STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CASTLE OF OLD WICK

We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.

Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Historic Environment Scotland
Longmore House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh
EH9 1SH

+44 (0) 131 668 8600
www.historicenvironment.scot

You can download this publication from our website at www.historicenvironment.scot

Cover Image: Oblique aerial view of Castle of Old Wick, looking South. © Crown Copyright: HES.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CASTLE OF OLD WICK

Contents

1 SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

Castle of Old Wick is one of Caithness' most striking medieval sites. Located c.2km south of the small town of Wick, it sits atop a promontory above the coast and surrounded by cliffs. It comprises a solitary, rectangular-plan partially ruined masonry tower fronting a rock-cut ditch, with extensive earthworks on the promontory behind. It is difficult to ascribe a definite date to the castle, but its origins are probably no earlier than the later 14th century. Although there is a possibility that the site saw earlier occupation, there is no firm evidence to confirm this. The castle is historically associated with families which were prominent in the history of late medieval Caithness, the Sutherlands and Oliphants, and was besieged during the Sutherland-Sinclair feud of the later 16th century.

Castle of Old Wick is a scheduled monument[1] which was taken into State guardianship in 1957, before undergoing extensive conservation to prevent further drastic decay. It is free to access and is unstaffed. It is signposted from the centre of Wick, and there is a small car park c.6 minutes' walk away north-east of the castle on the shore road.[2]

1.2 Statement of Significance

- Castle of Old Wick is a **rare** example of a late medieval castle in Caithness. The oldest fabric visible on the site is believed to date to the late 14th to 15th centuries, hinting that it may belong to a group of similar castle sites in the county such as Forse, Bucholly, Braal and Berriedale castles. In this respect, it is of **national** significance.

- Outwith the masonry tower, the castle comprises a raised coastal promontory whose earthwork remains suggest the castle saw a prolonged period of occupation into the 18th – 19th centuries. These also retain **good archaeological potential** for excavation.

- The site is at **risk of environmental pressures** which recently prompted a survey of half of its cliff-face remains. This in turn revealed the presence of fragments of masonry at the cliff-face near the promontory surface, which may relate to the standing structure, and earthworks of the castle itself.

- The castle enjoys a **dramatic and striking setting**, which must be recognised as a significant draw for visitors to the site outside of its historical significance and associations.

---

[1] SM90065, designation details accessible at: https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90065
[2] For access information please see: https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/castle-of-old-wick/

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH
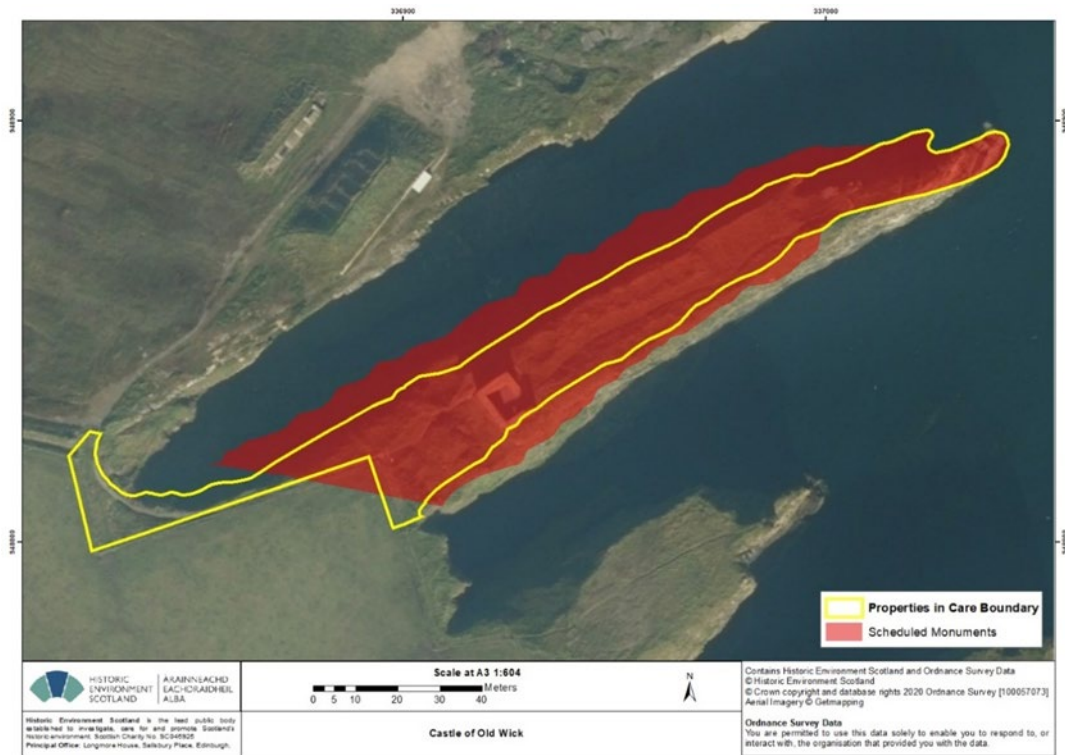
Castle of Old Wick 2

Figure A: Castle of Old Wick Scheduled area and Property In Care (PIC) boundary. For illustrative purposes only.

Figure B: Plan of Castle of Old Wick with approximate location and extent of masonry fragments on the north-west cliff face noted, identified in the 2009 survey. Red = masonry fragments 001, 002; blue = masonry fragment 003; green = masonry fragments 004, 005. © Historic Environment Scotland.

The above paragraphs outline the key significance of Castle of Old Wick. The following sections and Appendices offer more detailed descriptions and analysis of the site.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 3

2   ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

2.1   Background – Site Description

Castle of Old Wick comprises a rectangular-plan, partially ruined masonry tower with fragmentary remains to three stories constructed of now-lost timbers on internal ledges. Its walls are around 2m thick at ground level, narrowing at each storey. It was originally accessed at first-floor level on the north-east side, that is, from the promontory proper. The ground floor of the tower is now featureless but originally had two slit windows, facing south-east (whose internal jambs partially survive) and north-east respectively; the former has been lost to collapse. At first-floor level, the tower featured a garderobe mural chamber and, further along the wall, another slit window, on its south-east wall. On its north-east exterior face at this first floor level are traces of joist holes; evidence of a lost timber balcony, or (more likely) the original structure granting access to the tower at first floor, perhaps a platform or forebuilding. The second floor has two internal features; an intact slit window facing across the rock-cut ditch (though this appears at least partially rebuilt), and a faint hollow and pair of small joist holes for a fireplace, probably a hanging lum (chimney), on the north-west wall. The third floor is featureless, and it sits below a parapet level. Both may have had more features before their south-eastern halves collapsed, but these are lost.

It is likely that the tower was originally (or soon after its construction) accompanied by a small adjacent building on its north-west side, which would have completely blocked free access to the promontory from the mainland. A brief examination of other castles in Caithness shows this to be a familiar characteristic of castle architecture in the county.

On the cliff face of the promontory's north-west side are the fragmentary remains of several courses and clusters of masonry. Some of these appear to relate to the masonry tower, but others are independent of both it and the earthwork remains on the promontory. These earthworks comprise the remains of several phases of ancillary buildings either side of a road or yard running towards the end of the promontory, which features a denuded enclosure described as a garden.

The earthworks on the promontory are difficult to ascribe to a period of occupation but are probably more recent than that of the tower or the fragments of cliff-face masonry. The more recent buildings, which visibly overlie earlier obscured remains, compare in general terms to byre houses of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The history of the site is not extensive, but good evidence survives of the history of the estate within which it sits (and of which it was likely the caput or administrative centre) and gives the impression that the castle was occupied from the late-14th to late-17th centuries. Occupation earlier than this, often speculated in discussions of Castle of Old Wick, are currently unsubstantiated by any evidence.

Recent assessment of a timber fragment lodged within one of the fireplace joist-holes has yielded significant new information. The axe-worked alder element was wiggle-match dated, yielding a felling date-range of 1515-50 (98% confidence) or 1515-35 (68% confidence). The context from which the timber was recovered suggests it was part of a

repair or refurbishment of the tower. It may tentatively be argued that these works can be connected with an attested episode of violence and damage to the castle in the early 16th century, within the context of a succession feud between branches of the Sutherland of Duffus family.

For a detailed narrative site history, see [Appendix 1](#).

2.2 Evidential values

Castle of Old Wick has historically been deemed a castle of the 12th century, associated with Caithness' culturally and politically Scandinavian leaders of that period. Although this is now in doubt, it remains a place connected to the late medieval history of Scotland, and especially the violent and deadly feuds of the late 16th century.

The primary evidential values for Castle of Old Wick are:

- Its physical fabric: the castle's masonry tower, although diminished in height, retains sufficient evidence to allow an outline of its function and use.

  o *Condition*:

    ▪ The tower is in relatively good condition, its remains are straightforward to interpret, and it is not at any immediate risk.

    ▪ The promontory earthworks are in good condition and straightforward to interpret. However, they are at significant risk from erosion along the cliff-edge.

    ▪ The cliff-face masonry fragments are impossible to access and very difficult to interpret from the opposing mainland. They are at significant risk from further collapse.

  o *Completeness*:

    ▪ The castle's tower is reasonably complete to parapet level. Fragments of windows, the garderobe chamber, floor scarcements and joist holes, survive.

    ▪ The promontory earthworks are mostly complete, except for obvious discrete areas of robbing or collapse.

    ▪ The cliff-face masonry fragments are complete in small sections, varying from area to area. Zones of recent collapse were recorded.

  o *Extent*:

    ▪ It is likely that the greatest historic extent of the castle is already recognised in the remains, defined as the castle is by the promontory's bounds. It is plausible that when the castle was first occupied, the promontory was greater in extent than today, but has decreased in size due to subsequent collapse. It is difficult to assess this, but it may be noteworthy that the portions of cliff-face masonry retain facing stones, whilst buildings

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 5

constructed on the edge of the present cliff retain their cliff-side walls, bar some areas of collapse.

- o *Disturbance*:
  - There has been no obvious disturbance of the tower, though it is likely its interior and surrounding area were impacted by conservation efforts in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

  - The promontory earthworks are not greatly disturbed, and there does not appear to have been significant disturbance at the site following clearing and consolidating works there in the 1930s. However, it is recognised that there have been a series of unrecorded modifications to the site over time which are likely to have damaged or removed some evidence; either through early agricultural activity or 20th century footpath works.

  - The cliff-face masonry fragments appear to have suffered from recent episodes of collapse.

- Castle of Old Wick may represent a coherent example of a larger body of late medieval castles in Caithness, stemming from a lesser-known period of history.

2.3 Historical values

Castle of Old Wick is a site with a reasonably well-documented history, though often this is only manifest in a passing reference to the site. The castle is historically associated with two regionally important families, the Sutherlands and Oliphants, and was besieged during the Sutherland-Sinclair feud of the later 16th century.

The common perception of the site being connected to the earls of Caithness and Orkney in the 12th century is addressed more fully in Appendix 2, while the documentary evidence which either supports or rejects such an association is discussed in Appendix 3.

By means of summary, the castle has traditionally been ascribed a 12th-century date and associated with Caithness' culturally and politically Scandinavian leaders of that period. Yet this assertion cannot be supported on present evidence. It is here suggested that origins in the 14th century appear more plausible.

The original argument had several key strands, including the notion that Old Wick was a demesne estate held by the earls of Orkney-Caithness in the 12th century. Yet the limited evidence for castles in the 12th century in the earldom suggests that they were built by an emerging group of the nobility, and not by the earl.

References to a place of lordship called *Vík* appeared in the *Orkneyinga saga* several times over the course of the 12th century and were also used in support of the idea of Castle of Old Wick being the site of a 12th century castle. However, it is now considered more likely that *Vík* was used in reference to a lordship centre around the burgh of Wick, and not Old Wick itself.

Comparisons had previously been drawn between the plain stone tower of Castle of Old Wick and that known as **Cubbie Roo's Castle**[3] on Wyre; itself considered to be the 12th century Norse tower constructed by Kolbein *hrúga*, as referenced in the *Orkneyinga saga*. However, simple late medieval rectangular towers of this kind are to be found elsewhere in Caithness at places like Forse, and as the evidence discussed above and in Appendices 1 and 2 suggests, it is apparent that Old Wick was not a solitary structure, and that it bears no diagnostic architectural features that suggest the tower dates to the 12th century.

At the very least it can be said that the surviving fabric appears to relate to the 14th century. The first known reference to the estate of Old Wick (as a territorial unit, as opposed to the castle itself) appears in documentary evidence in the last quarter of the 14th century (1370s–1400s). But whilst the earliest relative phases of construction at Castle of Old Wick – the tower and associated features – need not represent the earliest phase of occupation, barring further evidence to the contrary, this is a moot point.

2.4   Architectural and artistic values

The extant remains of Castle of Old Wick are important for helping us to understand the historic fabric of the complex as it once stood. They are notable for the purposes of architectural and archaeological research, but perhaps more significantly also to inform management of the site from a heritage and conservation perspective.

Appendix 2 analyses the remains in detail, dividing the features into three areas: i) the tower; ii) the cliff-face remains; and iii) earthworks on the promontory. A brief discussion of how Castle of Old Wick compares to other castles in the region is also presented (section iv).

Appendix 2 also provides some examples of the many artists' depictions of the site over the centuries, some of which appear to record detail of features now lost.

2.5   Landscape and aesthetic values

Appendix 1 provides a detailed site narrative, including evidence for medieval occupation in the neighbouring area. This includes traces of possible rig-and-furrow c.1km north of the castle, and the placename evidence from the neighbouring farm of Castlepark, which may hint at a lost enclosure or larger formal park (in the medieval sense) close to the castle proper.[4]

Generally speaking, there is little which survives in the way of a medieval landscape around the castle, apart from what has been alluded to above and in Appendices 1 and 2. It is therefore difficult to reconstruct precisely what it may have looked like, particularly as it is not known whether the promontory itself was once greater in extent than today.

---

[3] Throughout the text, site names in **bold** are managed by Historic Environment Scotland and are publicly accessible. Access information can be found at: www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/
[4] For a brief outline of the word 'park', see https://canmore.org.uk/thesaurus/1/600/PARK

References to mills in medieval sources imply grain cultivation nearby, whilst allusions to hunting around Castle of Old Wick also hint at areas of upland being used for this aristocratic past-time. References in antiquarian sources to copper ore deposits around the castle are unlikely to relate to the castle's occupation (no reference to mineral extraction appears in the documents). In the 18th – 19th centuries, the castle's masonry tower was used as a landmark for fishermen in the North Sea. This has led to the tower being labelled the Old Man O' Wick, which is in fact the name of a now-lost sea stack on the east shore of the area of Hill of Man, c.1.1km north of the castle.[5]

Today, the castle remains a local landmark, and its position atop a perilous cliff-drop on two sides makes it an exhilarating site to visit, whatever the weather. Online reviews frequently mention the dramatic cliff-top location and pleasing sea-views,[6] if not the inland outlook towards the structures associated with the neighbouring Old Wick Rifle Range.[7]

Yet the effects of this exposed location also present a number of management and conservation challenges. Even before the property was taken into State care in 1957, there were visible signs of deterioration in the structure, owing to the exposed landscape in which it is situated. Processes such as coastal erosion and the decay of building fabric, that are affecting Castle of Old Wick, are naturally occurring but increasing in severity and impact due to climate change. The decisions that HES takes for the future management of the site will provide a real-world example of heritage conservation in the face of climate change impacts.

Castle of Old Wick has value for both HES and the wider heritage sector as a case study in the balances to be struck between adaptation, mitigation, or acceptance of loss at vulnerable heritage sites.

2.6 Natural heritage values

The site borders the East Caithness Cliffs Special Protection Area,[8] Special Area of Conservation,[9] and the Castle of Old Wick to Craig Hammel SSSI; designated as internationally important for the cliff-top vegetation, and colonies of breeding seabirds.

---

[5] *New Statistical Account*, (1845), p.188. J. Horne, *The County of Caithness* (1907), p.39. The stack appears to have acted as a boundary marker for the parliamentary boundary: NLS, Ordinance Survey 25-inch (1st ed.) (1873), Caithness XXV.6 (Wick), View map: Caithness XXV.6 (Wick) - Ordnance Survey 25 inch 1st edition, Scotland, 1855-1882 (nls.uk) [visited 11-2-20].
[6] For example, see Tripadvisor: OLD WICK CASTLE - All You Need to Know BEFORE You Go (tripadvisor.co.uk).
[7] See Canmore ID 75561:https://canmore.org.uk/site/75561/old-wick-rifle-range.
[8] SNH: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8492 [accessed 20.08.2020].
[9] SNH: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8248 [accessed 20.08.2020].
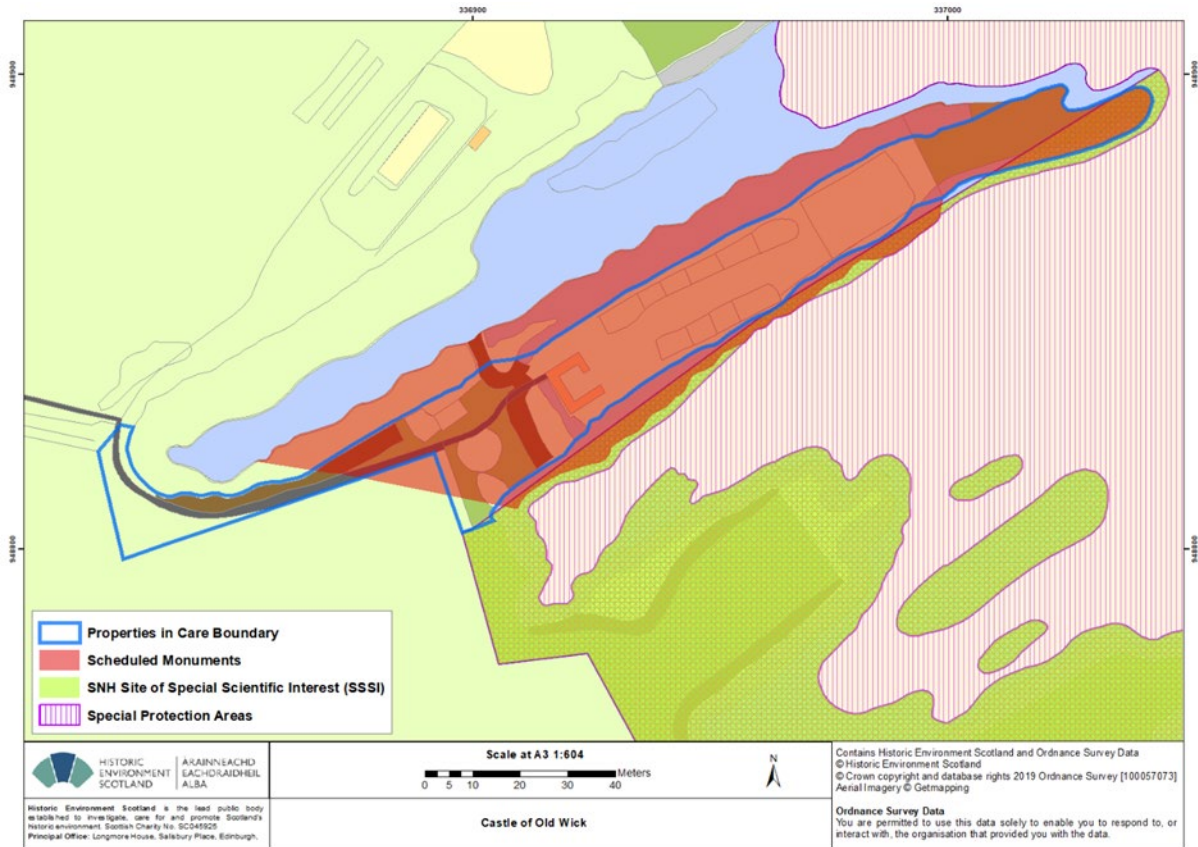
Figure C: Castle of Old Wick natural heritage designations. For illustrative purposes only.

