

TOTNES CASTLE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
2008

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during groundworks associated with the construction of a new site admissions building at Totnes Castle. The works located three wall footings probably associated with a medieval gatehouse, and a large stone foundation which may once have formed an abutment for a bridge leading into the medieval castle.

TOTNES CASTLE

Totnes Castle (OS grid ref. SX800605; SMC no. 2659; IoE no. 99088) was built by Judhael of Totnes shortly after the Norman Conquest of the South West in 1068. It is one of the largest and best preserved Norman motte-and-bailey earthwork castles in England. Masonry footings for an 11th- or 12th-century square, timber tower survive on the top of the motte. The upstanding stone shell-keep and partial remains of the bailey curtain wall date largely from the 14th century. The hall and other domestic buildings which formerly stood in the bailey had fallen into ruin by the time Leland described the castle *c.* 1538, and no longer survive. The ditch which once surrounded the motte and bailey has been largely infilled on the Totnes side of the castle, but to the north, away from the town, the ditch around the bailey survives as an impressive earthwork feature. The Castle was later owned by the Seymour family of Berry Pomeroy, who passed it into the guardianship of the Ministry of Works in 1947. The site is now owned and managed by English Heritage.

THE PROJECT

The archaeological watching brief was part of a programme of works designed to improve visitor facilities at the site. The old admissions building was replaced by a new larger one sited inside the bailey perimeter wall rather than outside.

The works included:

- i) construction of new site admissions building with raft slab foundation - maximum excavation depth 700mm.
- ii) new service trench between old and new admission buildings approx. 450mm deep.
- iii) extension of the service trench from the site of the old admission building to the gate entrance to the castle.
- iv) removal of step threshold at the gate entrance to the castle (to form ramp).
- v) excavation of a new soakaway pit near the site of the new admissions building, and excavation of a drainage trench leading to it.
- vi) excavation of ten post-holes for a new fence to the north side of the entrance path at 1.5m centres.
- vii) removal of the old site admissions building.

The work was carried out by Stewart Brown Associates on behalf of English Heritage from January to March 2008. A written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared before the project began and is included in this report (Appendix 3). The planning reference for the work is South Hams District Council 56/2238/07/F.

Archaeological evaluation 2002

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Stewart Brown Associates in February 2002 in order to investigate the depth and character of archaeological deposits in the area prior to construction of the new admissions building (Brown, S.W. 'Totnes Castle – Archaeological evaluation for new kiosk, February 2002', unpublished report to English Heritage). The evaluation comprised two trenches measuring 1 m x 1.5m. These revealed a series of post-medieval dump deposits 0.8m deep overlying a wall footing of probable medieval date.

DESCRIPTION

Fig. 1 shows the extent of the groundworks, including the two evaluation trenches opened in 2002 (trenches 1 and 2).

Trench 3 (Fig. 2)

Trench 3 uncovered only post-medieval dump deposits except at its northern end, where the depth of post-medieval stratigraphy was shallower, and part of a wall footing of probable medieval date was uncovered (Fig. 2a, sections i-iii; Fig. 2b, wall 6, Plate 1). The post-medieval dumps (3) underlay modern topsoil (1) and modern features, probably tree-holes (2, 4 and 5). The dumps comprised brown clay containing numerous stones, broken roofing slates and lumps of mortar, typical of demolition deposits. They also produced a number of large animal bones, some with butchering marks, so the area appears to have been used as a domestic rubbish dump as well. Dating evidence from the evaluation exercise undertaken in 2002 shows that the dumps date from the late 17th century or later.

Wall footing (6) was on average 0.5m wide and built of local sandstone rubble set in yellow clay. At its east end, the wall turned toward the north to cross the present path. The wall was similar in construction to nearby wall footing 7 uncovered in trench 2 in 2002 (Fig. 1, wall 7; Fig. 2b, plan of wall 7). It was however 0.1m narrower, suggesting that the two walls may date from different archaeological phases. Both walls had been dug into a deposit of clean yellow clay. The clay was not excavated since it lay beneath the level of trenching in this area. It probably represents a natural deposit, but this could not be established with certainty. Traces of a patchy pebble surface survived on top of the clay immediately to the east of wall 6.

