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SANDSFOOT CASTLE, OLD CASTLE ROAD, WEYMOUTH, DORSET

Archaeological Evaluation

Report No. 53328/2/1

March 2011

SANDSFOOT CASTLE, OLD CASTLE ROAD, WEYMOUTH, DORSET

Archaeological Evaluation, October 2010

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SUMMARY

In October 2010, Terrain Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation within Sandsfoot Castle, Weymouth, Dorset (SY67487737) to inform a proposal to open up the castle to the public. A single trench was excavated in the passage leading into the basement. The evaluation revealed that the stone flag floor of the passage and the basement had been robbed out, exposing the footings beneath and a drain running through these footings. The ashlar facing of the passage was also recorded. The passage and the basement had been backfilled with tips and dumps of stone and mortar rubble containing 18th and 19th century pottery to a depth of 1.5 m. These deposits probably derived from the robbing of the floor and the facing stone of the walls of the castle.

A lead shot from a wall piece or swivel gun was the only find recovered that relates to the period of use of the castle.

INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Weymouth and Portland Borough Council to undertake an archaeological evaluation within Sandsfoot Castle, Old Castle Road, Weymouth. This evaluation was requested to inform a proposal to place a platform within the castle to enable visitor access. It is proposed to found the platform on pads with the central area of the castle. This forms part of an HLF Stage 2 bid to open up Sandsfoot Castle to the public.

Sandsfoot Castle has statutory protection as a Scheduled Monument (SM No. 33198). The Castle is also a Listed Building Grade II*.

The proposal was to excavate a single trial pit in the passageway giving access to the basement in the western corner of the castle (at Ordnance Survey NGR SY67487737). No formal written brief for the works has been issued, but a Conservation Management Plan has been prepared and the requirement for a trial pit has been set out in an email from Jo Hibbert (the architect) to Veryan Heal (English Heritage). The scope of the evaluation was discussed with Veryan Heal (English Heritage), who also commented on the Written Scheme of Investigation (Terrain Archaeology 2010) prior to the application for Scheduled Monument Consent for the works.

An archaeological evaluation, as defined by the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (2008) is "a limited programme if intrusive fieldwork, which determines the presence, or absence of archaeological features, structured, deposits, artefacts of ecofacts within a specified area or site. If such archaeological remains are present, field evaluation defines their character, extent, quality and preservation, and enables an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context, as appropriate."

The fieldwork was carried out on between the 21st October and 3rd November 2010 by Peter Bellamy.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and cooperation of the following during this project: Jo Hibbert, Stephen Reeves and members of the Parks Department of Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, Veryan Heal (English Heritage), David Carter and Jo Draper.

THE SITE

Sandsfoot Castle is situated on a prominent coastal headland in Weymouth Bay (Figure 1). It lies off Old Castle Road at Ordnance Survey NGR SY674773 (Figure 2). It lies at a height of about 14 m above Ordnance Datum. The eastern side of the site is suffering from coastal erosion.

The castle lies within the public Sandsfoot Castle Gardens, which includes the area of the former 17th century earthwork bastion (Figure 2).

The underlying geology is Sandsfoot Grit of the Corallian Formation.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Sandsfoot Castle is a Tudor artillery castle built during the 1540s as part of a chain of forts along the south coast and it (together with Portland Castle) protected the anchorage between Weymouth and Portland. The castle is now ruined, but originally included a heavy gun emplacement, quarters for a garrison and a magazine. The surviving remains include a rectangular two-storey blockhouse, set over a basement, with an integrated tower at the northwestern end (RCHME 1970).

The landward side was protected by an earthwork bastion, which is first mentioned in a survey of 1623, which also refers to a stone structure, which may have run along the top of the bank of the earthwork. During the Civil War it was held for the King but was abandoned as a fort in 1664-5, but continued as a storehouse up until 1691 (RCHME 1970). In 1711 permission was given for the ashlar to be taken from the castle to build Weymouth Bridge.

There has been no previous archaeological investigation within the castle. Terrain Archaeology undertook a watching brief in 2007 during the construction of a new footbridge in Sandsfoot Castle Gardens across the bank and ditch of the seventeenth century earthwork bastion. No significant archaeological remains were observed (Tatler and Bellamy 2007). In October 2010, Terrain Archaeology observed a borehole in the southern end of the earthwork bastion. A layer of construction or robbing debris was recorded (Bellamy 2010).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the archaeological works was to determine the exact depth of the basement, to determine whether any of the original ashlar walling lies beneath the existing build-up and to evaluate the nature of the fill of the basement.

The objective of the archaeological works was to evaluate the archaeological potential of the site, that is, to appraise the nature, extent, level of preservation, and importance of any archaeological deposits.

The evaluation aimed to record all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the works in order to provide sufficient data to assess the archaeological significance of the site.

The evaluation aimed to assess the nature, extent, state of preservation and importance of the archaeological remains and present the results in this report.

The results of the evaluation may be used to formulate a strategy for the preservation or management of any archaeological remains; and/or formulate an appropriate response or mitigation strategy to planning applications or other proposals which may affect adversely any such archaeological remains, or enhance them; and/or formulate a proposal for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research.

METHODS

The Evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Terrain Archaeology 2010) and with the Institute for Archaeologists *Code of Conduct* and *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008).

A single trench (Trench 1) measuring 3.0 m by 1.2 m across was excavated by hand in the passageway giving access to the basement and partly within the basement as shown on Figure 3 and Plate 1. Excavation was halted when either the footings or the underlying natural deposits were reached.

All trenches were recorded to a standard commensurate with the aims and objectives of the project, using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. These have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines and the requirements of the receiving museum. A photographic record of the evaluation was maintained in 35mm black-and-white print and digital format, recording the setting and conduct of the works, as well as its technical detail.

RESULTS

Stratigraphy

Natural deposits

Natural yellowish-brown clay with yellowish-grey mottles (118) was only exposed at the base of the basement and at the base of Drain 111 (Figure 4).

Castle Structural Elements

Footings

At the base of the trench within the passageway was a layer of hard cemented yellowish-brown clayey mortar (110) with moderate to frequent stone rubble (Plate 2). This deposit was not removed so its thickness is not known. The upper surface was very irregular and the impressions where stones had been removed could be discerned in places. This stone and mortar layer has been interpreted as the footings or sub-base to the passageway into the basement. The remains of the paving of the passageway (114) were set into this mortar. Also, the stones forming the wall of the basement appeared to be set into this mortar deposit.