The bedrock geology in this stretch of coast is Caithness Flagstone, belonging to the Lybster Flagstone Formation,[10] with superficial deposits of Devensian Till.[11] The horizontal banding of this geology provides ledges offering ideal nest sites for seabirds including cormorant, fulmar and guillemot. The cliff faces and maritime/coastal grassland are also species-rich in flora, and support common scurvygrass, sea spurge, red fescue, sea mayweed and thrift.

To date there are no records of bats associated with this site; a bat survey is therefore required to ascertain use.

---

[10] BGS 2020: BGS Lexicon of Named Rock Units - Result Details - Lybster Flagstone Formation [accessed 20.08.2020].
[11] BGS 2020: BGS Lexicon of Named Rock Units - Result Details - Till Devensian [accessed 20.08.2020].

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 9

Figure D: The dramatic cliff-top setting of Castle of Old Wick offers an exhilarating visit, but the effects of its exposed location also present conservation challenges. © Historic Environment Scotland.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

Castle of Old Wick is an unstaffed free-to-enter site, so it is difficult to gauge the broader visitor experience.

Although the evidence for Castle of Old Wick as a 12th-century castle is held to be unsupportable, it must be acknowledged that its historic association with the earldom of Orkney-Caithness is part of its contemporary identity, separate from scholarly debates. Although this is less the case in Caithness than in contemporary Orkney and Shetland, the Norse past of the county is celebrated and elevated above others.[12] In this respect, discussion around how to frame Castle of Old Wick in light of new research must be sensitive to how this research may be received.

However, it may also be remarked that this change presents an opportunity of a different kind. If Castle of Old Wick is indeed a castle site coeval with others like Braal, Bucholly, Berriedale and Forse, then it represents a leading member of a body of sites which appeared and flourished together in an otherwise poorly understood period of Scottish history in this region. This sudden growth of castle architecture is itself worthy of celebration.

---

[12] For example: A. Hendry, 'Norse era in Caithness was our very own Game of Thrones', *John O'Groats Journal & Caithness Courier*, Published: 19:30, 31 August 2018.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick **10**

3 MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

- *The date of construction of the masonry tower*:

  A fragment of timber from within the castle fabric was dated to a felling date of the first part of the 16th century. Its context suggests it was part of a secondary refurbishment of the tower. While it is clear that the tower pre-dates that refurbishment, it has yet to be convincingly dated in its primary phase. A closer examination of comparanda within medieval buildings in Britain which contain hanging lum fireplaces would yield a body of contextual data which would aid dating of the tower.

- *Impact of past conservation on understanding of masonry tower*:

  Our understanding of the masonry tower is constrained by previous conservation efforts which have obscured smaller details of internal and external arrangements, without detailed recording of the works, or those features. As has been demonstrated, it is necessary to rely on incidental evidence.

- *Cliff-face masonry fragments*:

  The survey of cliff-face remains was targeted in order to establish the extent of decay of the site, not for the purposes of exploring the site's history in a non-invasive way. In this sense, although the survey has provided a significant amount of new information on the castle, further insight could be offered by a new survey which specifically explored questions of phasing and chronology, with a remit to establish an absolute construction, occupation and/or destruction date.

- *Documentary evidence yet to be examined*:

  A thorough review of the documentary material not covered here will doubtless yield further nuggets of information – for example from the Wick burgh records, from county records and from documents in Edinburgh archives. These include miscellaneous items in the National Records of Scotland (NRS) (for example, RHP8721, GD41/599, 601) and items pertaining the legal case on Chrisitian of Sutherland's legitimacy in the Scottish Catholic Archive (SCA).

- *Discrete units of archaeological 'unknowns'*:

  - Extent of masonry on south-east cliff face.

  - Precise character of masonry of Feature I.

  - Establish location of timber recovered from castle in 1910 and noted in a 1950 article in *Aberdeen Press and Journal*.

  - An independently verified date for the fragments of north-west cliff-face masonry.

  - The antiquity of features south-west of the tower, across the rock-cut ditch.

  - The appearance of the castle 'walk' or garden.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick **11**

- o Whether the promontory's buildings were constructed upon purposefully prepared shelves or terraces of bedrock, or whether the promontory's natural geology already suited requirements.
  - o Whether the peninsula saw earlier occupation, prior to the construction of the castle.

- *How the castle relates to others*:

  Once Castle of Old Wick is more firmly tied to a chronology of development anchored in independent dating evidence, its emergence, development and decline can be framed in terms of analogous evidence from elsewhere. This can allow an appreciation of the subtler trends in daily life in castles, giving a true insight into the lives of these complexes.

- *19th century interactions with the castle*:

  Extant newspaper records reveal a local interest in the castle as a monument as well as a guide for fishing boats. The castle also appears to have been used as a meeting place for artistic and creative endeavours. Exploring the evidence in more detail would reveal aspects of the castle's more recent history.

- *Potential loss*:

  It is not known how much evidence has been removed by unrecorded modifications to the site over time. Similarly, it is unclear whether the promontory was once greater in extent than today. If so, it is possible that any decrease in size due to collapse may have had associated loss of historic fabric.

4 ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

The difficulty in ascribing any precise chronology to Castle of Old Wick makes associating other places with it a complicated enterprise, and one in which a wider group of reference sites is most appropriate. Forse, Bucholly and Berriedale castles are most similar in terms of the configuration of their towers, positions and earthworks, though significant differences also remain; a wider list of more loosely similar sites is outlined in Appendix 2. Braal castle, the magnificent home of the earls of Caithness, is another analogous castle, of which only the tower remains. The wider world of late medieval castles in northern Scotland forms the context for the appearance of Castle of Old Wick, many of which are now in State care; among these are **Cubbie Roo's Castle**, Wyre; the **Bishop's and Earl's Palaces**, Kirkwall; the majestic **Earl's Palace**, Birsay; and **Muness Castle**, Unst. **Kisimul Castle** on Barra is another site whose compact configuration and features represents a good analogy for lost buildings at Castle of Old Wick; its stone tower too is loosely comparable.

5 KEYWORDS

Castle; Old Wick; Caithness; Lordship; Medieval; Sutherland; Oliphant; Earldom

BIBLIOGRAPHY

'Sigma' (1890), Some notes on the name of Cheyne (Chen, Chyen, or Cheen), *Notes & Queries*, series 7, vol. 10 (July-December).

Adams, I.H. (1978), *The making of urban Scotland.*

Anderson, A.O. (1908), *Scottish annals from English chroniclers, A.D. 500 to 1286.*

Anderson, J. (1873), *The Orkneyinga saga.*

Anderson, J. (1879), *The Oliphants in Scotland. With a selection of original documents from the charter chest at Gask.*

Anon. (2004), *Statement of Significance: Castle of Old Wick*.

Anon. (2015), *Discovery & Excavation Scotland*, New Series, 6.

Anon. (1950), Relic of 'Old Man of Wick' for Museum, *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (8 April 1950), p. 8.

Balfour Paul, J. (1882), *Registrum magni sigilli regum Scotorum*, Vol. 2 (1424-1513)

Balfour Paul, J. (1882), *Registrum magni sigilli regum Scotorum*, Vol. 4 (1546-1580).

Balfour Paul, J. (1904), *The Scots peerage*, Vol. 6.

Balfour Paul, J., Maitland Thomson, J. (1882), *Registrum magni sigilli regum Scotorum*, Vol. 3 (1513-1546).

Barrett, J.H., Slater, A., (2009) New excavations at the Brough of Deerness: power and religion in Viking age Scotland, *Journal of the North Atlantic*, 2, pp 81-94.

Brichan, J.B. (ed.) (1855), *Origines Parochiales*, Vol. 2.

Brown, K.M. (2007-2020), *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707.*

Caithness OS Name Books, 1871-1873, OS1/7/13/209.

Calder, J.T., Sinclair, T. (1887), *Sketch of the Civil and Traditional History of Caithness, from the Tenth Century.*

Cant, R.G. (1986), The medieval church in the North: Contrasting influences in the dioceses of Ross and Caithness, in J.R. Baldwin (ed.), *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland.*

Cordiner, C. (1780), *Antiquities & Scenery of the North of Scotland, in a Series of Letters to Thomas Pennant.*

Cowan, E.J. (1982), Caithness in the sagas, in J.R. Baldwin (ed.) *Caithness: a cultural crossroads.*

Craven, J.B (1908), *A history of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Caithness.*

Crawford, B. (2013), *The Northern earldoms: Orkney and Caithness from AD 870 to 1470.*

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 13

Crawford, B.E. (1982), Scots and Scandinavians in mediaeval Caithness: a study of the period 1266-1375, in J.R. Baldwin (ed.), *Caithness: a cultural crossroads.*

Dixon, P., Stoddart, H., Anderson, I., McCaig, A., Wallace, S., Wyeth, W., Field visit March 2016 (Special Survey (Castles)). Accessible at: https://canmore.org.uk/event/1040025 [accessed 11/02/2020].

Dunlop, J. (1982), Pultneytown and the planned villages of Caithness, in J.R. Baldwin (ed.), *Caithness: a cultural crossroads.*

Ewart, G., Baker, F. (1988), Carrick Castle: symbol and source of Campbell power in south Argyll from the 14th to the 17th century, *PSAS*, 128.

Gibbon, S.J. (2017), A survey of Norse castles in Orkney, in P. Martin (ed.), *Castles and galleys: a reassessment of the historic galley-castles of the Norse-Gaelic seaways*.

Good, G. L., Tabraham, C. J. (1988), Excavations at Smailholm Tower, Roxburghshire, *PSAS*, 118.

Gordon, R. (1813), *A genealogical history of the Earldom of Sutherland*.

Henderson, J. (1884) *Caithness family history.*

Hendry, A. (2018), Norse era in Caithness was our very own Game of Thrones, *John O'Groats Journal & Caithness Courier*, Published: 31 August.

Horne Stevenson, J. (1882), *The register of the great seal of Scotland*, Vol. 11 (1660-1668).

Horne, J. (1907), *The County of Caithness.*

Hutton Johnston T. (1886), 356. John Gow, the Pirate, *The Scottish Antiquary, or, Northern Notes & Queries*, vol. 5.

Johnston, A.W. (1916), Scottish influence on Orkney, *Scottish Historical Review*, 13.

Lowther, J. (2018), The excavation of a medieval burgh ditch at East Market Street, Edinburgh: around the town, *Scottish Archaeological Internet Reports*, 78.

MacGibbon, D., Ross, T. (1887), *Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, Vol. 3.

MacNeill, G.P. (1901), *Rotuli scaccarii regum scotorum: The Exchequer rolls of Scotland*, Vol. 21 (1580-1588).

Maitland Thomson, J. (1882), *Registrum magni sigilli regum Scotorum*, Vol. 6 (1593-1608).

Maitland Thomson, J. (1882), *Registrum magni sigilli regum Scotorum*, Vol. 7 (1609-1620).

Maitland Thomson, J. (1882), *Registrum magni sigilli regum Scotorum*, Vol. 8 (1620-1633).

Miller, D.B. (1977), Historic castles and families of the north 6. Forse Castle – the Sutherlands of Forse, *Caithness Field Club Bulletin.*

Mills, C. M. (2022), Castle of Old Wick Timber: Interim Scientific Dating Report, V2 Update.

Murray, D. (2009a), Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 1: preliminary survey, September 2009, Kirkdale Archaeology report (26 October 2009, project code HSCO-90065-2009-01).

Murray, D. (2009b), Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2: recording and evaluation, September 2009, Kirkdale Archaeology report (28 October 2009, project code HSCO-90065-2009-01).

New Statistical Account (1845), vol. 15.

NLS, Ordinance Survey 25-inch (1st ed.) (1873), Caithness XXV.6 (Wick).

NMRS, MS 36/11, Field notebook of A.O. Curle (RCAHMS), Caithness I.

NMRS, MS 36/17, Journal of A.O. Curle – Caithness I.

NRS, GD112/58/201, Miscellaneous writs of various lands in Caithness.

NRS, SIG1/157/19, Signature of the lands of Oldwick granted to Capt John Scott (Scot).

Robertson, W. (ed.) (1798), *An Index drawn up about the year 1629 of many Records of Charters.*

Rose, H., Shaw, L., Innes, C. (1848) (ed), *Genealogical deduction of the family of Rose of Kilravock* (Edinburgh).

Stell, G. (1982), Some small farms and cottages in Latheron parish, Caithness, in J.R. Baldwin (ed.) *Caithness: a cultural crossroads.*

Stubbs, W. (1868), *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, Vol. 4.

Thacker, M. (2016), Aros Castle, Survey, sampling and analysis, *Discovery & Excavation Scotland*, New series, 16.

Thacker, M. (2020), Dating medieval masonry buildings by radiocarbon analysis of Mortar-Entrapped Relict Limekiln Fuels - a buildings archaeology, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory.*

Thomson, T. (ed.) (1840), *Inqvisitionvm ad capellam domini regis retornatarvm, qvae in pvblicis archivis Scotiae adhvc servantvr*, vol. 1.

Vigfusson, G. (ed.) (1887), *Icelandic sagas and other historical documents relating to the settlements and descents of the Northmen on the British Isles*, Vol. 1.

Walker, B. (2008), 'Hanging Chimneys, Smoke Chimneys or Smoking Chimneys in Scottish Domestic Buildings', Vernacular Architecture, 39.1.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: NARRATIVE SITE HISTORY

Human history within approximately 1km of Castle of Old Wick predates the appearance of any late medieval buildings here. Material evidence of both earlier and later occupation is more visible around the castle than that which is coeval with it. There do not appear to be any traces of Neolithic or Bronze Age occupation within the area around Castle of Old Wick. Of course, this does not represent proof positive of a lack of occupation, but rather simply a gap in our understanding.

Iron Age:
1.6km west of Castle of Old Wick is Cairn of Humster, seemingly the remains of a collapsed broch and adjacent contemporary buildings with a later cairn gathered atop the mound. The mound was thought to originally have been c.36m wide, and on its west side the remains of a 13m-wide ditch were observed in 1963.[13] Brochs are typically ascribed to the Iron Age.[14]

Prehistoric (undefined):
Around 0.9km south of Castle of Old Wick is the small promontory fort of Gote O'Tram. Situated on a piece of flat land surrounded by cliffs, it is cut off from the mainland by a ditch and inner bank; its interior is featureless.[15] 1.3km west of the castle site beside the modern A99 road were the remains of a now-lost prehistoric burnt mound. It measured around 20m in diameter and 1.3m in elevation.[16] Elsewhere, a single Roman *denarius* of unknown date was recorded by Treasure Trove in Wick.[17]

Medieval (other):
The single-building complex at Brough, c.0.3km south-west of the castle site does not in itself present evidence for medieval occupation.[18] However, the alternative name for the small farm, Castlepark, may hint at a lost small enclosure or larger formal park (in the medieval sense) at this position close to the castle proper.[19] Further fragmentary medieval remains survive c.1km north of the castle, on the east edges of the Wick suburb of Pultneytown, were traces of possible rig-and-furrow were located in excavation. These are cultivation earthworks usually ascribed to the medieval period.[20]

The burgh of Wick, situated on the north bank of the Water of Wick, is a settlement of indeterminate but likely medieval origin. It was made a royal burgh in 1588,[21] but the old

---

[13] See Canmore ID 9639: https://canmore.org.uk/site/9639/cairn-of-humster
[14] For a brief outline of the word 'broch', see https://canmore.org.uk/thesaurus/1/409/BROCH
[15] See Canmore ID 8958: https://canmore.org.uk/site/8958/gote-otram
[16] See Canmore ID 273200: https://canmore.org.uk/site/273200/thrumster
[17] *DES*, Vol. 6 (New Series) (2005), p.188.
[18] See Canmore ID 90354: https://canmore.org.uk/site/90354/brough
[19] For a brief outline of the word 'park', see https://canmore.org.uk/thesaurus/1/600/PARK.
[20] See Canmore ID 300393: https://canmore.org.uk/site/300393/caithness-thrumster-raggra.
[21] See Canmore ID 9221: https://canmore.org.uk/site/9221/wick-general.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 16

parish church, dedicated to St Fergus, is documented in the 13th century.[22] The presence of a cross-marked stone from the vicinity of the old parish church, as well as the dedication to an early saint,[23] may suggest that a settlement here could pre-date the Scandinavian ascendency in Caithness in the early medieval period. The precise extent of the burgh is difficult to establish with certainty. It is marked as a major centre of the earldom of Caithness on the English Gough Map (c.1370s).[24] Both the Roy Map (1747–55) and a depiction of Wick of c.1790 appear to show a small settlement for Wick, with the parish church at the west limit of the settlement, and rows of houses running east; the whole occupying the triangle of land between the parish church, the modern harbour bridge, and Bridge Street.[25] Both Roy and the c.1790 map show a large house north-east of Wick, which may represent the farm of Hillhead. In 1969 excavation in advance of the construction of Hillhead Primary School revealed a coin hoard of 16th–17th-century date, whose contents originated from across Northern Europe, within the foundations of an 'old house'.[26]

Medieval (Castle of Old Wick):
It should be remarked from the beginning that there is no architectural feature at Castle of Old Wick which can act as a guide for dating the site. Nevertheless, new insight has been gained through a felling date for a fragment of timber lodged within a recess in the tower. The ascription of dates to features at the site, both in the past and at present, is discussed above. The material evidence here is presented in terms of stratigraphic phases: the oldest material is sequentially primary (*Phase 1*), that following is secondary (*Phase 2*), etc. Subsections of phases (i.e. 2a, 2b, 2c) does not imply that those phases are chronologically related.

Castle of Old Wick is situated on a raised cliff-girt promontory c.2km south-south-east of the burgh of Wick. The promontory, c.90m long by between c.20–35m wide, sits on a rough north-east/south-west axis, and is widest at its south-west end.[27] The archaeological and architectural remains comprise a square-plan masonry tower fronting a substantial rock-cut ditch at the neck of the promontory adjoining the mainland. North-east of the tower are the substantial turf-covered remains of sequences of parallel ranges of buildings running for c.50m separated by a grassy path or yard. Beyond these are the remnants of a small enclosed yard, variously labelled as 'Castle Walk' or 'Castle garden'.[28] South-west of the

[22] See Canmore ID 9136: https://canmore.org.uk/site/9136/wick-high-street-old-st-fergus-church-and-graveyard.

[23] See Saints in Scottish Place-Names - St Fergus' Church, Wick (gla.ac.uk).

[24] See entry for Wick: Settlements - Gough Map. The other major settlement of Caithness, not identified by the 'Gough Map Project', is probably Winless, a dispersed township c.6km west-north-west of Wick burgh.

[25] (J. Dunlop, 'Pultneytown and the planned villages of Caithness', in J.R. Baldwin (ed.), *Caithness: a cultural crossroads* (Edinburgh, 1982), p.149).

[26] See Canmore ID 9157: https://canmore.org.uk/site/9157/hillhead-wick

[27] The following description and measurements are drawn heavily from RCAHMS' inventory text on the site, alongside more recent notes from both archaeological evaluation in 2009 and a site survey undertaken at the site in 2015-6. These are supplemented by observations on phasing.

[28] Caithness OS Name Books, 1871-1873, OS1/7/13/209, HES (2020), Canmore entry for Castle of Old Wick: https://canmore.org.uk/site/8956/castle-of-old-wick; D. Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 1: preliminary survey, September 2009, Kirkdale Archaeology report (26 October 2009, project code HSCO-90065-2009-01), p.1.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 17

ditch fronting the tower are the remains of further turf-covered wall footings. At the cliff face below the level of the ranges and masonry tower are traces of walling on the north-west cliff face, which were the subjects of a survey in 2009.[29] No such walling was identified on the south-east cliff-face in 2009, though segments of masonry were identified in the 2016 survey.

