



**Evaluation Report No. 164**

**Carrickfergus Castle  
Carrickfergus  
Co. Antrim  
License No. AE/08/115**

Cormac McSparron

### Site Specific Information

Site Name: Carrickfergus Castle  
Townland: Carrickfergus  
County: Antrim  
Grid Ref.: J41438725  
SMR No.: Ant 52:059  
Current Land Use: State Care Monument  
Intended Land Use: State Care Monument  
State Care[X] Scheduled [  ]  
Other [  ]  
Excavation License No: AE/08/115  
Planning Ref / No. : N/A  
Dates of Monitoring: 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> April and 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of October  
Archaeologist Present: Cormac McSparron

### Brief Summary

Archaeological monitoring of replacement of service pipes, was carried out at ground to the north of the gatehouse of Carrickfergus Castle, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim. The excavated trenches followed the line of pre-existing pipes. A basalt block wall was encountered in the section of the northern most trench, Trench 2. It is thought most likely to date to the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, based on a photograph from the NIEA's photographic archive, although there was no artifactual or stratigraphic evidence to confirm this.

### Type of monitoring

Trench 1 was excavated manually under archaeological supervision of the license holder. Trench 2 was excavated both manually and mechanically. It was initially unsupervised but later supervised by the license holder.

### Size of area opened

It was initially proposed that a 10m trench would be excavated running from the existing path at the front of the entrance to the castle gatehouse, north down a grass slope, to connect with pipe-work at the bottom. It was then proposed that a 3m trench, Trench 1, be excavated at the top of the slope and a smaller 1m trench be manually excavated at the base of the slope, with a special pipe renewal machine utilized to replace the pipe. Unfortunately this proved unsuccessful and a second 3m trench, Trench 2, was partly manually and partly mechanically excavated at the base of the slope.

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## Brief account of the monitoring

### *Introduction*

Carrickfergus Castle is a complex multiphase fortification, originating in the twelfth century, which has been addressed comprehensively by McNeill (1980). The Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork was requested by Paul Logue of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to carry out monitoring of the replacement of service pipes running from the castle. This was carried out between 23rd and 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008. Due to engineering complications a wider trench was dug at the foot of the bank in October 2008. Andrew Gault of the NIEA visited the site and observed that this excavation had revealed some walling. The CAF was contacted and the monitoring was recommenced on the 6<sup>th</sup> October continuing to the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2008.

### *Excavation*

The evaluation consisted of the archaeological supervision of: Trench 1 a manually excavated stretch of trench 3m long, by 0.5m wide and 0.7m deep, running north from the edge of the entrance footpath at the front of the gatehouse, down a grassy slope towards the Marine Highway; and Trench 2 a mechanically excavated trench 3m long by 1.15m wide and 1.5m deep, in line with the first stretch of trench, at the bottom of the grassy slope (figure 1 & 2).

**Trench 1** This trench was 3m long by 0.5m wide and 0.7m deep. It ran north from the edge of the entrance footpath at the castle, down a steep grassy slope. (figure 2 and plate 1). The sod in this trench was above a clay / loam topsoil layer, which was itself situated on a made-up layer of building rubble, modern rubbish and warning tape for electrical service cables. The pre-existing pipe, dating from the 1960's, was found at the base of this trench. No archaeological artefacts or strata were uncovered during the excavation of this trench. At no stage was subsoil uncovered during the excavation.

**Trench 2** Due to engineering difficulties it was necessary to excavate a larger trench at the base of the slope (figure 2). This trench was 3m long, 1.15m wide and 1.5m deep. Its south end was situated 4.5m north of Trench 1, which it was in line with. The excavation of this trench cut through a number of modern rubble and earth fills (C. 1, 2, 3 and 4) and a modern, concrete block built, manhole (C.6) (figure 3, plate 2 & 4). In addition however an older stone built wall was revealed in section (C. 5) (figure 3, plate 2, 3, 4 & 5). It was constructed from dressed basalt blocks bonded with mortar. Although the wall had clearly been buried for several decades at least the mortar between the basalt blocks was intact and in good condition, possibly indicative of the wall having been re-pointed not long before its burial and modern sand and cement mortar having been utilized. Excavation of this trench was not deep enough to uncover the base of this wall fragment and only relatively modern strata were disturbed making it impossible to judge, from stratigraphy alone, the antiquity of this masonry.

