

Excavations at Bothwell Castle, North Lanarkshire

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ABSTRACT

The following report describes two small-scale excavations (in 1987–8 and 1991) within the castle enclosure and a watching brief carried out in 1993 during the topsoil clearance which preceded the installation of a new car park some 100 m east of the castle. Trenching to the immediate east of the postern revealed traces of what may have been an extension to the south range; and a possible robber trench, perhaps associated with the gatehouse, was uncovered just inside the modern entrance to the castle. The project was funded by Historic Scotland (former SDD/HBM).

INTRODUCTION

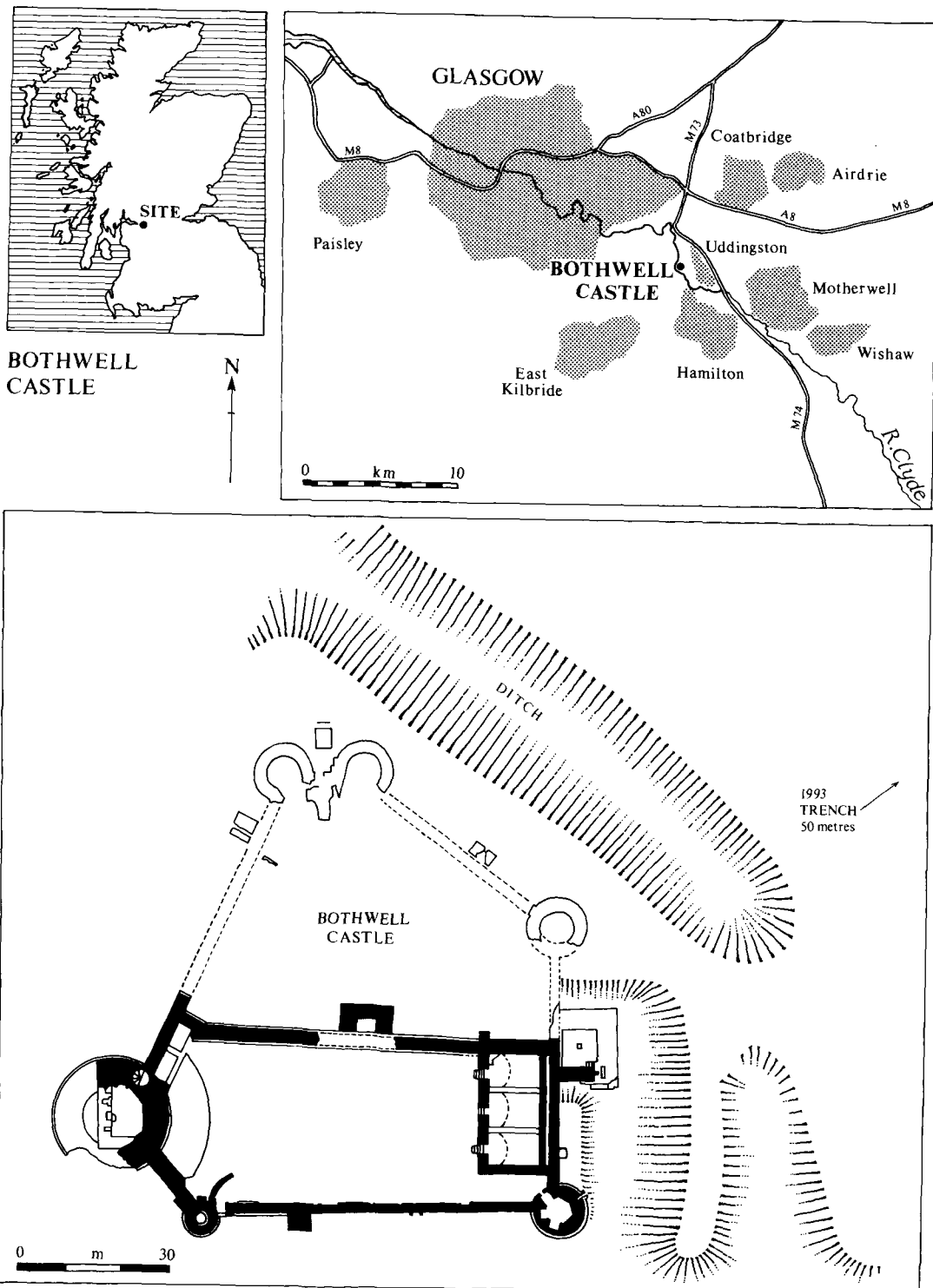
Standing high on the wooded north bank of the River Clyde, on the outskirts of the town of Uddingston and some 13 km south-east of Glasgow (illus 1), Bothwell Castle (NGR: NS 688 593) retains the air of the formidable stronghold that it once was (illus 2). Begun in the mid- or late 13th century by Walter of Moray or his son William, the original design of the castle was never brought to fruition, probably because of the depredations of the Wars of Independence in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. It was not until the early 15th century, following many turbulent years during which the castle changed hands on several occasions, that the enclosure was finally completed; by then the work was on a somewhat reduced scale from that originally conceived (Simpson 1958, 14).

