



The Iron Gate Footpath Steps, Tintagel Castle, Cornwall. Archaeological Watching Brief

Cornwall Archaeological Unit

Report No: 2016R027

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Report Name

The Iron Gate Footpath Steps, Tintagel Castle, Cornwall. Archaeological Watching Brief

Report Author

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Event Type

Watching Brief

Client Organisation

Quadron Building Conservation

Client Contact

Roger Scobie

Monuments (MonUID)

1014793

Fieldwork dates (From)

14/03/16

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17/03/16

(Created By)

CMT

(Create Date)

29/03/2016

Location (postal address; or general location and parish)

Tintagel Castle, Tintagel Parish

(Town – for urban sites)

Tintagel

(Postcode)

PL34 0HE

(Easting) X co-ord

SX 05078

(Northing) Y co-ord

89100



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1 Introduction

Cornwall Archaeological Unit (CAU) was commissioned by Roger Scobie, Contract Manager Quadron Building Conservation, to carry out a watching brief at Tintagel Castle, Cornwall, during the replacement of, and addition to, some steps along the pathways from the Inner Ward to the viewpoint above site C, and down to the Iron Gate at Tintagel Castle.

This short report covers the results of the archaeological watching brief carried out over two days: 14th and 17th March 2016.

2 Location, background and archaeological potential

Tintagel Castle (MCO16987), situated on the north coast of Cornwall within the parish of Tintagel, is a Scheduled Monument (National Monument Number 1014793). It is the site of a late Roman settlement (possibly the Durocornovio of the Ravenna Cosmography) of the 4th and 5th centuries AD; a major fortified citadel with trading links to the Mediterranean in the post-Roman period during the 5th to 7th centuries AD and subsequently a medieval castle dating to the 13th century (Figs 1 and 2).

It is suggested that during the post-Roman period the physical location of the fortress that developed was the origin of the place-name, in Cornish '*dyn tagell*', which means the fortress of the constriction or throat (Padel 1988).

A lead/silver mine known as King Arthur's Mine (MCO12202) located at SX 05091 89052 under the island operated in the 19th century, while the Haven (MCO4735) was used for servicing the slate quarrying and fishing industries from at least the later medieval period (Thomas 1993; Dyer 2005).

Since the 1930s the Ministry of Works and latterly English Heritage Property in Care have held in Stewardship land at Tintagel which is owned by the Duchy of Cornwall. English Heritage has Guardianship and management responsibilities over the site. Apart from the track to the village, English Heritage does not possess the freehold, but manages and maintains the historic property on behalf of the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport.

The bedrock geology is complex (BGS sheet 322), formed by the Tintagel Group consisting of a mixture of Upper Devonian Upper Delabole slates, Lower Carboniferous slates and siltstones and Lower Carboniferous volcanic agglomerates. The whole has undergone complex faulting and thrusting movements that have greatly influenced the topography by creating numerous lines of weakness and instability, easily exploited by the action of the sea, for example along the line of the Haven and Merlin's cave. Some of the faults have been heavily mineralised, the lodes having been worked in the past for their silver and lead content (see above).

Previous archaeological investigations, within the immediate area of the Iron Gate, and path, have included those directed by C.A. Raleigh Radford during the 1930s (Radford 1939), and work done by Cornwall Archaeological Unit in 2006 (Thorpe 2007; 2013).

These have shown that the path down to the Iron Gate passed over several man-made post-Roman terraces, two of which produced evidence for structures, perhaps edges of buildings or revetments for terraces. Numerous sherds of post-Roman imported Mediterranean pottery were recovered from along the entire length of the path. This indicates the high potential for any ground disturbance to encounter archaeological remains on this part of the Island.

3 Aims and objectives

The aims of the project were as follows:

- Liaise with English Heritage and the contractors (George Climo and Sons) on site to determine the most appropriate and least archaeologically sensitive locations for the new steps.
- To ensure that the site works were carried out in such a way as to allow archaeological recording.
- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains and record archaeological features and deposits affected by the scheme.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, date and significance of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To recover and record artefacts uncovered by the works.
- To provide further information on the archaeology of the area from any archaeological remains encountered.
- To deposit the archive (including any finds) with the relevant museum and disseminate the results of discoveries as a concise archive report and, if merited, wider publication.

The primary objective of the project was to report on the findings of the excavations and to complete an entry within the OASIS/ADS-Online database.

4 Working methods

Fieldwork took place over two day visits which commenced on 14th March 2016 and was completed on 17th March 2016.