### **Interpretation**

The manually excavated Trench 1 revealed nothing of archaeological interest. The mechanically excavated Trench 2 although it did not actually remove any archaeological strata, structures or artefacts did reveal a very well constructed dressed basalt block wall. This is an unexpected discovery. The area had apparently been reduced to bedrock by Dudley Waterman during his excavations at the front of the gatehouse in 1950 (Waterman 1952). It is possible however that Waterman would not have reported the finding of relatively modern masonry. A photograph from the NIEA archive suggests a possible explanation. Plate 4 and 5 show Carrickfergus castle in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. If the height of the serviceman in the bottom left of the photo is taken to be approximately 1.8m, the masonry pier at the base of the staircase can be estimated as being 18m due north of the door of the castle, approximately the same position as the masonry uncovered in October 2008. This does not of course prove that the wall is not older, nevertheless the regular cut stone masonry is different in character from the medieval

walls and revetments uncovered by Dudley Waterman and on balance a nineteenth or early twentieth century origin for this wall is perhaps most likely.

### **Recommendations**

There are no recommendations for future work.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Dr. Tom McNeill and Ruairi O'Baoill for their help in interpreting the masonry uncovered and Gareth Edwards for his assistance with the photographic archive of the NIEA.

### **Bibliography**

McNeill, T.E., 1981 *Carrickfergus Castle*, Belfast, HMSO.

Waterman, D.M., 1952 "Excavations at the entrance to Carrickfergus Castle, 1950", *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 15, 103-118.