Raised, thin promontories, and evidence for pre-modern human occupation on such natural features (be that prehistoric or medieval), are characteristic of coastal historic sites in Caithness; in this respect Castle of Old Wick is at first glance regionally typical.

Phase 0

Several discrete fragments of masonry below the turf line of the north-west cliff-face are built upon bedrock. This comprises a typical Caithness flagstone, easily dressed into blocks for construction as wall facing, rubble core, steps and lintels, but less so for more detailed features with ornamental or sculptural elements. It can be quarried as somewhat long, flat and relatively thin stones, which are in evidence across phases at Castle of Old Wick. It is not clear if the promontory's buildings were constructed upon prepared shelves or terraces of bedrock, crafted to suit the needs of the site, or whether the promontory's geology already suited requirements.[30]

Phase 1

The first phase of construction at Castle of Old Wick may be subdivided into two stratigraphically and spatially discrete zones; Phase 1a and Phase 1b. The reasons for this division are outlined below but may briefly be summarised as follows. The stratigraphic sequence of identifiable construction on the site rests upon periods of building atop stretches of bedrock visible across the promontory. However, masonry and earthwork fragments visibly built upon bedrock are not necessarily the earliest iterations of occupation at the site. When considering how buildings may have been erected on the promontory, with its limited space and potentially perilous cliffs, it was probably deemed sensible by past builders to construct foundations upon the bedrock proper, rather than the overlying geology. Thus, although it is generally plausible that identifiable construction directly atop bedrock (Phases 1a, 1b) are the earliest features, they are presented here as discrete phases.

Phase 1a

The primary phase of remains at the site comprises the ditch, separating the promontory from the mainland, which is c.8.5m wide, c.3m deep and c.35m long. It appeared to be almost entirely rock-cut, mostly steep-sided, and ended in a gentle U-shaped base.[31] The ditch appeared partly silted up. Although there is no unambiguous evidence for whether it is older or newer than masonry fragments 001 and 002 apparent on the north-west cliff face, the surveyors speculated that these fragments originally continued around the cliff face to

---

[29] For the sake of continuity and mutual intelligibility, the survey's labelling of features is retained.
[30] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 1, p.3.
[31] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 1, p.3.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick **18**

the eastern, inner face of the ditch.[32] It is possible that the ditch originates from an earlier phase of site occupation, but there is at present no evidence for this.

Figure 1: Annotated plan of Castle of Old Wick with approximate location and extent of masonry fragments on the north-west cliff face noted, identified in the 2009 survey. Red = masonry fragments 001, 002; blue = masonry fragment 003; green = masonry fragments 004, 005. © Historic Environment Scotland. [A duplication of Figure B in the main body of the text]

In the same Phase 1, masonry fragment 001 is built upon bedrock (see Figure 1). It is composed of large flagstones, and it was interpreted in the 2009 survey as revetment for the feature above it; masonry fragment 002, which is composed of smaller flags.[33] Upon closer examination, 001 presented no evidence of bonding agent, whereas 002 featured 'a very loose, pale yellow sandy mortar rich in shell fragments'.[34] The character of 002 was deemed very different from 001, perhaps representing the remains of a north-west wall of a narrow building on the promontory surface adjacent to the masonry tower.[35] A description of the features on the promontory itself is given in Appendix 2 (Section iii), after a discussion of the masonry tower itself (Section i).

Given that masonry fragments 001-002 appear to respect the spatial arrangement of the masonry tower atop the promontory, it is tentatively suggested that the tower and these fragments are of the same phase, namely Phase 1. This conclusion relies on the relationship identified in the 2009 survey, and refined means of ascribing a construction date to any features at Castle of Old Wick will improve upon this connection.

---

[32] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 1, p.5.
[33] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 1.
[34] D. Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2: recording and evaluation, September 2009, Kirkdale Archaeology report (28 October 2009, project code HSCO-90065-2009-01), p.4.
[35] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 1, p.5.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 19

The masonry tower represents the sole significant upstanding element of Castle of Old Wick. It is rectangular in plan, on present evidence stood three stories high, and measures 11m from north-west to south-east by 9m transversely.[36] Its walls at ground floor are c.2m thick, decreasing with elevation owing to the internal scarcements. It is positioned north-east of the rock-cut ditch blocking off this side of the promontory from the mainland, but it does not extend the entirety of its north-west edge, but rather leaves a distance of c.2m between the tower's north-west wall and the north-west face of the cliff. A photo of 1952 appears to show that the tower is constructed directly onto bedrock (see Figure 2). Although it has been remarked that the tower is architecturally featureless, Figure 2 reveals a single course of projecting stones at foundation level on the tower's south-west face, which appears to represent an architectural feature rather than slippage. It has been suggested that access to the castle across the rock-cut ditch was via a drawbridge,[37] but no evidence for this has been found.

The tower has lost much of its upper floors on the north-east and south-east but survives to what appears to be parapet level on the north-west, and to second floor on the south-west.[38] There has been considerable conservation work carried out on the structure, some of which has been rebuilt, especially on the south-west to landward, south-east of the slit window at ground floor level. The lintel of this south-east window retains graffiti of the 19th century.[39] No formal entrance is visible but the large gap in the stonework at first floor level on the north-east is most likely to have been where the tower was accessed. This means that there was very likely a staircase or forebuilding abutting the tower on its north-east face when the tower was in use.

---

[36] P. Dixon, H. Stoddart, I. Anderson, A. McCaig, S. Wallace, W. Wyeth, 'Special Survey (Castles)', Canmore ID 1040025, https://canmore.org.uk/event/1040025, accessed 11-2-2020.
[37] NMRS, MS 36/17, 'Journal of A.O. Curle – Caithness I'. Available online on Canmore: https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1348108 (Accessed 21 October 2022).
[38] The text here is largely verbatim from Dixon's summary of the 2016 survey, with modifications and expansions to reflect present thinking.
[39] See Canmore collection item DP 232060: https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1521904.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 20

Figure 2: Photograph of masonry tower, 1952. Note the general decay of the tower's masonry (here the south-west external face), much consolidated since. The lower course, southern end of the tower reveals that it is constructed upon bedrock. Plainly the fronting ditch has also since been cleared. © Crown Copyright.

Joist holes in the north-west end indicate that the first floor was supported by timber, but these have been lost in remedial work on the south-east. A fragment of timber, since removed for analysis and conservation, was noted to survive in-situ in a joist hole in the north interior wall. The first floor is featureless apart from traces of a small mural passage for a garderobe in the south-east wall. Millar's plan of the tower records the presence of a further slit window along this wall, since lost (see Figure 5). It also shows the presence of a deep draw-bar hole in the south-east jamb of the first-floor entry. The second floor is supported by a scarcement and there is a small slit window on the south-west overlooking the ditch and slightly offset from the middle of the wall to the north-west. A further small window, now lost, featured on the south-east wall. In the north-west wall there is a pair of joist holes for a chimney hood above a shallow recess for the back of a fireplace.
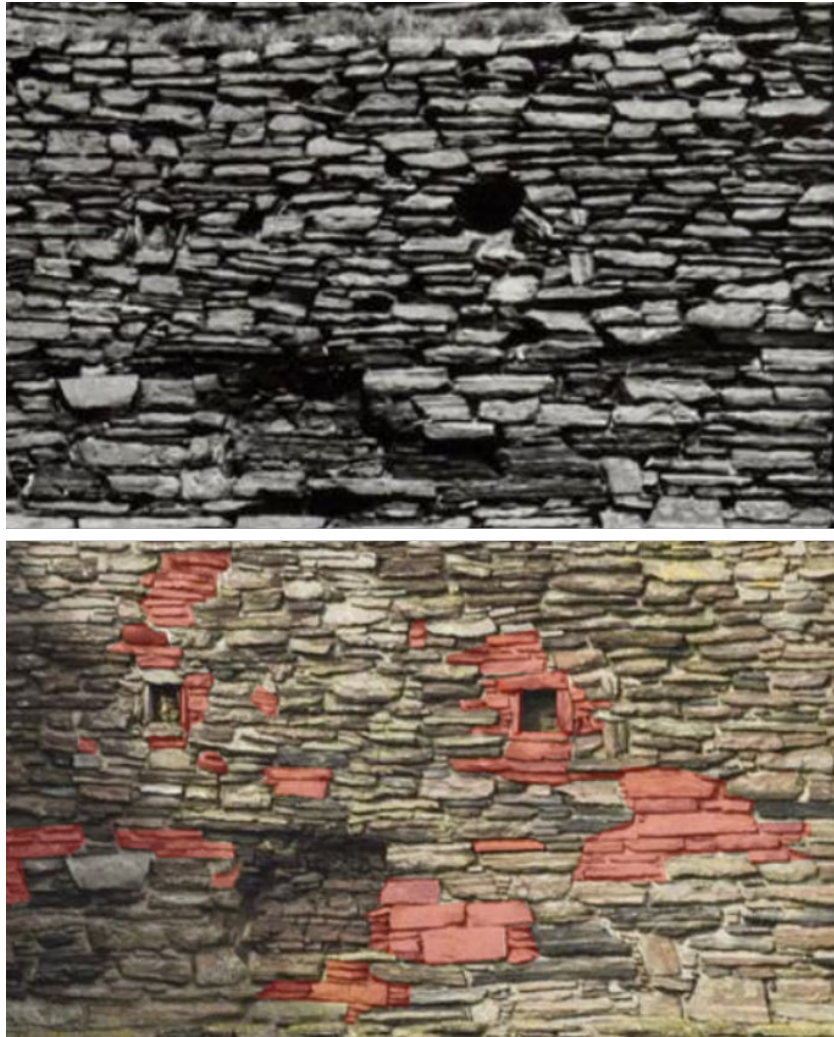
Figure 3: Comparison between section of wall photographed during a survey in 1961 (above, black and white image, detail of SC 2131175 © Crown Copyright: HES) and 2016 (below, colour image, detail of DP 232026 © Historic Environment Scotland) showing selected areas of new masonry (highlighted in red on 2016 photograph).

Comparison between early and contemporary photographs suggests the right-hand joist has been wholly rebuilt from a ragged hollow, but that its current position matches a likely precursor. The left-hand joist hole appears authentic, if slightly rebuilt (see Figure 3). The fireplace probably comprised a hearth-stone set against the wall. Above this was a light-weight wattle-and daub flue, lined with parge (a mixture of fresh dung and lime, sometimes fortified with animal hair). The flue carried through the third floor and to a chimney, perhaps of stone, at roof level. The lower part of this frame was anchored in the joist holes either side of the robbed recess, a reredos of stone or tiles. The third floor was supported by a timber floor set on a scarcement in the north-west and presumably south-east ends. A possible window opening on the north-east was suggested by a straight edge in the broken stonework but could not be confirmed. A joist hole was noted on the north-east exterior face at first floor level about 1m from the north corner, suggesting a timber platform, which was confirmed on a postcard of c 1925 (see Figure 4) which also shows a joist hole at the same level at the break in the wall where it has collapsed. These joist holes are of inferior construction compared to those of the fireplace hollow.

Figure 4: Postcard of Castle of Old Wick (c.1925), looking south-west towards the interior of the masonry tower, from the north-east. Note the presence of two small joist holes on the exterior face of the nearest wall (c.1/3 of the way up the wall), which do not all survive today. The degree of scarring on the tower's north-west face (on the far right here) is also more apparent than is evident today. © Courtesy of HES.

The postcard also reveals the presence of apertures in the tower's first and second floors which have now disappeared owing to significant structural collapse at some point between c.1925 and 1952. According to the 1890 plan of the castle, these are slit windows (see Figure 5), loosely of the same character as the surviving slit window at second floor on the tower's south-west face.
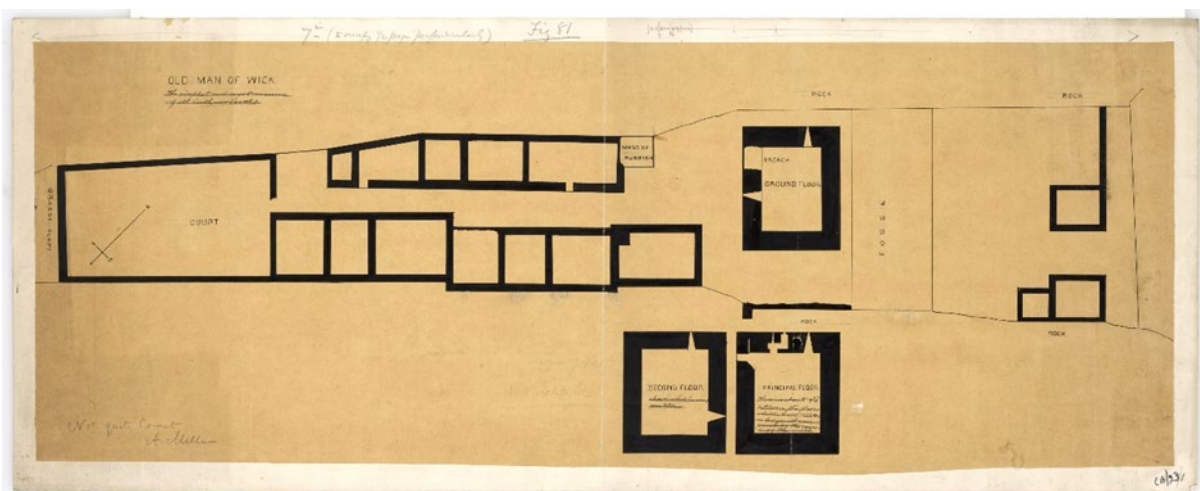

Figure 5: c.1890 plan of Castle of Old Wick by the Reverend A. Miller of Buckie, published in The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland, vol. 3, p.136, fig.83. © Courtesy of HES.

On the promontory itself, there is a linear earthwork bank running approximately south-east to north-west and acting to block off the space between the north-west wall of the tower and the north-west edge of the promontory. As outlined above (2.1), it was suggested that this feature represents the postulated remains of a building adjacent to the tower on its north-west face (see too Appendix 2-i). This bank is c.2m thick and where visible – in a recent break in the bank by the tower – it is apparent that the bank was composed of a rubble core.

South-east of the tower, on the cliff-face below its east corner, are three segments of roughly three runs of masonry. It is not clear if these masonry fragments are bonded or not, but it is striking that all three are roughly parallel, close to each other, and sequentially each upper course is set back slightly from the lower. It is tempting to regard their north-east termini, aligned as they are, as evidence for a vertical joint clearly respecting the east corner of the tower. However, the extent of the masonry fragments was not established conclusively. Nevertheless, it may be postulated that these fragments of masonry show familiar characteristics with those of the north-west cliff-face. Closer examination would facilitate an understanding of their extent, relationship with each other and the structures on the promontory, as well as whether or not they show evidence of bonding agent.

Phase 1b

The other feature of Phase 1, with no clear connection to the above primary phase, is masonry feature 003. Where not obscured by cliff-face vegetation, it is apparent that 003 was built onto bedrock.[40] At c.23m in length, excepting obvious areas of collapse, 003 represents the most significant stretch of masonry on the north-west cliff face. The wall of which it formed the external face was deemed to be approximate 1m thick.[41] It has been interpreted as revetment of the north-west wall of building ranges along the promontory.[42] However, it is unlikely that 003 relates to any of the surviving earthworks on the promontory surface. Its north-east terminus – ending in a clear, near-vertical joint of eight courses of stone – lies approximately mid-way along the corresponding remains of Building 4 (see Figure 6), which is older than the buildings adjacent to it.[43] Where apparent, in areas of collapse, the core of 003 comprised rubble of smaller stones, though there was also significant evidence of 'a pale, yellow silty clay' in the stonework. It was not clear if this represented a bonding agent or leaching from subsoil.[44]

---

[40] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.3.

[41] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, pp 5-6.

[42] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 1, p.6.

[43] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, pp 4, 7; dating of building 4: P. Dixon, H. Stoddart, I. Anderson, A. McCaig, S. Wallace, W. Wyeth, 'Special Survey (Castles)', Canmore ID 1040025, https://canmore.org.uk/event/1040025, accessed 11-2-2020.

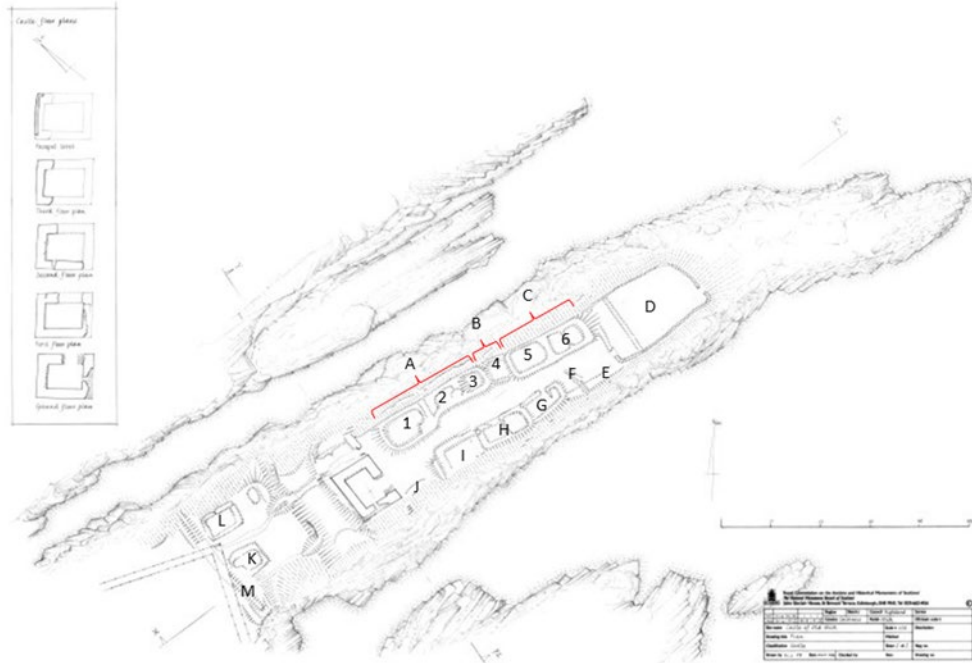[44] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.4.

Figure 6: Plan of Castle of Old Wick with earthworks labelled (1-6) according to the 2009 survey. These have been grouped (A-M) according to Dixon et al.'s 2016 survey of the promontory (from which this plan is the product); the tower has not been labelled. © HES

Phase 2

The secondary periods of construction identified are divided into subdivisions (Phase 2a, Phase 2b and Phase 2c), as they are stratigraphically later than the discrete primary phases identified above. The first relates to a feature on the promontory (Building 4 (=B), see Figure 6), the second to a pair of masonry courses (004–005). Separate from the phasing of masonry fragments and earthworks, the timber fragment recovered from within a joist-hole on the north-east internal face of the tower is discussed here as phase 2c.

Phase 2a

The 2009 survey's detailed inspection of the north-east terminus of masonry feature 003, as already mentioned, noted a near-vertical masonry joint indicating a clear break in construction. Above this, surveyors noted the presence of a 'low grassy ridge', set back 0.5m south-east from masonry feature 003, that is, adjacent to the north-west edge of the promontory surface.[45] Given that this ridge appeared to ignore (or be ignorant of) 003, it was suggested that the grassy ridge represented evidence for a range of buildings built over the masonry feature, rather than use it as its north-west wall.[46]

Although it is not explicitly suggested in the second of two reports for the 2009 survey, it is apparent from rough comparison between the elevation drawings of the features identified[47] and the location of Building 4 (=B)[48] that the grassy ridge may very well

---

[45] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.4.
[46] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.6.
[47] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, figs 2-3.
[48] Figure 6.

represent the north-west wall of Building 4 (=B).[49] Additionally, it is apparent that the survey of 2009 was able to identify (if not measure) an extension of the stratigraphically lower earthworks of which Building 4 (=B) forms part, which, for reasons of safety, were not assessed in detail in Dixon et al's 2016 survey of the promontory top.

