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THE PRISONS OF WAR IN EDINBURGH CASTLE

CHRIS TABRAHAM

BETWEEN 1757 AND 1814 the cavernous vaults beneath the great hall in Edinburgh Castle were pressed into use as prisons of war, as Great Britain fought across the world to expand its empire. The inmates included Americans, Danes, Dutch, French, Germans, Irish, Italians, Poles and Spaniards. This article reports on archaeological survey and excavation work undertaken in 2002–03, coupled with research into the associated documentation. The results cast further light on a fascinating episode in the history of Scotland's chief royal fortress.

THE CASTLE VAULTS BEFORE 1757

Deep beneath the great hall in Edinburgh Castle lies a labyrinth of stone-vaulted cellars, known today as the castle vaults (fig. 1). The vaults have a long and complex building history on which recent investigations have shed new light.[1] These show their origins reaching back into the late fourteenth century, when a multi-level range was built in the south-west corner of the castle's curtain wall, as part of a major rebuilding of the stronghold set in train following David II's return from lengthy captivity in England in 1356. This range certainly comprised the two western vaults (1 and 2) with their respective sub-vaults (7 and 8). The use to which all this accommodation was originally put is unknown.

During the fifteenth century the range was reordered, and further vaults (3–6) and sub-vaults (9–11) added to the east, along the inside of the south curtain wall. The great hall was built above them, and we know from recent dendrochronological dating of the great hall's fine hammer-beam roof that the construction of this second group of vaults must predate 1510, when the great hall was all but completed.[2] By then, the warren of vaults seems to have been serving a variety of uses, chiefly storehouses for food and military supplies.[3]

Two vaults beneath the great hall (4 and 5), together with their respective sub-vaults (10 and 11), were designed from the outset to serve as prisons and 'pits', and their creation may well be linked to the remodelling in 1481 of the burgh of Edinburgh's tolbooth to accommodate a prison.[4] No more would the royal castle be used to imprison common criminals (fig. 2).

The two prison vaults were entered from the south via a narrow walkway, known enigmatically as the 'Devil's Elbow', reached from east of the great hall (the present access from the west via a flight of steps up from Dury's battery dates only from the early nineteenth century). Each vault had a south-facing window and a large fireplace. The two sub-vaults were pit-prisons, entered through separate doorways and down steep stone steps. Each had a narrow ventilation slit, and a privy at the top of the steps (the privies serving the prisons above were located in a stone box projecting over the castle wall at the west end of the Devil's Elbow). The overall arrangement of these two prisons is similar to that at Dirleton Castle, East Lothian, also of fifteenth-century date.[5]

By the seventeenth century the prisons were clearly overcrowded. In 1607, the Privy Council declared the castle to be 'so pestered with multitudis of prisoners being commitit thairin for materis of debt and such lyke as no rowme is left to those who aught onlie to be committit to that prisone ... those guilty of crymes of treasoun, lese majestie and uther grite offensis'.[6] That century, riven throughout by strife between sovereign and subject, produced many political prisoners to fill the spaces vacated by the common debtors. The Jacobite uprisings of the following century produced still more. A Board of Ordnance plan, dated 1725, marks the vaults beneath the great hall as 'vaults for prisoners'.[7] Interestingly, this plan also shows well the dog-legged passage leading from Crown Square to the prison vaults;

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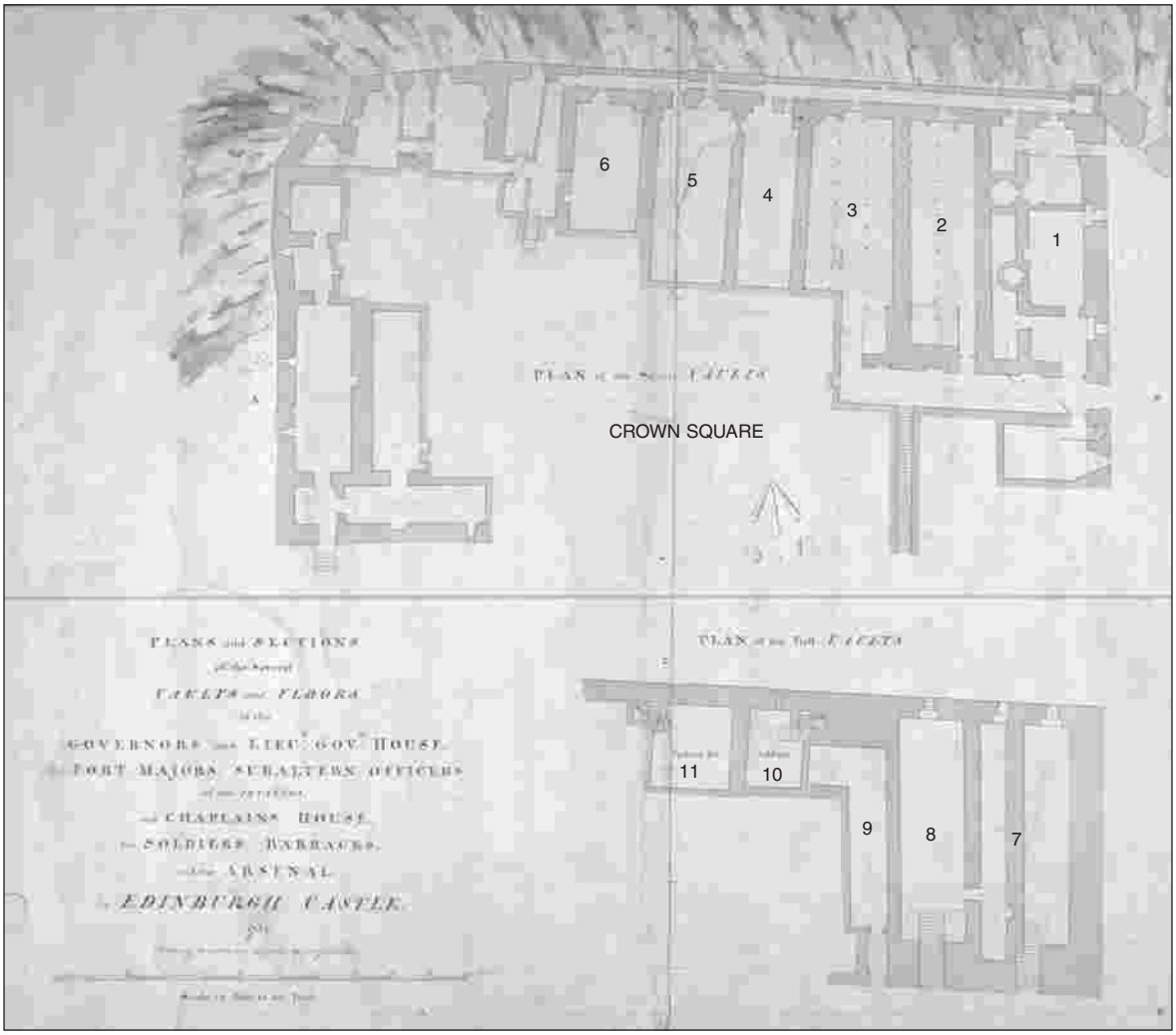

Fig. 1. Floor plans of the two tiers of vaults beneath the great hall, from the Board of Ordnance survey dated 1754. North is at the bottom. *(National Library of Scotland, MS. 1645 Z.02/14b.)*

was this steep and awkward access (the drop in level from Crown Square was over 4 metres) perhaps the inspiration for the name the Devil's Elbow?