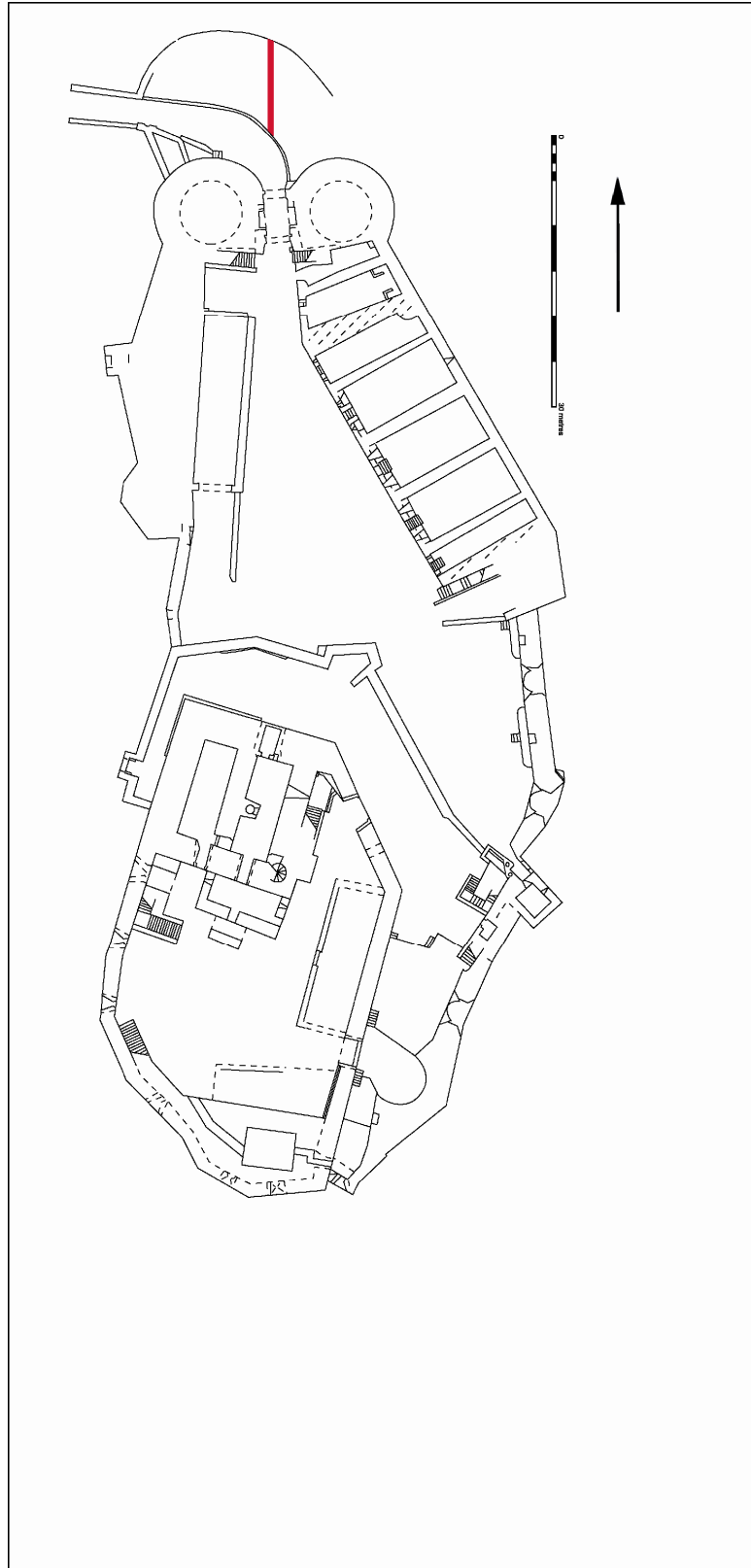


Figure 1: Plan of Carrickfergus Castle showing location (in red) of line of pipe replacement.