Thus, the grassy ridge and Building 4 (=B) are the same feature. It is secondary in phasing terms to masonry feature 003, but stratigraphically lower than the more recent Buildings 1–3 (=A) and Buildings 5–6 (=C).[50] Little is recoverable regarding the dimensions of Building 4; the recognised stretches of buried walling which survive are c.5m (representing the north-west and south-east walls); the length of the building cannot be established as its south-west and north-east walls are concealed beneath the adjacent later buildings. The visible walls are not especially thick (c.0.5–1m), especially in the context of the later buildings and earthworks at Castle of Old Wick, some of which are considerable. This relative thinness may be ascribed to the antiquity of Building 4, or its use – perhaps as an enclosure or yard, rather than a roofed structure.

Phase 2b

The masonry features 004 and 005, though visibly distinct, probably represent evidence for the close phases of construction. 004 represents a lower course, for a length of c.3m about 19m north-east of the vertical joint of masonry feature 003.[51] It comprised very thin flags, except for three substantial stones which projected at a right angle from the wall face 0.3m towards the north-west.[52] These are located in the upper course of 004. There was no evidence of mortar in the fabric of 004. The 2009 surveyors were confident that, although these stones had slumped, they were not evidence for a bulge or disfigurement of 004, but rather architectural features.[53]

Lying atop and north-east of 004 was masonry feature 005. It was extant only for c.1.5m and was set back 0.5m from the edge of 004 and was composed of smaller flags. Where trace of collapse was apparent, it was clear that 005 was bonded with an abundant amount of 'pale yellow, sandy, shell-rich mortar'.[54] It will be remarked that this description matches that ascribed to masonry feature 002 (Phase 1a). The significance of this is explored in Evidential Values.

In relation to the features on the promontory, it appears that masonry feature 004 straddles the meeting of Building 6 (=C) and the west corner of the 'Castle garden'.[55] Masonry feature 005 was only identified below the 'Castle garden', though surveyors expressed confidence in

[49] This was established by establishing the approximate distance between the W corner of the masonry tower (as depicted in Fig. 3, zone 1 of the 2009 (part 2) report), which gave c.45m, and the same exercise undertaken on Dixon et al's 2016 plan, which measured to approximately the middle of Building 4 (=B)'s north-west wall.
[50] P. Dixon, H. Stoddart, I. Anderson, A. McCaig, S. Wallace, W. Wyeth, 'Special Survey (Castles)', Canmore ID 1040025, https://canmore.org.uk/event/1040025 accessed 11-2-2020.
[51] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 1, p.4.
[52] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.3.
[53] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.6.
[54] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.5.
[55] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.6.

suggesting that it also extended, as 004, to the south-west.[56] What this means is difficult to interpret; it is apparent from Dixon et al's phase plan that the east end of Building 6 (=C) has rubble which overlies the west wall of the 'Castle garden'; stratigraphically, therefore, Building 6 is older than the 'garden'. This is unsurprising, in that is has already been recognised that the two long ranges of the north-west side of the peninsula are later, relative to Building 4, and show no relationship with the masonry features identified in 2009.

It is not clear if this conclusion also allows the assumption that the 'Castle garden' is coeval with masonry features 004–005, but this is certainly a tentative possibility expressed by the 2009 surveyors.[57] Finally, it is worth stressing that the walls of the 'garden' are evidently enclosing, rather than relating to a building. A linear ditch c.15m in length crosses the width of the 'garden' c.6m north-east of its south-west wall. It is probably later than its enclosing wall and was suggested as a modern feature in 2016.[58]

Phase 2c

This phase comprises the fragment of timber which was identified in an older edition of this Statement of Significance (2020). On the 22nd and 23rd September 2021 archaeologists from Dendrochronicle undertook the retrieval and examination of the timber fragment in order to undertake a dendrochronological assessment to establish the age of the fragment.[59] The timber species was identified as alder (*Alnus sp.*), a species common to wetter places and widely, historically, available in the north of Scotland. Alder is widely recognised as a material in pre-modern vernacular buildings but is less richly attested in high-status contexts. It is also fleetingly evidenced in medieval artefacts.[60] Smaller components of interiors may have used alder, though for structural elements, oak or pine were preferred.[61]

The fragment featured '[…] an axe-cut "notched" slightly faceted face to the inner (narrow) end […]. This narrower end of the timber is also very knotty and this is interpreted as the upper end of a tree stem where the branches have been axed off to tidy it up resulting in this notched faceted effect.'[62] The tree was slightly older than 80 years when it was felled, and was probably from an unmanaged, natural tree.[63]

As there is presently no alder tree-ring reference data for the later medieval period anywhere in Scotland, and no alder reference data for northern Scotland at all, there is no

---

[56] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.5.
[57] Murray, Castle of Old Wick: archaeological assessment Phase 2, p.6.
[58] P. Dixon, H. Stoddart, I. Anderson, A. McCaig, S. Wallace, W. Wyeth, 'Special Survey (Castles)', Canmore ID 1040025, https://canmore.org.uk/event/1040025 accessed 11-2-2020.
[59] What follows draws substantially on C.M. Mills, 'Castle of Old Wick Timber: Interim Scientific Dating Report', V2 Update (March 2022), 16 ps. Many thanks to C. Mills for extensive and fruitful discussions on the timber fragment.
[60] E.g. Item 'SF34' in J. Lowther, 'The excavation of a medieval burgh ditch at East Market Street, Edinburgh: around the town', Scottish Archaeological Internet Reports, 78 (2018), pp 22-4.
[61] E.g. Discussion of 'Roundwood' in G. Ewart, F. Baker, 'Carrick Castle: symbol and source of Campbell power in south Argyll from the 14th to the 17th century', PSAS, 128 (1988), p.980.
[62] Mills, 'Castle of Old Wick Timber: Interim Scientific Dating Report', p.5.
[63] Mills, 'Castle of Old Wick Timber: Interim Scientific Dating Report', p.7.

prospect of obtaining tree-ring data from the sample retrieved from the tower.[64] In this context, Radiocarbon Bayesian ('wiggle-match') dating was undertaken. This yielded a felling date of 1515-50 (98% confidence) or 1515-35 (68% confidence).

The timber was set within joist-hole c.1.7m from the floor level and 0.8m from the approximate ceiling level.[65] Its opening is coarsely built, comprising a lintel and sill of roughly cut stones, with jambs of thinner, roughly-cut stones set on edge. It is unclear if lining, facing stones carried through the entirety of the void. This joist hole is c.2m SE of the other, reconstructed joist-hole on this wall-face. The timber was embedded by loose sediment or debris, which may have been packing material (samples were preserved from recorded contexts for future analysis), on all four faces of the timber. The fragment was 46cm long, 12cm wide, and had a maximum height of 19.5cm at the exposed face, tapering to 6cm on its inner end. The visible end of the timber rested at the opening of the joist hole, but Dendrochronicle archaeologists established that the joist hole was much deeper than the timber's 46cm. It extended at least 70cm into the wall thickness, any further extent apparently blocked with debris.[66] An early plan of the castle (1890) appears to show joist-holes passing through the thickness of the wall entirely, but not apparently at the floor level of this feature.

The context of the fragment, filling only part of the void, is unusual. Dendrochronicle archaeologists have suggested that the alder fragment was likely prepared for the use in which context it was recovered in 2021 but would not rule out the possibility that the timber may have had an earlier use before being repurposed in the stone tower. It logically follows that, given the combination of features on this wall-face have previously been interpreted as elements of a hanging lum fireplace, that the alder was part of one such fireplace. It is also clear that this alder-built fireplace was a replacement for an earlier fireplace (or sequence of fireplaces) of similar design – this last inferred as there is little evidence for substantial rebuilding of the tower, suggesting at most refurbishment or replacement.

The fragment of alder is a highly unusual find. The rare survival of alder in high-status contexts, such as castles, is unusual. There are no known extant medieval hanging lum fireplaces which survive in Scotland (examples are known from England). Numerous examples appear in vernacular contexts in the 18th and 19th centuries. Traces of hanging lums in medieval contexts are attested in several pele or bastle-houses in the Borders, such as Mervinslaw and Slacks Tower, both dated to the 16th centuries.[67] Several examples survive from high-status contexts dating to the 17th century – at Newark Castle (Fife) and Elphinstone Tower (Stirlingshire), for example.[68] A building in the primary phase of construction at **Smailholm Tower** (Roxburghshire), identified as a hall-and-chamber block adjacent to the surviving tower (with later modifications), contained the remains of what

[64] Mills, 'Castle of Old Wick Timber: Interim Scientific Dating Report', p.7.
[65] Thanks to A. McCaig (HES) for sharing measurements from the digitised elevation survey, which are rounded to nearest 0.1m.
[66] Mills, 'Castle of Old Wick Timber: Interim Scientific Dating Report', p.3.
[67] Thanks to P. Dixon (retired, HES) for drawing attention to these examples.
[68] B. Walker, 'Hanging Chimneys, Smoke Chimneys or Smoking Chimneys in Scottish Domestic Buildings', Vernacular Architecture, 39.1 (2008), pp 75-6.

excavators identified as a hanging lum, in the chamber of the range. Although no diagnostic dating evidence was found to ascribe a date to the construction of the building, it was determined by excavators to be coeval with the primary phase of the stone tower in the 15th century.[69]

In summary, phase 2c represents a secondary refurbishment of the fireplace on the second floor of the tower during the early 16th century. The use of alder as a material in this context is not widely evidenced from elsewhere, but this is likely an accident of survival. More research on hanging lums as a diagnostic feature of medieval architecture in Scotland would enhance our understanding of this secondary refurbishment, and the construction of the masonry tower.

Phase 3

The third phase of occupation at the site, as with the first two, is not tied to a specific date. Rather, its identification as a later phase of construction relies on recognition of its relationship to features deemed to be older than it. In this case, it is related to Phase 2a only. Other features not discussed thus far do not fit into the established phasing here and will be interrogated following this discussion. These include the south-east range and associated earthworks along the south-east edge of the promontory.

Phase 3a

There are two structures in this phase, which both overlie features of Phase 2a; these are Buildings 1–3 (identified as compartments of a single structure, here labelled 'A', in Dixon et al's survey), and Buildings 5–6 (identified as subdivided single structure, 'C'). They lie to the north-west and north-east respectively of Building 4 (=B). No traces of masonry were apparent in either of these buildings.

The north-west structure, Building A, is 25m in length and 8m wide at its widest point, to the south-west. It is divided into two parts; the north-east part is narrower at 6m in breadth and is 13m in length. The south-west part is c.10m long and c.5m wide with walls c.1m thick, except on the south-east corner, which comprises a solid mass infilling the corner of the building, c.4m by c.2m. It is not clear if this clump comprises an original feature of the south-west part of Building A, but it seems plausible that this is the case. What this mass might be the remnant of is open to interpretation. It could be the fragments of a corner hearth or staircase. The difference in width between these two parts of the north-west of Building A is evidence for a difference in phasing between the parts. It may be tentatively suggested that the larger of the two is the older, but by how much is not obvious, and comparable evidence from elsewhere suggests the opposite is possible.[70] Although it has been suggested that these two subdivisions were of different periods of construction, they have been grouped here as they were probably built and developed within the same period of occupation, rather than between phases of demolition or configurational differences phases in how the site operated. Between this subdivision and the two north-west subdivisions is a shallow

---

[69] G.L. Good, C.J. Tabraham, 'Excavations at Smailholm Tower, Roxburghshire', PSAS, 118 (1988), pp 245, 262.

[70] G. Stell, 'Some small farms and cottages in Latheron parish, Caithness', in J.R. Baldwin (ed.) *Caithness: a cultural crossroads* (Edinburgh, 1982), p.89, fig.6.2, plan number 7: Bruan.

linear depression, running south-east to north-west along the line of the wall dividing these features. This is a later feature, probably connected to stone-robbing or drainage efforts. It also suggests that the north-east gable of the south-west subdivision of Building A had collapsed, perhaps in part explaining the substantial linear earthwork upon which the robber trench sits.

The north-east building, Building C, is 19m in length by 7m in breadth over stony banks up to 1m in height. It is subdivided into two compartments of roughly equivalent size, the easternmost of which has a further subdivision creating two smaller spaces of roughly equal size. The partition of the space is too faint to represent a wall and must represent traces of a timber screen. Beyond establishing a relative phasing and outlining their dimensions, there is little more that can be said of these buildings. The possibility of dating them in absolute terms is discussed in Evidential Values (and see Section 3: Major Gaps in Understanding).

Features of Castle of Old Wick not fitting into the current phasing scheme

Although it has been possible to establish a reasonably consistent phased development of large parts of Castle of Old Wick, the standing masonry tower, cliff-face runs of masonry and promontory earthworks, certain parts of the castle are not tangible physically (and therefore related in phasing terms) in a convincing way to others. This in turn prevents their being included in the main phasing scheme (Phases 1–3). These remaining features, with three exceptions (features K–M), are confined to the earthworks along the south-east side of the promontory (features E–J), which are situated upon a defined area fronting the rock-cut ditch (see Figure 6). Features E–J are discussed here first, in order of the features which are stratigraphically older (G, I), followed by the building which overlies them (H). After this, the remaining earthworks on the promontory (Features E and F; J) are examined. The earthworks south-west of the tower and ditch (K, L, M) are covered last.

Building G

Building G is one of the two stratigraphically older structures along the south-east side of the castle promontory, located at the east end of the sequence of south-east earthworks. Its west portion of Building G is overlain by the east end of Building H. Building G is rectangular in plan, c.8m x c.4m with its long wall on the south edge of the promontory. A gap in its north-west wall probably represents the location of the original entry. An inwards return of walling on the east side of this entry may represent a primary feature for Building G, perhaps the remains of a closet or internal partition lost on the south side. It is possible that Building G is in fact not a building per se, but rather an enclosure; on balance, it appears that the estimated thickness of the walls (presently comprising a spread bank c.1m broad) suggests that a roofed structure is more likely. There is a small portion of masonry on the cliff face south-east of Building G, identified in Dixon et al's 2016 survey (see Figure 1and 6). Its relationship with the features on the promontory could not be established.

Feature I

Feature I comprises a slightly raised, flat rectangular platform c.7m x c.4m, with its longest side forming the edge of the promontory on the south-east side. Its east side is overlain by the spread bank representing the west wall of Building H; the platform may have extended further east, but this is obscured by the north wall of Building H. It may also have extended

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 30

south, but the evidence for this is limited. There are two small runs of masonry forming the south-east edge of the present platform, at the ground level of the platform which forms Feature I and descending for some courses down the cliff face. The relationship of this masonry to Feature I is uncertain, but it is plausible they form part of the same construction period. The precise character of the masonry, whether formed of large or small flags, or whether bonded or not, could not be established.

The south-west side of Feature I is defined by a shallow ditch, though it is apparent from the plan of Castle of Old Wick from c.1890 (see Figure 5) that the small linear bank south-west of this ditch comprised a 'Mass of Rubbish'. This 'mass' could represent the upcast of a robber trench which forms this ditch defining the south-west edge of Feature I. The role or function of Feature I is not understood. It could represent an area of paving or an enclosure, but it is unlikely that it represents the remnants of a building platform, as there is no evidence of a built structure upon it. It might be argued that if the structure were built of timber, its surface remains would be scant, but it appears that the Caithness building tradition for much of its history oriented around the easily manipulated flags and turf walling, not timber. Thus, Feature I is of uncertain function.

Building H

Building H comprises a two-cell rectangular structure c.10m x c.5m; its long side adjacent to the south-east edge of the promontory (see Figure 1 and 6). The banks forming the remains of walls are inconsistent in width, perhaps suggesting a period of robbing has taken place here; indeed, the west side of the north-west wall is partly robbed away. This proposal is all the more likely given that Building H is the only structure among the earthworks of the promontory to have evidence of masonry fabric. The north-west wall of the building's north-east cell features a near-continuous run of external facing masonry. Its character (whether bonded or not) is not clear but appears to not be bonded.[71] The internal partition appears slight in character, in common with some of the subdivided structures on site. Building H overlies the earthworks either side of it (Building G, Feature I), and so is younger than them. The 2016 survey revealed three discrete segments of masonry in the cliff-face below H, close to each other and appearing on roughly the same alignment, allowing for slippage. As with other south-east cliff-face masonry fragments, it is not clear whether these were bonded or unbonded.

Features E and F

Features E and F are grouped together as F has little of interest except to note that it bisects E and is probably a modern insertion; it is discussed following an outline of Feature E's characteristics.

Feature E comprises a very broad (c.2m), low bank running between the south corner of the 'Castle garden' and the east corner of Building G, which it appears to partly overlie. It represents the broadest linear earthwork at Castle of Old Wick. Its nearest comparator, the large bank with masonry fragments north-west of the masonry tower, could suggest that Feature E represents the remains of the stone wall of a building, but the dearth of evidence for any interaction with features on the promontory proper argues against this. Instead, it is

---

[71] Pers. comm., Piers Dixon, 22-02-20.

possible Feature E represents evidence for an enclosing curtain wall or its foundations at this segment of the promontory. The presence of two discrete segments of masonry (unclear whether bonded or not) on the south-east cliff face below E may be confirmation of this theory. Conversely, that Feature E appears to overlie the corner of Building G also argues against it being the foundations of a curtain wall, as the construction of a wall over the foundations of G would lead to structural problems. Equally, however, the south-west terminus of E, overlying Building G, could also represent a fairly recent slumping of material over the corner of G, adding confusion to their stratigraphic relationship. The north-east terminus of E is not defined, as the bank peters out in definition before it reaches the nearest portion of the small earthwork enclosing the 'Castle garden'.

As mentioned, Feature F appears to be a drainage ditch beginning in the area between the ranges on the promontory north-west of Feature E, and ending c.4m north-east of the north-east wall of Building G. A small bank parallel to F, north-east of and abutting it, probably represents upcast from the ditch.

Feature J

Feature J comprises a spread of raised ground between the south-east corner of the masonry tower and the west side of Feature I. Its south-west and north-east limits are ill-defined, for the raised segment of ground which it comprises, peters out at its ends. Feature J lacks a defined south-east edge, instead being defined by the south-east edge of the promontory above the cliff-face. There is a single segment of masonry (character unclear), located on the edge of the promontory surface and cliff-face. This makes it somewhat more likely that Feature J is structural, rather than evidence of robbing or rubbish. It may very tentatively be understood as a bank defining the edge of the promontory; whether this was for buildings or a curtain wall cannot be said with certainty. Its proximity to the position of the first-floor entrance to the masonry tower could also suggest it was connected to access to it, via a forebuilding of which Feature J formed part. Again, however, there is no compelling evidence for this theory, and at best Feature J can be said to have only a vague spatial relationship with the buildings either side of it.

Building K

Building K comprises one of two rectangular-plan earthworks south-west of the masonry tower. The irregular extent of its banks, ranging nearly 2m wide to under 0.5m, make it difficult to suggest what this building might be, and furthermore raise the possibility that this is not a building, but an enclosure. It is apparent that the structure may be overlain at its south corner by collapsed earth or rubble, but its extent is too faint to suggest how this might relate to the other features in its vicinity.

Building L

Building L comprises the second of two rectangular-plan earthworks south-west of the masonry tower, though its extent and identification as a building rests on firmer evidence. It comprises a single cell and is approximately 7m x 5m, with its long wall parallel to the north-west edge of the land above a gentle cliff-face at this segment of the site. Where intact, its walls are c.1m thick; there has been clear robbing of its wall fabric on the north side of its

north-west wall. The irregularity of wall thickness on its south and west sides may relate to the construction of Feature M, or a general decay of its fabric.