The contractors George Climo and Son used hand tools to excavate the areas required for the new steps. In each case the steps were inserted where the path had become a deep rut in the ground surface. The steps were constructed by having a narrow vertical groove cut on either side flanking the path in order to provide the seating for a timber plank riser to be inserted across the width of the path. Each groove was dug to a depth sufficient for the base of the riser to lie flush with the existing surface of the path. In no case was the actual surface of the path dug down into. The upslope side of the step was then infilled with compacted material (derived from previous groundworks within the Upper and Lower Wards of the castle which took place in 1998/9 [Reynolds 2006; Thorpe 2015] that had been stored on the island) in order to build up and level the path to the top of the riser.

This groundwork was carried out with archaeological monitoring. Once the grooves were dug the sides were inspected for any archaeological features or artefacts and a photographic record was made. The spoil was also examined for any artefacts. Notes were made of the soil profile encountered in each excavated area.

Only one step (Step 9) revealed buried archaeological remains: a section of possibly early slate walling. A plan was made at a scale of 1:10 (Fig 7).

5 Results

A total of 13 steps (Fig 3) were examined during the course of this project, their sections being noted and each individually photographed. The details of these are kept within the site archive.

Step 1.

This step was situated on the path (Figs 3 and 4) leading from the medieval gate out of the northern curtain wall of the Inner Ward, to the viewpoint above Site C. It was

placed at the southern end of the existing steps at SX 05032 89121. The path was at this point roughly 1m wide. Slots measuring 0.25m long by 0.15m wide were dug, that on the western side was 0.35m deep while that on the eastern was 0.25m deep.

The soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil overlying 0.1m of dark-grey clay loam subsoil, 0.05m of dark grey-brown clay with shillet fragments, 0.1m of grey-brown clay with numerous shillet fragments (some large), and 0.05m of grey-brown clay. Solid bedrock was encountered at the base of the trench. The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile. No archaeological features were observed. This was the only new step created on this path.

The remaining 12 steps were located on the path leading down the eastern side of the island from the Inner Ward to the Iron Gate (Fig 3).

Step 2.

This step is situated at the southern end of the path (Fig 3) located at SX 05073 89053. The path was at this point roughly 0.5m wide. Slots measuring 0.25m long by 0.15m wide and 0.28m deep on the west, and 0.2m long by 0.15m wide and 0.2m deep on the east were dug.

The soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil which overlay 0.1m of dark-grey clay loam subsoil, then 0.1m of dark grey-brown clay with shillet fragments, and finally 0.03m of grey-brown clay (which was not bottomed). The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile. Bedrock was not encountered. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 3.

This step was located at SX 05073 89057 (Fig 3). The path was at this point roughly 0.4m wide. Slots measuring 0.25m long by 0.15m wide and 0.25m deep on the west, and 0.2m long by 0.2m wide and 0.2m deep on the east were dug.

Here the recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil which was on top of 0.1m of dark-grey clay loam subsoil, which sealed 0.1m of dark grey-brown clay with shillet fragments. Grey-brown clay was seen at bottom of the excavation. The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and bedrock was not encountered. A single small abraded sherd of Bii amphora was recovered from the spoil. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 4.

This step was located at SX 05074 89059 (Fig 3). The path was at this point roughly 0.35m wide. Slots measuring 0.25m long by 0.15m wide and 0.25m deep on the west, and 0.2m long by 0.2m wide and 0.2m deep on the east were dug.

Here the recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil that overlay 0.1m of dark grey-brown clay loam, and 0.1m of grey-brown clay with lots of shillet fragments which was not bottomed. The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and here too bedrock was not encountered. Prior to digging the slots, a sherd of medieval Saintonge Polychrome ware was recovered from the surface of the path. Post-Roman pottery comprised a medium sherd of Bi amphora and a small abraded sherd of Bii amphora; both were recovered from the spoil. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 5.

This step was located at SX 05075 89062 (Fig 3). The path was at this point roughly 0.45m wide. Slots measuring 0.25m long by 0.1m wide and 0.2m deep on the west, and 0.15m long by 0.18m wide and 0.18m deep on the east were dug.

Here the recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil that overlay 0.08m of grey-brown clay loam subsoil, and 0.07m of crushed shillet (tip layer) which was not bottomed. The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and bedrock was not encountered but was seen to outcrop just to the south of this point. One small sherd of Bi amphora was recovered from the spoil. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 6.

This step was located at SX 05076 89069 (Fig 3). The path was at this point roughly 0.35m wide. Slots measuring 0.25m long by 0.2m wide and 0.3m deep on the west, and 0.18m long by 0.15m wide and 0.2m deep on the east were dug.