No dating evidence was found in association with walls 6 and 7, but they almost certainly belong in the medieval period, possibly dating from as early as Norman times. The walls are likely to represent parts of a structure or structures erected close to the bailey periphery, at a position where a gatehouse leading into the castle from Totnes town would be expected (see Discussion, below)

Trench 4

Another similarly constructed wall footing was uncovered at the northern end of trench 4 (Figs. 1 and 2b, wall 8; Plate 2). The footing was 0.7m wide and extended southwards beneath the present bailey wall, which undoubtedly dates from the later post-medieval period. On its west side, the footing had been dug into clean yellow clay like walls 6 and 7. On its east, by contrast, the wall face was abutted by a series of post-medieval demolition dumps more than 0.5m deep (Fig. 3a, 9). The dumps comprise stone rubble, broken roofing slates

and mortar set in light brown clay. They extend across a large area to the east of wall 8 and were located again in trenches 5-14 and trenches 17 and 18, those in trench 8 producing two finds, the latest dating from the 16th or 17th century (trench 8, below; Appendix 1). The difference between the deposits to each side of the wall would imply that the wall stood at the edge of the bailey, next to a ditch which became infilled in post-medieval times. The wall could represent the footings of the former medieval bailey curtain wall, although its width (0.7m) seems too narrow by comparison with the surviving length of curtain wall on the east of the bailey, which is close to 2m thick. The wall is more likely to have been associated with walls 6 and 7, and to have stood as the front (east) wall of the gatehouse mentioned above.

The remainder of trench 4 was insufficiently deep to expose more of the wall.

Trenches 5 and 6 (Fig. 3)

Trenches 5 and 6 located parts of a large stone foundation (17) and an associated flanking wall (18) which may well have formed part of an abutment for a bridge leading into the medieval castle (Figs. 5 and 6). The foundation was built of local sandstone rubble set in white lime mortar with a core of rubble set in clay (Plate 3). Wall 18 was built entirely of mortared masonry and extended along the northern edge of the foundation, presumably delineating its northern side (Fig. 3b; Plate 4). The masonry exposed in trench 6 was also entirely mortared and may possibly represent part of another wall flanking the foundation on its south. The alignment of the wall and foundation is turned at a slight angle to the present entrance gateway (a post-medieval structure), so if the foundation did indeed lead to a bridge, then the other end bridge must have lain further to the north than the present gateway through the bailey curtain wall.

Both the wall and foundation are covered directly by modern deposits, so there is no overlying stratigraphy to help date their construction. The foundation's western face however is abutted by the series of post-medieval demolition dumps mentioned above which extends as far as the bailey wall (Fig. 3a, 9). The same deposits were uncovered in trenches 7 and 8. In trench 8 they produced finds dating from the 16th or 17th century (below). It would seem highly likely that the wall and foundation date from the medieval period, especially so since there would be little reason to build such a sizable structure leading into the castle after its domestic buildings had already fallen out of use, which had happened by Leland's time (c. 1538).

Trench 7

Trench 7 linked the western end of trench 5 with trench 8. It exposed little more than the same post-medieval demolition dumps (9) as those in trenches 5 and 6, showing that these extend northwards across a considerable area. At its north-eastern end the trench uncovered one side of a linear feature (11) which was more fully investigated in trench 8 (below).

Trench 8 (Fig. 4a)

In trench 8 the post-medieval demolition dumps (9) produced part of a late medieval floor tile and a sherd of pottery dating from the 16th or 17th century (Appendix 1, below). Beneath the demolition dumps were two interconnecting linear features, one set at a right-angle to the other (11). One branch extended from west to east with remnants of stones set on edge along its sides. It appeared to be ending just beyond the western limit of trench 8. The other branch

extended from south to north, continuing beyond the northern limit of the trench. Both features had been cut directly into natural clay and were filled with grey gritty claysilt, stones and slate fragments (10). The features may represent two connecting drains, or possibly settings for two horizontal timbers set into the ground such as sole-plates for a wooden bridge.

At the northern limit of the trench was a wall footing (14; Plate 5). The construction trench for the wall (13) had been cut through fill 10, so the wall must post-date the two linear features. The wall was built of local sandstone rubble bonded with white lime mortar containing gravel aggregate. It had been partially robbed (robber-trench 12) and its remains covered over by the same demolition dumps as found further south (9). This would suggest that it dates from either the medieval or early post-medieval period.