The most noticeable surviving remnants of the 13th-century arrangement comprise the massive circular donjon, which was partly demolished in the 14th century; the adjacent, south-west section of the curtain wall; a small prison tower in the south-west angle; and, adjoining the prison, a postern which appears to have been altered at a later date (illus 3). Other 13th-century structures are located to the north of the castle enclosure and consist of the foundations of a twin-towered gatehouse, a round tower and connecting curtain walls, none of which was ever raised above its existing levels.

The north curtain wall, the adjoining gatehouse and the east curtain wall were added in the late 14th century. The great hall and chapel on the east side of the courtyard were products of the early 15th century, as were the circular south-east corner tower, the south curtain wall and the adjacent south range. Now completely demolished, the south range was upgraded during the early 16th century when the curtain wall was heightened and transomed windows inserted into it.

The castle is now a guardianship site in the care of Historic Scotland.

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ILLUS 1 Location map and plan of Bothwell Castle. (Based on the Ordnance Survey map © Crown Copyright)



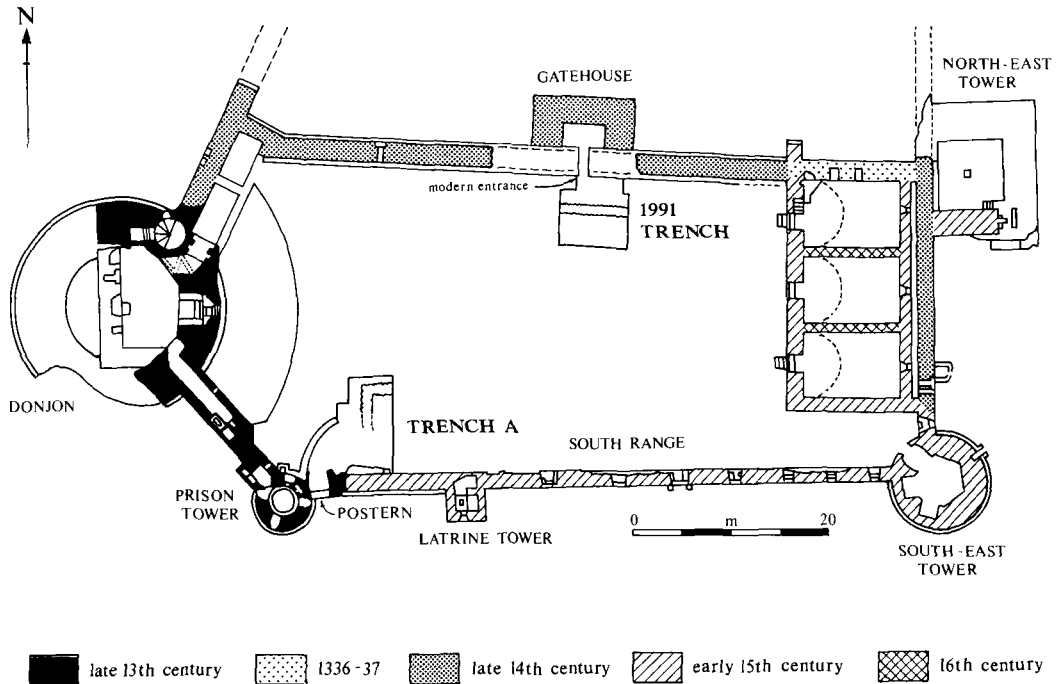
ILLUS 2 Bothwell Castle, from the south-west (*Historic Scotland* © *Crown Copyright*)