Drain 111

Towards the eastern end of the trench were exposed the remains of a stone lined drain (111). This drain ran diagonally across the passageway below the floor in a roughly E-W direction (Figures 3 and 4). The drain was formed by a single course of large cobbles set within the clayey mortar layer 110, capped by large stones. The drain measured about 0.25 m wide and 0.12 m high and was void where it passed under the walls of the passageway (115, 116). The base of the drain was not lined and was formed by the surface of the natural clay 118. The large capping stones remained intact where they lay beneath the walls, but in the centre of the passageway the capping and the stone(s) forming the southern side of the drain had been removed, presumably as part of the robbing (113) of the structure.

Passage

The passage was formed by two mortared ashlar walls (115, 116) 1.2 m apart. The walls were built from large dressed stone blocks and two courses were exposed below the present ground level

(Figures 7 and 8; Plates 4 and 5). Traces of plaster were found on the faces of both walls, but they were particularly noticeable on wall 115 (Figure 7). The base of the walls rested on a series of stones (114) that projected into the corridor. These stones were of varying sizes, but almost all appeared to have been dressed. The upper surface of these stones was flat. Some appear to have been broken *in situ*. These stones are thought to be the remains of the floor of the basement, the remainder of which had been robbed.

Basement 119

Only a very small part of the edge of the basement was exposed within the trench (Plate 3). The edge of the basement was formed by a stone mortared revetment (117). Up to two courses survive, but below the lowest course, there is stone rubble infilling irregularities in the top of the natural clay. The face of the lowest course has mortar adhering and this is interpreted as forming the last traces of a stone flag floor to the basement. If this were the case, then originally the floor of the basement would have been one step (0.25 m) below the height of the floor in the passageway. No physical remains of the floor were found; instead the base of the basement survives as an irregular scooped surface in the underlying natural clay, which is assumed to be the result of robbing of the original stone flooring material.

Robbing Deposits

The robbing of the structure is represented by the removal of the majority of the paving stones of the floor, leaving only those stones that were physically partly beneath the walls of the passage and the cut (113) into drain 111 removing the capstones and the stones on the south side of the drain (Figure 4).

Following the robbing, the basement and the passage were filled with a series of layers of stone and mortar rubble and debris, which appeared to be tipped into the passage from the south, forming a deposit up to 1.3 m thick (Figures 5-6). The basement is filled with a layer of mid yellowish-brown gritty clay (109) with moderate quantities of stone rubble and frequent lime mortar flecks, which measured up to 0.52 m thick. This layer covered the robbed floor and lapped over the top of the surviving exposed basement wall 117 (Figure 5). This layer was sealed beneath a series of layers of stone rubble in a mid yellowish-brown gritty clay matrix (105,107, 112) interspersed with layers of mid yellowish-brown gritty clay containing frequent mortar flecks and moderate amounts of stone rubble (103, 104, 106, 108). The stone rubble comprised mainly of irregular fragments and cobbles between 70-350 mm across, with a small number of dressed fragments. Three large dressed blocks up to 0.6 m across were present in layer 105 (Plate 6).

Above these tipped layers of rubble was an intermittent layer of dark yellowish-brown silty clay (102) with moderate mortar flecks and occasional small stone rubble. This is probably a silting and weathering deposit following the deposition of the robbing backfill and prior to the development of the topsoil.

Topsoil

The rubbly robbing deposits were sealed beneath a 0.18 m thick layer of fairly loose dark greyish-brown silty clay (101), containing a mixture of modern materials including plastic bottles, beer cans, spray paint cans, bottle glass, etc. The upper part of this layer is very loose and it is clear that this layer was formed by gradual accumulative silting.

Finds

A range of artefacts was recovered from the trial pit and these are tabulated below in Table 1. Almost all these artefacts appear to reflect post-abandonment activity rather than associated with the construction and occupation of the castle.

Context	Iron	Lead	Pottery	Clay Pipe	CBM	Slate	Plaster	Glass	Worked bone	Animal Bone	Shell
101			4/190g	1/2g				3/54g			1/7g
102	2/47g		14/114g	13/50g	2/78g	3/43g		9/263g			3/97g
103			1/5g					1/19g			
102/103			8/52g	22/68g			1/10g	3/28g		1/2g	3/144g
104	2/28g		3/11g	20/56g	1/98g	1/5g	1/77g	7/164g		2/5g	5/121g
105	2/6g		19/297g	43/131g			2/33g	7/145g		7/43g	15/188g
106	1/<1g		24/259g	33/109g		2/1g	2/52g	3/80g		9/67g	9/55g
107			11/120g	50/170g	2/183g	1/196g	1/29g	1/1g		4/9g	7/61g
108		1/83g	28/327g	7/21g	1/58g	2/7g	3/58g	1/1g		2/8g	10/66g
109			11/69g	11/29g		2/66g	11/116g			9/121g	25/157g
112			1/2g	2/5g	1/76g	1/4g			2/9g	2/7g	1/3g
Total	**7/81g**	**1/83g**	**123/ 1446g**	**202/ 641g**	**7/ 493g**	**12/ 322g**	**21/ 174g**	**26/ 755g**	**2/9g**	**36/ 262g**	**79/ 899g**

Table 1: Finds Assemblage (no./wt (g)).

Iron

Six iron nails and spikes were recovered from robbing contexts 102, 104 and 105, all highly corroded and incomplete. A single nickel-plated steel pin with spherical head was recovered from robbing layer 106.

Lead

A single lead shot was recovered from context 108. It was highly abraded, with a number of flat facets, but appears to have been originally 25 mm (1 inch) in diameter, with a weight of 83 g ($2^{7}/_{8}$ oz). The size and weight suggests that it was from a wall piece (or swivel gun) rather than from a musket.

Post-medieval Pottery

One hundred and twenty three sherds of post-medieval and modern pottery (1446 g) were retained (Table 1). These were identified by Jo Draper FSA. The assemblage includes both fineware, local earthenwares and industrial whitewares. The majority of the sherds are from tablewares. The date range of the pottery is broadly early 18th-late 19th century. The lower deposits (contexts 106, 107, 108 and 109) contained pottery dating from the early 18th century to the 1830s. The upper contexts (101, 102) contained sherds dating to the 1890s. Context 105 contained some late 19th century pottery also. The early 18th century pottery includes a sherd of manganese glazed pottery from context 109 and Westerwald stoneware from contexts 105 and 109. There is also a Delft tin-glazed sherd from context 105. Context 107 produced the base of a cream ware tea bowl of very late 18th century date. There are some early 19th century pearlware sherds form contexts 107 and 108, probably dating to the 1830s. Context 108 also produced some early 19th century mocha ware sherds and some iron-glazed pottery. Two fragments from an early 19th century 'Poor Man's Friend' ointment pot from Bridport. The late 19th century pottery included blacking bottle sherds from context 101, marmalade jar from contexts 102, 103 and 105. A single sherd of imported Chinese porcelain was recovered from context 107.