Around 5m north-east of Building L is an oval hollow situated on the northernmost portion of the platform upon which Buildings K and L are located. The feature may represent robbing or quarrying of the site, but beyond these tentative assertions it is not easy to establish its importance.

Feature M

Feature M comprises a group of three discrete banks of differing extent, and a ditch, running north-east/south-west. Although probably not part of the same feature on chronological terms, they are grouped here for ease of comparison and discussion.

The most substantial bank appears to have straddled the entire promontory, though its central portion was apparently demolished and overlain by modern post-and-wire fencing which separates private land from a path giving pedestrian access to Castle of Old Wick from the west. Its north portion is complemented by a fronting ditch on its south-west side and is approximately 9m long. The bank itself is meagre in width, c.0.5m, and the ditch too is perhaps c.1m wide. It is reasonable to postulate that the fabric of the bank comprises upcast from the ditch.

South of the demolition incurred by the wire fence construction, the bank continues towards the south-east cliff, but stops short with a rounded end of the cliff proper. This south-east terminus argues against the bank being a feature related to occupation of the castle but may be explicable as a remnant of an access route into the castle in the last century or two. There is no fronting ditch south-west on this south side of the promontory-spanning bank.

The south side of the promontory-spanning bank is flanked on its east and west end, by the cliff face, by two discrete earthen banks. These are on mutually similar axes but slightly different from the promontory-spanning bank. The east bank, the less extensive and substantial of the two, is approximately 3m long and c.1m wide. Its south extent is marked by the cliff-face at this end of the site, while its north edge peters out into flat ground. The west bank, c.4.5m long and c.1.5m thick, similarly abuts the cliff on its south side and also peters out into flat ground fronting the long bank. The difference in axis of these two banks compared to the slighter promontory-spanning bank suggests difference in phasing, and it may tentatively be suggested that they are older. The scale of the west bank is significant, comparable to banks in the castle proper (such as that north-west of the tower) which are deemed to be either walls of buildings or curtain walls.

This goes some way to confirming that there may have been an area of occupation at Castle of Old Wick outside of the area of the masonry tower and earthworks to the north-east of it. This postulated area may have been bounded on its north-east side by the rock-cut ditch and its south-west side by a substantial wall (with lost ditch), and on its north-west and south-east sides by cliff face. The difficulty with this thesis is the lack of certainty about the features and their relationships with each other. There are many explanations for the form and extent of Feature M which do not necessitate an occupation of this particular area around the same time the promontory and tower were occupied.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 33

Late-17th – early-19th centuries:
The purchase of the estate of Tellstane c.2.2km south-west of Castle of Old Wick by William Dunbar in 1690x1 also included the purchase of the estate of Old Wick.[72] The construction of an estate house at Tellstane, renamed Hempriggs in honour of Dunbar's seat in Moray, took place soon after.[73] Hempriggs House survives today, though it has been much altered since its late 17th-century origins. Around a century later the noted Improvement-era architect Thomas Telford was invited to discussions around improving the provision of fishery facilities at Wick proper, and specifically with regards efforts by the British Fisheries Society.[74] The product of this discussion was the modern suburb of Pultneytown (but until 1902 jurisdictionally independent of Wick burgh), which transformed the area south of the medieval burgh, and indeed the hinterland of the Castle of Old Wick. In 1803 Benjamin Dunbar, then owner of much of the land south of Wick including the castle hinterland and the Hill of Man north of the castle, sold rights to those lands to the Society,[75] and development of the planned settlement of Pultneytown began in earnest. It was joined by curing stations on the lower sandy ground on the south side of the mouth of Water of Wick.

Part of the wider improvement to the agricultural practices of the district around the castle undertaken at the same time as the construction of Pultneytown were a series of lades running from Loch of Hempriggs south-west of the castle to the Water of Wick north of it.[76] These works may not all be ascribed to Thomas Telford specifically, but rather can be understood in terms of changing practices in land management, tenants' rights and the organisation of fields. It should be remarked that there were certainly mills in this area before these Improvement works, as evidenced in their frequent appearance in medieval documents relating to the estate and castle of Old Wick.

19th century:
The early Ordnance Survey maps of the late 19th century suggest the presence of many small farms in the area north, west and south of the castle.[77] Some, like the farm of Charity, are known to pre-date the 19th century.[78]

---

[72] J. Henderson, *Caithness family history* (Edinburgh, 1884), p.221 and see Appendix 3.

[73] NMRS, C 35557: photo of bay window at Hempriggs House, detail of datestone (*ex orig. situ.*) marked 1692.

[74] J. Dunlop, 'Pultneytown and the planned villages of Caithness', p.148.

[75] J. Dunlop, 'Pultneytown and the planned villages of Caithness', p.150.

[76] See Canmore ID 341299: https://canmore.org.uk/site/341299/wick-telfords-mill-lade; and Canmore ID 151522: https://canmore.org.uk/site/151522/oldwick-wick

[77] See following entries on Canmore: https://canmore.org.uk/site/151522/oldwick-wick; https://canmore.org.uk/site/97757/old-wick; https://canmore.org.uk/site/97732/old-wick; https://canmore.org.uk/site/97731/harden-old-wick; https://canmore.org.uk/site/97714/old-wick; https://canmore.org.uk/site/90354/brough; https://canmore.org.uk/site/90358/brough; https://canmore.org.uk/site/8962/brough; https://canmore.org.uk/site/8952/tail-of-brough; https://canmore.org.uk/site/8953/brig-of-tram; https://canmore.org.uk/site/195867/barnyards; https://canmore.org.uk/site/97713/old-wick.

[78] T. Thomson (ed.), *Inqvisitionvm ad capellam domini regis retornatarvm, qvae in pvblicis archivis Scotiae adhvc servantvr*, abbreviation (1840), Vol. 1, doc. no. 28; see Canmore ID 195869: https://canmore.org.uk/site/195869/charity-farm.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 34

20th century:

The 20th century saw changes to the area around Castle of Old Wick. At Hill of Man c.1km north-north-west of the castle, a series of gun emplacements were built around the Second World War.[79] The dramatic intervention into the hinterland of the Castle of Old Wick was the construction of a rifle range and butts c.0.08km north-west of the castle promontory around the First World War.[80]

APPENDIX 2: DISCUSSION OF EXTANT REMAINS

The extant remains of Castle of Old Wick are important in reconstructing the historic fabric of the complex, for the purposes of architectural and archaeological research, but perhaps more significantly also to inform management of the site from a heritage and conservation perspective. The importance of these features can be divided into three areas: i) the tower; ii) the cliff-face remains; and iii) earthworks on the promontory. A brief discussion of how Castle of Old Wick compares to other castles in the region is presented (iv). Lastly, Castle of Old Wick is discussed in terms of its association in historiography and contemporary heritage interpretation as a site with 12th-century origins (v).

i) Tower

At several points in the discussion of the fabric at the site it has been suggested that there may be a structure north-west of the masonry tower remains at the landward side of the promontory. It is apparent from early cartographic and illustration sources that there was an adjacent building or chamber in this space until the end of the 19th century (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Extract of 1st edition OS map (25-inch), which is of sufficient resolution to suggest a chamber or building NW of the masonry tower. Caithness XXV.10 (Wick), 1872. Reproduced under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY) licence with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

---

[79] See Canmore ID 119920: https://canmore.org.uk/site/119920/wick-hill-of-man.
[80] See Canmore ID 75561: https://canmore.org.uk/site/75561/old-wick-rifle-range.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 35

The evidence for this is not straightforward, however. Charles Cordiner's c.1776 sketch of the castle, by far the earliest detailed depiction of Castle of Old Wick, appears to show a solitary masonry tower bereft of north-west chamber or adjacent building (Figure 8). The tone of Cordiner's image is one of romantic turbulence, emphasizing the dramatic setting of the castle, with a floundering masted ship in the foreground surrounded by tumultuous foamy waves. A small chamber is depicted projecting north-east of the lowermost portion of masonry on the sketch, but how (or if) this relates to historic material or the evidence discussed from the present site, is not clear. Considered from an alternative perspective, it is, however, possible that Cordiner's sketch depicts both the masonry tower and the adjacent north-west structure before the latter collapsed or was robbed out; from the evidence of Castle of Old Wick today the structures appear to be on the same alignment, so could feasibly appear as a single structure from afar. Again, it is not possible to verify this theory.

Figure 8: C. Cordiner, Antiquities & Scenery of the North of Scotland, in a Series of Letters to Thomas Pennant (London, 1780), opposite p.80.

In the brief discussion complementing the sketch of Figure 8 is a description of the remains of the tower, which records 'narrow stairs of communication between the upper and lower

apartments [...]'.[81] No evidence for stairs was recorded in later studies of the castle.[82] It is possible inter-floor access was via a mixture of stairs and ladder-and-hatch. It is unfortunate that Cordiner did not note the location or fabric of the stairs, but given that he recorded no trace of internal partition within the chamber space of the tower (and may be deemed a reliable interpreter of structural remains), it may be assumed that the stairs he identified were of timber, rather than stone.

A print of Castle of Old Wick by landscape painter William Daniell (1769–1837) dated to 1821 illustrates the presence of the structure north-west of the tower very clearly (Figure 9). It also tends to confirm the relationship postulated in an earlier discussion between the lowermost courses of extant masonry on the north-west cliff-face of the castle and this building north-west of the tower.
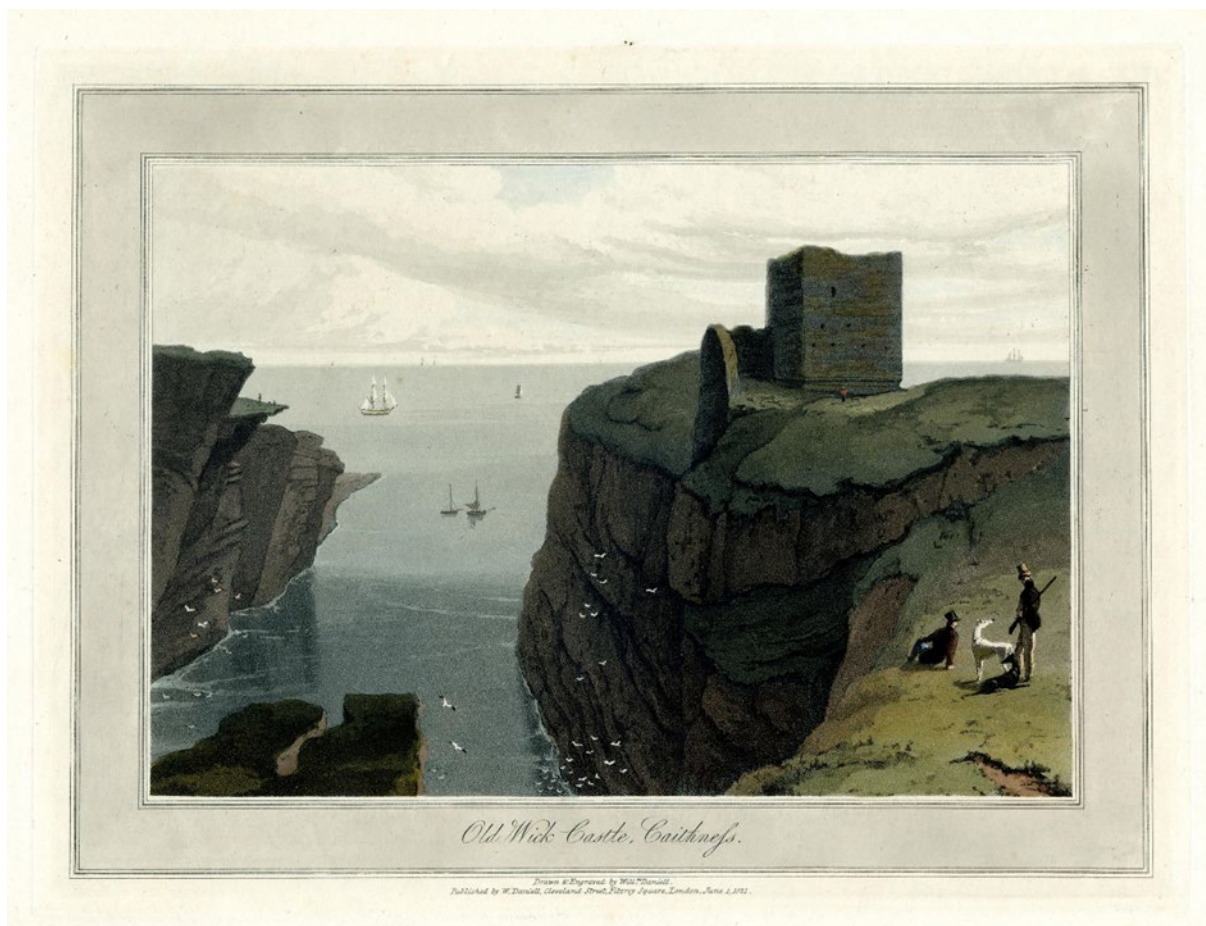

Figure 9: William Daniell, 'Old Wick Castle, Caithness', 1821. © The Trustees of the British Museum

It appears that by 1875 the tower was deemed to be a standalone structure. This is evidenced in Christian MacLagan 1875 plan and sketch view of Castle of Old Wick, which shows a monolithic tower and plan, single-cell tower (Figure 10). It may be suggested, therefore, that the depiction of a two-celled structure in the 1st edition OS (Figure 7) depicts an intermediate phase of decay for the structure adjacent to the tower, or rather

---

[81] (C. Cordiner, *Antiquities & Scenery of the North of Scotland, in a Series of Letters to Thomas Pennant* (London, 1780), p.80)
[82] NMRS, MS 36/11, f.3, 'Field notebook of A.O. Curle (RCAHMS), Caithness I'; MS 36/17, f.8.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 37

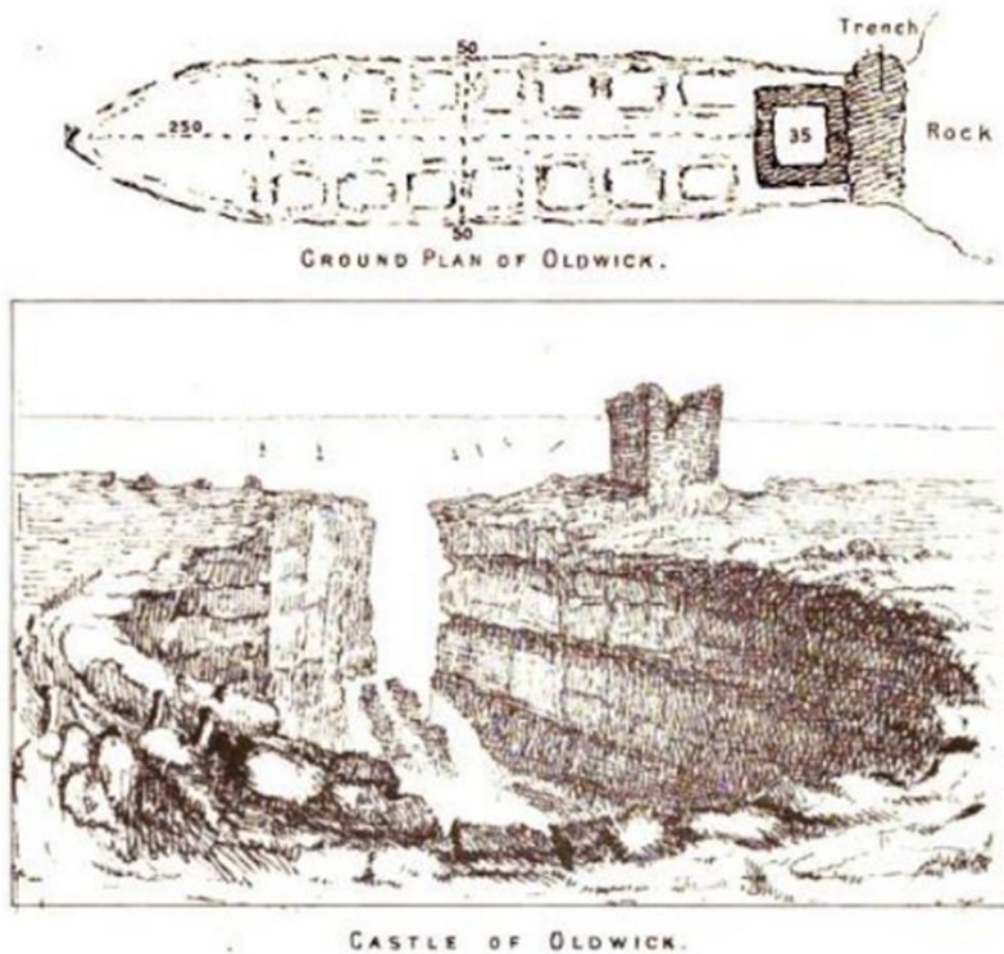depicts the presence of diagnostic footings, rather than a building surviving to full or near-full height.

Figure 10: 'Groundplan of Oldwick', 'Castle of Oldwick', from C. MacLagan, The hill forts, stone circles and other structural remains of ancient Scotland (Edinburgh, 1875), plate xviii. The plan is apparently more conjectural than representative of the earthwork remains but appears to be the earliest attempt to outline the wider site in plan form.

In spite of its fragmentary state, it is possible to offer an interpretation of its spaces based on its remains. The ground floor, devoid of heating, facilities or easy access, must be understood as a storage space, perhaps for food, drink, valuables and/or documents. It was probably entered via a ladder and hatch from the first floor. At first floor, the presence of a secured door to the exterior and a garderobe makes this likely a chamber for receiving guests and, perhaps in addition, for eating and drinking. The second floor, with its fireplace, can be understood as a further chamber, more oriented towards sleeping than hosting. The lack of over half of the third floor makes speculating upon its function pointless, but its position in the stack of chambers make it likely it was also related to accommodation. The passage of the hanging lum flue through this third floor may be understood as offering secondary heating to this chamber too. The parapet offered spectacular views of the landscape and coast which, in an era before skyscrapers or when buildings above a single story were rare, was a privilege offered only to the castle's owners and their esteemed guests.

ii) Cliff-face remains

Much of the importance of the cliff-face remains has been demonstrated on how they can enable the creation of a relative phasing scheme of Castle of Old Wick's history. This scheme is rightly open to critique and amendment, but its presence allows a better understanding of how both the masonry tower and the earthwork remains relate to each other.

The cliff-face remains also form a repository of scientifically datable material. Those fragments (masonry features 002, 005) with shell-rich mortar composition present the best candidates for mortar analysis; a technique recently deployed by Mark Thacker with success at a number of northern and western sites.[83] This methodology will allow a firmer grasp of where the phasing at Castle of Old Wick sits relative to general chronology. It will allow discussion of the site to be informed by evidence other than documentary, which (as has been suggested by Thacker as well as here) is of limited and limiting potential.

iii) Earthworks on promontory

The relative phasing scheme proposed here suggests that certain features on the promontory are newer than others. Those features whose extent and composition are clearest – A, C, and H – can be compared to more firmly dated structures from elsewhere. In general terms they comply with a typical form of Scottish rural housing of broad chronology: the byre house (see Table 1).[84] In their detail they appear broader (especially Buildings A and C), but this may be explained by the spread of material following their collapse.

Although these are among the youngest structures apparent at the castle, in their basic shape they are dissimilar from each other. As noted above, A appears to be a single-celled thin-walled structure abutted against (or abutting) a bicameral long building to the north-east. C is more intelligible, representing a long bicameral structure whose north-east cell is subdivided into equal parts by a thin bank, perhaps trace of a timber partition. H is a shorter bicameral structure whose north-west wall is partly robbed away, but whose exterior face appears to have traces of stonework.

