

Excavations at Craignethan Castle, 1984 and 1995

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ABSTRACT

This report describes excavations carried out within the basement of the ruined north-east tower (1984) and at courtyard level to the immediate east of the tower house (1995) at Craignethan Castle. The former was originally a kitchen but was remodelled at some stage, perhaps to a brewhouse. There was evidence that a range of buildings had been planned for the east side of the inner courtyard but that quite early in the development of the castle (built c 1530) it was abandoned in favour of the impressive tower house. The project was funded by Historic Scotland and its predecessor, Historic Buildings and Monuments.

INTRODUCTION

Several accounts have been written of Craignethan Castle (including MacGibbon & Ross 1887; Simpson 1963; MacIvor 1977; and McKean 1995; but see also Pringle 1992) and these should be consulted for more detailed descriptions of the monument than can be included here. Nevertheless, a brief summary of its history and architecture is presented in this paper in order to set the scene for the excavations described within.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

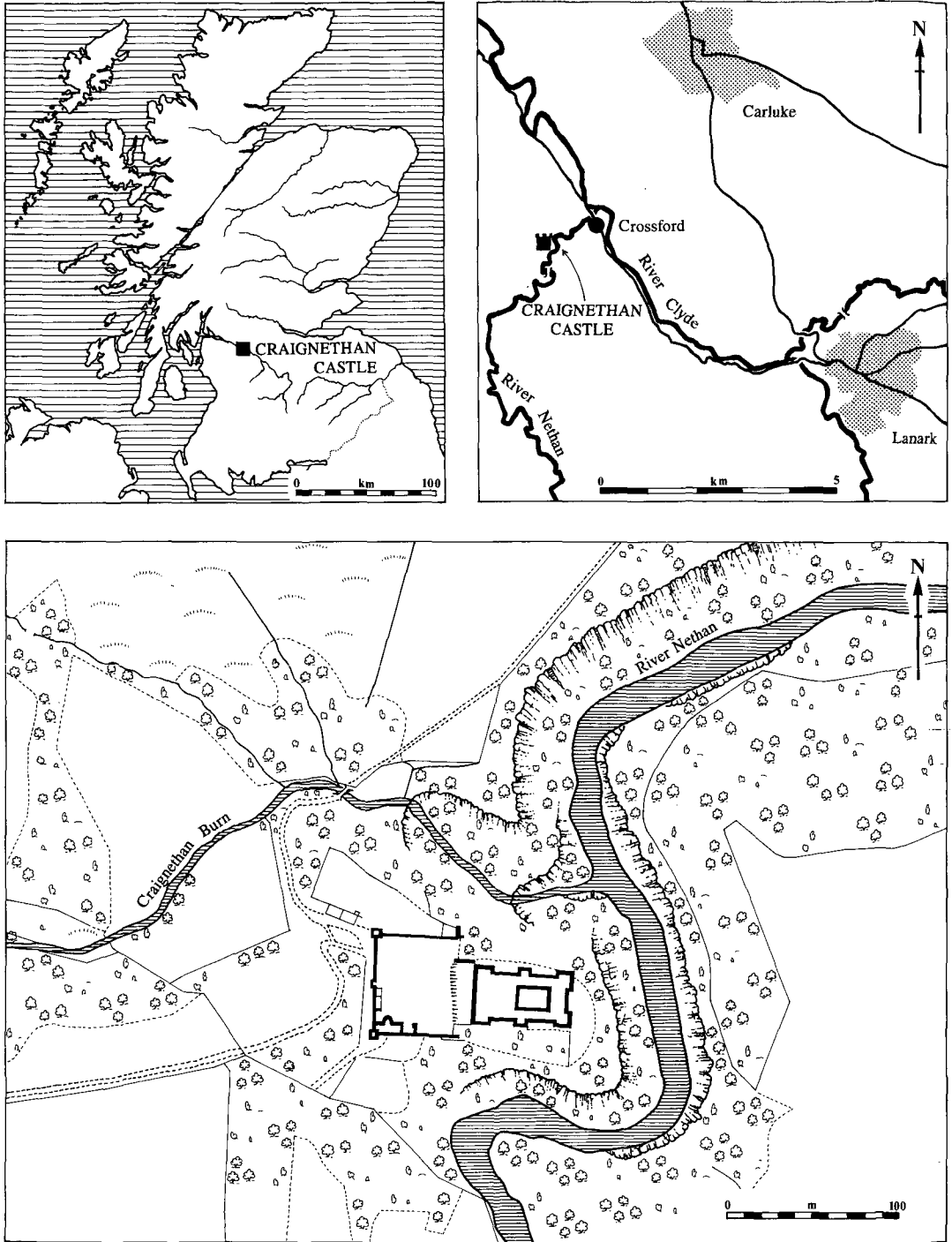
Craignethan Castle dates from around 1530 and was the brainchild of Sir James Hamilton of Finnart, the illegitimate son of James, first Earl of Arran and great-grandson of King James II. Finnart not only commissioned the building of the castle but, as one who was passionately interested in architecture (and indeed the future Master of the King's Works), took a very active interest in its construction.