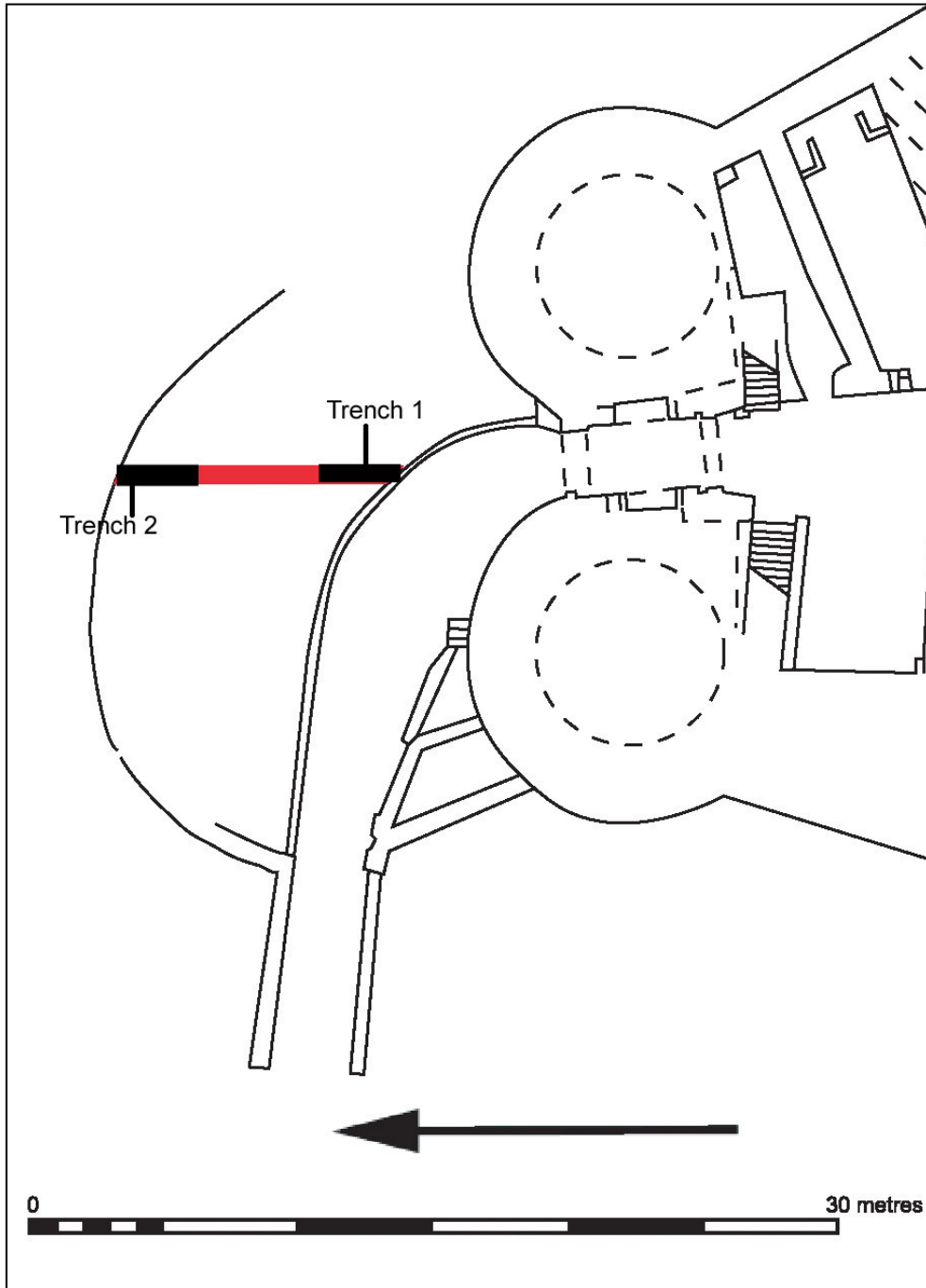


Figure 2: Detailed location map showing Trench 1 and Trench 2.