EXCAVATIONS

Three separate archaeological investigations have been carried out at Bothwell Castle since the foundations of the gatehouse were uncovered in 1981 (Lewis 1984). Following that excavation, the outline of the gatehouse was laid out and a new sales point for visitors was built within an adjacent breach in the north curtain. Between December 1987 and January 1988, prior to the installation of a new drainage system, several trenches were excavated within the castle courtyard by John Cannell. In late 1991, before the sales point was extended into the courtyard, the area immediately inside the modern entrance to the enclosure was investigated by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology Limited (illus 3). Early in 1993 David Reed of Scotia Archaeology Limited kept a watching brief during the machine-stripping of topsoil over a large area some 100 m east of the castle before that area was laid out as a new car park. All of these investigations were initiated and funded by Historic Scotland and its predecessors.

THE EXCAVATION IN 1987–8

Four trenches (A–D) were opened within the castle courtyard and another trench (E) outside the 14th-century north curtain wall. The largest trench (A) was located adjacent to the postern in the south curtain wall; the remaining trenches were considerably smaller in size.



ILLUS 3 The castle, showing the principal areas of excavation in 1987-8 and 1991

Trench A (illus 4-6)

Measuring a maximum 9 m north/south, this trench extended 6 m eastwards from the postern in the south curtain wall. The trench was defined on its west side by a retaining wall, 2.25 m high, to the left of which was a flight of steps leading down from the courtyard to the postern. This wall comprised a sandstone rubble core built against a vertical earth bank and lined on its east side with ashlar although much of the facing stonework had been removed. As in all the trenches, turf and topsoil overlay deposits of disturbed clay and rubble, the latter resulting from the partial demolition of the surrounding buildings and recent levelling operations within the courtyard.

Towards the north end of the trench were the bottom two to three courses of two walls, forming what appeared to be the north-east angle of a building. Both walls stood on undisturbed, orange-red boulder clay and, in places, bedrock; they were built of mortar-bonded sandstone rubble, the bottom courses of which were stepped out slightly. About 3 m of the west wall and 2 m of the north wall of this building were uncovered, the remainder of each structure being overlain by rubble and clay which could not be removed within the time available. For the same reason, it was not possible to determine the full width of either wall although the north wall was at least 1 m wide. There were no positive indications of where the west wall of the building had met the curtain wall, from which it might be assumed that the building abutted the curtain wall and was, therefore, a later structure.