Finnart was executed for treason in 1540 and the castle eventually fell into the hands of his half-brother (also James), who was to become the second Earl of Arran and Regent of Scotland during the minority of Mary, Queen of Scots. In 1566 he fell out of favour with Mary and was banished to France, but returned shortly afterwards. From the time of the Queen's abdication in 1567, Arran supported Mary's cause even when it became a lost one, his allies having to retake Craignethan after it had fallen into the hands of his enemy, the Regent Moray. The Earl died in 1575; four years later his kinsmen were dispossessed of their estates and their strongholds (including Craignethan) were slighted. Some of the castle's buildings appear to have remained

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ILLUS 1 Location map of Craignethan Castle. (Based on the Ordnance Survey map © Crown copyright)

habitable after this event and parts of it were still considered secure in 1592 (Simpson 1963, 41), but its days as a major fortification were past. Some time after 1659, probably when most of the castle was uninhabitable, new buildings were added to the outer courtyard by the then owner, Andrew Hay, who made good use of the ample supply of masonry from the earlier dereliction.

Craignethan reclaimed some renown when it was equated (erroneously or otherwise) by many with Tillietudlem Castle in Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816). Some time later, a railway halt and its associated hamlet of Tillietudlem were established 1 km south-west of the castle.

LOCATION

Craignethan Castle stands near the confluence of the River Nethan and the Craignethan Burn, 1 km south-west of the village of Crossford, in Lanarkshire — although considerably further by road — and 7 km north-west of Lanark in upper Clydesdale (NGR: NS 815 463) (illus 1). Although its defensive qualities were compromised somewhat by the elevated ground that lies to its west, the castle was well protected on its north, east and south sides by precipitous cliffs on the sides of the two rivers. These cliffs may also have protected an earlier building, Draffan Castle, which perhaps dates to the 13th century, and is thought by some to have stood on this site (Simpson 1963, 42). The physical evidence of this fortification has yet to be located.

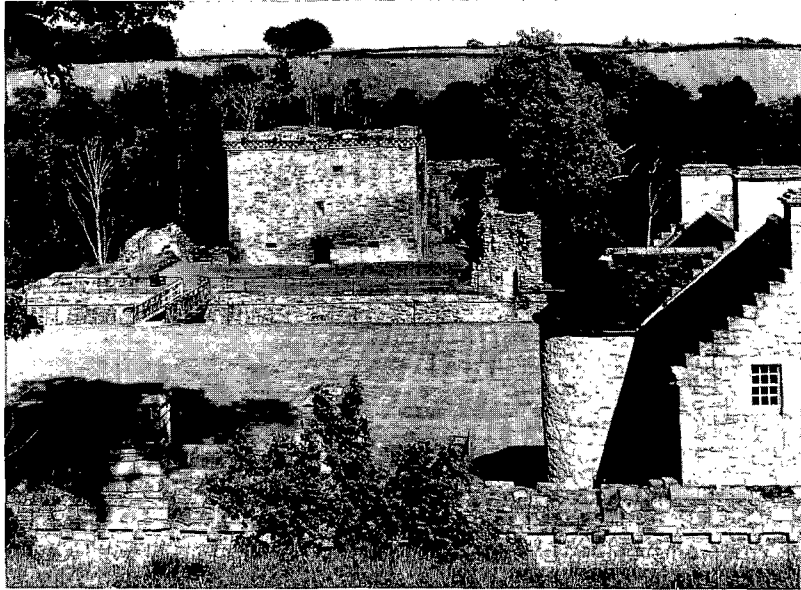
ARCHITECTURE

The castle (illus 2 & 3) is approached from the west and entered through a gateway to an outer courtyard (possibly not an original feature of the castle — although an early one, nevertheless) which is separated from its inner courtyard by a ditch. This ditch was spanned by a bridge (now replaced by a modern one further south) and protected at its base by a caponier (ie a covered passage within the ditch to allow defensive fire along its length). On the east side of the ditch was a stone rampart, 5 m wide, defending the inner courtyard from any artillery that might have been positioned on the elevated ground to its west. On its remaining three sides, where artillery was less of a threat, its walls were considerably less robust. There were large, square towers at the north-east and south-east corners and smaller ones at the two remaining corners of the inner courtyard: only the south-east tower still stands to any appreciable height.

Originally, there were two other entrances into the inner courtyard: small gate-towers, midway along the north curtain and towards the west end of the south curtain (the latter blocked at some stage, perhaps in favour of the north gate). Towards the east end of the south curtain wall, at first-floor level, were three windows which had also been sealed at some stage. It has been suggested that these windows were associated with a south range, perhaps containing a hall, whose construction was abandoned in favour of the nearby tower house (Simpson 1963, 44). Alternatively, the intention may have been to shed light into the tower house although this would have been thwarted when the openings were sealed.

The principal building of the castle was a tower house of unusual and ingenious design, measuring 21 m by 16 m and 10 m high. Over a basement containing storage cellars and a prison was a hall (unusual in the ground floor of a castle) whose barrel vault extended upwards through two storeys, a height of over 6 m. Above its adjoining kitchen and withdrawing room was private accommodation. The entire building was capped with a four-roomed attic, now in ruins.