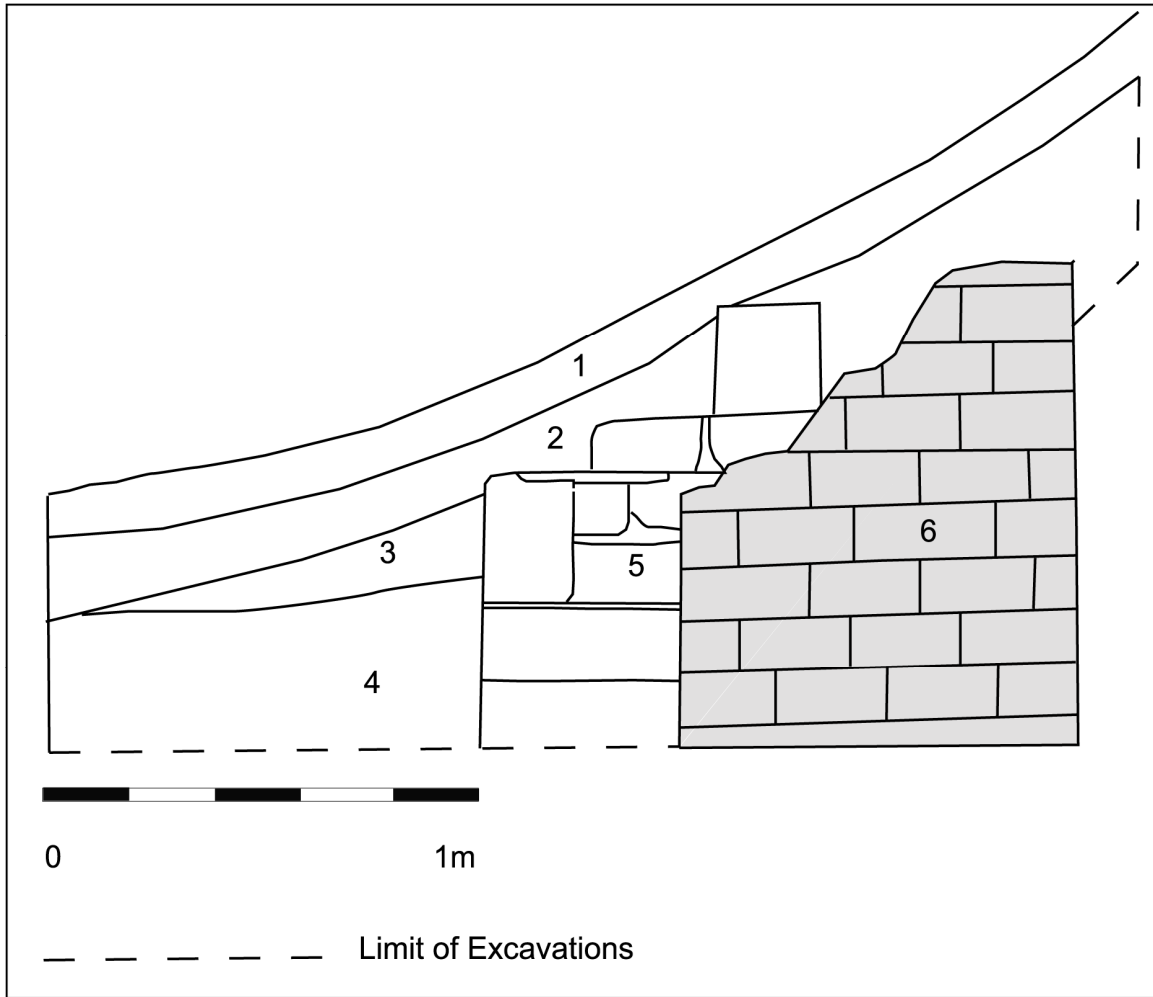


Figure 3: Section drawing of east face of Trench 2, showing modern concrete block manhole wall (6), basalt block wall (5) and modern rubble and soil layers (1),(2),(3) and (4).



Plate 1: Trench 1 from the north showing existing services.



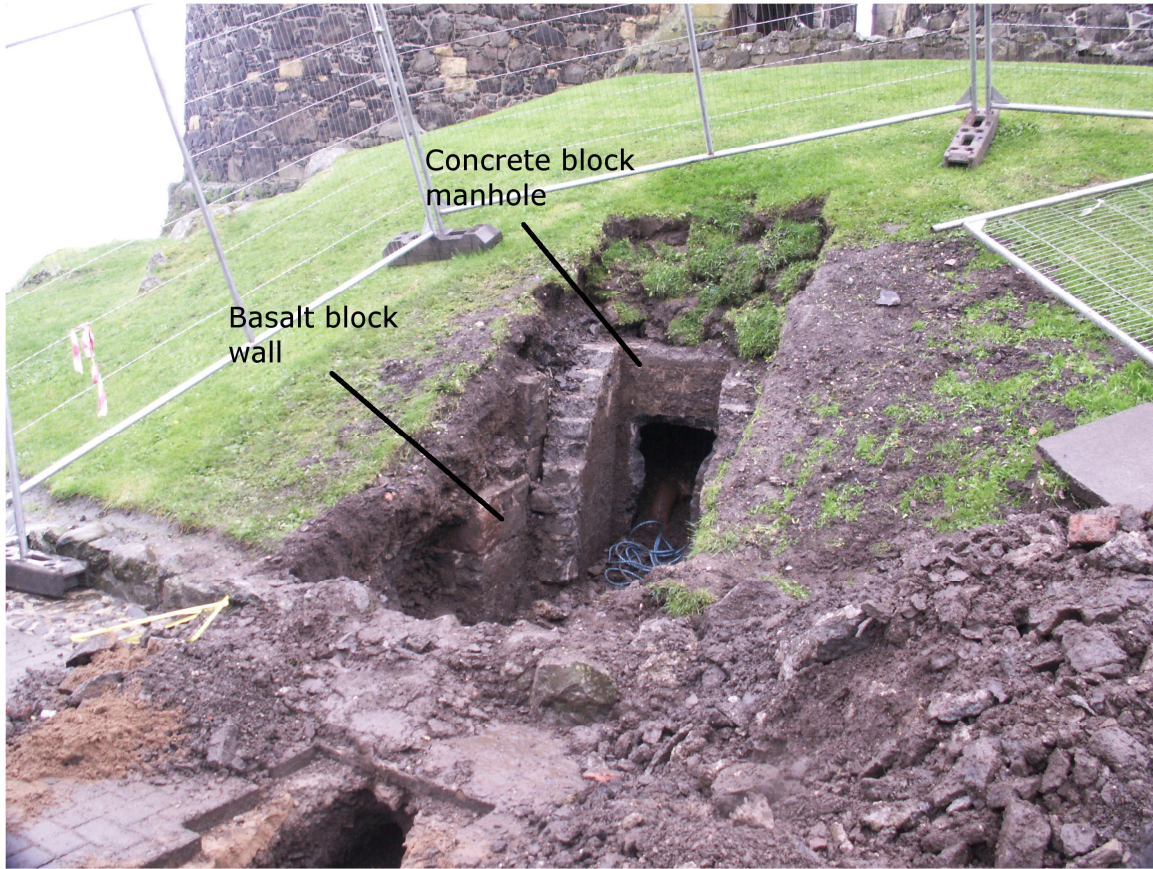


Plate 2: Trench 2 from the northwest showing concrete block manhole wall (6) and basalt block wall (5).