To what use the western vaults were put in all this time is less certain. We know that vault 1 had been divided up and part-converted into a bakehouse following the construction of the Queen Anne barrack building around 1710; the two large bread ovens are still in evidence today. The oldest surviving Board of Ordnance survey, dated 1719, marks the rooms in vault 1 as 'empty', suggesting that the bakehouse was not then operating.[8] The other vaults and sub-vaults are simply, and unhelpfully, marked as 'vaults'.

In 1737 vaults 2 and 3 were converted for use as barrack rooms and fitted out with bed-galleries — one gallery against the east wall of vault 2, and two along the side walls of vault 3.[9] The Board of Ordnance 1754 survey shows the bed-galleries *in situ*, including the positions of the upright timbers supporting the galleries and a stair accessing the upper level (fig. 1).[10] In 1980, physical evidence of the structure in vault 3 was discovered, when the brick floor, still incorporating the stone bases and

Fig. 2. The medieval prisons and pit-prisons below the great hall as they may have been used around 1500: reconstruction drawing by David Simon. *(Historic Scotland.)*

sawn-off stumps of the supporting timbers, was found preserved beneath a later raised timber floor. The substantial timber framework also found beneath the raised floor was initially thought to be part of the bed-galleries, but this was discounted on further investigation. A fuller description and interpretation of the timber framework, which dates from the vault's use as a prison of war, is given below.

The opening in 1755 of a purpose-built barracks, the north barracks (the building that today forms the core of the Scottish National War Memorial), on the north side of Crown Square, led to the vaults ceasing to serve as barrack rooms. The start of the Seven Years' War in 1756 meant they did not stay empty for long.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND[11]

POWs from the Seven Years' War (1756–63)

On 28 April 1757 the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* reported that the 78-strong crew of a French privateer, the *Chevalier Barte* of Dunkirk, had been put ashore at Leith from HMS *Solebay* the previous day, marched up to Edinburgh Castle and locked away. They were the castle's first prisoners of war (POWs) — if we exclude assorted Englishmen held there in medieval times when Scotland and England were separate kingdoms, and Jacobites caught up in the various attempts by the exiled Stuart dynasty to reclaim the throne of Great Britain between 1689 and 1746.[12]

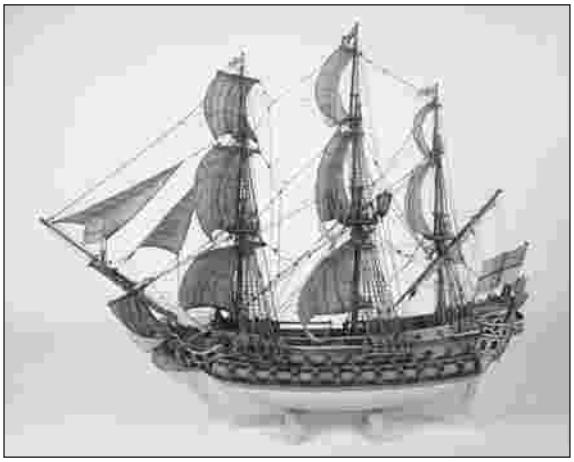

Fig. 3. The model of the *St George*, made by French POWs in Edinburgh Castle in 1760 for the Duke of Atholl. *(Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland.)*

As the Seven Years' War dragged on, so the numbers of POWs grew. By November 1759 it was reported there were 362 in total.[13] Some combined their time and talents in 1760 to create a splendid ship model commissioned by the Duke of Atholl (fig. 3). By the end of hostilities in February 1763, there were around 500 of them. Their repatriation was soon put in hand. On 14 May 1763, the *Courant* reported that 'this day the French prisoners confined in the castle, to the number of 500, were carried to Leith, in two divisions, under strong guards, to be embarked there for France'.

POWs from the War of American Independence (1775–83)

Although hostilities between Great Britain and her American colony began in 1775, it took a while for the war to impact directly on Britain, and on Edinburgh Castle in particular. Only when France formally declared war on Britain in June 1778 did home waters become a major theatre of war. The British authorities soon recognised the need for POW accommodation once more, and on 9 November 1778 the Admiralty wrote to the body responsible for POWs — the Commissioners for taking care of Sick and Wounded Seamen and for Exchanging Prisoners of War (known more conveniently as the 'Sick and Hurt') — directing them to fit out Edinburgh Castle as a 'place of security for French prisoners'.[14] General Oughton, commander-in-chief of the armed forces in Scotland, in a letter to the Admiralty dated 25 November, estimated that 'the casements in the castle' would hold 300 men, and reported that 33 prisoners from Greenwich had already been locked away therein. These may well have been the crew of the French privateer *Le Volage*, taken earlier that month.

The *Caledonian Mercury*, on 6 January 1779, reported on a New Year's Day meal provided by the citizens of Edinburgh to the 35 inmates then being held in the castle. It was clearly a feast to savour, comprising amongst other delicacies 'a hind-quarter of mutton, boiled with carrot and turnip; a principal of beef, weighing 25 pounds, roasted and served up with a pudding proportionately large; and a dozen of rabbits smothered with onions', all washed down with a 20 pint cask of good strong ale, and a pint of Dutch gin.

By May 1779 they had been joined by crews from at least four more French privateers — *L'Audacieuse, Le Beauvoisin, La Jeune Agathe* and *Les Trois Frères*. These were most probably the 64 POWs, all French, whom John Howard, the prison reformer, found there during his first visit of inspection, in July that year, housed in reasonable comfort in two rooms formerly used as soldiers' barracks.[15]

This comparatively manageable situation was not to last. Even as Howard was making his inspection, the shipping lanes around Britain were fast becoming crowded and dangerous. The enemy by now included not only the French but also the Spanish, who had declared war on Great Britain in June 1779. The 27 Spanish POWs who arrived in early October are the first non-French POWs recorded as being imprisoned in vaults more popularly known as 'the French Prisons'.[16] Americans, Dutch and Irish POWs followed soon after.

By the time the notorious Luke Ryan, Irish captain of the French privateer *Calonne*, and his 235-strong multinational crew were brought to the castle on 17 April 1781, the war was fast reaching its climax.[17] Had John Howard visited Edinburgh Castle in July 1781 rather than July 1779, he would have found not 64 but almost 1000 men crammed into the vaults. They included 140 poor wretches pulled from the wreckage of a French frigate, the *Marquis de la*

Fayette, sunk by the Royal Navy in the West Indies. By the time HMS *Endymion* put them ashore at Leith on 26 June 1781, following a harrowing 14-week voyage on scant rations across the Atlantic, they were in an appalling state.[18] It comes as no surprise to discover that of the 29 French POWs who died whilst in captivity in Edinburgh during the War of American Independence, 21 were from the *Marquis* alone.[19]

The chronic overcrowding prompted the authorities to begin repatriating POWs in earnest. There had been few POW exchanges previously. In August 1779 Captain Herebore of *L'Audacieuse* and his eight crew were released only on the grounds that their vessel had not actually been captured but had been shipwrecked off the Highlands of Scotland. In July 1780 another 56 French POWs were shipped to Calais. Such instances were rare.

