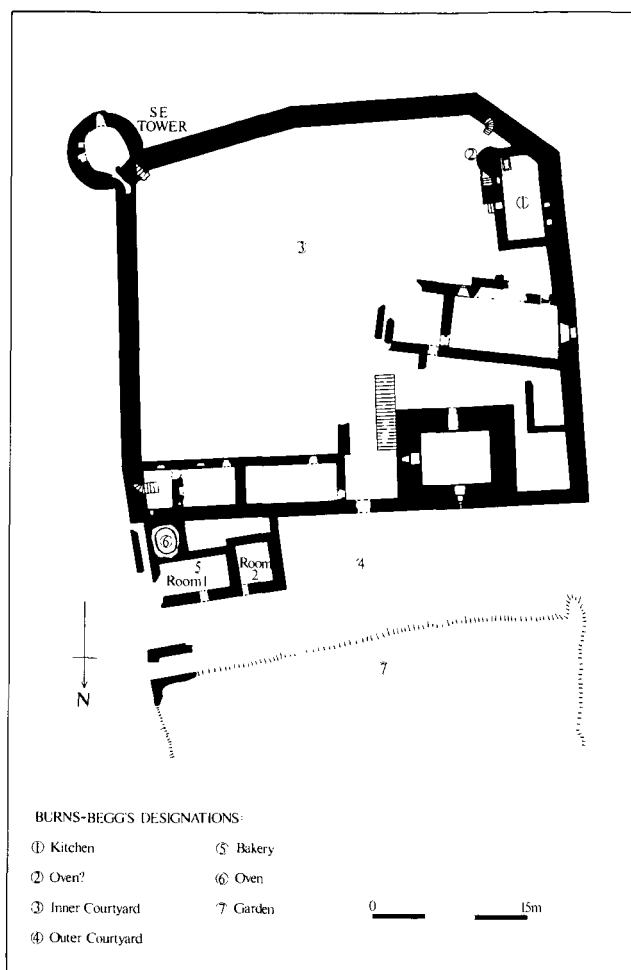
not allow a detailed investigation of the whole range and, consequently, the excavation concentrated on the structure adjacent to the two threatened walls.

The removal of rubble up to 1 m deep adjacent to the curtain wall revealed a semi-circular structure 2.50 m east/west by 1.40 m north/south – F104 – described by Burns-Begg as an oven. The walls were 650 mm to 800 mm thick and stood to a maximum height of about 1 m. The curved wall on the east, south and west sides had been built on a platform of light brown clay similar to that bonding the bottom two courses of tooled sandstone blocks. Above these two courses the stonework had been rebuilt, probably in recent times for the rubble masonry was bonded with a very hard white mortar. There was no evidence of a stone floor, merely a few patches of dark red, heat-affected clay overlying the natural water-washed boulders and coarse yellow sand.

The north side of F104 was difficult to interpret. The south wall of Room 1, the ‘bakery’ according to Burns-Begg (illus 2), may have been rebuilt at some stage. This was because its masonry seemed to overlie an earlier, parallel wall (perhaps a continuation of the south wall of Room 2) whereas, at foundation level adjacent to F104, the relative chronology was apparently reversed. Here the north wall of F104 overlay the bottom course of the south wall of Room 1 (illus 3). Further excavation would be required before these anomalies could be explained.

Between F104 and the curtain wall to its south, and a rubble-built wall to its east, was an infill of tightly-packed rubble. Its denseness suggested that it had been deposited intentionally, perhaps to prevent the loss of heat from F104. Removal of part of this rubble exposed the bottom course of the north curtain wall which had been built upon midden material such as ash, coal and animal bone fragments. The relationship between this wall, which was not a primary feature of the castle according to some sources (RCAMS 1933, 296), and the range to its north could not be ascertained from the limited amount of material uncovered.