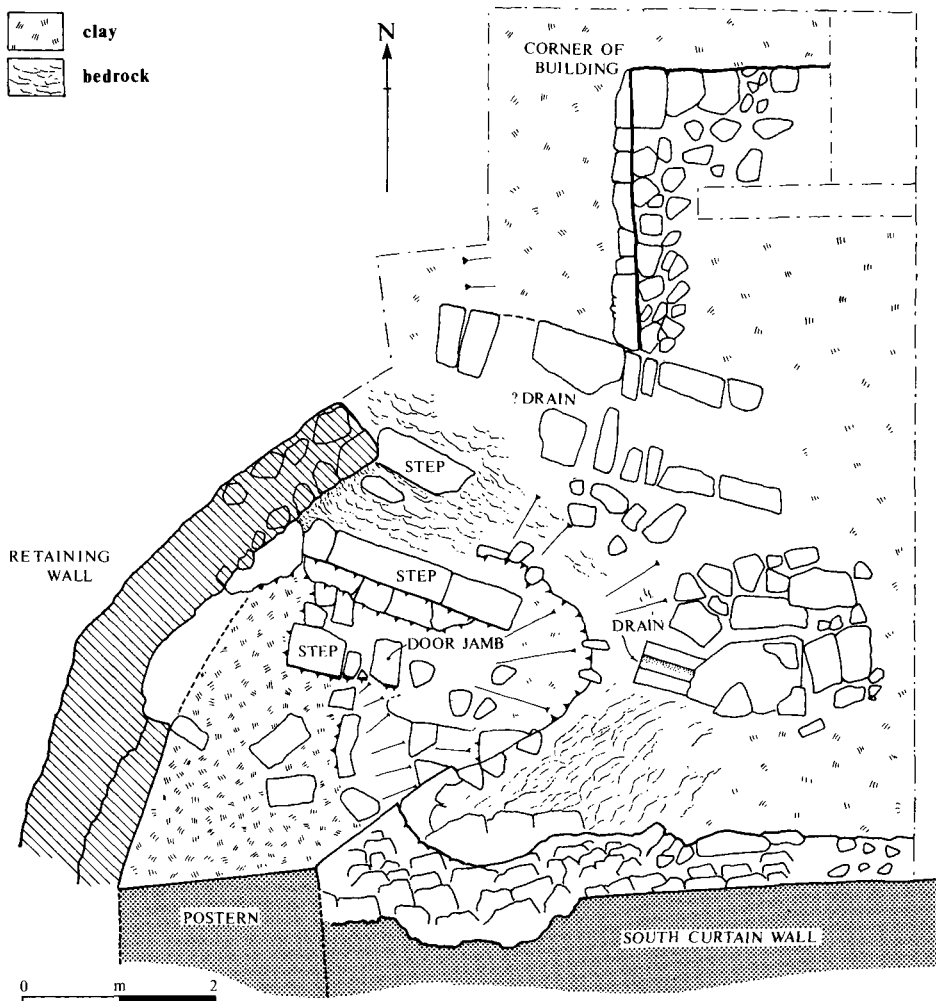
The rubble that overlay one side of the west wall also partly obscured what may have been the sides of a stone-lined drain, probably contemporary with the building. Further south were the remnants of another, truncated drain which seemed to extend beyond the eastern limit of the trench. Within this drain was a (?reused) weeper stone, identical to one protruding from the base of the west wall of the late 14th-century gatehouse on the north side of the castle (Lewis 1984, 124). It is quite likely that the northernmost drain issued into the donjon moat. The course of the southern drain may have continued below the threshold of the postern although this could not be substantiated. It can probably be assumed that one or both of the



ILLUS 4 The castle courtyard in 1987, viewed from the north-west; Trench A is in the right foreground

ILLUS 5 Trench A, viewed from the north-east





ILLUS 6 The principal excavated features in Trench A (1987-8)

drains had been set below the floor of the building; although there was no trace whatsoever of that floor within the area excavated.

Set into the sloping ground leading to the postern were the few fragmentary remnants of a stone stair. One course of a chamfered door jamb survived on the east side of the bottom step; the west jamb was missing, perhaps having been lost when the ashlar face of the retaining wall was removed. There was no further evidence that the stair led to the chamber which had housed the mechanism for operating a portcullis above the postern. It was also apparent that the partly excavated building was not directly associated with that mechanism.

Trenches B, C & D (illus 4)

These small trenches were excavated to a depth of about 0.3 m, only turf, topsoil and recently disturbed rubble and clays being removed. A brick-built drain, uncovered in Trench B, was presumably part of an earlier attempt to rid the courtyard of excess water; otherwise, nothing of archaeological interest was

discovered in any of these trenches. Trench B measured 4 m east/west by 1 m wide and was located approximately 3.5 m from the south curtain wall, midway along its length. Trench C was opened near the centre of the enclosure and measured 3 m north/south by 1 m wide. Trench D measured approximately 5 m east/west by 2 m north/south and was located 2 m east of the moat that protected the donjon tower. None of these trenches was drawn during the excavation, their positions being indicated only by photographs.