In the summer of 1781, though, the trickle turned into a flood. On 6 July the *Courant* reported that 391 French POWs had been returned. An advertisement in the 23 July issue of the same paper invited ship owners to tender for taking 95 Spanish POWs to Cadiz, and bringing back about 120 British. We know from subsequent press reports that the owners of the *Amity's Friendship* of Leith won the contract, that the vessel sailed in mid August, and duly returned to Leith on 5 December with 90 British POWs.

The POWs in Edinburgh Castle dreamed of being exchanged more in hope than expectation. The possibility of even getting on to an exchange list was a problem, apparently because Scotland was too far away from the main theatres of war. A letter signed by Captain Renos and 13 others, dated at the castle on 20 February 1782 and addressed to 'the gentlemen in charge of letters from prisoners of war, London', told of their feeling 'so remote here up north', and begging to be allowed 'to go to any other place to enable us to be exchanged at the earliest opportunity'.

But if the French, Spanish and Dutch POWs felt hard done by, spare a thought for those classified as 'rebels' — the Irish and Americans; they were not even considered for exchange. When Howard paid his second visit to Edinburgh Castle, on 27 March 1782, six months after the British surrender at Yorktown, he found there not only Captain Renos and his crew, still awaiting a vessel to take them home, but also 15 Americans and 'ten who were said to be Irish, who were closely confined, being out only one hour a day'.[20]

POWs from the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815)

In 1793 Britain and France were at war once more, and it was only a matter of time before Edinburgh Castle would be pressed into use again as a prison of war. The first POWs, the crew of the Dutch frigate *Zephyr*, arrived in March 1796. By July 1799, there were around 750 POWs — the optimum maximum had been put at 450. The nationalities now also included Danes, Germans, Italians and Poles.

In order to cope with the numbers, the Transport Office — who in 1796 had taken over responsibility for POWs from the 'Sick and Hurt' — pressed into use other areas of the castle. These included the 'new barracks', a short distance to the north-west of the castle vaults, which had only recently been completed. The Army were not much taken with their new lodgers in the basement because of the possibility of them 'deranging the present garrison and causing danger to the depot of military stores'.

By February 1799 the Board of Ordnance had spent £1401. 15. 9 on 'alterations and repairs'; the Transport Office's inspector guessed it had been spent chiefly on 'timber for stockades, hammer-railing, and some common partitions'. The same inspector noted that the prisons of war in the castle were 'divided into two parts, the one consisting of ancient caverns or cells under the castle, and the other of the vaults, probably intended for stores, under the new barracks lately erected within the precincts of the fortress for the reception of troops'. The letter describes the 'caverns' (i.e. castle vaults) as 'for the most part miserable holes, fit only for the reception of the worst malefactors, of admitting but little light and air, and, in their present crowded state, very offensive if not dangerous in point of health'.

The problem of overcrowding just would not go away, even though the castle had been declared full in June 1798. The landing at Greenock in October of 500 sailors from the French frigate *La Résolve* made a bad situation worse, for apparently all the prisons and prison ships down south were 'very much crowded'. Somehow Malcolm Wright, the Transport Office's agent, squeezed in the crew of the *Résolve*.

In 1799 the situation began to ease as POWs began to be sent south to a new POW camp at Norman Cross, near Peterborough. In May 1800 the prison was described as 'quite quiet', the prisoners requiring only two coppers (boilers for washing clothes and hammocks). There was even room for a hospital. By 1801 the whole situation was resolved. In October, Wright was instructed to send all remaining POWs to Chatham, on the Thames, and in December he was paid off.

The peace of 1802 was short-lived. In 1803 back came the POWs — and back to his desk came Malcolm Wright. By now, however, the Transport Office had identified Greenlaw House, at Glencorse to the south of the city, as a suitable site for a POW camp. It had been Wright himself who first put forward the idea of a new camp outside the city, in 1799. In 1804 200 POWs were marched out of the castle to their new home in the country, and most POWs landed at Leith from then on were sent direct to Greenlaw.[21]

But as the conflict worsened from 1810 on, so the situation in the Edinburgh depot intensified. The castle had once more to take its share of POWs; conditions in the vaults became even more unbearable. The French and Spanish 'constantly engaged in feuds' and had to be separated, and friction between the French and Danes resulted in the latter being sent south to Portsmouth on the frigate *Romulus*. The diet also deteriorated — one visitor reported that 'the soup was shockingly bad, apparently like water taken out of a ditch, and no meat or vegetables of any kind to be seen in it'. Hardly surprising that the inmates were bent on escape.

The mass breakout of 49 POWs in April 1811 finally put paid to the castle's role as a prison of war.[22] Although they were eventually captured — other than one poor soul who lost his hold on the castle rock and plunged to his death — the Admiralty declared in December that 'in consequence of the ease with which French prisoners of war can escape from Edinburgh Castle [we are] pleased to direct that this depot be abolished'.

In reality, the decision to abandon the castle as a prison of war had been taken before the 'great escape'. In 1810 the government purchased the Esk and Valleyfield mills in Penicuik, with the intention of turning them into POW camps. Valleyfield alone would be capable of housing 5000 inmates in purpose-built accommodation. Esk mills was operational by Christmas, though it was not long before 450 of the 'most mutinous' among them were transferred to the castle following persistent trouble. In August 1811 Valleyfield too opened its doors.

The existence of these new camps — plus the opening of a fourth at Perth in 1812 — did not spell the end of Edinburgh Castle as a prison of war, though it seems to have been closed for most of 1812. When it reopened, the castle performed a useful role as a high security prison reserved for hardened prisoners; in November 1813 25 officers accused of breaking the terms of their parole in Perth were sent to Edinburgh Castle. Other notable events that year included the inmates celebrating Bonaparte's birthday (15 August) by marching around their airing ground shouting 'Vive l'Empereur et Marie Louise'!

The end of Edinburgh Castle's role as a prison of war finally came in the spring of 1814, in the false dawn following Napoleon's capture and banishment to Elba. The remaining inmates were escorted to Leith and embarked for France. Was it coincidence, or did someone in the Transport Office have a sense of history? The ship chosen to take away those last POWs was none other than HMS *Solebay*, the vessel that had brought the first POWs to Leith 57 years earlier.