House 20, excavated at Brough of Deerness, Orkney, which was abandoned between the 11th-12th centuries, shows similar dimensions to Building H at Old Wick, though it was seemingly a single-cell structure with, at least one phase of occupation, a central hearth and side aisles. More broadly, though the excavators drew attention to the similarities between Brough of Deerness and Old Wick,[85] evidently from this comparison they are different in detail. Nevertheless, the evidence from Brough of Deerness reminds of the necessity to consider the possible antiquity of the earthworks at Castle of Old Wick.

---

[83] For example at Aros Castle: M. Thacker, 'Aros Castle, Survey, sampling and analysis', *Discovery & Excavation Scotland*, New series, 16 (2016), p.48; for a wider overview of Thacker's wider project and conclusions see M. Thacker, 'Dating medieval masonry buildings by radiocarbon analysis of Mortar-Entrapped Relict Limekiln Fuels - a buildings archaeology', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* (2020).

[84] Byre house data from Stell, 'Some small farms and cottages in Latheron parish, Caithness', p.89, fig. 6.2.

[85] Barrett, Slater, 2009, 'New excavations at Brough of Deerness', p.85.

Place	Length (m, c.)	Width (m, c.)	Number of cells
Structure 23, Brough of Deerness	7.2	3.5	?1
Building H, Castle of Old Wick	10	5	2
House 20, Brough of Deerness	10.4	4.9	?1
Torbeg I	17	5	2
Bruan (primary phase)	18	5	2
Building C, Castle of Old Wick	19	7	3
The Corr (primary phase)	22	5-6	2/3
Building A, Castle of Old Wick	25	8	3
Skaill, Lybster (primary phase)	26	6	4
The Corr (later phases)	27	5-6	5
Bruan (later phases)	32	5	4
Skaill, Lybster (later phases)	33	6	5

Table 1: Selection of 18th-19th-century byre houses in district between Wick and Berriedale; two 11th-12th-century structures from Brough of Deerness; and Buildings A, C and H from Castle of Old Wick, arranged by length.

iv) Regional comparators

There are several local and regional sites whose topography is similar to Castle of Old Wick. Three of the most significant – Forse, Bucholly, Braal – are noted here briefly, but a fuller discussion is at present lacking in the limited historiography of Caithness castles.[86] It is apparent from this limited discussion that whilst there are features which are common to these sites, there are equally divergent characteristics which raise questions about how these sites are related in chronology and architectural typology.

iv.i) Forse:

Forse Castle in Latheron parish, Caithness, is located c.20km away as the crow flies, south of Castle of Old Wick. It is a ruined promontory castle comprising standing remains and significant earthworks. No up-to-date plan exists for the castle, but that of the Rev. Millar from 1890 (Figure 11) suggests that the configuration of the site closely matches that of

---

[86] A fuller, if inexhaustive, list of sites with analogous characteristics and varying volumes of intelligible architectural and documentary evidence, follows: Berriedale, Borve, Brough, Caisteal Bharraich, Caisteal Uisdean, Dirlot, Dunbeath, Dunrobin, Gunn, Halberry Helmsdale, Knockinnon, Mestag, Langwell, Sinclair-Girnigoe, Swiney. Additionally, the castle of Skelbo is unlike these in purely typological terms (forming a walled enclosure), whilst 2015 surveys at Proncy and Invershin further south have demonstrated further typologies (raised mound; moated site). Fast Castle in East Lothian, dated in its primary phase to the 14th century, shares a similar topological setting and cliff-face walling below ranges of buildings arrayed along a sea-girt promontory.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 40

Castle of Old Wick. The masonry tower's long wall faces into a rock-cut ditch cutting off the complex from a raised promontory above the coast here, and behind it are two ranges of buildings (both of which appear to be of bonded masonry), one of which survives to two stories. East of the masonry tower are rectangular footings of a building which appears to have acted as a part of the entry complex into the castle's core, forming the east side of a north-south passage between it and the tower, marking the sole point of access to the enclosure behind. MacGibbon and Ross note that the tower measures 6.5 x 3.5m internally, with walls 2.1m thick, and that its remains rise to 9.1m high.[87] These dimensions are approximately half those of the tower at Old Wick (11 x 9m), except for the wall thickness and height which are comparable. Within the east exterior face of the tower at first floor height is a shallow alcove with a pointed arch.[88] This can be interpreted as a feature which relates to the now-lost building east of the tower, and specifically to a chamber which was located above the aforementioned access passage. It may be speculated that both this feature and the postulated chamber relate to portcullis machinery, but there is no evidence for this. Unlike the tower at Castle of Old Wick, however, the quoins of the remains of the tower at Forse are squarish blocks of stone, rather than undifferenced Caithness flag. Although Millar's plan is a useful starting point, an updated topographical survey would greatly improve our understanding of this fragile and decaying site. An annotated version of Millar's plan in the Historic Environment Scotland collections suggests the presence of terraces of masonry on the cliff-face north-west of the tower.[89]

Presently Forse is at significant risk of collapse, and its remains are accessible, but in an unsafe and dangerous way, from the mainland, via a thin raised path crossing the ditch.
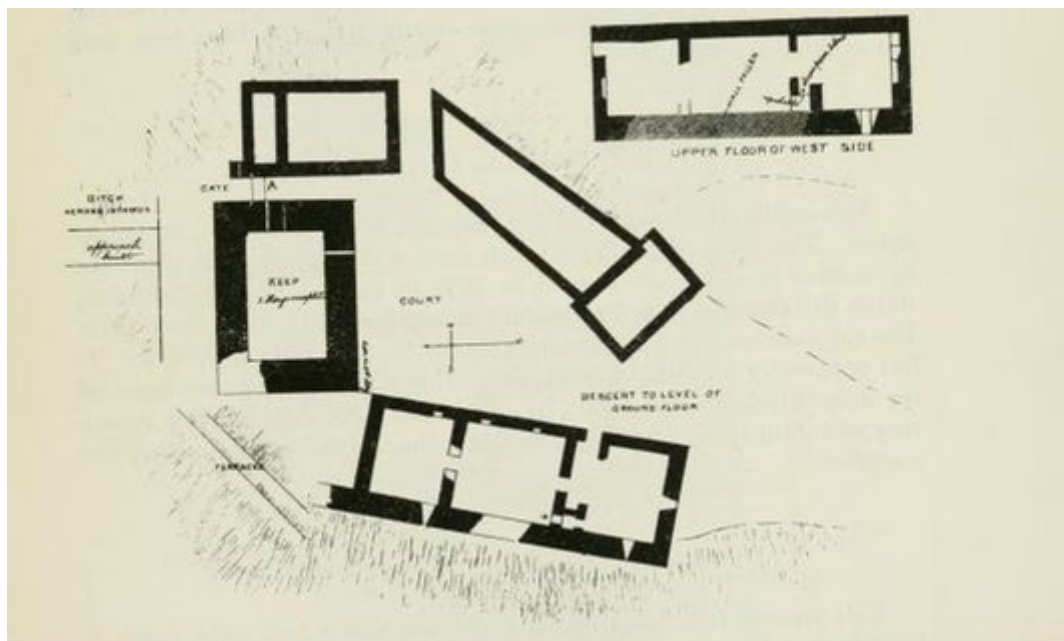

Figure 11: Plan of Forse Castle, by Rev. A. Millar, from D. MacGibbon, T. Ross, The castellated and domestic architecture of Scotland, from the twelfth to the eighteenth century (Edinburgh, 1887), vol. iv, p.299.

---

[87] See Canmore ID 8640: https://canmore.org.uk/site/8640/forse-castle.
[88] NMRS, CA/28.
[89] NMRS, CA/20/1.

A simplistic assessment of the documentary history of Forse Castle in relation to the Sutherland family in Caithness would suggest that the earliest castle here would date to the late 14th century, in the control of Kenneth Sutherland, 3rd son of William, 5th Earl of Sutherland. Forse was held by the Sutherlands from the 14th – early 20th centuries, though it appears only to have been occupied up to the mid-17th century, when the dynastic centre was removed to a now-lost house at Nottingham farm.[90] Although the layout of the earthworks behind the castle is poorly understood, many feature masonry fragments and, in one building, the possible remains of an oven and a staircase.[91]

iv.ii): Bucholly

Bucholly Castle is located c.17km north of Castle of Old Wick, in the parish of Canisbay. As with Castle of Old Wick and Forse (and, indeed, a wider corpus of northern castles) it is situated on a rocky promontory above the sea. Although Rev. Millar's plan was published in *Castellated and Domestic Architecture*, a more detailed and accurate plan (created around the same time, c.1890), is discussed here (Figure 12 and Figure 13).
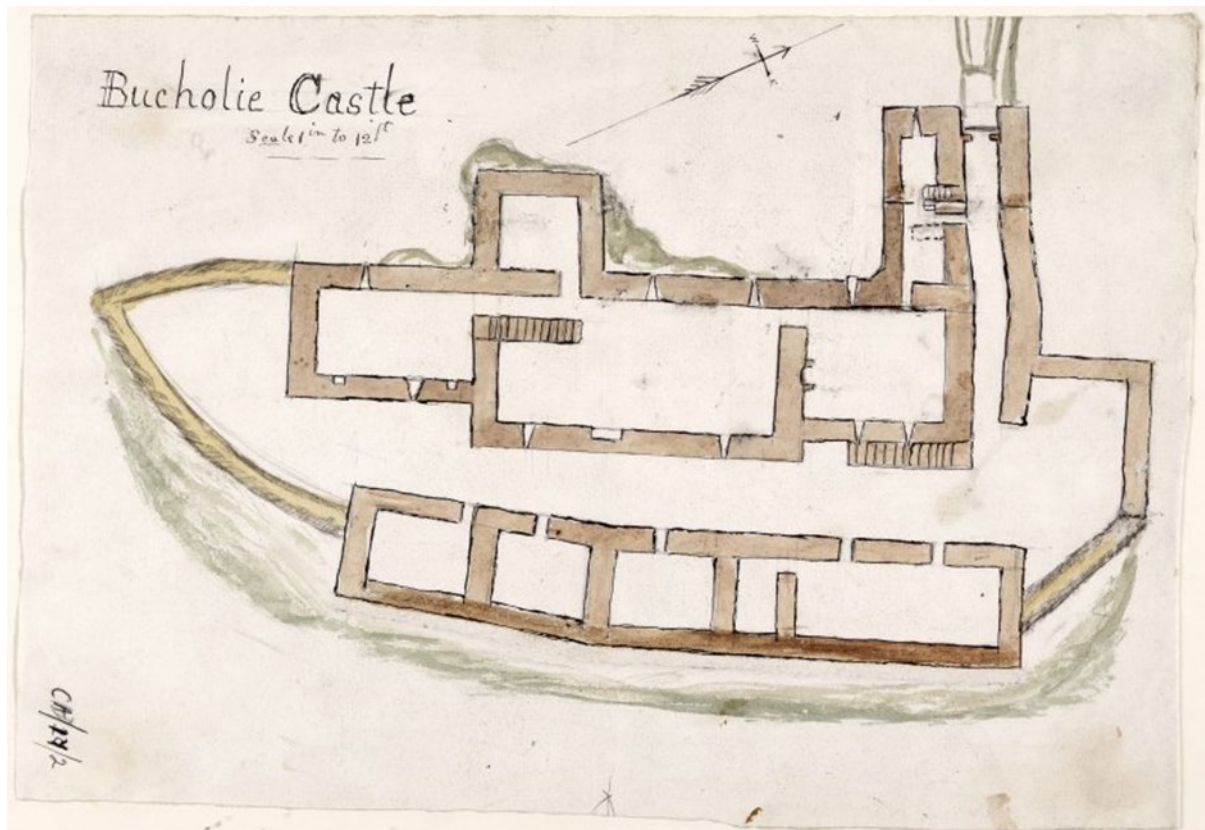

Figure 12: Plan of 'Bucholie Castle'. The weakness of this plan in contrast to that of Rev. Millar is that it lacks a plan of the two upper stories of the 'gatehouse'. © Courtesy of HES.

The most significant feature at Bucholly, the 'keep' or 'gatehouse' is 6.09 x 4.27m in footprint and stands to c.9m tall. Unlike either Forse or Old Wick, whose internal floors were laid upon internal scarcements, the first floor of Forse is constructed upon a vault. Its

---

lowermost walls are also thinner than the aforementioned castles, measuring 1.2m at ground floor level, receding to 0.7m above. The thinness of the upper wall segments makes it unlikely that there were three stories, but the tower could have stood high with a high-ceiled first-floor chamber. As with Forse, and now too at Old Wick, the castle was approached across a rock-cut ditch separating the promontory from the mainland via a narrow passage set between flanking buildings. Unlike at Forse or Old Wick, however, at Bucholly the passage appears to pass beneath a built whole, rather than between two distinct buildings. In traditional typological terms, therefore, the 'keep' at Bucholly is in fact a gatehouse, whilst those at Forse and Old Wick are more comfortably 'keeps' or towers.[92]
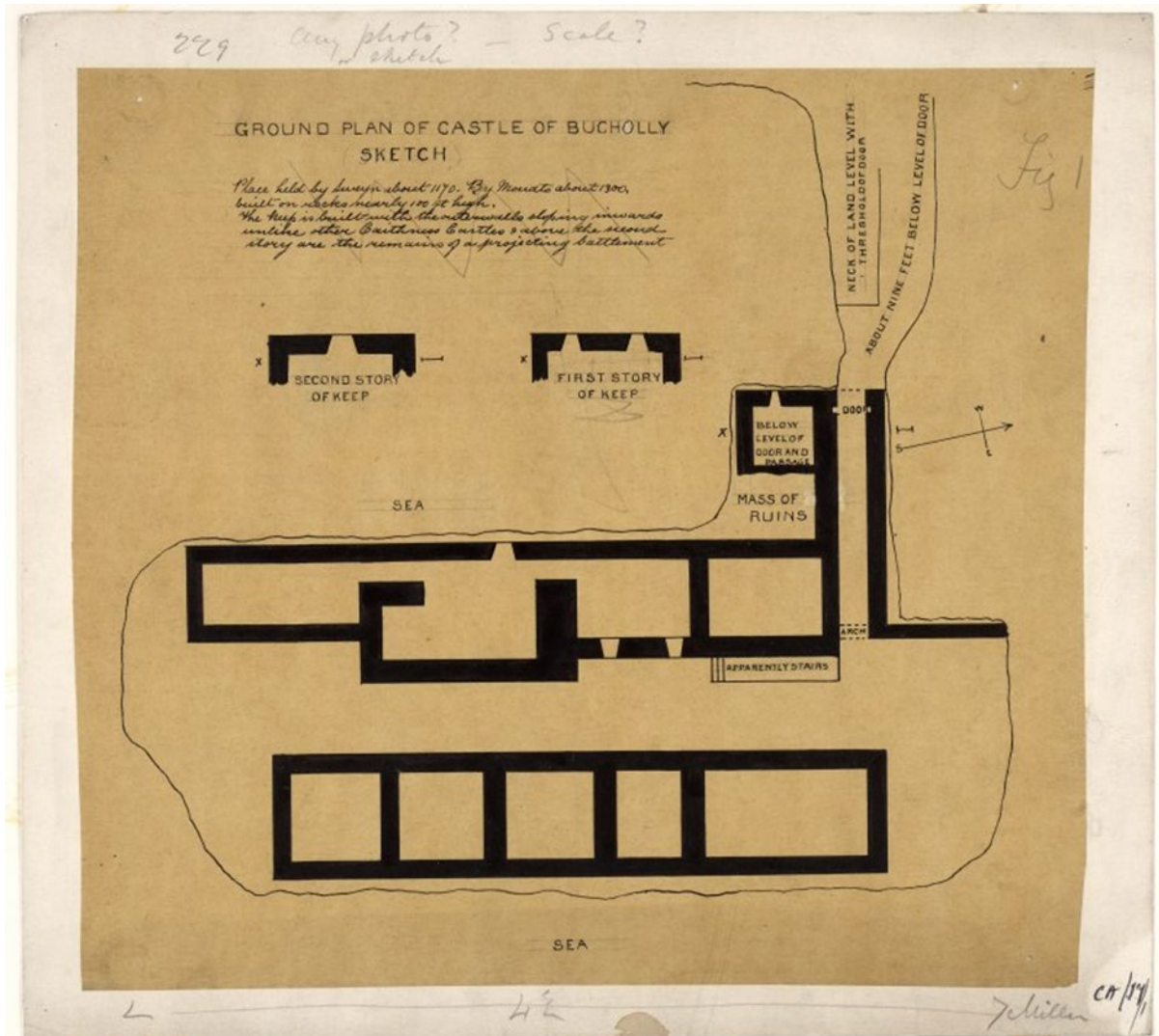

Figure 13: Plan of Bucholly Castle by Rev. Millar, c.1890. © Courtesy of HES.

The earthwork remains and fragments of buildings behind the tower are difficult to interpret from the two late 19th-century plans alone, and a renewed topographical survey would substantially advance our understanding of the site. It is apparent from a comparison

---

[92] To a significant extent this distinction is arbitrary, as there is no clear way of identifying the phasing of different components relating to the entry point at either of these sites. As such, the identifications here should be understood in terms of the paltry evidence for these sites' development, marking a beginning of interpretation rather than a definitive understanding.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 43

between the two plans above ([Figure 12](#) and [Figure 13](#)) that there has been significant collapse at the site in the late 19th century; the west range of Millar's plan is devoid of a squarish westward projecting chamber or tower which features on the anonymous, coeval watercolour plan.

The history of Bucholly is poorly understood, though it is speculated to have origins as a lordship centre in the early 14th century, making it slightly earlier in appearance than either Old Wick or Forse.[93] It is unlikely that the remains at the site are from this early period, and that the remains here testify to the last phase of its occupation.

iv.iii) Braal

Braal Castle is located c.25km west-north-west of Castle of Old Wick in the parish of Halkirk. It comprises a tower set above the River Thurso and seemingly cut off from its surrounds by a wet ditch.[94] It is probable, if unevidenced, that the site comprised a wider complex of buildings, of which only the tower – the likely place of lordly accommodation – survives. No recent survey, and only a single photograph, survives of the interior of the castle, which is in a perilous state and inaccessible owing to loose masonry. Millar's 1890 plan ([Figure 14](#)) is sufficient to suggest that the structure is more intricate and complex than any of towers examined thus far. A sequence of mural chambers and passages punctuate the wall thickness at each of the three levels which survive, below a parapet which was probably at the fourth storey. At 11.88 x 10.97m it is also the largest of the towers, with massive walls between 2.4–3m thick. It is the sole structure to have an integral stone staircase, though as with Forse and Old Wick, it retains what are probably garderobe chambers and like Old Wick, a fireplace. In common with Old Wick and in contrast to Forse, however, its fabric appears to comprise long, thin plain Caithness flag, and its quoins are unremarkable from the rest of the wall fabric, whilst only lintels, comprising more massive flags, are distinctive.

This distinction is to a certain extent continued in the interior of the tower.[95] Here, although local stone continued to be used, it was used in a way which references the use of ashlar blocks. This is clearest in the photograph of the windows at ground- and first-floor on the west wall; the voussoirs comprise thin flags bunched together with liberally-applied mortar.

The history of Braal is not fully understood, yet it may be inferred with a degree of confidence, drawing on Barbara Crawford's assessment, that Braal was a demesne estate and formal centre of the joint earldom of Orkney-Caithness. Furthermore, into the 13th century, it may perhaps represent the foremost lordship centre of the detached earldom of Caithness. If this context is accepted, then the sophistication of its construction in comparison to analogous sites already discussed is to a certain extent explicable.

