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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT PENRITH CASTLE, PENRITH, CUMBRIA

NGR: NY 556 637

**FOR
ENGLISH HERITAGE**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2008, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by Sue Barnard, Interpretation Officer, English Heritage to undertake a programme of archaeological works on land beside Penrith Castle, Cumbria (NY 556 637; SM no.23649). The site is located within an area of high archaeological potential, within the boundary of the designated Scheduled Ancient Monument of Penrith Castle. As a result, all works associated with the insertion of a new interpretation panel in the environs of the castle required a programme of archaeological work to be undertaken, in the form of a watching brief, undertaken on all groundworks associated with the development.

The works involved the excavation of four square pits, measuring 0.2m by 0.2m and excavated to an approximate depth of 0.60m, to hold the supports for two interpretation panels. Medieval and post-medieval pottery was recovered from one pit associated with Interpretation Panel 2. However, no archaeological features were encountered during the excavation.

The archaeological material encountered, which consisted of pottery with clean breaks, was consistent with material that is to be expected in view of the past habitation in the vicinity. The discovery of pottery is unsurprising given the location of the site within the castle courtyard.

As this report comprises the recommendations for archaeological recording of the developments relating to works at Penrith Castle, no further work is necessary. However, due to the continuing high archaeological potential of the area, and the status of the site as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, any further development in the area should be subjected to a programme of archaeological investigation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Sue Barnard, Interpretation Officer, English Heritage for commissioning the project.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Rachel Horn, who also wrote the report. The drawings were produced by Matthew Town and Rachel Horn. The project was managed by Frank Giocco, Technical Director for NPA Ltd. The report was edited by Matt Town, Project Manager for NPA Ltd.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 In September 2008, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd were commissioned by Sue Barnard, Interpretation Officer, English Heritage, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the installation of two interpretation boards at Penrith Castle, Penrith, Cumbria (NGR: NY 556 637). The development site is within the area of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Penrith Castle. Deposits of archaeological significance may exist in the area of the works associated with the insertion of new interpretation panels. As a result, a condition of the planning permission was that, before the development commences, a programme of archaeological work be undertaken. This is in line with government advice as set out in the DoE Planning Policy Guidance on Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16). The development works also required Scheduled Monument Consent from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and English Heritage advised that such consent was conditional upon the implementation of a programme of archaeological work.
- 1.1.2 The proposed groundworks involved the insertion of two new interpretation panels. The first was located outside the castle walls (Interpretation Panel No.1), and the second was within the courtyard (Interpretation Panel No.2). All of these groundworks had to be excavated under full archaeological supervision. The objective of this watching brief was to obtain an adequate record of any archaeological deposits or finds, which were disturbed or exposed by work associated with the development. All stages of the archaeological work were undertaken following approved statutory guidelines (IFA 2002).
- 1.1.3 This report comprises the results of the archaeological work, namely: the archaeological recording of the groundworks associated with the development, and post fieldwork analysis of the archaeological deposits recovered during the groundworks.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

2.1.1 A project design was submitted by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd in response to a request by Sue Barnard, Interpretation Officer, English Heritage for an archaeological watching brief of the study area. Following acceptance of the project design, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by the client to undertake the work. The project design was adhered to in full, and the work was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), and generally accepted best practice.

2.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

2.2.1 The watching brief comprised a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during groundworks at the site, followed by the systematic examination and accurate recording of all archaeological features, horizons and artefacts identified.

2.2.2 The aims and principal methodology of the watching brief can be summarised as follows:

- to determine the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains;
- to produce a photographic record of all contexts using colour digital, 35mm colour slide and monochrome formats as applicable, each photograph including a graduated metric scale;
- to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes;
- to sample any environmental deposits encountered according to the NPA standard sampling procedure and in consultation with appropriate specialists;
- to prepare a site archive in accordance with MAP2 (English Heritage, 1991) and MoRPHE standards (English Heritage 2006);
- depending upon the results of the work, to prepare a report for publication.

2.3 ARCHIVE

2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design, and in accordance with current UKIC (1990) and English Heritage guidelines (1991). The paper and digital archive will be deposited in Penrith Museum.

2.3.2 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd supports the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) project. This project aims to provide an online index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature created as a result of developer-funded archaeological fieldwork. Details of the results of this project will be made available by North Pennines Archaeology, as a part of this national project. The OASIS reference number is northpen3-48052.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 3.1.1 The town of Penrith lies 29km southeast of Carlisle in eastern Cumbria. Penrith is situated at the junction of two major routeways: an east-west artery over Stainmore (presently the A66) and the main western route north (presently the A6-M6) corridor. Both routeways are at least of Roman origin (Newman et al., 2000, 107), and this junction may have provided an impetus for the development of settlement foci in the Penrith area.
- 3.1.2 Penrith is situated on the north bank of the River Eamont close to its confluence with the River Eden in the south-eastern corner of the medieval royal forest of Inglewood, and within a mile of the southern boundary of pre-1974 Cumberland. At Penrith, the valleys of the River Eamont and River Eden form a narrow tract of lowland between the Lakeland massif to the south and west, and the Pennines to the east. The result of this geographical situation is that Penrith is ideally positioned to take advantage of its agricultural hinterland and the traffic passing to and from the east and north (Newman et al, 2000, 107).
- 3.1.3 The terrace of the River Eamont at Penrith consists of glacial drift deposits of a presumed late Pleistocene or early Holocene date, overlying a solid geology of outcropping red sandstone (Moseley 1978). The glacial drift deposits (sand and gravel) of the river terrace are generally overlain by fine silt and loam topsoils of the Wick Association. This soil is ‘very fertile, especially near the Eamont, where ... loam prevails (Parson and White, 1829, 498)’.