To the west of F104, below destruction debris, was a thin layer of light brown loam (maximum depth 50 mm) which included the only two sherds of medieval pottery recovered during the excavation; these are described below. This soil, deposited after the range had been abandoned, sealed a



ILLUS 2 Lochleven Castle: based on Burns-Begg's plan of 1887

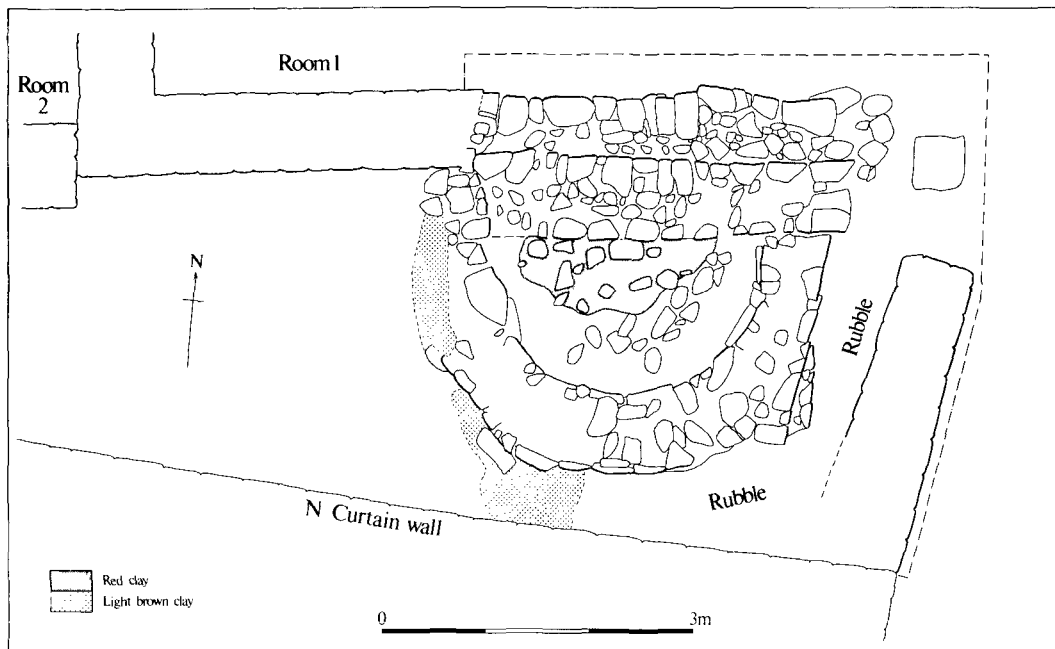
series of layers of ash and small coal, up to 300 mm deep, within which were several bones of butchered domestic animals.

SOUTH-EAST TOWER

When various soils, mortar and collapsed masonry, up to 800 mm deep, were removed from the southern half of the ground level of this tower no trace of a floor was revealed. Time did not permit a very extensive investigation but it soon became apparent that any floor that had existed had been removed long since. Fragments of 19th-century glass and ceramics were found immediately above the stonework of the cellar's vaulted roof and, consequently, archaeological work was abandoned in this area.

FINDS

Other than objects of 19th- and 20th-century dates, the only artefacts recovered from the excavation were the two sherds of pottery found to the west of F104. These are described below.



ILLUS 3 Lochleven Castle: F104 (the 'oven')



ILLUS 4 Lochleven Castle: F104 (the 'oven') from the south

POTTERY

- 1 Basal sherd of East Coast gritty ware. Date uncertain but probably 16th- or 17th-century.
- 2 Handle of jug with smooth red fabric. Its source of manufacture was probably either Stenhouse or Throsk; its date 16th- or early 17th-century.

DISCUSSION

Not enough evidence remained to confirm or deny Burns-Begg's assumption that F104 was an oven. Very little survived above foundation level, the floor had been completely removed and no cereal grains were found. However, the ground plan of the structure suggested an oven and the clay inside had definitely been baked.

The dates ascribed to the pottery indicate that the abandonment of F104 (and probably the 'bakery') was no later than the early 17th century. There was nothing to date the construction of F104 and its chronological relationship to the curtain wall is not at all clear. The east end of the north curtain, built on rubble and redeposited soils, is obviously not a primary feature of the castle but, again, its date of construction is unknown.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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