Trench E (not illustrated)

This small slit trench (which again was not drawn during the excavation) was situated beyond the north curtain wall, towards its west end. At the north end of the trench, about 0.3 m below turf level, was a disturbed path. Flooding from an underground spring prohibited further excavation and the investigation had to be abandoned at an early stage.

EXCAVATIONS IN 1991 (ILLUS 3)

A single trench, measuring 7 m north/south by 6 m east/west, was opened adjacent to the present entrance into the castle on the north side of the courtyard. The northern part of the trench was capped with reinforced concrete; in the remainder of the trench turf and topsoil were about 0.3 m deep, as in the 1987 trenches. There were several drains beneath the concrete and topsoil, particularly in the north of the area where the archaeological record may have been irretrievably damaged by their insertion.

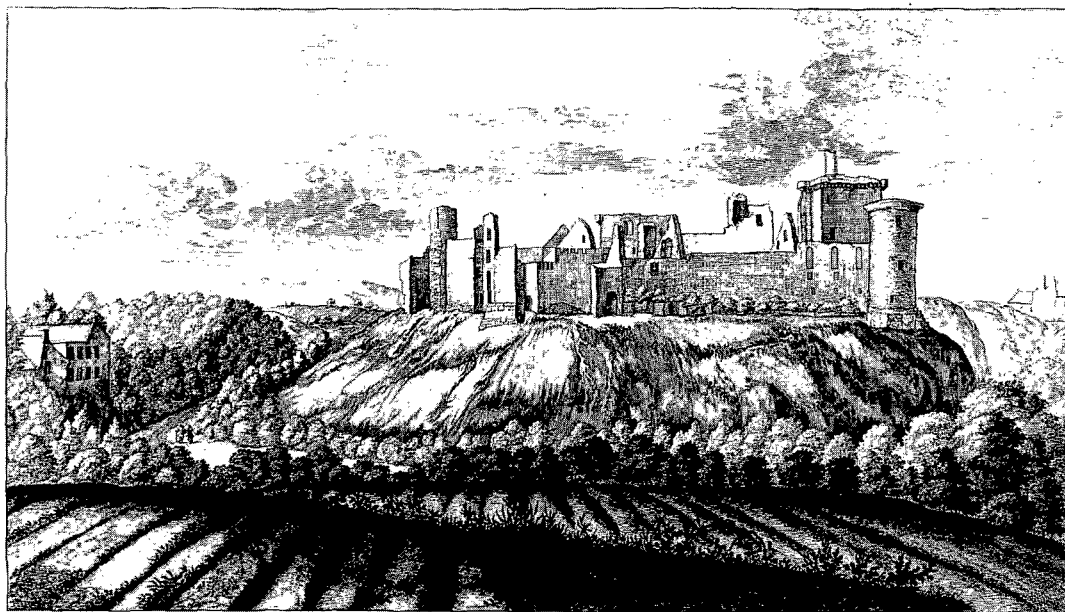
Two features of interest were uncovered within this trench: a circular pit, located near the east end of the trench, which measured 0.7 m in diameter and was infilled with a dark grey, clay loam; and an east/west linear feature which spanned the width of the trench and extended beyond its limits. The latter comprised a spread of rubble, clay and soil which, although devoid of mortar, was typical of the infill of a wall robbing trench. Because of time limitations, it proved impossible to investigate this feature fully: it measured approximately 1.5 m wide with a clearly defined north side whereas its south edge had been disturbed by the insertion of a drain pipe.