THE EASTERN VAULTS, 1757–1814

Vaults 4 and 5 beneath the great hall seem the most likely destination for the 78 crew of the *Chevalier Barte* in 1757, for they were purpose-built prisons. Each had a fireplace and window providing heat and ventilation. There were privies too, at the west end of the Devil's Elbow, which served as their 'airing ground', or exercise yard. Assuming an allocation of 2 m² of floor space per man — prison regulations stipulated 6 ft x 2 ft 6 in (1.80 x 0.75 m) but this would be slightly less where the men slept in hammocks, as here — then these two vaults, comprising around 140 m² of floor space in total, would have fitted the bill adequately enough.[23]

The Archaeological Evidence

During their use as prisons of war, the two vaults were modified. The fireplace in vault 5 was reduced in width and given a new basket grate (since removed),

Fig. 4. Vault 5: the stone-flagged floor, narrowed fireplace, door (right) and wall pockets to carry the 'hammer-railing' for the prisoners' hammocks all date from the time the vault was used as a prison of war in the later eighteenth century. *(Historic Scotland.)*

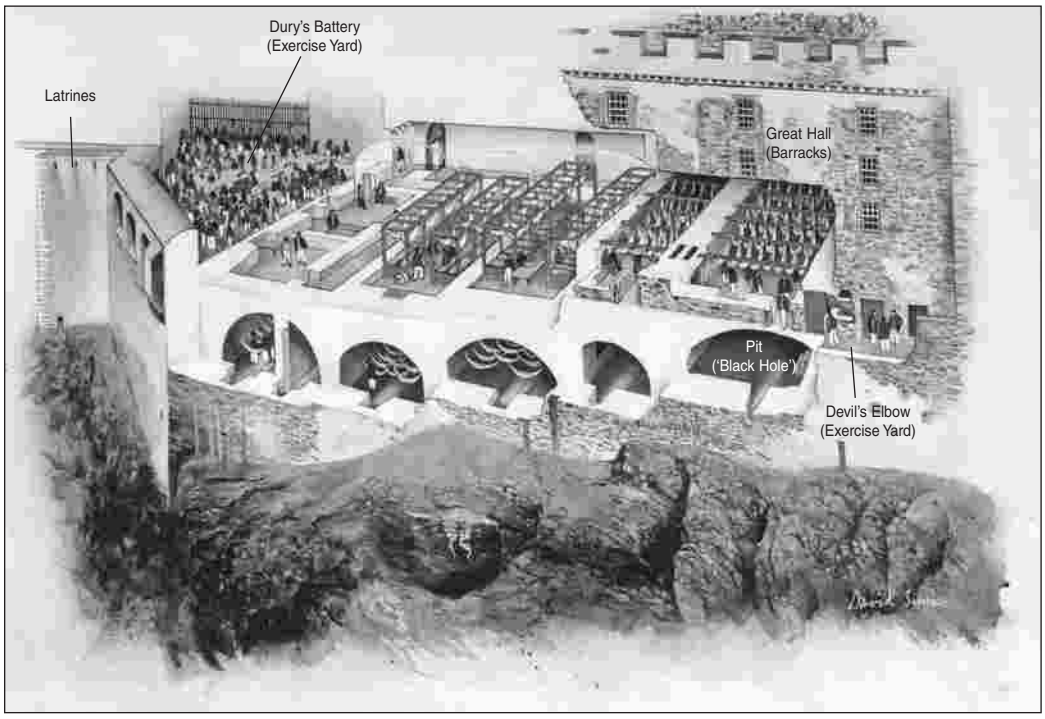

Fig. 5. The prisons of war as they may have been used in 1781; reconstruction drawing by David Simon. *(Historic Scotland.)*

a doorway was slapped through the internal wall dividing the two vaults (no such opening is shown on the 1754 Board of Ordnance plan), and timber beams were crudely inserted across both vaults, five in each, from which hammocks were probably slung; the sockets in the stone vault alone survive (figs 4 and 5). These beams were presumably the 'hammock-railing' referred to by the Transport Office.

The floor was altered too. Stone flagstones were laid, with shallow drainage gutters graded to take water out beneath the door thresholds (the flagstones in vault 4 were replaced by a timber floor in the nineteenth century). Contemporary records repeatedly stress the need for cleanliness, not just for the prisoners' benefit but to reduce the threat of disease spreading to the town below. There are numerous references to the agent providing inmates with coppers, washing tubs and soap, and a Transport Office inspector, visiting in 1799, found the airing grounds crowded with 'bedding and cloathes brought out to the wind'. The 'great escape' of 1811 was blamed partly on the turnkeys' failure to remove from the prisoners each evening 'the lines for drying their clothes, in consequence of which the escape was facilitated'. The privies outside were extended too, presumably to meet the growing demand. A 'two-seater' privy was added to the east end of the original 'three-seater' clearly marked on the 1754 survey.

Quite how the two pit-prisons (10 and 11) were used is not known. Most likely they served as punishment cells for problem prisoners, much as they would have been used by the soldiers who preceded them. British soldiers contemptuously referred to such places as 'black holes', the French as 'les cachots' (secret hiding-places). This is certainly how they were used during the Napoleonic War. In December 1812, POWs caught attempting to tunnel their way out of Greenlaw were sent to the castle, there to be 'confined in the cachot on short allowance'.

The eastern pit-prison (11) is certainly little more than a black hole, with just the hard basalt castle rock for a bed and the medieval privy at the top of the steep stone steps. The pit would have been even blacker prior to the present window being inserted around 1890, as part of the great hall restoration, for the original opening was simply a narrow slit, as the 1754 survey shows.

The western pit-prison (10) retains the wood and brass fittings installed in the 1880s when it was converted into an ammunition store. However, the plastered walls still bear graffiti from its time as a prison of war. This includes a detailed depiction of a 26-gun three-masted vessel, probably a frigate, with all its running, standing rigging, shrouds, ratlines and yards, but minus sails. The clusters of scratches elsewhere in the plaster could conceivably have been made by prisoners marking off the days of their detention.

Three timber doors covered in graffiti survive from these vaults, though they are no longer *in situ*. Two hung at the entrances to vaults 4 and 5, and the third at the entrance to pit-prison 11. The graffiti on the first two doors is mostly on their external faces, suggesting that the prisoners spent much of their waking day out in their 'airing ground' along the Devil's Elbow. The graffiti on the third door is restricted to its inside face, and was carved by prisoners confined in their cachot.

The graffiti on the door into vault 4 (fig. 6) is almost entirely of ships, including the odd three-masted 'man o' war', but mostly two-masted brigs or brigantines, and smaller gaff-rigged cutters or sloops; these were the vessels most popular with privateers. The door into vault 5 (fig. 7) has a few graffiti ships, but the highlights are: a hangman's gibbet with a body dangling from it accompanied by the date 1781 and the words LORD NORD (Lord North was the British Prime Minister who presided over the War of American Independence); and a representation of the 'Stars and Stripes' (one of the earliest known) flying from the stern of a brig.[24]

However, it is the graffiti names on this second door that are of special interest, for used in conjunction with names in prison records surviving in the French National Archives, they cast valuable additional light on our inmates in the castle.[25] In those records, each ship's crew is listed separately, starting with its most senior able seaman (officers were paroled elsewhere, unless they were American or Irish) and ending with the cabin boys (mousses). In some lists, each crew member's rank is also given, such as sail master (mâitre de voilier), cooper (tonnelier), carpenter (charpentier) and ordinary seaman (matelot).