Of the six towers around the perimeter of the inner courtyard, the south-east and north-east were by far the largest. The former may have housed a chapel within the single, lofty storey above



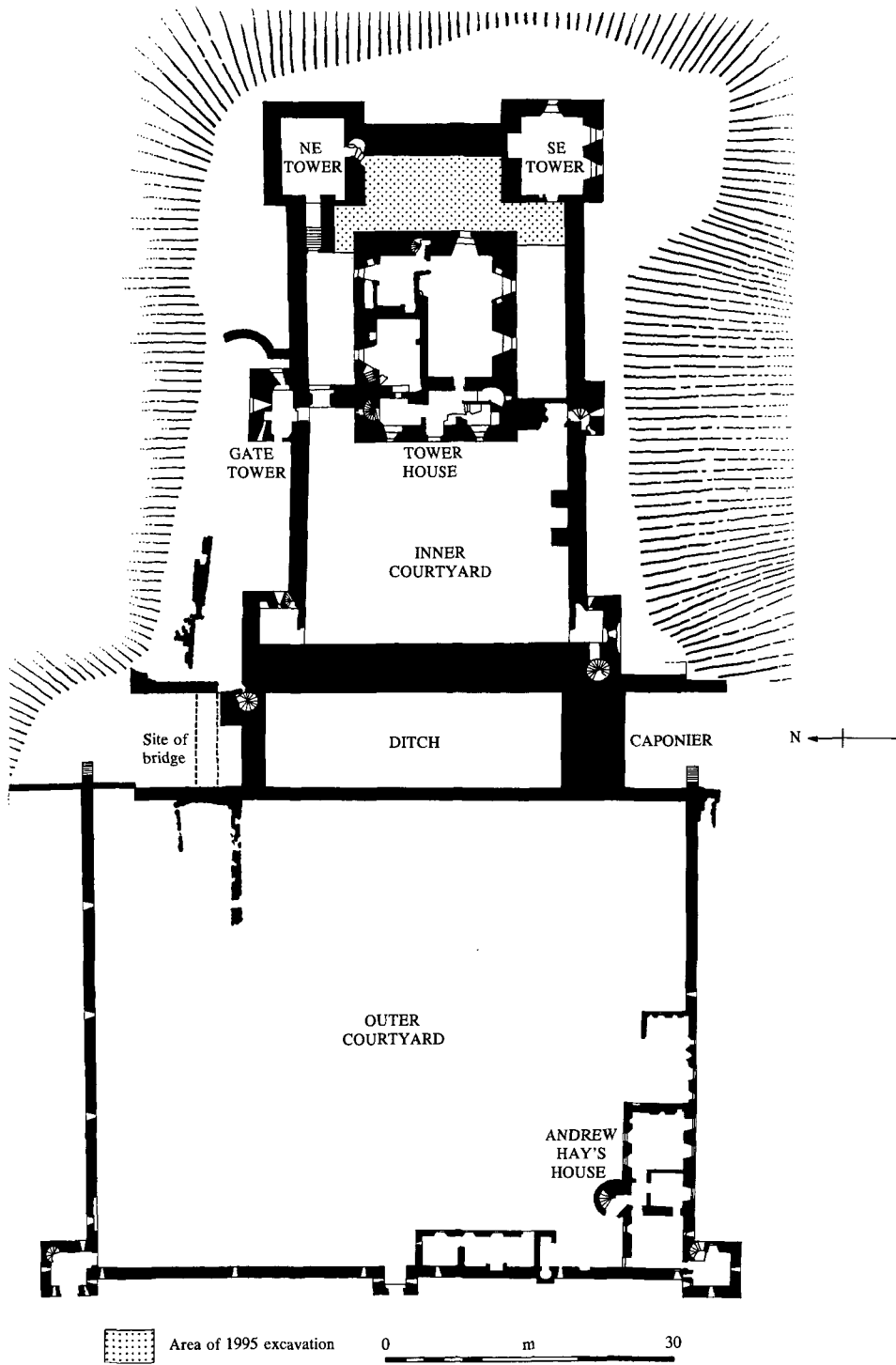
ILLUS 2 Craignethan Castle viewed from the west. (*Historic Scotland* © Crown copyright)

basement level. The latter probably included residential accommodation, perhaps on two floors, over a basement kitchen which was remodelled at some stage (see below). Other accommodation would have been ranged around the walls of both courtyards although, apart from some roof corbels against the walls of the outer ward, few traces of those original buildings now survive above ground level.

The south-east and north-east towers each measured approximately 10 m square and allowed for flanking fire along the outside of the east curtain wall by projecting some 2 m beyond it. The south-east tower still stands to its full height of 10.7 m whereas the north-east tower has been demolished to below ground-floor level, its basement being infilled with large quantities of rubble, mainly from its collapsed vaulted roof. Between the basements of these two towers is a range of three vaulted cellars (the east range), each with a doorway in its west wall. These cellars are entered from a vaulted passage, accessed by a flight of stairs at its north end and, at its other end, by a doorway from outside the castle's walls. This passage is not a primary feature of the castle: before the tower house was built, the cellars were probably entered directly from the inner courtyard, perhaps down a sharp slope or flight of steps. The slope at the east end of the castle is so steep that the first floors of the east range and its adjacent towers were level with the ground floor of the nearby tower house.