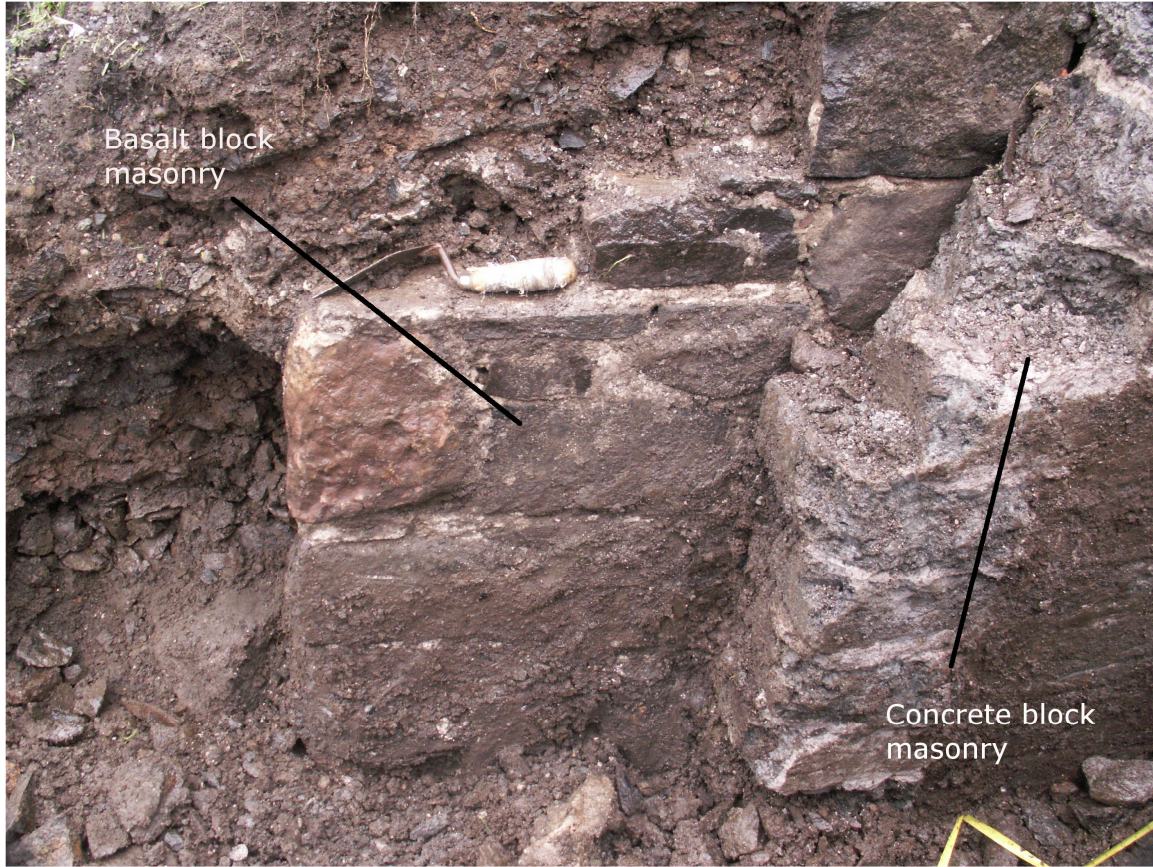


Plate 3: Photo of section of Trench 2 showing concrete block masonry (6) and basalt block masonry (5).



Plate 4: Early 20<sup>th</sup> century photograph of Carrickfergus Castle showing possible masonry pier (arrowed) at the base of a staircase with metal handrail.



Plate 5: Detail of Plate 5 showing possible masonry pier (arrowed).