One list includes the 93 crew of the *Rohan Soubise*, a French frigate captured in late April 1781

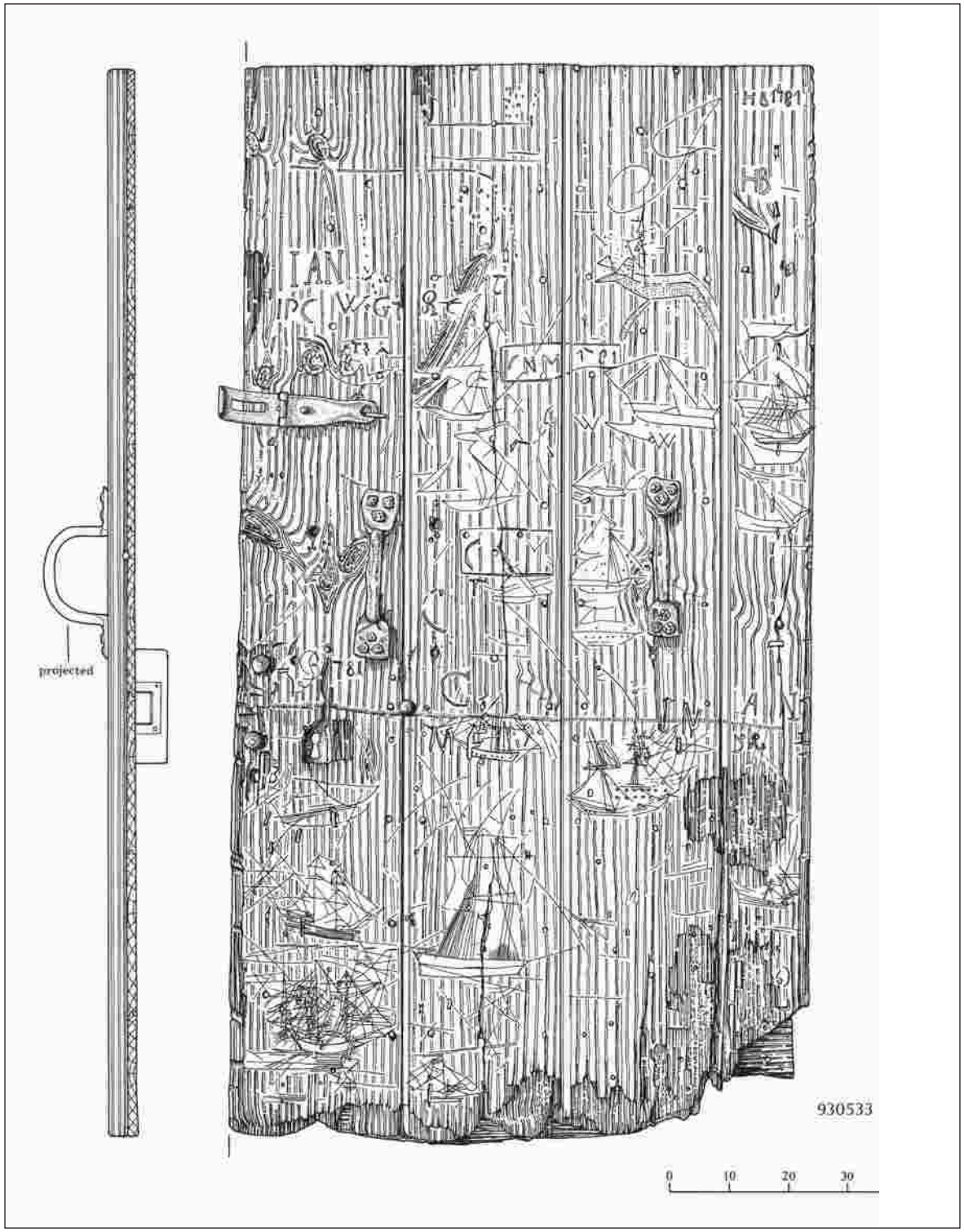

Fig. 6. The graffiti on the door into vault 4, drawn by Sylvia Stephenson. *(Historic Scotland.)*

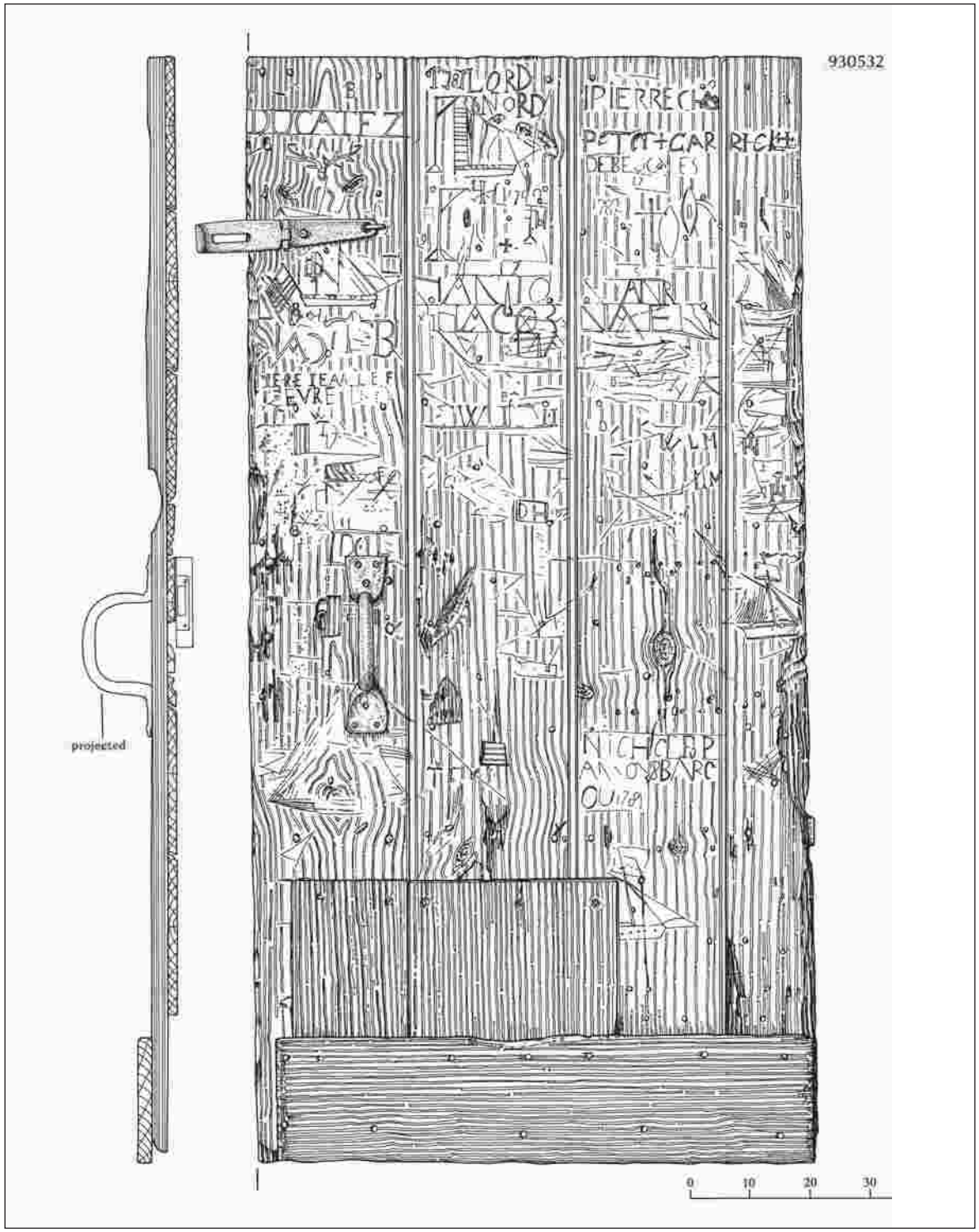

Fig. 7. The graffiti on the door into vault 5, drawn by Sylvia Stephenson. The stars and stripes flag is at the stern of the vessel just below the clasp at the upper left side of the door, and 'Lord Nord' at the top of the adjacent plank. *(Historic Scotland.)*

following a 13-hour chase across the North Sea. Her crew were landed at Leith shortly afterwards and marched up to the castle. That much we know from Admiralty records and newspaper accounts — that and the fact that the *Rohan Soubise* was built in 1780, was initially named *La Comptesse d'Artois*, carried 22 nine-pounder guns, and had sailed from Dunkirk.[26]