EXCAVATIONS

The castle came into the care of the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1949, after which the debris that covered much of its remains was removed and its masonry gradually consolidated. The ditch separating the two courtyards was not emptied until 1962 when the caponier was discovered. In 1984 this programme extended to the interior of the north-east tower (its exterior had been consolidated at an earlier date). Before the fabric of this building could be repaired, the rubble and other post-abandonment deposits within it were removed archaeologically. In the autumn of



ILLUS 3 Plan of Craignethan Castle

1993 an exploratory trench was dug through the concrete covering the roof of the east range basement. Early in 1995 all of the concrete was removed pending repair work to render the underlying stonework waterproof. This offered an opportunity to study elements of the roof and to determine their relationships with adjacent structures and features.

All site records and documents are lodged with the National Monuments Record of Scotland.

NORTH-EAST TOWER

Although it had probably once stood to the same height as the south-east tower, this building had been almost totally demolished. On its south and west sides, only a few courses of masonry survived above the level of its first floor, now collapsed, and its other two walls had been reduced to only 1.5 m in height.

Basement (illus 4, 5 & 6)

Internally, the basement of the tower measured 7.8 m east/west by 5.1 m north/south within walls 1.7–2.5 m thick, the widest being on the north side of the building. Prior to excavation, the debris within it was up to 1.3 m deep and comprised mostly large rubble derived from the collapsed roof and walls of the tower, together with smaller rubble, mortar and soils.

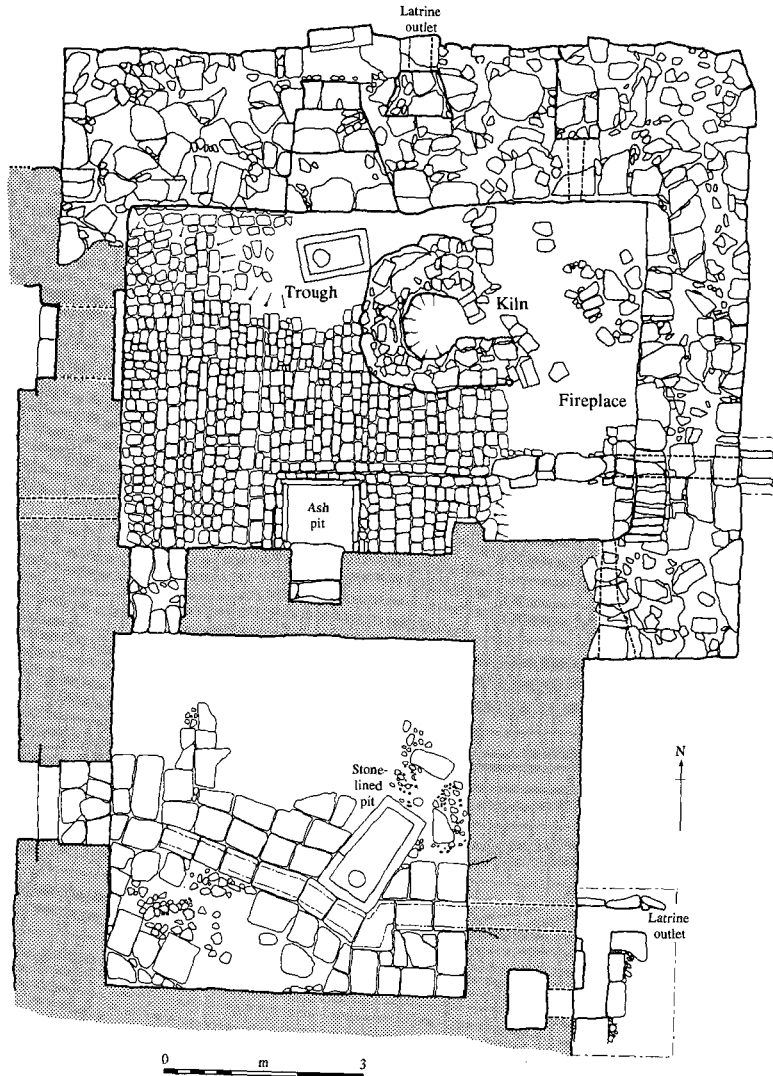
At first, the basement had been a kitchen but its role appears to have changed when a kiln was built over the floor of the room, a stone trough installed next to it and, probably at the same time, one of its doorways blocked.

Phase 1 Originally there had been two ways into this basement. One was by means of a straight stair from the courtyard through a doorway, 1.35 m wide at its base but splaying to 1.5 m at a height of 1.6 m above threshold level from where it had been arched (only the springers survived). The other entrance, which led from the cellar to the immediate south, was through the west end of the south wall, the opening narrowing from 0.8 m within the tower to a mere 0.65 m on its south side where the door had been.

The east side of the basement was taken up with a large fireplace, 2.5 m deep, which extended over the entire width of the room. Its arched front of large sandstone blocks was continuous with the room's vaulted ceiling of which only a few courses survived on the south side of the room. It would be common for such a fireplace to be flagged and its central hearth to contain an iron basket; no trace of either was uncovered. There was, however, considerable heat damage to a height of 1.5 m in the south-east corner of the fireplace where there were large quantities of heat-shattered sandstone rubble, ash and burnt clay, perhaps the remnants of a collapsed bread oven. There was another, much smaller fireplace recessed 0.8 m into the south wall of the basement, its flue partly blocked although still discernible at first floor level (see below). To the front of this fireplace was an ash-pit. Set 0.3 m into the floor, it was lined on its sides and base with stone and measured 1.0 m square.