3.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.2.1 Penrith Castle is presently an extensive sandstone ruin dating primarily to the late 14th and early 15th centuries. This comprises a ruinous curtain wall, 1.52m thick, enclosing a courtyard 40m square. Various buildings, including a garderobe turret, project from the western wall. The castle would originally have comprised a walled enclosure probably with timber buildings around a central courtyard with a tower (the Strickland tower) guarding the northern entrance (Jackson 1990, 80).
- 3.2.2 Penrith Castle was remodelled in the early 15th century. At this time a guard tower on the western wall (the Red tower) was added, providing a new entrance. An outer gatehouse was added to the Red tower in 1471 when more buildings were erected, and there were minor alterations between 1485-1603. The Strickland Tower collapsed between 1739-78 and only low restored walls survive (Jackson, 1990, 80). In 1840-5 the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway bought the Castle. It was then acquired by Penrith Urban Council in 1913, and was presented to the Ministry of Works (now English Heritage) in 1914, who excavated and consolidated the ruins in 1928 (*ibid*).

4 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 Summary results of the watching brief are presented below, and are illustrated in Figure 1 (Appendix 1) and Plates 1 to 6. The watching brief took place on 4th September 2008 and consisted of the excavation of foundations for two interpretation boards to be placed in the area of Penrith Castle (Interpretation Board No.1 and No.2). No actual archaeological features were observed, and therefore no environmental samples were taken. However, finds were recovered from the foundations of Interpretation Board No.2.

4.2 INTERPRETATION BOARD NO.1



Plate 1: Interpretation Board No.1 under excavation, facing west

4.2.1 The groundworks commenced at the area to the east of the castle. Two square foundation cuts were excavated, into which the posts of the interpretation board were to be placed. These were 0.20m in length and 0.20m in width and were dug to a depth of 0.54m. The stratigraphy in this area consisted of topsoil (**100**), a dark brown silty sandy clay that had a depth of 0.18m. This overlay a mid red sand (**102**) that was interpreted as a layer of degraded red sandstone spread across the area from the castle ruins. This had a depth of 0.12m and lay on top of a light greyish brown silty sand (**103**), which was excavated to a depth of 0.12m. No finds were recovered from any of these contexts.



Plate 2: foundation cuts for Interpretation Board No.1, facing east.



Plate 3: Interpretation Board No.1 in situ, facing west.

4.3 INTERPRETATION BOARD NO.2

- 4.3.1 The second interpretation board was located within the area of the castle at the north-western end of the courtyard. A further two 0.20m by 0.20m holes were excavated, also to a depth of 0.53m. The stratigraphy was slightly different in this area and consisted of topsoil (**100**), a dark brown silty sandy clay, which had a depth of 0.12m. This overlay the subsoil (**101**), a dark brown silty clay, which had a depth of 0.15m. Finds were recovered from this context (**101**) and consisted of a fragment of post-medieval pottery and a larger fragment of medieval pottery. Below this lay another deposit (**104**), a light reddish brown silty clay containing large sub-angular stone inclusions. This deposit was excavated to a depth of 0.26m, and no finds were recovered from this context.



Plate 4: Interpretation Board No.2 under excavation, facing east



Plate 5: foundation cuts for Interpretation Board No.2, facing west.



Plate 6: Interpretation Board No.2 in situ, facing east.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1 The archaeological watching brief recorded all works associated with the insertion of two new interpretation panels at Penrith Castle, undertaken on Thursday 4th September 2008. Archaeological finds were recovered from one of the two pits excavated for Interpretation Panel No.2, and will be deposited with Penrith Museum.
- 5.1.2 The archaeological material, which consisted of one sherd of medieval and one sherd of post-medieval pottery, comprised sherds with clean breaks, which is consistent with material that is to be expected in view of the past habitation in the vicinity. The discovery of pottery is unsurprising given the location of the site within the castle courtyard.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.2.1 As this report comprises the recommendations for archaeological recording of the developments relating to the insertion of the new interpretation panels, no further work is necessary. However, due to the continuing high archaeological potential of the area, and the status of the site as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, any further development in the area should be subjected to a programme of archaeological investigation.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

6.1 SECONDARY SOURCES

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APPENDIX 1: FIGURES