In the French archives we find the flesh to put on these raw bones. Whilst the 16 officers of the *Rohan Soubise* were being escorted to Linlithgow on parole, the 93 crew were settling into their new home in vaults 4 and 5. We know this because three of them — Peter Garrick (prisoner no. 242), Pierre Jean Lefèvre (no. 301) and Jean Jacques Ducatez (no. 312) — helpfully carved their names legibly into the door of vault 5. Their names also appear on two crew lists of the *Rohan Soubise*, drawn up at the beginning of May 1781. All three are classed as 'matelot'. In the first list they acknowledged receipt of their clothing allowance from the French government — jacket, pair of breeches, shirt, stockings and shoes — and, in the second list, receipt of 1 penny per day from the same source. Obviously, Mr Middleton, the agent signing on their behalf, was British for he failed to spell their surnames correctly — Lefèvre (on the door) is 'Lefebre' in the records, and Ducatez appears as 'Ducattés'. Peter Garrick (on the door) appears as 'Pierre Garric', hinting that here was an Irishman successfully passing himself off as a Frenchman, to avoid being classified by the British authorities as a 'rebel'.

The graffiti on the doors, taken in conjunction with the prison lists, also confirms what we might reasonably surmise anyway — that individual crews were kept together, so far as possible. Judging by the respective positions of the names on the lists, it may be that shipmates (maybe a gun crew) were able to stick together in the vaults, much as they had on board ship. Lefèvre and Ducatez, for example, are just ten names apart in the first list and eleven apart in the second. Similar relationships can be seen in other crew lists.

The graffiti on the third door (fig. 8) includes two dates from the Napoleonic War (1807 and 1808), confirming that the cachots were still in use at this late date, even though the vaults above them had by then become redundant as prisons. Another date, carved by Pierre Henderix, has been transcribed as 1773, which would be most curious because Britain and France were not officially at war then. The date could, however, be interpreted as 1778 or 1798, either of which would fit known use of the castle as a prison of war depot.

THE WESTERN VAULTS, 1757–1814

The situation regarding the use of the western vaults is more confused. What is clear, however, is that these far larger spaces, comprising some 450 m² of floor space, plus their much greater floor-to-ceiling heights, were used to house the vast majority of POWs throughout the period the castle was a prison depot. But because these vaults had not previously been used as prison accommodation, unlike vaults 4 and 5, they needed much more restructuring to make them 'fit for purpose'.

The Documentary Evidence

There are numerous references to works being carried out in, or proposed for, the vaults. The problem is that it is well nigh impossible to match the documentation with the archaeological evidence.

The first mention of work being done comes in a letter in the *Courant's* 11 October 1759 issue, where the correspondent refers to 'new fireplaces ... struck out' and 'little ventilators fixed to extract the foul air'. Given that vaults 4 and 5 already had suitable fireplaces and windows, the logical conclusion to be drawn is that the 'rooms of confinement' referred to were vaults 2 and 3; vault 1 had the bakehouse in it, whilst none of the lower vaults has ever had a fireplace. Presumably the growing numbers were forcing the 'Sick and Hurt' to look elsewhere for additional space.

The difficulty with the *Courant* statement is that vaults 2 and 3 already had fireplaces, installed most probably when the vaults were fitted out as soldiers' barracks. The 1754 survey shows the fireplaces in position, though the windows are blocked up. The alterations to these two vaults during the course of the eighteenth century were substantial, and we shall examine them in more detail below. Meanwhile let us return to the documentary record of change.

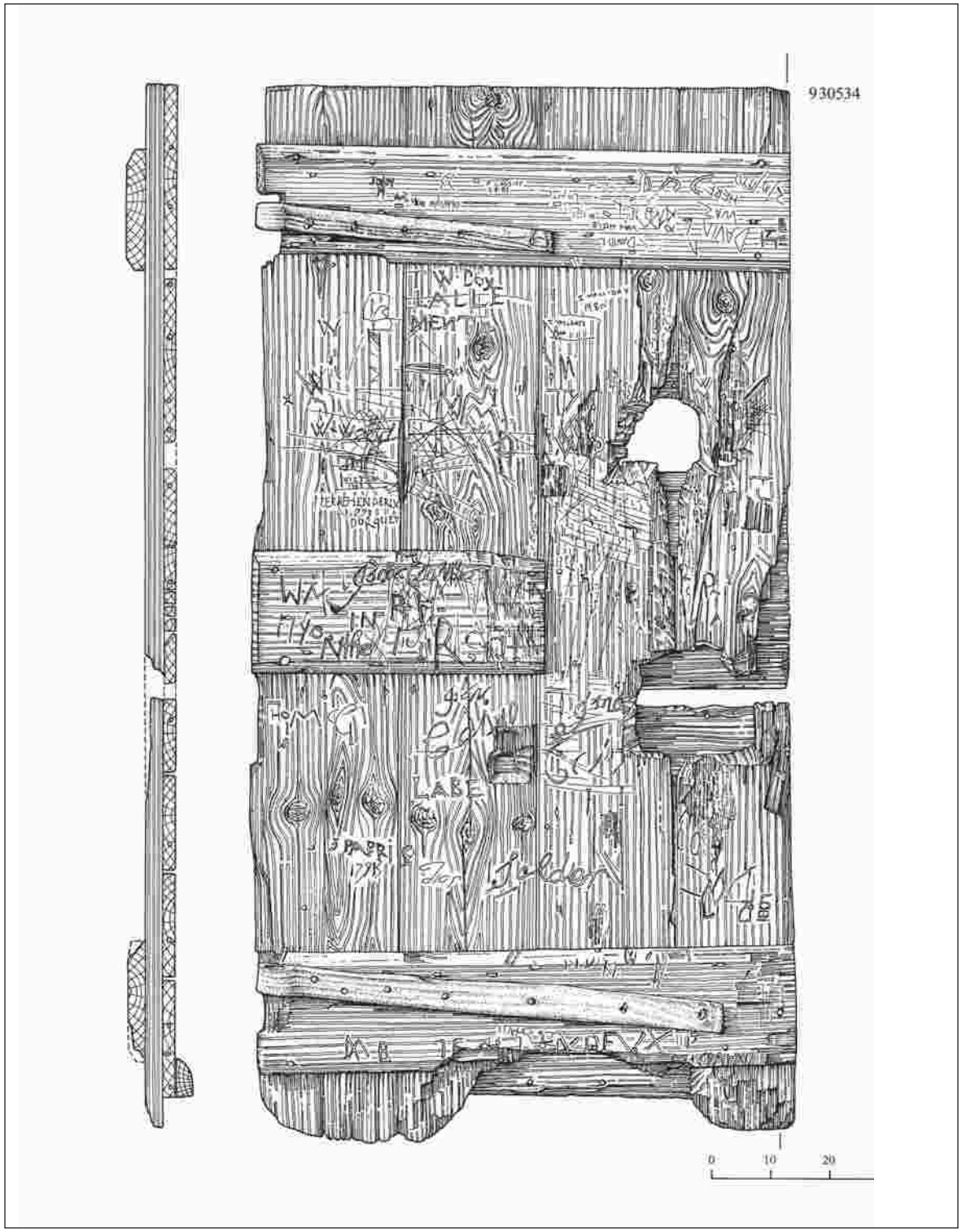

Fig. 8. The graffiti on the door into vault 11, drawn by Sylvia Stephenson. *(Historic Scotland.)*