There were gunloops in the north, east and south walls of the basement, all three accessed through the main fireplace. Each of these apertures was for handguns; those in the north and east walls having only slight splays and therefore affording limited fields of fire whereas the one in the south wall, sighted along the outside face of the east range, splayed quite widely.

The kitchen was lit by two windows, one each in its east and north walls and both about 1.2 m above floor level. The east window was only 0.5 m wide externally, splaying to 1.2 m inside the building. The north opening was badly damaged, but had been about 0.7 m wide externally; there were two grooves for metal bars in its sill and another for glass in its left jamb. Near to this window was the outlet for a latrine serving the upper floor(s) of the tower.



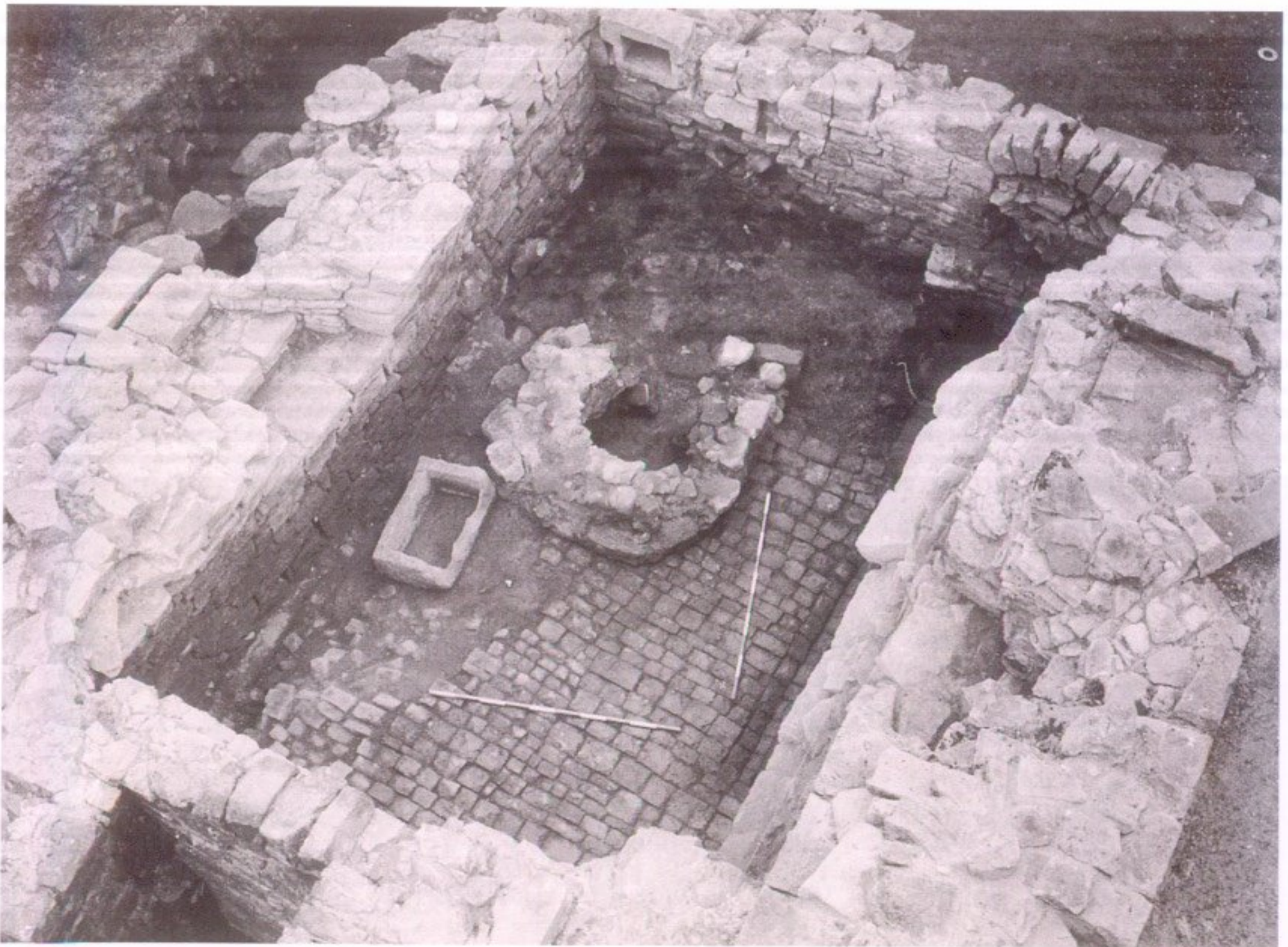
ILLUS 4 Plan of the north-east tower and adjacent cellar at basement level

The basement was floored with roughly squared and tightly laid setts of dolerite, bedded in yellow sand over undisturbed boulder clay. Dolerite is a hard-wearing, volcanic stone, presumably quarried from the bed of the River Nethan, which has been used for similar purposes throughout the castle. It often assumes a yellow colour when weathered, as at Craignethan. The setts had been disturbed somewhat in the north-west corner of the room, perhaps when the building collapsed. There was a definite edge to these setts at the front of the fireplace and it was clear that they had never extended into it.