Clay Tobacco Pipe

202 clay tobacco pipe fragments were recovered, of which the majority are stem fragments. Only two complete bowls are present, both of 19th century type, one with lobed or fluted decoration and one with a crosshatched shield decoration on the side and a leaf decoration front and back. Both bowls were recovered from context 102. Two small fragments from 19th century bowls found in context 105 had traces of a leaf decoration. No other decorative pieces or maker's marks were found. Seven heel and bowl fragments, possibly from 18th century pipes were found in contexts 102/103, 105, 107, and 109. A spur fragment was found in context 106.

Building Materials

There was a range of building materials found within the trial pit. This primarily comprised plaster fragments, with a small amount of slate and ceramic building materials also present. All ceramic building materials were recovered, but only an arbitrary selection of slate and plaster.

Seven pieces of ceramic building material (CBM) were recovered. These comprised three brick fragments from contexts 107 and 112, one fragment of plain terracotta floor tile (from context 104), one fragment of flat ceramic roof tile (from context 108) and two fragments of terracotta drain pipe (from context 102). It is unclear whether any of these ceramic building material fragments derive from the castle.

Twelve pieces of slate were recovered. Four pieces have traces of mortar or lime concretions on them suggesting that they may have been used for galletting (i. e. fitted into the joints between the masonry). Slate galletting is visible in a number of places on the standing masonry.

A large number of plaster fragments were found in the robbing layers. The 21 fragments of plaster retained have traces of masonry or laths on the rear face. The plaster is between 15 mm to 20 mm thick. No traces of paint are visible.

Glass

Twenty-six pieces of glass were recovered. Only two small fragments of window glass 2 mm thick were found in contexts 105 and 108. The remainder of the glass was bottle glass and included clear, green and brown wine bottle glass from both two piece and one piece moulds, three fragments from Codd bottles (contexts 101 and 102), two fragments of case bottles (contexts 102/103 and 104) and two sherds from probable medicine bottles (context 104). In addition, there is one small sherd of possible vessel glass (from context 107). The bottle glass all appears to be 19th or 20th century in date.

Worked Bone

Two fragments of a bone knife handle were recovered from the fill of drain 111 (112). The remains of three iron fixing pins survive within the handle and the inner face is discoloured by rust from the scale tang of the knife.

Animal Bone

The small animal bone assemblage was fragmentary and included both cattle and sheep bone, together with a small number of rodent or bird bone.

Shell

The 79 marine shells and shell fragments comprised 30 oyster, 25 mussel, 19 limpet, four cockle and one razor shell. Many of these shells may have become accidentally incorporated into the deposits through the action of seabirds. Six oyster shells have traces of mortar adhering suggesting they were used for galletting.

CONCLUSIONS

The aims of the archaeological works were to determine the exact depth of the basement, to determine whether any of the original ashlar walling lies beneath the existing build-up and to evaluate the nature of the fill of the basement (Terrain Archaeology 2010). The results of the trial trench excavation have answered or contributed to all of these aims.

The base of the cellar was shown to be between 1.4 m and 1.6 m below current ground level. This is the level of the bottom of the basement following the robbing of the floor. The original floor

level was about 1.1 m below current ground level. The base of the passage lies between 1.25 m and 0.9 m below the existing ground level, but the original height of the floor prior to robbing was 0.9 m below.

The emptying of the backfill from the passage revealed that the lower two courses of the ashlar facing stones still survived *in situ* and that these walls were originally plastered. There is some suggestion that the facing stones of the basement wall are more damaged and only the lowest course of facing stones survives intact, although more investigative work is needed to confirm this. The archaeological work has shown that the stone flag floor of the passage and the basement had been almost completely robbed out.

The fill of the basement and the passage were similar, comprising a series of tips of stone rubble and mortar debris, which had clearly been derived from the robbing of the stonework of the castle, as it contained mainly rubble stone, small broken fragments of dressed stone and mortar and plaster fragments and flecks. The pottery recovered from these tips suggested the basement and passage were backfilled in the 1830s or later, with the upper part of the sequence dating to the end of the 19th century. The date range of the pottery from the early 18th century to the late 19th century may indicate the main period of robbing of the structure. Only a single residual artefact, a lead shot from a wall piece or swivel gun, dates to the period of use of the castle.

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[RCHME] Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (England)	1970	*An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Dorset, Volume 2: South East.* London, HMSO
Tatler, S & Bellamy, P. S.,	2007	'New Footbridge, Sandsfoot Castle Gardens, Weymouth, Dorset: Archaeological Observations and Recording, October 2007' Unpublished Terrain Archaeology Report No. 53266/3/1, December 2007.
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APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARY TABLE