Trenches 9-18 (Fig. 4b)

Trenches 9-11 were post-holes dug by the contractors for a new fence (Plate 6). These were on average 0.45m deep and uncovered little more than modern topsoil and post-medieval demolition dumps (9). At the bottom of trench 11 however, part of a mortared stone feature, probably a wall, was located (wall 16). Trench 11 was dug adjoining the north-west corner of trench 8 (Fig. 1), so wall 16 may have been connected to or associated with nearby wall 14.

Removal of the old site admissions building

Removal of the old site admissions building caused minimal ground disturbance so revealed nothing of archaeological interest.

DISCUSSION

Medieval

Gatehouse

It would seem highly likely that walls 6, 7, and 8 formed parts of a medieval structure or structures which once stood at a point on the periphery of the bailey where a gatehouse leading into the castle from the town would be expected. Fig. 7 shows possible reconstructions of Norman and later medieval gatehouses in this position. More detailed interpretation is however made difficult by the fragmentary nature of the evidence and the present absence of dating material from deposits associated with the walls. It is possible that the walls represent more than one phase of construction.

Bridge abutment

The large mortared stone foundation 17 and wall 18 clearly formed part of an important structure associated with the entrance into the castle. These too presently have no dating evidence associated with them, but are probably medieval in date. In view of its location, some 10m to the east of the bailey, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the foundation was a bridge abutment. Wall 18, which flanks the foundation on its north, could have formed part of a parapet for a causeway leading to the abutment, or possibly part of another gatehouse on the Totnes side of the bridge. The bridge itself could have been of either timber or stone.

?An early timber bridge

Feature 11 (trench 8) comprised two interconnecting linear trenches of medieval date dug into natural clay at right-angles to one another, with remnants of stones set on edge along their sides. The trenches may possibly represent two connecting drains, but equally could be settings for earthfast timber beams associated with a timber bridge. Timber bridges were often of trestle construction, raised on sole plates set into the ground.

Wall 14 (trench 8)

Only a small part of wall 14 was exposed in trench 8, so its purpose is at present unclear. The wall's construction post-dates the two linear trenches mentioned above (11), but pre-dates the 16th- or 17th-century demolition dumps which cover much of the surrounding area. The wall could have been associated in some way with the later medieval stone bridge.

Medieval Topography (Figs. 5 and 6)

Figs. 5 and 6 illustrate the intrusive impact the Norman castle made on the Saxon burh. Part of the defensive ditch surrounding the Saxon burh was excavated in 1999 by Exeter Archaeology. The former arrangement of defensive ditches around the Norman motte and bailey can be substantially reconstructed from the surviving lengths of open ditch and the topography of the surrounding town (houses have infilled the former ditch on the south and east sides of the castle). It is however difficult to know whether the ditch surrounding the bailey linked fully with that surrounding the motte, or whether a narrow neck of land was left upstanding between them in order to more easily construct a bridge leading into the castle from the east. Natural clay was exposed in trench 8 at a depth of only 0.6m below present ground level, but the trench was located on the inner brow of the bailey ditch, so the survival of natural clay here is not surprising. The presence of the recently uncovered bridge abutment, which extends to about midway across the line of the bailey ditch, would suggest that there was indeed a narrow land bridge to found it on. It is less likely that the bridge abutment would have been built out half-way across a deep ditch.

The position of the existing North Gate, which stands well outside the limit of the Saxon burh, but adjacent to the eastern entrance into the castle, indicates that it was intended to provide security for the castle rather than the town. The gateway is a plain rubble-built structure with a Romanesque arch, and may well be Norman in origin. The gate formed part of an outer defended area, or barbican, which controlled access to the bridge leading into the castle.

Post-medieval

The most prominent feature of the post-medieval archaeology of the area is the large volume of demolition material which was used to infill the ditch between the bridge abutment and the bailey sometime in the 16th or 17th century. This is likely to have resulted from the destruction of medieval structures in the vicinity of the entrance, and possibly those buildings which once stood in the bailey too. The material includes dressed fragments of red sandstone imported from the Torbay area, so the source is likely to have been a building or buildings of relatively high status.

CONCLUSION

The watching brief conducted in 2008 has demonstrated that important archaeology lies at shallow depths below ground level in the area of the present entranceway. The archaeology has high potential for future investigation regarding the Norman and later medieval castle and its relation with the North Gate barbican and town. The watching brief was however limited to observations made during trench excavations undertaken by building contractors, during a particularly rainy period of the winter, so fine detail within the stratigraphy may not have been recorded. In addition, the archaeological remains have suffered damage owing to the insertion of underground services both in the 20th century and in 2008.