EXCAVATIONS IN 1993

The aim of this exercise was to remove turf and topsoil using a mechanical excavator (JCB) from an area measuring approximately 50 m north/south by 35 m east/west, to hand-clean the trench thereafter and to record any archaeological features uncovered. Working conditions were appalling during the entire period of the project: incessant rain turned the clay soil into a morass that hindered the operation of the JCB, making it difficult to identify any features that may have been exposed. Nevertheless, a few relatively modern features such as drains and fence posts were identified, although nothing of any antiquity was uncovered.

FINDS

No securely stratified finds were retrieved during any of the phases of excavation. All of the artefacts recovered from the 1991 and 1993 investigations were of recent origin and have been discarded. In 1987 several sherds of late medieval and early post-medieval pottery were recovered. These comprised four fragments of handles (probably from jugs), two basal sherds and eight body sherds, all in local fabrics (R Will, pers comm). None is described here.



Prospectus Arcis BOTHWELLÆ. The prospect of BOTHWELL Castle.

51.

ILLUS 7 Engraving of the south aspect of Bothwell Castle, as depicted by John Slezer in 1693

DISCUSSION

Two of the areas examined between 1987 and 1993 proved to be of archaeological interest: Trench A (1987–8), adjacent to the postern; and the trench inside the entrance to the courtyard (1991).

THE SOUTH RANGE

Although both the area of excavation and the time available to undertake the work were somewhat limited, some evidence was uncovered of a building set against that part of the south curtain wall to the immediate west of the latrine tower. All that can be said about the building's dimensions from the evidence uncovered is that it had an internal width of about 6 m and that it extended eastwards from a point 3.3 m east of the postern. The main south range may have extended from the chapel, in the south-east corner of the castle, to a point just beyond the latrine tower, the west wall of the range visible now only as tussing in the curtain wall.

Somewhat confusingly, Slezer's engraving of 1693 (illus 7) depicts two possible west gables for the south range: one, as might be expected, adjacent to the latrine tower; the other some distance to the east of it. While Slezer's work may not be wholly accurate in detail, it does suggest the intriguing possibility that the artist is representing two separate buildings set against the south curtain wall.

Alternatively, at some stage — perhaps when the south range was upgraded in the early 16th century or even later — a small building may have been added to the west end of the south range. This putative building, of which the north-west corner was uncovered in 1987, would have measured about 7 m east/west and would have been two (or more) storeys high, its first floor

supported by eight joists whose sockets are still visible in the south curtain wall about 2.4 m above ground-floor level.

The drains emanating from the west side of this building may indicate that its ground floor comprised service accommodation; or simply that drains were necessary to reduce waterlogging in the courtyard during the occupation of the castle — as is still the case.

THE ENTRANCE TO THE CASTLE

The present entrance to the castle reflects the approximate position of the gateway through the 14th-century north curtain wall (illus 3), although the arrangement whereby entry was gained to the courtyard at that time is still not fully understood. It was never established whether the gatehouse, uncovered in 1981, simply projected outwards from the curtain wall or whether the building had extended into the castle enclosure. The evidence from the 1991 investigation was anything but positive, although it is possible that the putative robber trench that extended across the width of the trench was associated with the inside wall of the gatehouse. It was not possible to excavate that feature or to extend the trench in an attempt to trace its course, and the problem remains unresolved.

CONCLUSIONS

Excavation against the north curtain wall was too limited to add much to our knowledge of the entrance into the late 14th-century castle. In addition, it must be wondered whether the evidence for this has survived the insertion of services in that area. Should waterlogging necessitate further trenching within the courtyard, this could allow investigation beyond the depths achieved in 1987–8, thus determining whether anything survives of a buried medieval surface. Unfortunately, it is all too common to find that courtyard surfaces have not survived the efforts of stone-robbers and, subsequently, those who have cleared debris from such monuments in preparation for public display.

Of more interest is the relationship between the main south range of the castle and the building whose north-west corner was uncovered in Trench A. This could, perhaps, be achieved by excavating a relatively small area adjacent to the latrine tower at some future date.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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