TRENCH 1		
Length: 3.0 m	Width: 1.2 m	Depth: 1.55 m

Context Number	Description and interpretation	Depth below ground level
101	Modern topsoil and silting deposit. A loose dark greyish-brown silty clay with sparse vegetation coverage and containing modern rubbish.	0.00 – 0.18m
102	Intermittent silting and weathering deposit over robbing backfill deposits. Friable dark yellowish-brown silty clay with moderate mortar flecks occasional small stone rubble.	0.1 – 0.35m
103	Robbing backfill layer. A fairly compact dark yellowish-brown silty clay with moderate to frequent small-medium stone rubble, moderate mortar flecks and sparse charcoal flecks.	0.25 – 0.4m
104	Robbing backfill layer. A fairly compact yellowish-brown silty clay with moderate small-medium stone rubble and frequent mortar flecks.	0.4 – 0.65m
105	Robbing backfill layer. A compact dark yellowish-brown gritty clay with very frequent stone rubble and moderate mortar flecks and pieces.	0.15 – 1.0m
106	Robbing backfill layer. A friable yellowish-brown gritty clay with frequent mortar flecks and moderate small stone rubble.	0.25 – 1.0m
107	Robbing backfill layer. A compact yellowish-brown gritty clay with very frequent stone rubble and moderate mortar flecks.	0.35 – 1.25m
108	Robbing backfill layer. Fairly loose mid yellowish-brown gritty clay with frequent mortar flecks and occasional-moderate small stone rubble.	0.5 – 0.95m
109	Robbing backfill layer in basement. A friable mid yellowish-brown gritty clay with moderate stone rubble and frequent mortar flecks.	0.95 – 1.55m
110	Footings. Hard yellowish-brown clayey mortar with moderate to frequent stone rubble.	1.05 – 1.4m
111	Drain constructed of a single course of stone cobbles within footings 110, with large capstones. Aligned E-W.	1.05 – 1.4m
112	Fill of robbing cut into Drain 111. A compact yellowish-brown gritty clay with very frequent stone rubble and moderate mortar flecks. Same as context 107.	1.2 – 1.5m
113	Robbing cut into drain 111.	1.5m
114	Paving. Stone paving in passage. Only survives where it lies under the walls of the passage, but some of the larger stones have been broken to remove them.	0.95m
115	North wall of passage. Large mortared ashlar blocks, two courses survive. Some traces of plaster survive on the faces of some blocks.	
116	South wall of passage. Large mortared ashlar blocks, three courses survive below ground. Some traces of plaster survive on the faces of some blocks.	
117	Basement wall. Mortared ashlar forming revetment wall to basement.	
118	Natural Clay. Stiff yellowish-brown clay with yellowish-grey mottles.	1.5m +
119	Basement. General number given to basement.	1.55m