There are no further references to the vaults for the rest of the Seven Years' War, and the next record comes in November 1778, in a letter from the Admiralty Office to the 'Sick and Hurt' giving them authority for 'enlarging the windows to the size they were originally of and doing whatever else may be necessary for the accommodation of ... prisoners'. General Oughton replied confirming that he had permitted the 'Sick and Hurt' to 'fit them up in the most convenient manner'.

On 6 July 1779 John Howard visited Edinburgh Castle and wrote of finding 'sixty four French prisoners, in two rooms formerly used as barracks for the soldiers. In one of the rooms they lay on straw, two and two, in boxes against the wall, with two coverlets to each box: in the other room they lay on mattresses in hammocks.' His description clearly refers to vaults 2 and 3, and we shall return to his observations when we examine the archaeological structures in vault 3.[27] Other than a brief mention in the *Courant* for 19 February 1781 of 'several apartments in Edinburgh Castle' being fitted up for Dutch POWs, the records once more fall silent.

Nothing further is heard of works to the vaults until May 1796, two months after the first POWs from the French Revolutionary War arrived, when works were carried out to the 'airing grounds', possibly referring to the erection of a security fence to ensure proper separation from the adjacent 'new barracks', then under construction. As the number of POWs increases, so the references to works rise. In August 1797 the agent contracted for 'some small [*sic*] alterations and repairs to be made in the prison', and in the same month provided 'cordage for mending and reswinging hammocks'. In January 1798 there is note of the 'fitting up' of other apartments being approved. In 1800 a prison hospital is mentioned, also wards being 'whitewashed', both doubtless in response to the 'contagious disorder' referred to in October that year. But by the end of 1801 the Transport Office had closed the prison and auctioned off 'all the wooden erections made'.

The refitting of the prison following the reopening of hostilities in 1803 is barely alluded to in the records. A plan dated 1811 identifies vaults 2 and 3 as 'casemates for French prisoners', and vault 1 as a 'hospital' and 'provision store' entered off the entrance passage, with a 'cooking house' separately accessed from the 'prisoners yard' on Dury's battery.[28]

The Archaeological Evidence

The archaeological evidence for the use of vaults 1–3 as prisons of war can usefully be divided into two elements — security and living arrangements.

The level of security required in the vaults for prisoners was clearly very different from that needed for the previous occupants, British soldiers. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that most of the iron bars, grilles, chains and so forth existing today were fitted in the later eighteenth century. The obvious exceptions are the grilles on the outside of the two south-facing windows into vault 1, which are medieval. Were these perhaps the grilles used by French POWs who, on the night of 5 December 1759, 'made their escape from the castle by means of ropes fastened to the grates of their windows'?

On the present evidence, it is impossible to say what was done, and when. However, if we accept that the present flagged floor along the entrance passage was laid at the same time as the flagged and guttered floor in vault 3 (the flags and gutters are identical), then the flooring and security grilles in the passage, and the alterations to vault 3, may well be part of a comprehensive refit of these vaults. The question is when?

One alteration does seem to be closely dated — the enlarging of windows 'to the size they were originally of' in November 1778. This can only refer to the two large south-facing windows lighting vaults 2 and 3, which are shown blocked up in 1754 but which are now open on the inside faces to their original medieval jambs (fig. 9). The window openings themselves, with their external large circular iron bars, must be what the 'Sick and Hurt' letter refers to. Reopening the windows required rerouting the flues of the fireplaces immediately beneath them (probably installed in 1759). These were somewhat awkwardly taken sideways, and smoke tests in 2002 demonstrated that they rose right up to the parapet of the great hall. The cast-iron grate in the fireplace of vault 3 bears the royal cipher of George III (1760–1820) and probably dates from the same operation.

Fig. 9. Vault 3 looking south in 1980. The large window, formed probably in 1778, sits neatly within the fifteenth-century stone jambs. The cast-iron grate bears the royal cipher of George III (1760–1820). *(Historic Scotland.)*

Evidence about living arrangements was discovered in 1980 when a substantial timber framework was discovered beneath a raised timber floor in vault 3 (fig. 10). The framework sat upon a well preserved brick floor, and in that brick floor were preserved the stone bases that matched almost exactly the positions of the upright timbers for the soldiers' bed-galleries marked on the 1754 plan. Much of the framework was subsequently removed to the lower vaults for safe storage, with just those lengths against the side walls left *in situ*. In 2001–02, the entire framework was analysed in detail. The results convincingly showed that the pinewood structure belonged in its entirety to the use of vault 3 as a prison of war and had nothing to do with the 1737 bed-galleries.

The framework had clearly been fitted at the same time as the stone-flagged floor in the northern half of the same vault. Much of this had been removed before the raised floor was laid over it in the nineteenth century, for the stone drainage gutters surviving along the side walls had undressed faces, indicating they had been tampered with.

The framework comprised two separate sections, one against the west wall and the other against the east wall. They were roughly the same size — 9.2 m long x 2.2 m wide x 600 mm high — and construction — a main horizontal frame on short legs, with horizontal struts laid along the top from front to back. There were signs that the framework had been modified slightly over time, but no evidence to suggest that the uprights had ever risen above the upper level of the framework.

The framework was pockmarked with features, including nails of varying types, pieces of metal plate, pegs and peg holes, gouges and cuts, scorch marks, graffiti (mostly indistinct) — even drops of red sealing

Fig. 10. Vault 3 showing part of the timber framework discovered underneath a raised floor in 1980. The framework, which supported beds, was probably installed in 1778. *(Historic Scotland.)*

wax (POWs were permitted to write letters and several survive in the Admiralty Papers). Tantalising fragments of 'soft furnishings' were also found, including textile (from canvas mattresses perhaps) and leather (possibly for concealing valuables).

The overall size of the framework, coupled with the spacing of the struts, suggests sleeping accommodation for 34 men —18 down the west wall and 16 down the east wall, where there is a constriction caused by the presence of the privy in the pit-prison (10) through the wall. Both the size and structure seem to accord with Howard's observation in July 1779 that in one vault the men lay in boxes against the wall. That the wooden framework was in place before 1793 is clear from the date carved into one of the horizontal frames facing into the room. How that date came to be on the bed framework is not obvious, for the war with Revolutionary France had only started that year and there is no record of any POWs arriving until 1796.