At the base of the west wall, towards its south end, was a small, square opening, perhaps to take water draining from courtyard level before the adjacent passage was built. By this arrangement, water would have flowed across the surface of the floor towards the ash-pit, around which it had been diverted along an open, V-shaped drain fashioned out of the dolerite setts. The drain continued through the south end of the large fireplace, where it was constructed of sandstone flags (and perhaps where it had been capped), before issuing through the east curtain wall through another square opening.



ILLUS 5 The kitchen fireplace in the north-east tower; viewed from the north-west



ILLUS 6 The interior of the north-east tower showing the kiln and trough; viewed from the south-west

Phase 2 At some stage the interior of this basement was remodelled; perhaps when its role was relinquished to the kitchen in the tower house or perhaps in the aftermath of the catastrophic events of 1579. Alternatively, the alterations may simply reflect the changing habits and fortunes of a household during times of peace.

The most obvious modification was the addition of a kiln, inserted directly below the arched front of the fireplace, at its north end. Its circular bowl measured about 1 m in diameter within a wall, 1.0–1.2 m wide. This was built of two skins of clay-bonded masonry (mostly sandstone), the inner face being of superior stonework. Little remained of the flue which would have extended well into the fireplace. The north side of the bowl had been built over redeposited yellow boulder clay (after the dolerite setts had been removed), whereas the masonry on its south side sat directly on the stone floor; the flue, however, had been cut into the glacial till to a depth of 0.25 m. There was a thin layer of burnt materials over the floor near to the kiln.

To the immediate north-west of the kiln, adjacent to the window in the north wall, was a rectangular trough carved from a single block of sandstone. It measured 0.85 m by 0.45 m and 0.32 m deep within walls 0.1 m thick although the structure was broken on its south and west sides. At the west end of its base was a shallow, circular depression, 0.3 m in diameter, perhaps a silt trap. The stone setts had been removed from the floor in the vicinity of this trough, perhaps when it was inserted. The proximity of the trough to the kiln suggests that the two features were associated in some way although precisely how is not clear.

Perhaps at the same time as the kiln and trough were added, the arch of the west doorway was removed and the opening blocked with mortar-bonded rubble. Two sockets, each measuring 0.15 m by 0.12 m, were inserted into this blocking, 1.9 m above floor level. These small sockets may have carried timber beams although their purpose remains unknown.

First storey

There had been two entrances into the tower at first-floor level: one from the west, through a doorway 1 m wide with roll-moulded jambs on its exterior and a single step down into the building; and another at the east end of its south wall where a spiral stair had led to the floor(s) above. This doorway, perhaps originally meant to open into the east range, was set at a slight angle and was only 0.8 m wide. A short passage led through the thickness of the wall to a doorway, 1 m wide, into what had probably been a single chamber of private accommodation. There had been a fireplace to the immediate west of the inner doorway, the surviving evidence of which comprised heat-affected masonry within the wall face and, adjacent to this, the partly blocked flue leading from the fireplace in the south wall of the basement (see above). Although no trace of the floor of the first storey survived, the numerous large, finely dressed sandstone flags recovered from the rubble infill of the tower may well have been remnants of it.

EAST RANGE

The 1995 area of excavation was at courtyard level and ran between the north-east and south-east towers, extending around the fronts of both buildings and measuring approximately 13 m north/south by 7.5 m wide.

It seems likely that the east range was never completed above basement level although the east curtain appears to have been built to its full intended height, at least on the evidence of the tussing in the north wall of the south-east tower. However, the curtain wall was partly demolished at some stage (perhaps when the castle was slighted in 1579) and now stands barely above courtyard level.

Basement (illus 7)

At basement level, this range comprised three cellars, each measuring 5.4 m east/west and with vaults springing from their north and south walls. Both the central and south chambers were 4 m wide, with doorways in their west walls and earthen floors. The northernmost room, however, was 5.4 m wide and had doors in its west and north walls, the latter leading into the basement of the north-east tower. In addition, the south half of the north cellar was flagged, while the remaining part of its floor was simply earth. Some of the flags had been fashioned to form a shallow open gully, again to remove water seeping down the slope to the west. Latterly, this drain may have removed overspill from the well in the basement of the tower house which issued midway along the west wall of the passage. The gully debouched through the east wall of the cellar, linking with a latrine chute intended to serve the upper storey(s) of the east range. Its course was rather circuitous, running round one end of a stone-lined pit sunk into the floor of the room, suggesting that the drain had been re-routed when the pit was inserted.