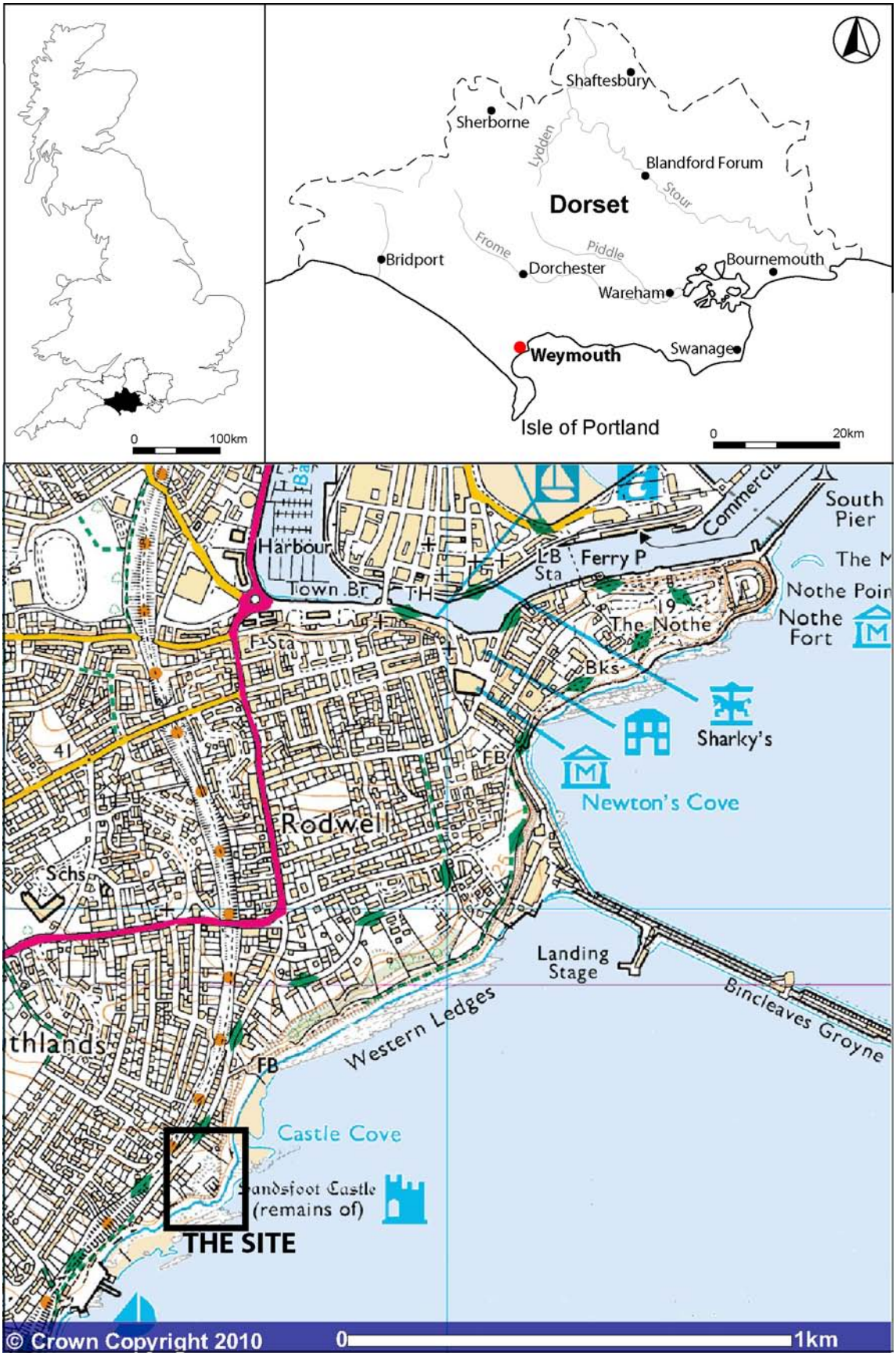

Figure 1: Location map

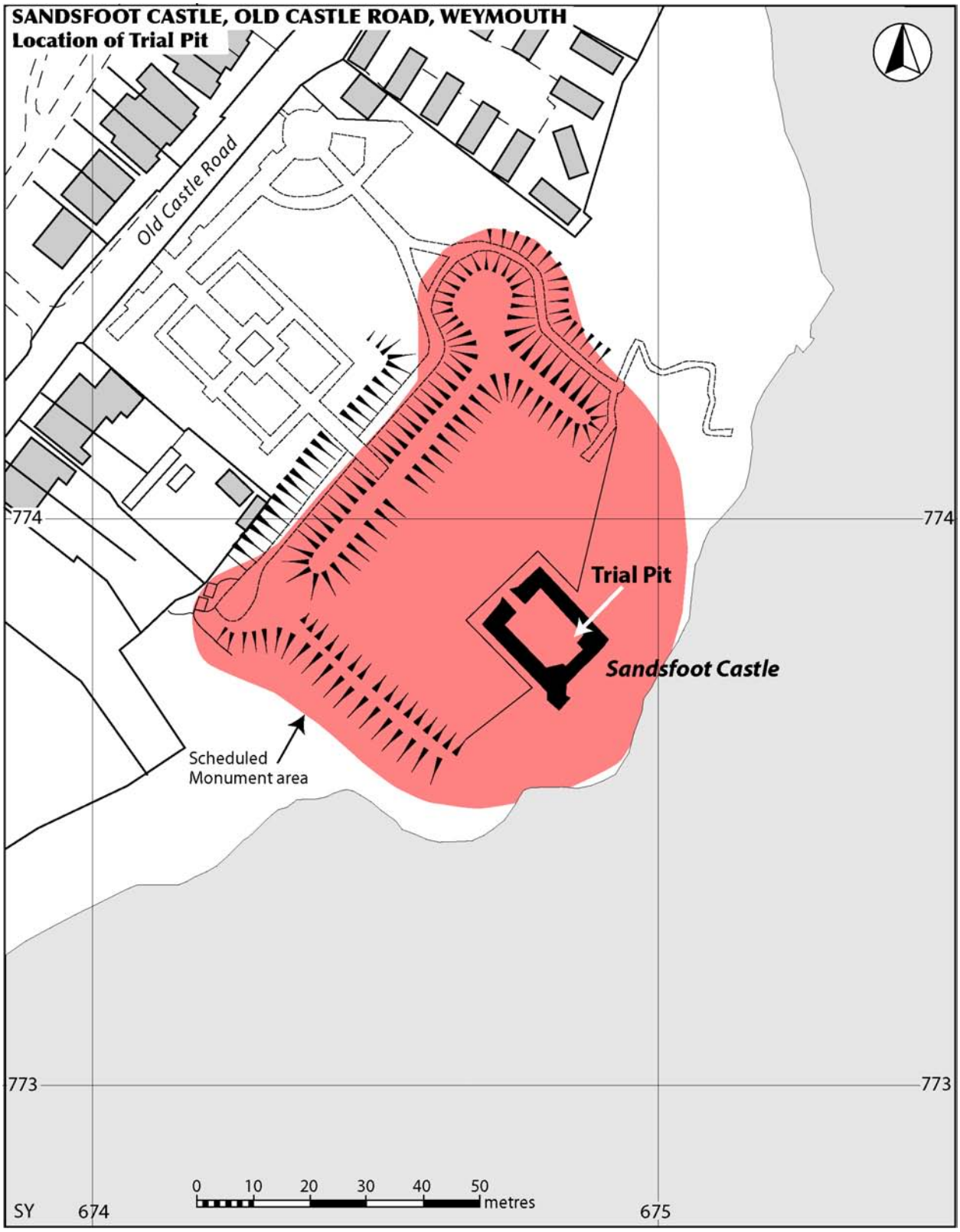

Figure 2: Map showing location of Trial Pit and