RECOMMENDATION

Any future development of this area should be preceded by full archaeological excavation to an appropriately high standard.

Stewart Brown 7/4/08

APPENDIX 1
POTTERY IDENTIFICATION
by
John Allan

Context	sherds	description	date
9	1	Low Countries floor tile fragment, thick, copper green glaze	15 th /early 16 th cent.
	1	Totnes-type glazed coarseware bowl	16 th or 17 th cent.

APPENDIX 2
THE SITE ARCHIVE

The site archive for the watching brief will be deposited at Exeter R.A.M. Museum (Accession number 609/2007).

The archive contains:

Site records

18 context description sheets
7 site drawings, pencil on drafting film plus index
1 A3 graph paper sheet of drawings

Photos.

7 b/w photo prints plus index
cd containing 19 digital colour photos. Plus index

Report

1 copy of report

Finds: 1 floor tile fragment; 1 pottery bowl fragment plus pottery identification by John Allan.

APPENDIX 3

WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION REGARDING AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF DURING THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW ADMISSIONS BUILDING

Prepared by Stewart Brown Associates for English Heritage
October 2007

1. INTRODUCTION

English Heritage is to construct a new admissions building at Totnes Castle (SX800605) just inside the entrance through the existing perimeter wall on the east of the site. An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Stewart Brown Associates in February 2002 in order to investigate the depth and character of archaeological deposits and remains in this area prior to development (Brown, S.W. 'Totnes Castle – Archaeological evaluation for new kiosk, February 2002', unpublished report to English Heritage). The evaluation revealed a series of post-medieval dump deposits 0.8m deep which overlie a wall footing of medieval or early post-medieval date. An assessment of the impact of the proposed development was appended to the evaluation report. This recommended a mitigation strategy whereby footings for the new building would be limited to 700mm depth or less, so that archaeological damage would be confined to the relatively insignificant post-medieval dump layers, and not extend to the level of the excavated medieval or early post-medieval wall. Plans for the development (prepared by Parkes Lees Architects; job no. 007/25, 01-07) have taken these recommendations into account, so that the new footings will not exceed 700mm depth. The plans also include new service and drainage trenches, the construction of a new soakaway, and the erection of a fence along the north side of the path leading to the entrance, for which ten post-holes will be required. In addition, an archaeologist is to be present during the removal/reinstatement of ground in the area of the old admissions building, and will ensure that there is no archaeological damage during the installation of the compound and during the works themselves (rutting, etc).

This Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) describes the methods to be employed during the watching brief.

2. THE PROPOSED WORKS

- i) Construction of new site admissions building as shown in drawings 007/25, 01-07. The foundations for the building are to be a raft slab foundation and maximum excavation depth is anticipated to be approximately 600 - 700mm deep at the south end of the building. In addition, a fir tree will need to be cut down but the stump will not be removed by excavation, it will be drilled and poisoned.
 - ii) New service trench between old and new admission buildings which will be approx. 600mm deep.
 - iii) An extension of the service trench from the site of the old admission building to the gate entrance to the castle.
 - iv) Removal of step threshold at the gate entrance to the castle (to form ramp).
 - v) Construction of a new soakaway near the site of the new admissions building, and excavation of a drainage trench leading to it.

vi) new fence as shown on drawings to North side of entrance path. Posts will be at approx 1.5m centres.

3. OBJECTIVES

The principal objectives of the watching brief are to:

- i) investigate and record any architectural deposits and remains which are revealed by the excavations. If artefacts are uncovered, their context will be recorded and they will be removed for preservation.
- ii) monitor groundworks associated with the development to allow any significant archaeological deposits to be investigated and recorded.

Should significant archaeological deposits be revealed works will cease and both the English Heritage Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Devon County Council Historic Environment Service will be notified to discuss and agree the most appropriate way forward

4. METHOD STATEMENT FOR WATCHING BRIEF

4.1 *Monitoring*

Stewart Brown Associates will agree monitoring arrangements with English Heritage and the County Historic Environment Service and give two weeks notice, unless a shorter period is agreed with English Heritage/the County Historic Environment Service, of commencement of the fieldwork. Monitoring will continue until the deposition of the site archive and finds, and the satisfactory completion of an OASIS report.