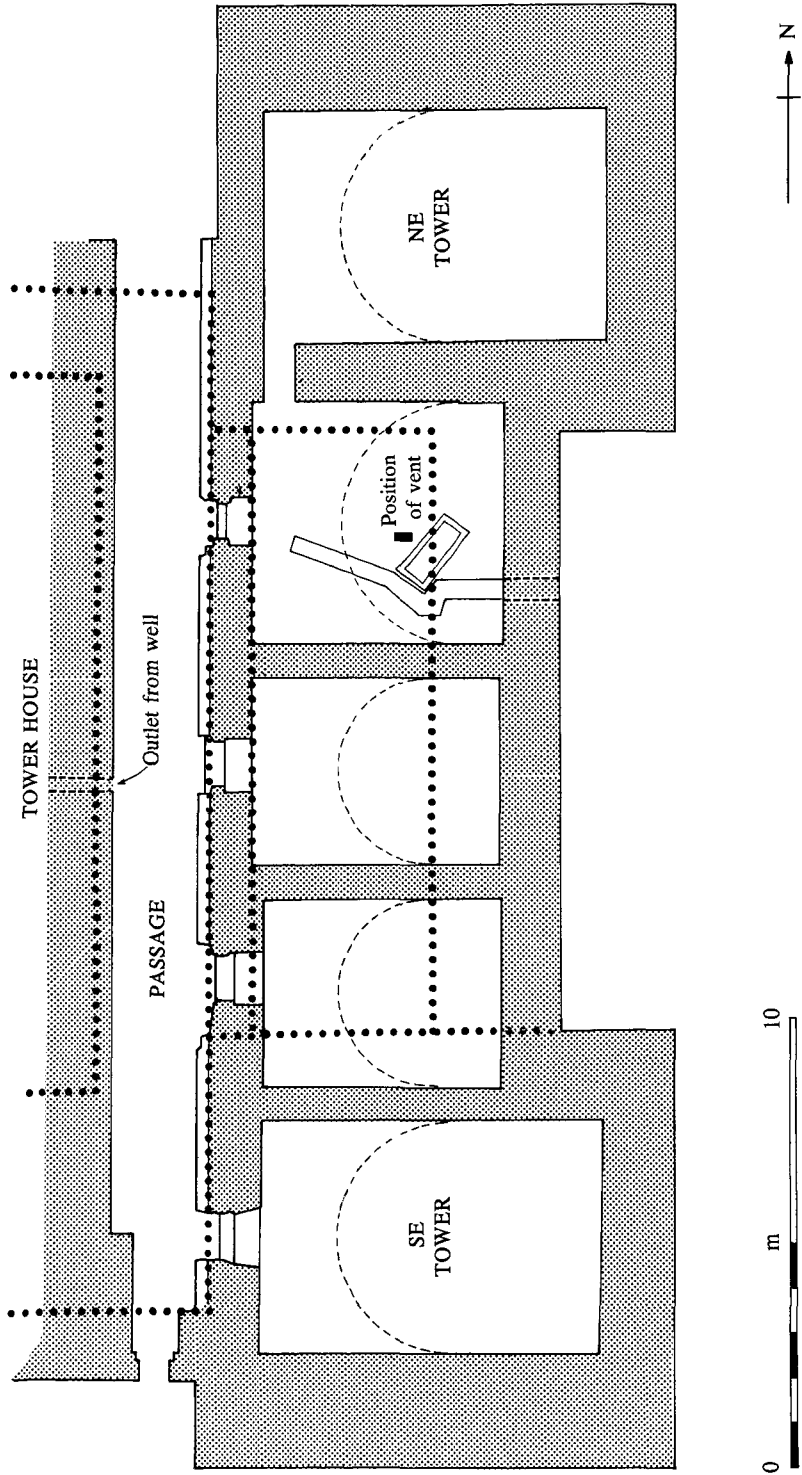
The pit This was constructed of several sandstone flags and set 0.2 m into the floor. It was 1.45 m long, widening from 0.5 m at its north end to 0.6 m on its south. Piercing the roof of the vault (about 1 m thick at this point), just to the west of the pit, was a rectangular aperture, measuring 0.28 m by 0.26 m. This hole, which seemed to be integral with the masonry of the vault, may have been a vent; although it is difficult to imagine it opening into one of the ground-floor chambers of the putative east range. It is possible that the opening removed the smoke from a fire (perhaps in a brazier) set over the stone-lined pit which could have collected ashes. However, there were no visible remains of a fireplace in this room. Alternatively, an object such as a pendant light could have been suspended below this aperture, as has been suggested for a similar feature in the chapter house roof at Inchcolm Abbey (RCAHMS 1933, 11).

The passage The existing arrangement whereby the cellars are entered from a narrow passage to their north was probably introduced at the same time as the tower house was built. The corridor was 2 m wide with a vaulted roof 1.9 m high. Its west side was the east wall of the tower house whereas its east side comprised a thin skin of masonry added on to the west wall of the cellar range, thus masking its original ashlar face.

Courtyard level (illus 7 & 8)

The range was some 2 m shorter at this level than it was in its basement because here the walls of the north-east and south-east towers had been thickened, the additional masonry being borne by the vaults of the cellars below. (The curtain wall is also thicker by 1.5 m at courtyard level than at its base, thus imposing additional strain on the foundations of the building.) On the evidence of the latrine chute towards the north end of the east curtain wall, it had probably been the intention to extend the east range above courtyard level, although there is nothing to suggest that this work was ever completed. It is likely that the scheme was abandoned in favour of the tower house which may have incorporated the roles of the putative east and south ranges. Furthermore, if the east range and the tower house had coexisted, the former would have severely restricted the amount of light entering the first-floor hall of the tower.