extent of Scheduled Area

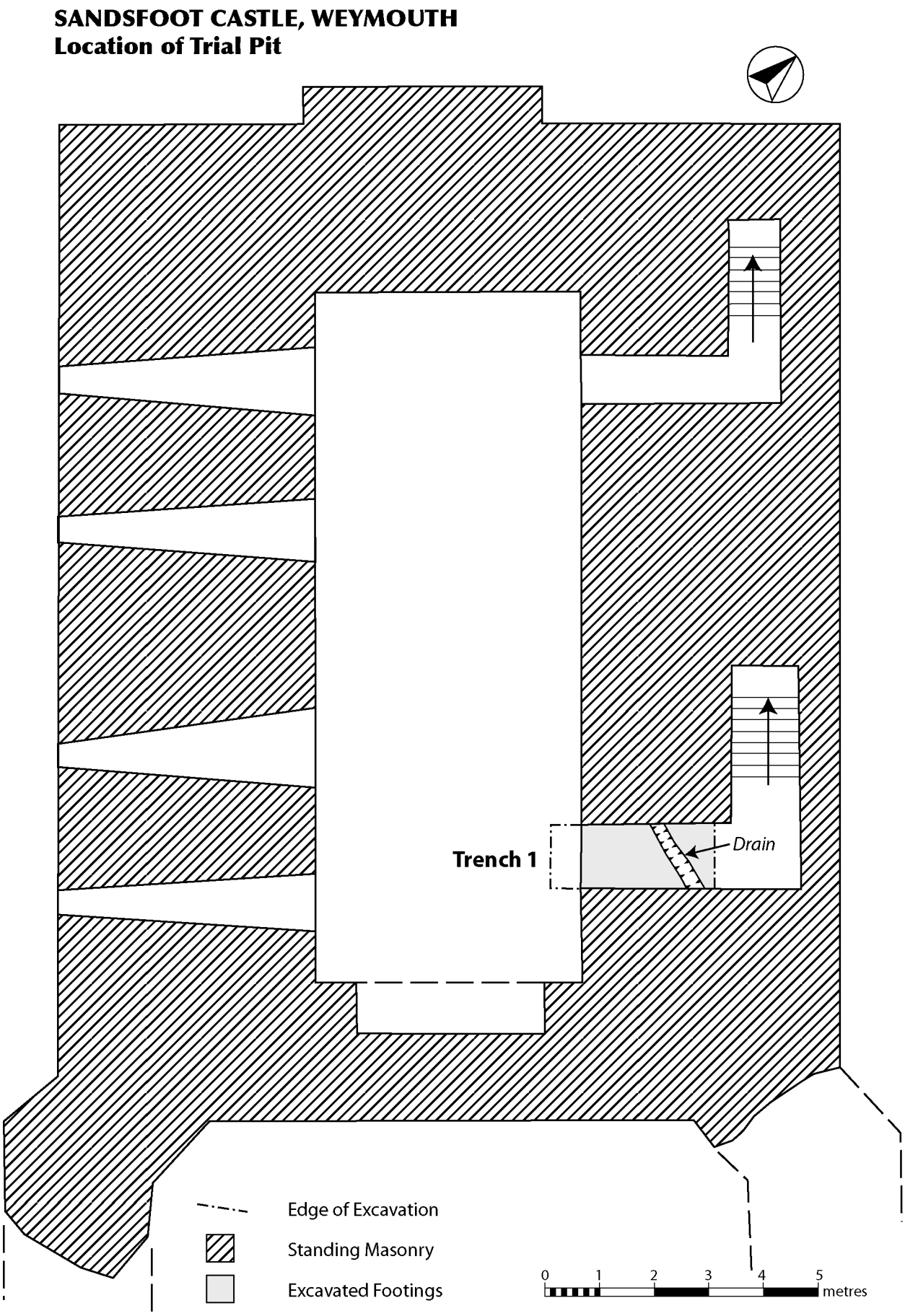

Figure 3: Plan of basement of Sandsfoot Castle and location of Trial Pit (Trench 1).