The English Heritage Advisor for Archaeological Science will be consulted before the project commences (V Straker 0117 9750689)

4.2 *Standards*

The work shall be carried out in accordance with IFA Standards and Guidance regarding archaeological watching briefs.

4.3 *Finds*

Recovered artefacts will be related to the context from which they came by a system of coding. Ceramic finds will be identified by a specialist consultant (John Allan, Exeter Archaeology). Finds of undoubted modern origin will be discarded on site.

Should deposits be exposed that contain palaeoenvironmental or datable elements appropriate sampling strategies will be initiated. The project will be organised so that specialist consultants who might be required to conserve or report on finds or advise or report on other aspects of the investigation (e.g. palaeoenvironmental analysis) can be called upon and undertake assessment and analysis of such deposits - if required.

Human remains will initially be left in-situ, covered and protected. Removal will only take place under appropriate Ministry of Justice and environmental health regulations. Such removal will be in compliance with the relevant primary legislation.

Should gold or silver artefacts be exposed these will be removed to a safe place and reported to the local coroner according to the procedures relating to the Treasure Act 1996. Where removal cannot be effected on the same working day as the discovery suitable security measures will be taken to protect the finds from theft.

4.4 *Report*

A draft report will be submitted to English Heritage for comment prior to its formal submission.

On completion of the report, hard copies will be supplied to English Heritage and the County Historic Environment Service on the understanding that one of these copies will be deposited for public reference in the Historic Environment Record (HER). In addition to the hard copies of the report, one copy will be provided to the HER in digital format - in a format to be agreed in advance with the County Historic Environment Service - on the understanding that it may in future be made available to researchers via a web-based version of the HER.

The report will be produced within three months of completion of fieldwork - dependant upon the provision of specialist reports, radiocarbon dating results etc the production of which may exceed this period. If a substantial delay is anticipated then an interim report will be produced.

Stewart Brown Associates will complete an online OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of archaeological investigationS) form in respect of the archaeological work.

5. SITE ARCHIVE AND DEPOSITION OF ARCHIVE AND FINDS

A project archive will be prepared containing project records and finds in a permanently accessible form within a reasonable time of the completion of works (normally three months). The structure of the archive will follow the specifications outlined in 'Management of Archaeological Projects 2' (English Heritage). The archive, including the finds, will be deposited with Exeter RAM Museum (Accession no. 609/2007). The museum's guidelines for archive preparation will be followed. It is usual practice for ownership of the archive and finds to pass into the hands of the museum in order to guarantee permanent safekeeping (the museum cannot accept the archive unless ownership has been transferred; written permission for transference of ownership will be requested from English Heritage).

6. PERSONNEL

The work will be carried out by Stewart Brown, who is a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) and one or more site assistants. A list of specialists who can be consulted if required appears below.

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Archaeological work will be carried out in accordance with guidelines issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Unless specifically agreed otherwise, English Heritage will be

responsible for general safety on the site, checking for live underground services, and for preventing access by unauthorised persons to the area of excavation.

8. LIST OF SPECIALISTS WHO COULD ADVISE OR CONTRIBUTE TO THIS PROJECT IF REQUIRED:

Medieval and post medieval finds - John Allan (Exeter Archaeology);
Roman finds - Paul Bidwell (Tyne & Wear Museums, Arbeia Roman Fort);
Prehistoric lithic finds - John Newberry (Paignton);
Prehistoric ceramic finds - Henrietta Quinzel (Exeter);
Bone artefacts - Ian Riddler;
Clay tobacco pipes – David Higgins (Liverpool);
Coins and tokens - Norman Shiel (Exeter);
Finds conservation - Exeter RAM Museum Conservation Service (contact Alison Hopper-Bishop);
Environmental sampling - Vanessa Straker (English Heritage, Bristol);
Faunal remains - Southampton University Faunal Remains Unit;
Plant remains - Julie Jones (Bristol);
Geological identification and mineral analysis – Roger Taylor (Exeter Museum).

9. INSURANCE

9.1 Stewart Brown Associates has insurance cover in the following areas: Public Liability, Employers Liability, Professional Indemnity, All Risks, and Personal Accident.

9.2 Stewart Brown Associates will not be liable for any damage caused to the site which unavoidably results from archaeological site operations being carried out within the agreed scope of works.

10. PERMISSIONS

English Heritage will be responsible for obtaining any necessary permissions or consents required for the purpose of archaeological recording and excavation.