Two dates from the documentary record suggest themselves as candidates for works of such scale being carried out — 1759 and 1778. The year 1759 saw the prison population more than treble in size almost at a stroke — from 100 to over 350 — so stretching the accommodation beyond its previous limits in vaults 4 and 5. The year 1778 saw the 'Sick and Hurt' formally establish Edinburgh Castle as the prison depot for 'North Britain' (the next closest was Liverpool). In October they appointed George Middleton as their local agent, and it was most probably his arrival in post that led to the instruction to enlarge the windows 'and doing whatever else may be necessary for the accommodation of such prisoners'. Lessons had been learned during the previous conflict, and providing proper bedding and

washing facilities (which is clearly what the guttered flagstone floor was designed to do) would now have been deemed 'necessary'. On balance, I favour the 1778 date for the major refitting.

Box-beds sleeping 34, and hammocks catering for around the same number, may have served well enough initially, but as the numbers increased, so did the need for bed space. The crude square holes cut into the ceiling of vault 3 may well have been made to take wooden crossbeams from which hammocks were slung, in much the same way as was done in vaults 4 and 5. Vault 7, at the lower level, also has similar holes, showing that this too was pressed into prison use, even though it never had a fireplace, washing facilities or decent light and ventilation.

Evidence for the refitting of the old bakehouse in vault 1 was discovered in 2003, during conservation work to the timber doors there. Beneath the layers of paint, white stencilled lettering was found alongside the casual graffiti left behind by the POWs. The two-leaved door from the entrance passage bore the words 'HOSPL' and 'BEDG', which accords with the 1811 map.

Meanwhile, out on Dury's battery, the POWs airing ground, a privy was at some point contrived in the westernmost gunport, as the 1811 plan shows. One user, called ABRAHAM, carved his name three times on the stonework; an Abraham Le Duc, from the *Zephyr,* was a POW in 1796. Another POW carved a two-masted ship into one of the gunports on Dury's battery.

THE END

When the castle vaults were handed back by the Transport Office to the Army in April 1814, they were recorded as being left in a 'filthy and dirty condition'. The garrison soon had them usefully serving again as stores, their former function. Already by 1811, vaults 4–6 had been converted into 'barrack stores', and in 1839 vault 3 was adapted to form a 'bedding store'; this was probably when the brick floor and timber framework were floored over and hidden from sight. An illustration published in 1848 shows the raised floor and timber racking in place.[29] The new raised floor covered the entire vault and required the iron grille on the doorway leading from the entrance passage to be rehung on the outside of the door frame. Other vaults were fitted up too, and white stencilled lettering reading 'UTENSIL STORE' was found in 2003 on the door leading down to vault 8.

During the twentieth century, the vaults were gradually emptied of their stores and opened to visitors as 'the French Prisons'.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2 Anne Crone and Dennis Gallagher, 'The Medieval Roof over the Great Hall in Edinburgh Castle', *Medieval Archaeology, vol. 52 (*2008) (in press).

3 For an overview of the likely uses to which the castle vaults were put in the later Middle Ages see Iain MacIvor, *Edinburgh Castle* (London 1993), pp. 45–47.

4 RCAHMS, *Edinburgh*, p. 127.

5 RCAHMS, *Inventory of East Lothian* (Edinburgh 1924), pp. 16–21.

6 David Masson (ed.), *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, 1604–07*, vol. VII (Edinburgh 1887), p. 415.

7 National Library of Scotland (NLS), Board of Ordnance (BO), 1725 plan, MS. 1645 Z/19.

8 NLS, BO, 1719 survey, MS. 1645 Z2/1b (no. 5). The surveyor was Thomas Moore.

9 National Archives, London, CL SP. 41.35. The BO engineer responsible was Dougal Campbell, who also designed the governor's house in the castle.

10 NLS, BO, MS. 1645 Z.02/14b. The surveyor was Charles Tarrant.

11 For previous published accounts dealing with the historical background, both generally and in relation to Edinburgh Castle in particular, see Francis Abell, *Prisoners of War in Britain, 1756 to 1815* (Oxford 1914); Nicholas G. Allen, 'The French Prisons in Edinburgh Castle', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, 35 (1985), pp. 160–170; and Chris Tabraham, *Edinburgh Castle: Prisons of War* (Edinburgh 2004). The medieval castle most heavily used as a prison of war was Portchester, in Hampshire, and for a full account of this role see Barry Cunliffe and Beverley Garratt, *Excavations at Portchester Castle*, vol. V, *Post-Medieval, 1609–1819* (London 1994).

12 For example, Sir James Balfour Paul (ed.), *Accounts of the*

Lord High Treasurer (Edinburgh 1911), notes that in 1549 two 'Inglische men', John Forster and Edward Fasart, had been 'haldyn as spyis' in the castle for six months. For Jacobites, see, for example, Bruce G. Seton and Jean Gordon Arnot (eds), *The Prisoners of the '45* (Scottish History Society, 3rd series, nos XIII-XV, 1928), pp. 69–70.

13 *Caledonian Mercury*, 14 November 1759.

14 Extract from a letter by P. Stephen, Admiralty Office, to the 'Sick and Hurt Board', dated 9 November 1778. The vast collection of Admiralty Papers (chiefly ADM 97, 98, 103 and 105) in the National Archives, London, provides most of the source documentation for this paper, and no further individual references are given.

15 Howard's accounts of his three visits of inspection to Edinburgh Castle on 6 July 1799, 27 March 1782 and 17 August 1784 were published in John Howard, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*, 3rd edn (London 1784).

16 *Edinburgh Evening Courant* (*EEC*), 6 October 1779.

17 *EEC*, 18 and 21 April 1781. For an account of Luke Ryan's adventures, see Donald Petrie, 'The Piracy Trial of Luke Ryan', *American Neptune*, vol. 55, part 3 (1995), pp. 185–204.

18 *EEC*, 27 June 1781.

19 Centre Historique des Archives Nationales de France, Ministère de la Marine papers, Marine F2 94–95, F2 99–101, contain all relevant records pertaining to French prisoners detained in Edinburgh Castle and parole towns around. Marine F2 94, for example, lists the names of French POWs dying in captivity in Edinburgh, 1770–91, together with their rank (e.g. midshipman), their ship, their date of death, and the date their body was returned to France.

20 See note 15.

21 Ian MacDougall, 'Napoleon's Men in Scotland', *Scottish Local History*, issue 65 (winter 2005), pp. 36–40.

22 *EEC,* 13 April 1811.

23 See Abell, *Prisoners of War* (note 11), p. 6.

24 The 13-star flag was formally adopted by the American Congress on 14 June 1777, the same day the Scot John Paul Jones received his captain's commission into the fledging American navy. Jones was the first to fly the 'Stars and Stripes' in European waters, from the stern of the *Ranger* in 1778.

25 See note 19.

26 *EEC*, 15 July 1781.

27 See note 15.

28 National Archives of Scotland, RHP 35687.

29 Daniel Wilson, *Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time*, 2 vols (Edinburgh 1848), I, p. 126.