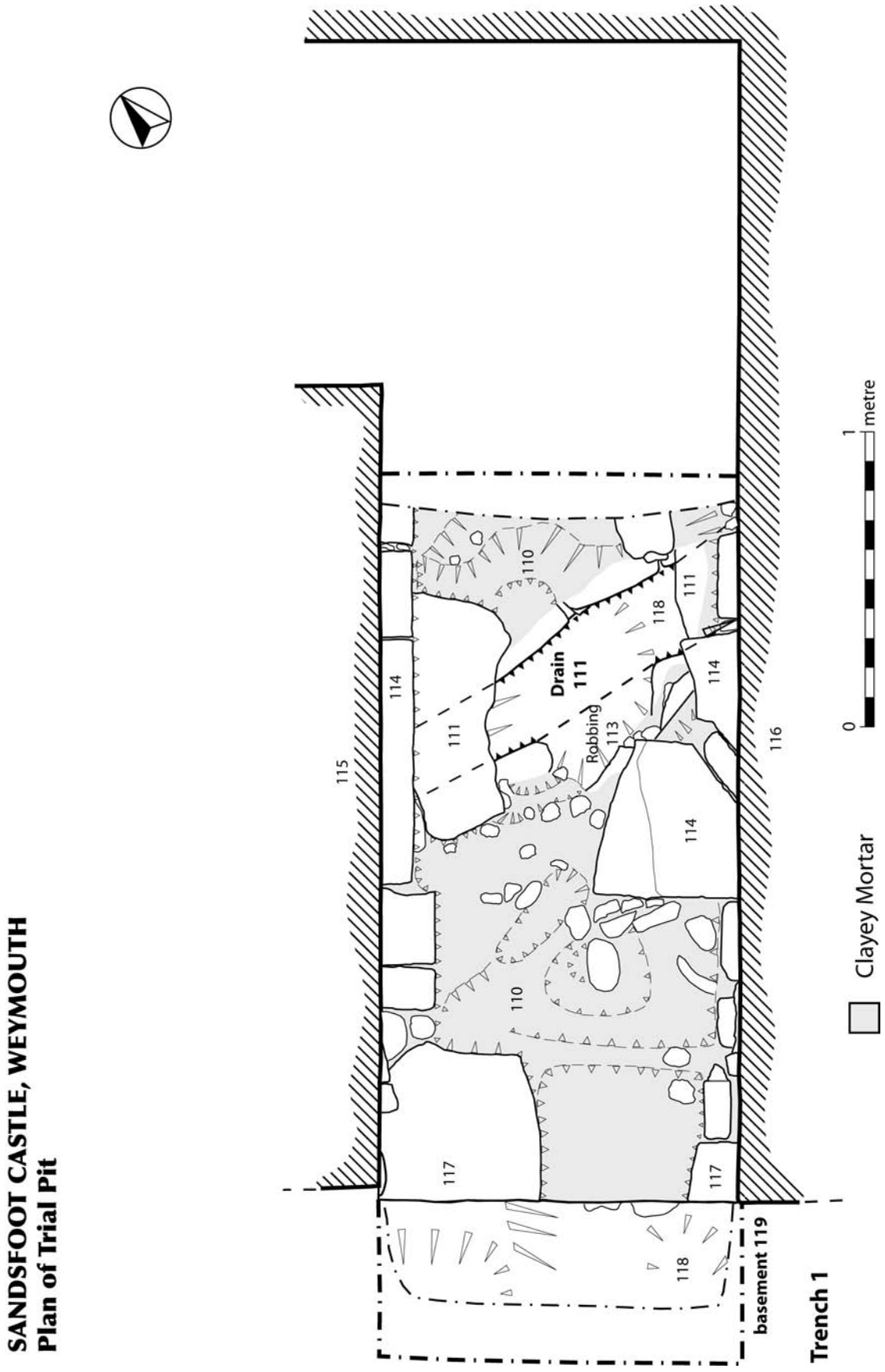

Figure 4: Plan of Trial Pit

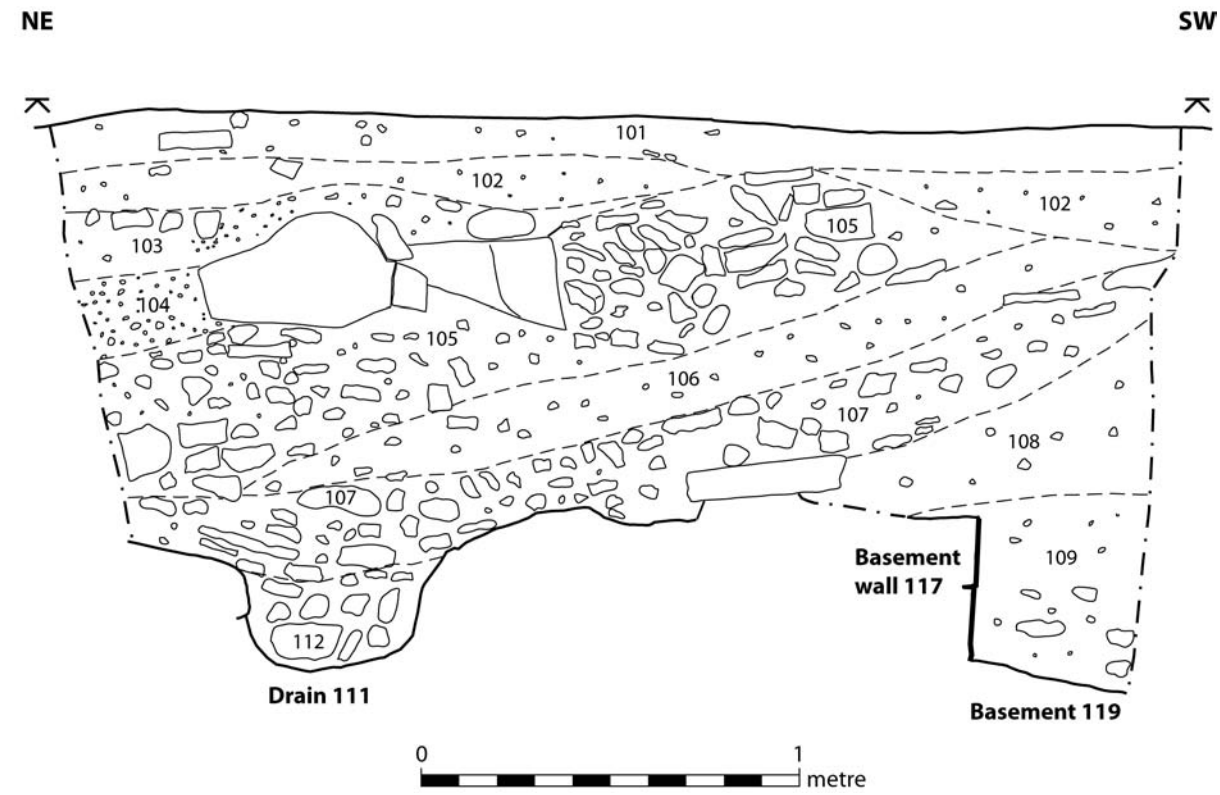

Figure 5: Northwest-facing section through robbing deposits filling passageway.

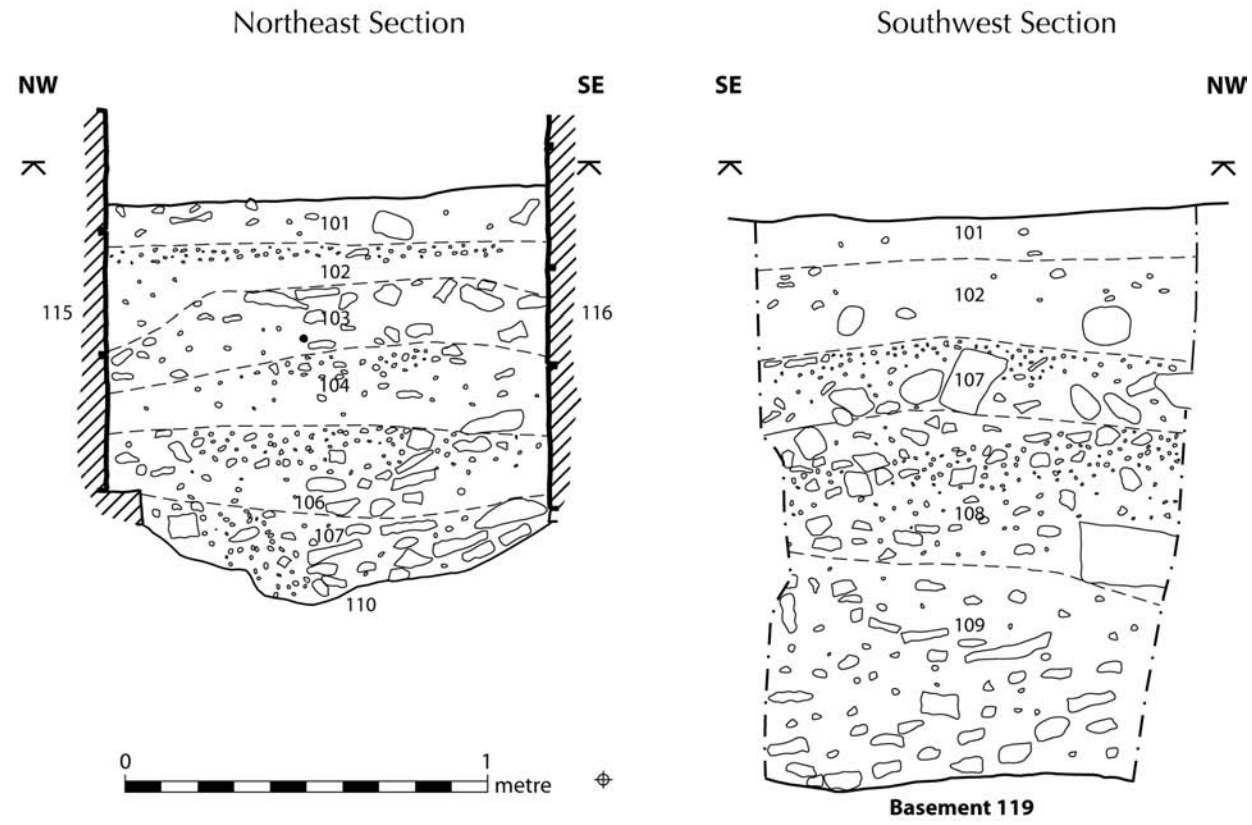

Figure 6: Sections through deposits at northeast and southwest ends of Trial Pit.