---

[93] See Canmore ID 9301: https://canmore.org.uk/site/9301/bucholly-castle
[94] D. MacGibbon, T. Ross, *Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland* (1887), Vol. 3, p.137.
[95] Observations of the interior of the tower are limited to the interpretation of the single known photograph of its interior, NMRS, CA/10, from c.1900.
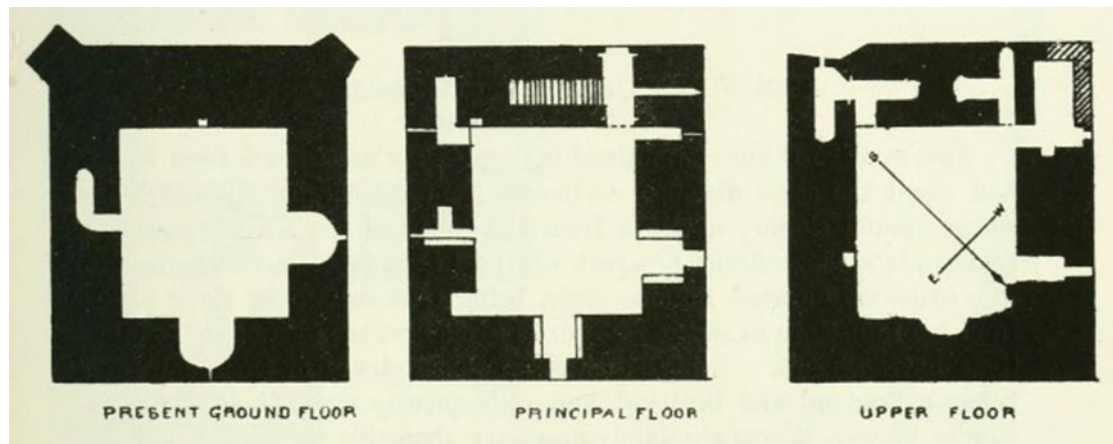
Figure 14: Plan of Braal Castle, Caithness, by Rev. Millar (1890). MacGibbon and Ross, D and T. (1887-92) The castellated and domestic architecture of Scotland from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries, Edinburgh. Vol. 3, 137.

iv.iv) Conclusion:

It is apparent from this brief survey of sites analogous to Castle of Old Wick that it sits within a loosely defined corpus whose characteristics vary from site to site. It must also be acknowledged, with a degree of dismay, that thinking on these sites has advanced little since the late 19th century. Although early attempts to draw parallels with these sites and Iron Age or early medieval remains are no longer accepted, the suggestion that Castle of Old Wick – and by extension sites analogous to it – have origins in a 12th-century castle tradition, is an idea which persists in the historiography.[96] This short study has suggested that origins in the later 14th to 15th centuries appear the most plausible; at the very least the surviving fabric relates to this period. Whether earlier occupation took place is moot, barring further evidence.

If this date is accepted as a new point of departure for discussion, then Castle of Old Wick and the sites discussed here form a corpus of castles emerging in northern Scotland during one of the kingdom's most tumultuous periods of political and social history. Although Caithness was untouched by the Wars of Independence, the environmental and pestilential problems of the later 14th century must have altered society, and consequently lordship, in this northernmost mainland county.

More work is needed, especially at those sites discussed here which are at risk from environmental threats. The survey of Castle of Old Wick has shown how much information can be gleaned from non-invasive approaches to standing buildings and earthworks.

v) Castle of Old Wick as a 12th-century castle

It is apparent from the discussion of historical material connected to the estate (versus the castle) of Old Wick that this territorial unit first appears in documentary evidence around the last quarter of the 14th century (so 1370s –1400s). The discussion has also noted

---

[96] (B. Crawford, *The Northern earldoms: Orkney and Caithness from AD 870 to 1470* (Edinburgh, 2013)) and S.J. Gibbs, 'Norse castles in Orkney', in P. Martin (ed.), *Castles and Galleys: A Reassessment of the Historic Galley Castles of the Norse-Gaelic Seaways* (Laxay, 2017), p.242.

Crawford's argument regarding the demesne estates of the earls of Orkney-Caithness were fragmented upon the inheritance of heiresses, of whom only Lady Joanna bore children, in the early 13th century. The estate of Old Wick was clearly among these lands, which therefore means that it comprised part of the earl's lands in the period before the Scottish political and cultural ascendency in Caithness, when rulers of Scandinavian cultural and political orientation dominated affairs in the county. Separately, it has also been noted how a place of lordship (perhaps a large farm or similar) called *Vík* appeared in *Orkneyinga saga* several times over the course of the 12th century. Separately again, it is precisely in the 12th century that *Orkneyinga saga,* in passing, records the construction of a *steinkastala* ('stone castle') on the island of Wyre in Orkney. On that island are the remains of a medieval complex at whose core is a small, plain stone tower (7.83 x 7.92m, with walls 1.75m thick) known as '**Cubbie Roo's Castle**'.[97] While there is yet to be a decisive piece of evidence which offers a clear date for this building, it is likely that the core building dates to around the time in which the *steinkastala* is referred to in the saga, around 1153.

These three strands of evidence appear to have led to the belief that Castle of Old Wick is the location of a 12th century castle: that Old Wick was a demesne estate held by the earls in the 12th century; that *Vík* appears in the saga; and that a plain stone tower is indicative of an early (read, 12th-century) construction, perhaps part of a larger corpus of such castles.[98] While no new piece of evidence has been presented here, it is obvious that this assertion cannot be supported on present evidence. To begin with, the evidence for castles in the 12th century in the earldom is extremely limited, but what evidence there is suggests they were built not by the earl, but by an emerging group of the nobility not drawn from the old landholding group of the earldom. Kolbein *hrúga*, the person credited with building **Cubbie Roo's Castle**, is one such person, and for all that Wyre is well situated for viewscapes, its place-name evidence does not suggest it was held in esteem by the highest ranks of landholders in Orkney. Next, it is reasonably clear that the *Vík* referred to in *Orkneyinga saga* refers to a lordship centre around the burgh of Wick itself, not Old Wick. On this basis the *saga* offers nothing to Old Wick. Lastly, it is apparent that the tower at Castle of Old Wick was not a solitary structure (nor, indeed, was that at **Cubbie Roo's**), perhaps not even in its earliest phase of occupation. Thus, the argument from typology – that the towers share comparable dimensions and proportions – is unsustainable. The evidence from the Brough of Deerness, which has been interpreted as a chiefly centre, forces us to keep an open mind about the architecture and spatial arrangements of what a 12th-century castle might look like.

More generally, it is unwise to unilaterally argue for a connection between the earliest phase of castle occupation and its appearance in documents: this applies as much to **Cubbie Roo's** as Castle of Old Wick, and in this sense the dating of both must rely on an accumulation of evidence. In this respect, the earliest phases of construction at Castle of Old Wick – the tower and associated features – need not represent the earliest phase of

---

[97] Anon., *HES Statement of Significance: Cubbie Roo's Castle* (2019), Accessible at: Cubbie Roo's Castle Statement of Significance | Hist Env Scotland (historicenvironment.scot).

[98] S.J. Gibbon, 'A survey of Norse castles in Orkney', in P. Martin (ed.), *Castles and galleys: a reassessment of the historic galley-castles of the Norse-Gaelic seaways* (Laxay, 2017), p.242; Crawford, *The Northern earldoms*, p.195.

occupation. In this sense, it is possible that Castle of Old Wick saw 12th-century occupation, but there is no evidence at present to support this view.

APPENDIX 3: DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

Castle of Old Wick is a site with a reasonably well documented history, though often this is only manifest in a passing reference to the site. The common perception of the site being connected to the earls of Caithness (also earls of Orkney) in the 12th century not directly addressed here, but rather the documentary evidence which either supports or rejects such an association is discussed.[99]

The place named *Vík* in Old Norse (meaning 'bay') is mentioned three times in the 13th-century source which is so important to understanding the central middle ages in Caithness, *Orkneyinga saga.*[100] All date to the 12th century. In the first reference (1142), a figure called Hroald hosted Earl Rognvald (c.1100-1158) at *Vík.*[101] There is little which is noteworthy in this passage, and it adds nothing to improving our understanding. Certainly, it is not apparent that where *Vík* is referred to, that either Wick or Castle of Old Wick is implied. The second reference to *Vík* (c.1143) notes that several individuals, fearful of a certain Margad Grimson operating out of Duncansby, fled to Hroald at *Vík* for protection.[102] Again, this reference adds nothing, only confirming Hroald held *Vík* and that he was evidently a figure of some political standing to enable protection offered by him from Margad's depredations to have meaningful substance to those who sought it. The final reference notes that, in the absence of Earl Erlend in Norway, his co-ruler Earl Harald spent the winter (including Christmas) residing at *Vík.*[103] As with the previous references, this gives no sense of where *Vík* might be, except that it is possible that this complex was a place of some sophistication if it were deemed suitable to host an earl.

It may be argued, without pushing the *Orkneyinga saga* data too much in one direction or another, that *Vík* was a lordly complex, probably a farm, at the time in which it appears in these events. This is certainly an argument from silence, but not an argument from absence. As noted, Hroald was deemed a figure of sufficient standing and means to both host Earl Rognvald and offer protection to those fleeing Duncansby. Later, *Vík* hosted another earl for Christmas. It is not controversial, therefore, to imagine *Vík* as being like other lordly centres which appear in similar contexts, and in the world of Late Norse society such centres are estate centres with an agricultural hinterland. The topography of such centres is varied, but in general are close to water and comprise clusters of buildings, among which is a hall building, significant for its ceremonial importance in events like feasting and hosting socially esteemed guests. Roger of Howden (late 12th century) identifies 'Wick' ('in Cathenes apud

---

[99] This association is discussed in, 'Architectural and artistic values'.

[100] (E.J. Cowan, 'Caithness in the sagas', in J.R. Baldwin (ed.) *Caithness: a cultural crossroads* (Edinburgh, 1982), p.27)

[101] Anderson, *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 84; ON: G. Vigfusson (ed.), *Icelandic sagas and other historical documents relating to the settlements and descents of the Northmen on the British isles* 91887), Vol. 1, pp 138-9. On the term, see A.W. Johnston, 'Scottish influence on Orkney', *SHR*, 13 (1916), p.217.

[102] (J. Anderson, *The Orkneyinga saga*, pp 122-3)

[103] (J. Anderson, *The Orkneyinga saga*, pp 118-9)

Wic') as the place where Harold, the younger of two earls of Orkney so-named, was killed in battle with the elder.[104]

There appear to be no further references to Wick, or *Vík*, in the entire of the 13th century, until there is an incidental record in the wardrobe accounts of the English king.[105] It might have been imagined that the records of the episcopate would be useful in some respects, but records of Caithness are apparently lost.[106] At the very least, it may be remarked that the name 'Wick' is that of the parish, and that the parish church is located in the core of the later medieval burgh. It is known, too, that Wick was a prebendary church of the bishopric when it was formally established at Dornoch in the early 13th century.[107] From the 4th–6th October 1290 Henry of Rye and Thomas of Braytoft, ambassadors for Edward I (1272-1308) stayed at Wick (so-named), it is reasonably assumed on a mission to bear witness to the passing of the young Margaret, Maid of Norway (1286-90) and heiress of the Kingdom of Scotland.[108] It seems more than likely that the ambassadors were aware of Margaret's death before they reached Caithness, but their journey nevertheless continued north for confirmatory purposes.

Their itinerary is useful in helping to identify what 'Wick', so-identified but not necessarily coterminous in location with the late medieval burgh, may have comprised. Aberdeen, Meikle Ferry (Sutherland), Hemlsdale, Spittal were all places capable and suitable for hosting esteemed guests (as agents of Edward I were). Crawford has speculated that some destinations were chosen for their owners' political ties and allegiances to Edward I.[109] In this context, Wick appears to have fulfilled the same role as *Vík* a century earlier, as relayed in *Orkneyinga saga*. This is hardly proof positive of what has been readily assumed previously, that *Vík* and Wick are the same place, but it does tend to confirm it.

The next reference of interest, and the first to specifically name Old Wick (versus 'Wick' or *Vík*) is found in an index of charters of 1629. Ascribed to the reign of Robert III (1390 – 1406), it records a grant 'to Neill Sutherland, of the town of Auldwick, in Caithness, with ane burgh of barony, and ane taillie'.[110] Although no castle is mentioned here per se, this represents the first realistic evidence for ascribing the remains outlined above a date. The reference to a 'town' should be understood in contemporary terms, as meaning 'farm

---

[104] A.O. Anderson, *Scottish annals from English chroniclers, A.D. 500 to 1286* (1908), pp 316-7; W. Stubbs , *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene* (1868), Vol. 4, p.11.

[105] That Wick was assigned as a prebendary church of the Bishopric of Caithness in Dornoch is inferred by its absence in the list of churches and lands assigned to the bishop's officers: (J.B. Brichan (ed.), *Origines Parochiales* (Edinburgh, 1855), Vol. 2, Part 2, p.601, fn. 5)

[106] (J.B. Craven, *A history of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Caithness* (Kirkwall, 1908), p.23)

[107] The history of the bishopric is beyond the scope of the present focus, but it has been noted that the formalisation at Dornoch probably confirms that the parishes of Caithness proper, alongside the parishes in Sutherland which formed additional prebendary churches, were well established by c.1224: (R.G. Cant, 'The medieval church in the North: Contrasting influences in the dioceses of Ross and Caithness', in J.R. Baldwin (ed.), *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland* (Edinburgh, 1986), p.53)

[108] (J. Anderson, *Orkneyinga saga* (Edinburgh, 1873), p.L, n.3)

[109] (B.E. Crawford, 'Scots and Scandinavians in medieaeval Caithness: a study of the period 1266-1375', in J.R. Baldwin (ed.), *Caithness: a cultural crossroads* (Edinburgh, 1982), p.63)

[110] W. Robertson (ed.), *An Index drawn up about the year 1629 of many Records of Charters* (Edinburgh, 1798), p.137, entry 2. For 'taillie', see Dictionaries of the Scots Language:: DOST :: tail3ie n (dsl.ac.uk), §2, 'The settlement of heritable property on a specified heir or line of heirs.'

settlement' rather than the modern understanding of an urban settlement. Similarly, reference to a 'burgh' should be understood in terms of the legal right that status conferred, rather than any recognition of an urban settlement. From examining the list of burghs of barony produced by Adams in 1978, it is apparent that many of these burghs were in fact farms (in the modern sense) appended to lordship centres, rather than burghs or towns in contemporary reckoning. The date for this now-lost charter is also very suspect; it is early for attested Caithness burghs of barony and would indeed be among the 12 oldest in all of Scotland, of the total 339 attested.[111] Most date to between the late 15th–17th centuries.[112]

The political world of Caithness in the 13th–14th centuries is especially difficult to reconstruct, due to the near total lack of documentary references. Crawford's 1982 study goes some way to bringing light to an otherwise murky period in the county's history, through a reconstructed inheritance of the lands of the earldom which passed into the hands of later lords. By this way, it is possible to frame the appearance of Neill Sutherland's grant in the reign of Robert III, even in a suspect document.

Crawford notes how the demesne lands of the earl of Caithness were fragmented upon the murder of Earl John (d.1231), whose two daughters, one of whom is suspected of being *Domina* ('Lady') Joanna, inherited half of the earldom lands.[113] Joanna's marriage to Freskin de Moravia appears to be the first introduction of the de Moravias, later Sutherlands, into Caithness. Joanna and Freskin's union saw half of the Caithness lands pass to the husband of their eldest daughter, Mary, who was Rannald Cheyne II (d.1305).[114] This union in turn saw half of the Caithness lands pass to Rannald Cheyne III (d.1341x53), who in turn died leaving two co-heiresses, Marie and Marjory.[115] Each of them inherited half of the lands of Caithness held by their father. While Mary's marriage to her second husband, John Keith, saw the Caithness lands pass to the Keiths of Inverugy, Marjory's marriage to Nicholas Sutherland of Duffus (*fl*. 1360x67-1427) saw the Sutherlands become holders of originally comital property in Caithness. Although it is unlikely that Nicholas Sutherland and Neill

---

[111] Caithness burghs of barony: Hempriggs (1705); Magnusburgh/Inver of Dunbeath (1624); Reay (1628); Scrabster (1526/7); Thurso (1633). Wick proper was a royal burgh in 1589. Of attested burghs of barony only Newton-on-Ayr (c.1314-1371), Prestwick (1165-74), both Ayrshire; Langton (1394), Berwickshire; Dunbar (13th cent.), Seton (1321), North Berwick (1381-88), all East Lothian; Buittle (1325), Urr (1262), Kirkcudbrightshire; Dalkeith (1401), Midlothian; West Linton (1306), Peeblesshire; Dunblane (13th-14th cent.), Perthshire, are earlier or roughly coeval. I.H. Adams, *The making of urban Scotland* (Montreal, 1978), appendix pp 278-80.

[112] Adams, *The making of urban Scotland*, appendix pp 278-80.

[113] Crawford, 'Scots and Scandinavians in medieaeval Caithness: a study of the period 1266-1375', p.66. The other daughter is unnamed, but may be Margaret, who is elsewhere attested as marrying Simon Fraser (d.1333).

[114] There is a tradition that the Cheynes held lands in Caithness thanks to a grant of David II. No such document has been found, but it may demonstrate evidence of a confirmatory document. J.T. Calder, T. Sinclair, *Sketch of the Civil and Traditional History of Caithness, from the Tenth Century* (Wick, 1887), p.89, fn*. The marriage of their younger daughter, Christian, to William Fedrey, appears to have been childless. A charter of the reign David II saw Reginald Cheyne receive ¼ of Caithness lands from Fedrey: Robertson, *An Index drawn up about the year 1629 of many Records of Charters*, p.62, entry 22.

[115] 'Sigma', 'Some notes on the name of Cheyne (Chen, Chyen, or Cheen)', *Notes & Queries*, series 7, Vol. 10 (July-December 1890), pp 223-4; Robertson, *An Index drawn up about the year 1629 of many Records of Charters*, p.34, entry 17.

Sutherland are the same person (the dates do not align), they may be father and son – Nicholas and Neill are used interchangeably in this period.[116] A later genealogy of the Sutherlands records that the family's lands in Caithness were detached from the tenure of the Sutherland of Duffus and given, it would seem as a dowry, to an Oliphant husband in marriage with a Sutherland daughter.[117] What Crawford's theory suggests is that those families connected to the Keiths and Sutherlands later in history, who hold fractions of land for dating back to the 14th century, are inheritors of demesne estates of the earls of Caithness since the 13th century, and probably earlier into the 12th too. A reference from c.1438 may indicate the comital lands acquired by the Sutherland family following the union of Marjory Cheyne and Nicholas Sutherland of Duffus may have included parts of Wick. Margaret Mureff, who was from Moray and who was married to their son Henry, was recorded on her death in c.1438 holding a halfpenny's worth of lands on the east side of Wick, with houses there 'abon the sande'.[118] These may have been dowry lands accorded her on her marriage to Henry.

Apart from the above grant of barony, the first reference of Old Wick is in a grant made by Alexander Sutherland of Duffus to a landowner in Caithness, which was issued at 'Aldweke' on 20th January 1469/70.[119] The Sutherland daughter referred to above is likely Christian of Sutherland who married Sir William Oliphant c.1497, and among these lands were the lands of Berriedale and Old Wick.[120] They are recorded in a confirmatory grant of 1497 by James IV, who affirmed that their eldest son George would inherit the lands of Duffus in Moray and the lands of Berriedale and 'Aldwik' in Caithness.[121] This document may have partly been written to substantiate their claims to these lands: a year earlier, in 1496, Christian Sutherland and William Oliphant complained that William Sinclair, 2nd Earl of Caithness and William Sutherland of Querrelwood, illegally held 'the howsis and strenthis of Auldewick [and] Berydaile.'[122] However, George appears to have died prematurely, and Charles their second son was murdered.[123] This killing is disclosed in an agreement to adjudication between the aggrieved party Christian and her eldest surviving son Andrew Oliphant on the one hand, and the aggressor party, William Sutherland of Duffus on the other. In addition to Charles being murdered at the instigation or with the support of William, the castles of Berriedale and Old Wick were also occupied, damaged and looted:

> […] for the slachtir of umquhile Charlis Oliphant […] And anent the taking and withalding of the howsis of Baridaill and Alwik fra the said Cristian and Andro and

---

[116] Nicolas Sutherland resigned his barony of Thoroboll and Proncy to his son, Henry, in the reign of Earl Robert (c.1370 x 1427): R. Gordon, *A genealogical history of the Earldom of Sutherland* (Edinburgh, 1813), p.61

[117] Gordon, *A genealogical history of the Earldom of Sutherland*, p.54.