The extrados of the cellar vaults was covered with a thin layer of hard grey mortar over which was substantial rubble set in very hard, pale cream mortar. This was thickest against the curtain wall and petered out towards the tower house, thus establishing the pronounced westward slope reflected by all subsequent deposits. This slope, which appears to have been created deliberately, would have been wholly inappropriate inside most buildings. Its creation almost certainly post-dated either the demise of the east range or the abandonment of its construction.



ILLUS 7 Plan showing the outline (bold dots) of courtyard-level structures over the east range cellars



ILLUS 8 View northwards of the east range at courtyard level

A level path of crude sandstone flags had been laid against the east side of the tower house, over the roof of the basement passage. At some stage, the sloping ground between the path and the east curtain was also flagged but with smaller, even cruder stones, set in loose, sandy mortar. This surface did not continue around the north and south sides of the tower house, where dolerite setts were in evidence. To the north of the building some of the setts had been fashioned into a V-shaped, open drain; others are of recent origin.

The setts were missing outside the south-east tower where there may have been a lean-to, timber gallery (McKean 1995, 1081). The roof raggie of that structure is still visible in the west wall of the corner tower although no trace of its walls or floor was revealed by excavation.

FINDS

Very few finds were recovered from either excavation. The pottery merits a brief description (below), but all other artefacts are considered to be of negligible interest and are not described here.

Pottery (not illustrated)

The 30 sherds recovered from the north-east tower in 1984 (all of them in residual contexts) were of thick-walled vessels with reduced, grey fabrics and a thick green glaze, typical of the utilitarian material manufactured in central Scotland during the late 16th century. One sherd was decorated and another was from a jug rim. Unfortunately, these sherds are now lost.

Most of the very small assemblage from 1995 was retrieved from disturbed levels to the immediate west of the south-east tower. Other than 19th- and 20th-century material, all the sherds had grey, reduced fabrics and were covered with green or greenish-brown glaze. None of the sherds was particularly diagnostic.

DISCUSSION

Whilst it was obvious that there had been two stages of development within the east range of the castle and some remodelling within its north-east tower, it would be unwise to assume that all of these changes were contemporary. Unfortunately, there was no artefactual or architectural evidence to help date these changes.

It is possible that the original layout of the castle did not include provision for the tower house and that the south and east ranges had been earmarked as its principal accommodation. However, neither range appears to have been completed (Simpson 1963, 44). No trace of the putative south range, other than blocked windows in the curtain wall, has been uncovered, although such evidence could have been swept away by later developments.

EAST RANGE

The weight of evidence suggests that the east range was never built above basement level. The definite thickening of the masonry of the corner towers from courtyard level upwards is a clear indication of a radical change of plan early in the castle's development. Almost certainly this would have had a consequent effect on the design of the east range. The presence of a latrine chute towards the north end of the east curtain wall is a strong indication that the initial intention was to build upwards. However, there was no trace of the floor of a ground storey either below or over the sloping, hard-packed rubble; and the vent in the roof of the northernmost cellar, which did not appear to be a secondary insertion, is unlikely to have opened into the interior of a building.

The implied change of building strategy could have centred on the decision to build the tower house. It would have been inconceivable to have built it quite literally in the shadow of an east range. With only 2 m separating the two buildings, minimal light would have entered through the windows of the tower's first-floor hall.

The slope to the east range roof was probably to allow for drainage. Although taking water towards the tower may not have been the most direct route for its disposal, taking it in the opposite direction (through the curtain wall) would have ruled out the insertion of the two small basement windows in its east wall.

The wall-head of the east curtain may have been reached from the north-east tower: there was certainly no access to that level from within the south-east tower. At some stage, an external stair seems to have been built against the north wall of the south-east tower (RCAHMS 1956) although no trace of it was uncovered during the excavation.

NORTH-EAST TOWER AND ADJACENT CELLAR

There appear to have been two distinct phases of use within the basement of this tower, initially as a kitchen and later to house some other domestic, or perhaps industrial, process.

The large fireplace on the east side of the room was typical of those in the kitchens of important households; and it must be wondered whether it was intended to serve as the principal kitchen of the castle. If this was the case, then the kitchen within the tower house (and surely the building itself) could not have been included in the architect's original design. Thus it could be argued that the remodelling of the basement of the north-east tower was contemporary with the construction of the tower house; although it is also possible that the kitchen continued to serve the private apartments in the upper storeys of the building for some time thereafter. The smaller

fireplace (also a primary feature) in the south wall of the room could have continued in use after the kiln was installed.

The kiln had no particularly diagnostic features and its precise function remains unknown. Its form and size are typical of those of grain-drying kilns (Gibson 1988; Lewis 1995, 1033) although there was no trace of grain within or near to it. The proximity of the trough (also a secondary feature) suggests that the two features were connected in some way, the trough perhaps used to cool utensils for some industrial process. No trace of metal-working debris or the waste from any other process was evident in the vicinity of the kiln. It may have been used to heat a mash-tun or a still, the liquor from the latter perhaps being cooled in the adjacent trough.

The adjacent cellar has always been connected to the tower basement by a small doorway: latterly it was the only way into the basement. It is tempting to speculate that the roles of these two chambers were also linked in some way, the cellar at first being a food store and later providing some subsidiary service associated with the kiln.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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