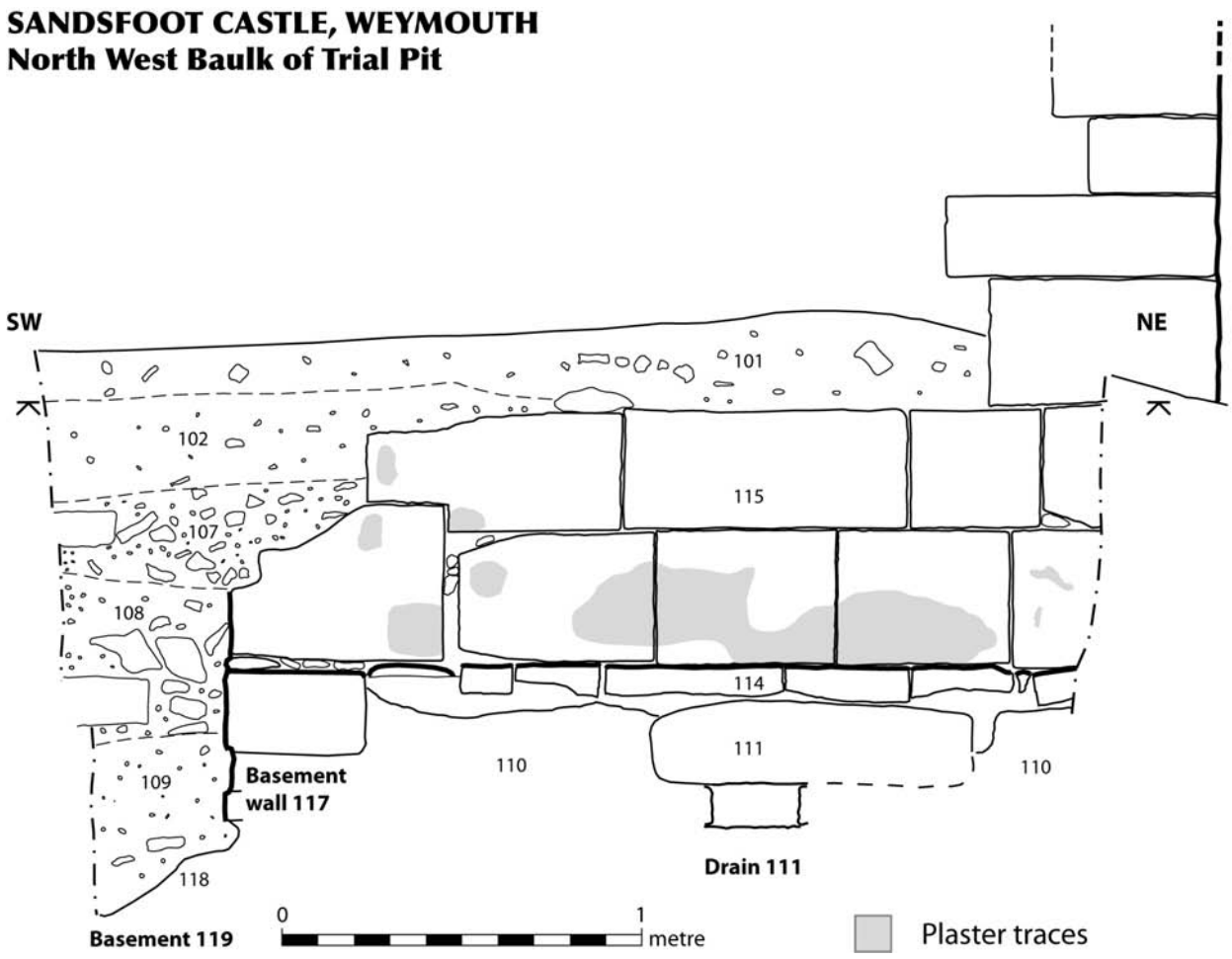

Figure 7: Elevation of northwest side of passageway.

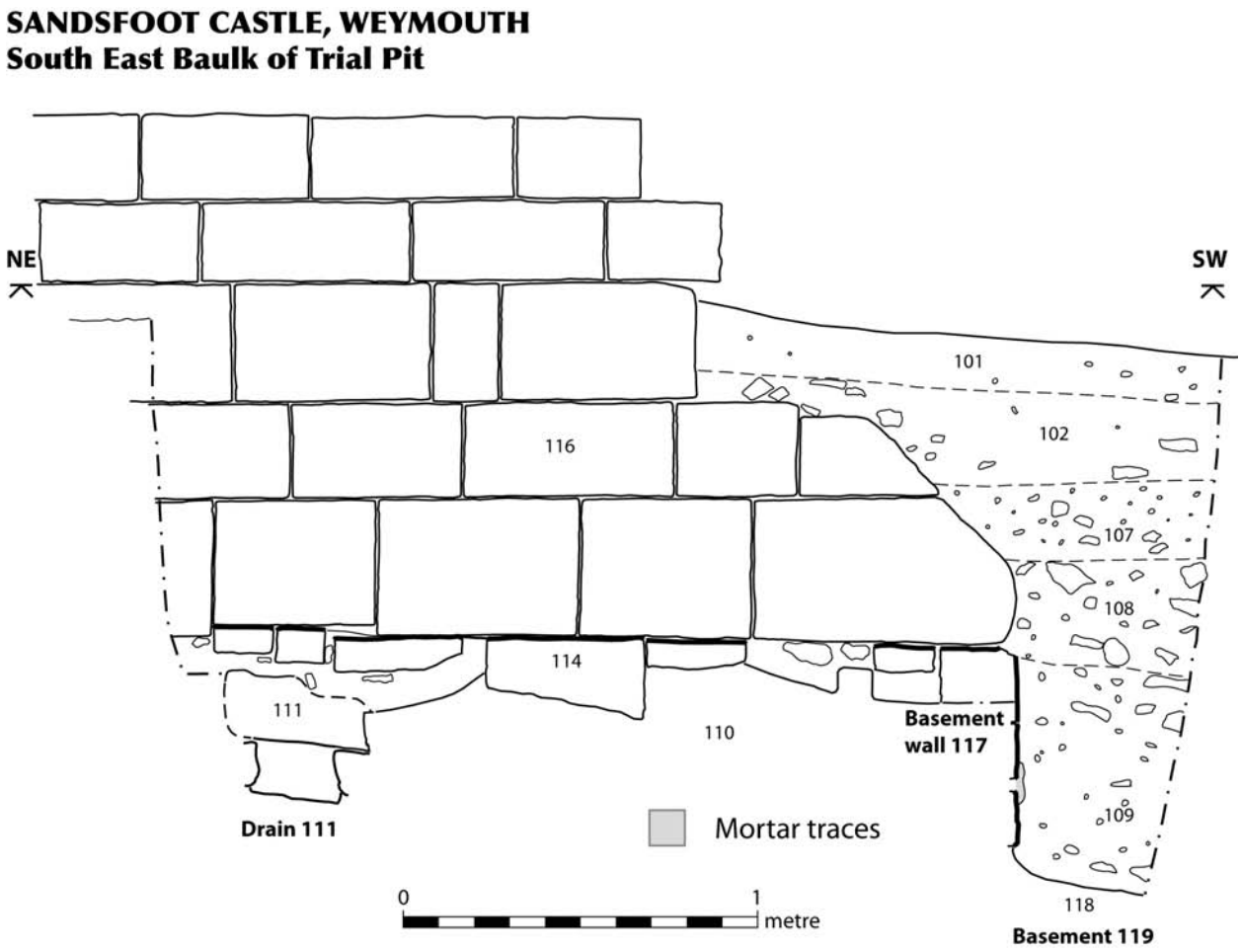

Figure 8: Elevation of southeast side of passageway.

Plate 1: General view of Trial Pit after excavation, viewed from south.

Plate 2: Plan view of passageway after excavation.

Plate 3: View of basement and basement

Plate 4: View of north side of passageway showing exposed masonry.

Plate 5: View of south side of passageway showing exposed masonry.

Plate 6: Rubble infill in passageway.

Plate 7: Rubble infill in basement.

Plate 8: View of rubble infill in passageway.