[118] Balfour Paul, The Scots Peerage (1904), Vol. 3, p. 192.

[119] National Records of Scotland, RH1/2/266, 'Transcripts and photocopies of Miscellaneous Charters and Papers'.

[120] (J. Anderson, *The Oliphants in Scotland. With a selection of original documents from the charter chest at Gask* (Edinburgh, 1879), p.LI)

[121] *RMS*, ii, 2371, pp 504-5.

[122] RPS, 1496/6/57: Records of the Parliaments of Scotland (rps.ac.uk).

[123] RMS, iv, 745, p. 167 fn.1.

anense the spoliation awaytaking and withalding fra tham of all maner of gudis beand in the said howsis [...][124]

[...] for the slaughter of the late Charles Oliphant [...]. And concerning the taking and withholding of the houses of Berriedale and Old Wick from the said Christian and Andrew, and concerning the spoliation, carrying off and withholding from them all manner of goods being in the said houses [...]

The precise dates of these events are not recorded, but probably took place between William's succeeding to his father's titles in 1507 and the date of the adjudicatory document in 1517.[125] Separately, in 1507 Christian Sutherland agreed a settlement following an extensive legal case with William Sutherland of Duffus's father, William Sutherland of Querrelwood, over the question of Christian's inheritance.[126] Both parties eventually argued their cases at the Curia in Rome. In the settlement, Querrelwood took the Moray lands (including Duffus itself), while Christian held the Caithness estates and lands in West Lothian. Christian is referred to again in a document of 1511 residing 'at her duelland place of Aldweke'.[127] Later, Andrew Oliphant held the castle by 1521, when he was recorded granting saisine to certain lands near Duncansby to William Grot in 1521, and the document was issued at Auldwick.[128] In 1526, partly resulting from the exhaustive financial strain resulting from his mother's legal case against Querrelwood and his inability to fully take control of his estates, Andrew sold his estates to his cousin Laurence, 3rd Lord Oliphant (d.1566).[129] In the reign of James V, in the year 1538, the king confirmed to William Earl Marischal and Lady Margaret Keith possession of quarter of the mill of 'Auld-Wik'.[130] Although no castle is mentioned, it is apparent from this fraction of the property that the lands of Old Wick may have formed part of the earldom estates in the 13th century. The revenues from the estates of Berriedale and Old Wick were briefly in the hands of Henry Kempt in 1540 and again in 1542 following the death of Andrew Oliphant. In 1541, control of the estates was given to Alexander Innes, and included income from 'Newtoun of Auldweik' and 'Mylntoun of Auldweik'. In 1549 Queen Mary confirmed to Laurence extensive properties in Caithness including 'the lands of Auldweik' as well as 'the town of Wik, with the fourth part [¼] of the salmon fishings'.[131] A document of around 1552-3 notes that the tenant of Auld-Weik, here perhaps the lands rather than the castle, was Thomas

---

[124] Anderson, Oliphants of Scotland, pp 54-5, document no. 111.

[125] Several un-consulted archival sources may illuminate this case: NRS, B22/22/1 – Protocol Books of Peter Marche, Canongate, S(cottish) C(atholic) A(rchive): SCA/GD/175/1/2, microfilm and xerox copies of the Sacra Romana Rota relating to Scotland. Among these, a digest of cases for Aberdeen (SCA/GD/175/1/2/74) and a calendar (SCA/175/1/2/55) covering the dates relevant to the dispute over Christian Sutherland's legitimacy. Many thanks to M. Schmueckle (Ph.D. student, University of Edinburgh) for sharing aspects of their research and for signposting these sources.

[126] Calder, Sinclair, Sketch of the Civil and Traditional History of Caithness, from the Tenth Century, p 284.

[127] H. Rose, L. Shaw, C. Innes (ed), Genealogical deduction of the family of Rose of Kilravock (Edinburgh, 1848), p. 182.

[128] Calder, Sinclair, Sketch of the Civil and Traditional History of Caithness, from the Tenth Century, p 284.

[129] RMS, iii, 353, p. 79

[130] *RMS*, iii, 1798, pp 400-1.

[131] Anderson, *The Oliphants in Scotland*, p.LIII.

Mowet.[132] The Master of Oliphant confirmed to Hugh Groat lands in Duncansby in 1557, and the documented was signed at Auldwick.[133] The late 1560s saw the Oliphants join their kinsmen the Sutherlands in feud with the Sinclair family lead by George Sinclair, Earl of Caithness. The earl complained to the Privy Council of crimes committed against his men, reporting that the alleged criminals had fled to Berriedale Castle, a castle of Laurence Lord Oliphant.[134]

It was at Castle of Old Wick in 1569 that Laurence, 4th Lord Oliphant (d.1593) was besieged by John, Master of Caithness (d. 1576), son of George the 4th Earl. A quarrel between Lord Oliphant and his host Master Thomas Keir of Wick on the one hand, and Andrew Keith of Sibster, William Sutherland the younger of Clyne and his brother John Sutherland, totalling 24 people on the other, spilled into bloodshed outside Wick. Swords were drawn and several people killed or injured, after which Lord Oliphant fled to Old Wick.[135] Hearing that Andrew Keith was planning a further attack on Master Keir's house, Laurence dispatched servants to Wick to protectively escort Master Keir to Old Wick. However, these servants were shot at and injured by bowmen in the service of Andrew Keith at the market cross of Wick. The following day, Alexander Sutherland – father of the abovementioned John who was killed in the original affray – attacked and carried off some of Oliphant's tenants, while John, Master of Caithness besieged 'the said Lord Oliphantis place and castell of Auldweik' for eight days, until a lack of water prompted Laurence to surrender.[136] However, 'nochtwithstanding the quhilk, the said Maister and his hail company continewit still at the said assege and departit nocht thairfra quhill the said Lord Oliphant wes compellit to rander to their handis thir his servandis, viz., Sir James Layng, Patrick Ochtirlony, Maister Thomas Keir, Johnne Keir, and Johnne Law, messenger, quhome presentlie they detene captive […]'.[137] This particular detail may be interpreted as evidence that the siege was more destructive than the circumstances of the besieged mandated. Though the feud was settled soon after following pleas to the Crown by Oliphant, it reappeared in 1587 and 1591.[138] The Crown briefly reported income from the quarter of the mill of Old Wick in 1581–2,[139] but it is not clear whose portion this implied, for Lord Oliphant died a decade later in 1593.

Produced three years after the siege, Abraham Ortelius' 1573 *Scotiae tabula* labels it "*Old:wÿko*" is among the earliest attested appearances of Old Wick on a map.[140] It appears in subsequent maps of Scotland, largely undertaken by Dutch cartographers, in the late

---

[132] *RMS*, iv, 745, p.167 fn.1. A Thomas Mowet was the husband of one of Andrew Oliphant's daughters, Helen J. Balfour. Paul, *The Scots Peerage*, p. 542.

[133] Calder, Sinclair, *Sketch of the Civil and Traditional History of Caithness, from the Tenth Century*, p.285.

[134] Anderson, *The Oliphants in Scotland*, p.LIV.

[135] These Sutherlands were close kin to the Sinclairs, but also of Oliphant.

[136] Anderson, *The Oliphants in Scotland*, p.LVI-II.

[137] Anderson, *The Oliphants in Scotland*, p.LVII: "none withstanding the which, the said Master and his whole company continued still with the besieging and did not depart from there until the said Lord Oliphant was compelled to render to their hands [e.g. custody] his servants, namely … whom presently they detain captive."

[138] J. Balfour Paul, *The Scots peerage* (1904), Vol. 6, p.547.

[139] *Exchequer Rolls*, xxi, p.469/fol. 132.

[140] NLS, shelfmark Marischal 2.

16th–17th centuries, although many of these are probably derivative of Ortelius'.[141] Old Wick does not appear in Robert Gordon and Joan Blaeu's 1654 kingdom-wide portrayal of Scotland.[142] The Latin text accompanying the map mentions, in Caithness, the castles of Sinclair-Girnogoe, Ackergill, Keiss, Mey, Dunbeath, Berriedale and Dounreay.[143] However, Old Wick may have been one of those '*multa alia non spernenda ædificia*,'[144] and indeed it appears in a more detailed view of Caithness published at the same time, as a settlement of some sort.[145] Timothy Pont's more detailed map of northern Scotland published by Blaeu in 1654 does feature Old Wick as either a substantial township, castle or settlement.[146] Pont's travels to Orkney (perhaps via Caithness) in the late 1590s, as well as his appointment as minister to Dunnet parish north of Wick in 1600 or 1601, probably makes his representation of Caithness the more up to date.[147] It features in subsequent maps too, as a settlement which may or may not include the castle.[148] William Roy's (1747-1755) military map of the area shows 'Old Castle of Wick' as comprising only the extant masonry tower, with the buildings on the promontory no longer surviving.[149]

By 1606 it appears that the Sinclair earls of Caithness were in control of many of the lands in Caithness discussed above, '*quas Laurentius dom[inus] Oliphant in favorem dicti Geo[rge] resignavit*'.[150] These estates, listed in order of importance and significance, were firstly, Berriedale, with its water and salmon fisheries; and secondly, the lands and two mills of Auldwick. The extent of the earl's estate was enormous, comprising many estates probably held by the earls in the 13th century, such as the comital estate of Murkle ('Mwrkill')[151] and later centres like Aikergill and lands connected to Braal ('Subuster-brawle', 'Brawlbynd'). In 1612 the estates of the earl were confirmed again, and half of the mill of 'Auldweik' was held, but whilst the castles of Forse, Thurso and Aikergill were mentioned, no such reference appears for Old Wick.[152] In 1616, many of these lands were confirmed by the king to John Murray, burgess and merchant of Edinburgh, previously held by George, Earl of

---

[141] Only maps available on NLS maps website were considered. Old Wick (variously rendered) appears in John Leslie's *Scotiae Regni Antiqvissimi Accvrata Descriptio*, 1578 (NLS Marischal 4); Gerhard Mercator's *Scotia Regnum*, c.1595 (Marischal 5); Mercator's *Scotia Regnum* [north-east sheet], 1595 (EMS.s.4a); William Hole's *Scotia Regnum*, 1607 (Marischal 8); John Speed's *The Kingdome of Scotland*, 1610/27 (Marischal 10), Speed's *The Kingdome of Scotland*, 1662 (EMS.s.9B), Willem Blaeu's *Scotia Regnum*, 1635 (Marischal 21) and Hondius Hendrik's *Scotiae pars septenntrionalis*, 1636 (pub'd 1662) (EMS.s.660a).

[142] NLS, shelfmark EMW.X.015, 'Cathenesia'.

[143] NLS, Latin text of Blaue's *Atlas*, p.189 (f.116), Blaeu Latin.doc (nls.uk), accessed 11-2-20. These castles also appear as identified places on the map.

[144] "Many other not displeasing buildings"; NLS, Latin text of Blaeu's *Atlas*, p.189 (f.116).

[145] NLS, shelfmark EMW.X.015.

[146] NLS, shelfmark EMW.X.015. It is deemed significant by the application of red ink to its icon.

[147] On Pont's life: D. Grout, 'The elusive Timothy Pont (c.1564-c.1614)', NLS website, Blaeu Atlas of Scotland - Maps - National Library of Scotland (nls.uk), accessed 11-02-20.

[148] Jansson's *Extimae Scotiae pars septentrionalis* […], 1659 (EMS.s.216); Moll's *The Shires of Caithness and Sutherland*, 1745 (EMS.b.2.1(30)).

[149] British Library Maps, C.9.b 38/1b.

[150] *RMS*, vi, 1758, p.640: "[lands] which Laurence Lord Oliphant had resigned in favour of the aforementioned George [Sinclair earl of Caithness]."

[151] Identified by Crawford as belonging to the earl: Crawford, 'Scots and Scandinavians in medieaeval Caithness: a study of the period 1266-1375', p.64.

[152] *RMS*, vii, 776, pp 286-7.

Caithness and his son William, Lord Berriedale.[153] In 1622, the lands were held by David Murray, Lord Scone, and a favourite of James VI, with the consent of the earl of Caithness and his son.[154] Here, as elsewhere, the two mills of the lands of Old Wick were specified. A charter of 1661 confirmed to the earl and his heir, his lands held of the king, in great detail. It included 'the lands of Auldweik, with houses and mills thereof', as well as half of the Mill of Auldweik.[155] Six years later (1667) these lands were leased to the Edinburgh merchant Thomas Calderwood for a lump sum of £5764.[156] The township and lands of 'Auldweik' were mentioned in a long list of lands leased out in return for a lump sum in 1671, and again no castle is mentioned.[157] In 1691 the lands of Tellstane (renamed Hempriggs) and Old Wick were purchased by Sir William Dunbar.[158] In none of these instances, since 1606, is the castle of Old Wick mentioned, though other castles – Berriedale, Sinclair-Girnigoe, Thurso-be-East, Forse – are occasionally noted. This may suggest the Castle of Old Wick was no longer in use as an administrative centre for estates in the area.

A passing reference from 1698 suggests that this was the case; an 1890 account of extracts held by the National Records of Scotland, records a certain Michall Lamb as 'indweller in the banks of Oldwick'.[159] This needn't suggest that the site was ruined or decayed, but rather that it was being leased out as a property like any other, rather than being treated differently for being a castle.

There is some silence in the published records for the next half-century,[160] before which the lands of Old Wick were granted to a Captain Scott in 1753.[161] By 1762, when the Bishop of Caithness recorded in passing that he saw Castle of Old Wick, which was 'now a ruin'.[162] In 1874 a visitor to Castle of Old Wick inscribed their name and the date onto a lintel stone in the castle.[163] Around 1910, John Ross, retired watchmaker of Longbury, Oldwick, excavated a timber from the earthworks of the castle and gave it to the museum of Wick Public Library in 1950. Its present whereabouts is unknown.[164] The site was taken into State guardianship in 1957, given by the Dunbar family. In 1987 Caithness County Council excavated and laid the current path through the earthworks to the north-east side of the tower.

---

[153] *RMS*, vii, 1508, pp 544-5.
[154] *RMS*, viii, 251, p.86
[155] *RMS*, xi, 54, pp 23-7.
[156] *RMS*, xi, 1070, pp 534-5.
[157] Thomson, *Inqvisitionvm ad capellam domini regis retornatarvm*, Vol. 1, doc. no. 28.
[158] (J. Henderson, *Caithness family history* (Edinburgh, 1884), p.221)
[159] (T. Hutton Johnston, '356. John Gow, the Pirate', *The Scottish Antiquary, or, Northern Notes & Queries*, Vol. 5 (1886), p.184)
[160] Records in NRS, GD112/58/201, 'Miscellaneous writs of various lands in Caithness', covers part of this period (1656-c.1700), but a shortness of time has prevented a study of these records.
[161] NRS, SIG1/157/19, 'Signature of the lands of Oldwick granted to Capt John Scott (Scot).'
[162] (Craven, *A history of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Caithness*, p.275)
[163] See Canmore DP 232060: https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1521904
[164] 'Relic of 'Old Man of Wick' for Museum', *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (8 April 1950), p. 8.

1390x1406	Grant 'to Neill Sutherland, of the town of Auldwick, in Caithness, with ane burgh of barony, and ane taillie'. Uncertain authenticity.
1469/70	Alexander Sutherland of Duffus makes a grant of property to James Birsbane, dated at 'Aldweke'.
1496	Complaint by Christian Sutherland that William Sinclair 2nd Earl of Caithness and William Sutherland of Querrelwood were illegally holding 'the howsis and strenthis of Auldewik [and] Berydaile'.
1497	Confirmation grant of James IV that George Oliphant would inherit the lands of Duffus in Moray and the lands of Berriedale and 'Aldwik' in Caithness.
1511	Summons on behalf of James IV to Christian Sutherland, 'the spouse of the umquhile William Oliphant of Berriedale', 'at her duelland place of Aldweke'.
1517	Agreement to adjudication between Christian Sutherland, Andrew Oliphant, and William Sutherland of Duffus, regarding the murder of Charles Oliphant and the 'And anent the taking and withalding of the howsis of Baridaill and Aldwik […] and anense the spoliation awaytaking and withalding frat ham of all maner of gudis beand in the said howsis'.
1521	Andrew Oliphant confirms seisin given to William Grot, issued at Auldwick.
1526	Andrew Oliphant sells rights to estate including Old Wick to cousin Laurence, 3rd Lord Oliphant.
1538	James V confirms to William Earl Marischale and Lady Margaret Keith possession of ¼ of mill of 'Auld-Wik'.
1540	Henry Kempt confirmed in tenure of revenues from estates of Berriedale and Old Wick.
1541	Alexander Innes received income from 'Newtoun of Auldweik' and 'Mylntoun of Auldweik'.
1542	Henry Kempt confirmed in tenure of revenues from estates of Berriedale and Old Wick.
1549	Mary I confirmed to Laurence Oliphant 'the lands of Auldweik' as well as 'the town of Wik, with the fourth part [¼] of the salmon fishings'.
1552-3	Thomas Mowet recorded as tenant of Auld-Weik, Mowet may be the husband of one of Andrew Oliphant's daughters, Helen.
1557	Master of Oliphant confirmed to Hugh Groat lands in Duncansby, signed at Auldwick.

1569	Siege of Castle of Old Wick by Sinclairs and allies. Attack was successful, privy council description may suggest significant damage to complex.
1606	Earl of Caithness in possession of former Oliphant lands in Caithness including the lands and two mills of Auldwick.
1612	Earl of Caithness' estates confirmed again, including ½ the mill of 'Auldweik'. Castles at Forse, Thurso, Ackergill mentioned, no mention of castle at Old Wick.
1616	Lands of Old Wick confirmed to John Murray, Edinburgh burgess and merchant.
1622	Lands held by David Murray, Lord Scone.
1661	Confirmation charter to Earl of Caithness held of the king, including 'the lands of Auldweik, with houses and mills thereof', as well as ½ of the Mill of 'Auldweik'.
1667	Thomas Calderwood, Edinburgh merchant, purchased lease township and lands of 'Auldweik', for lump sum.
1671	Township and lands of 'Auldweik' in list of lands leased for a lump sum, no reference to castle.
1691	Lands of Tellstane (renamed Hempriggs) and Old Wick were purchased by Sir William Dunbar.
1698	'Michall Lamb' recorded as 'indweller in the banks of Oldwick'. Unclear if reference is to castle (plausible) or other feature.
1753	Lands of Old Wick were granted to a Captain Scott.
1762	Bishop of Caithness recorded in passing that he saw Castle of Old Wick, was 'now a ruin'.
1874	Visitor to Castle of Old Wick inscribed their name and the date of inscription onto lintel in castle.
1910	Timber from the earthworks of the castle excavated, given to Wick Public Library in 1950. Present location unknown.
1957	Castle taken into State guardianship.
1987	Caithness County Council excavated a path through earthworks on north-east side of tower.

APPENDIX 4: SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

2009	Survey of cliff-face remains on north-west side of castle by Kirkdale Archaeology.
2015	Earthwork and standing buildings survey of castle by Dixon et al.
2021	Recovery and analysis of in-situ timber fragment from joist hole within stone tower by Dendrochronicle.

Historic Environment Scotland – Scottish Charity No. SC045925
Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

Castle of Old Wick 57