Here the recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil that overlay 0.15m of grey-brown clay loam subsoil, and 0.1m of grey-brown clay with numerous shillet fragments (which was not bottomed). The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and bedrock was not encountered. Three small bodysherds with grooved decoration of Bi amphora, one rimsherd of Bii amphora and two small bodysherds of Bii amphora were recovered from the spoil. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 7

This step was located at SX 05075 89080 (Fig 3). Here the path was roughly 0.3m wide. Slots measuring 0.25m long by 0.15m wide and 0.2m deep on the west, and 0.2m long by 0.2m wide and 0.2m deep on the east were dug.

The recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil that overlay 0.1m of grey-brown clay subsoil, and 0.05m of grey-brown clay and shillet (which was not bottomed). The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and bedrock was not encountered. One small sherd of Bi amphora was recovered from the spoil. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 8.

This step was located at SX 05075 89087 (Fig 3). Here the path was roughly 0.4m wide. Slots measuring 0.25m long by 0.15m wide and 0.25m deep on the west, and 0.18m long by 0.25m wide and 0.2m deep on the east were dug.

The recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil that overlay 0.1m of grey-brown clay subsoil, and 0.1m of grey-brown clay. Grey-brown clay with numerous shillet fragments was seen at the base of the hole. The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and bedrock was not encountered. One small sherd of Bi amphora and a single undiagnostic 'B' ware sherd were recovered from the spoil. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 9.

This step was located at SX 05077 89093 (Figs 3 and 6). Here the path was roughly 0.4m wide. Slots measuring 0.25m long by 0.15m wide and 0.15m deep on the west, and 0.2m long by 0.15m wide and 0.15m deep on the east were dug.

The recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil, above 0.1m of grey-brown clay loam subsoil. Bedrock was encountered at the base of the slot. The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile.

The digging of the slots and the cleaning of the surface of the path revealed an alignment of slates running roughly north-west to south-east across the path for a length of 0.8m (Figs 7 and 8). This alignment of slates had a similar appearance to the post-Roman walling encountered during previous archaeological work on the island. The walling exposed was roughly 0.5m wide. It consisted of three layers of flat slates laid upon each other although they had slipped downhill towards the north-east. The walling

appeared to sit directly on bedrock. There was no evidence for any clay bonding between the stones, but this may have been washed away due to the stones being exposed on the pathway.

This walling appears to mark the back edge of one of the man-made terraces cut into the hill side, its alignment following a distinct break of slope and pointing towards a linear length of vertical rock face to the south of the path, examination of which showed that it had been quarried and was not a natural rock face. No dating evidence was obtained for this structure. Its interpretation as a revetment for a terrace seems likely.

Step 10.

This step was located at SX 05079 89098 (Fig 3). Here the path was roughly 0.5m wide. Slots measuring 0.3m long by 0.18m wide and 0.15m deep on the west, and 0.18m long by 0.25m wide and 0.15m deep on the east were dug.

The recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil that overlay 0.08m of grey-brown clay loam subsoil, and 0.02m of grey-brown clay which was not bottomed. The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and bedrock was not encountered. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 11.

This step was located at SX 05077 89113 (Fig 3). Here the path was roughly 0.4m wide. Slots measuring 0.3m long by 0.15m wide and 0.1m deep on the west, and 0.2m long by 0.15m wide and 0.1m deep on the east were dug.

The recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil that overlay and 0.05m of grey-brown clay loam subsoil (not bottomed). The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and bedrock was not encountered. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 12.

This step was located at SX 05077 89134 (Fig 3). Here the path was roughly 0.35m wide. Slots measuring 0.3m long by 0.18m wide and 0.25m deep on the west, and 0.18m long by 0.15m wide and 0.2m deep on the east were dug.

The recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil that overlay 0.1m of grey-brown silty loam subsoil, and 0.1m grey crushed shillet (tip layer). Grey clay loam was seen at the base of the profile. The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and bedrock was not encountered. No archaeological features were observed.

Step 13.

This step was located at SX 05075 89145 (Fig 3). Here the path was roughly 0.42m wide. Slots measuring 0.3m long by 0.18m wide and 0.18m deep on the west, and 0.25m long by 0.18m wide and 0.15m deep on the east were dug.

The recorded soil profile in the western slot consisted of 0.05m of grass and topsoil that overlay 0.1m of grey-brown silty loam, and 0.03m brown-grey clay (not bottomed). The eastern slot was cut through a similar soil profile and bedrock was not encountered. A single bodysherd of Bi amphora and two undiagnostic 'B' ware sherds of post-Roman date (5th to 7th centuries AD), and two co-joining neck sherds of medieval South-western micaceous ware dating from the 13th century AD were recovered from the spoil. No archaeological features were observed.

6 Discussion

This project has given an insight into the archaeological potential of some areas of Tintagel Island.

The Iron Gate was utilised as a landing place for ships during the medieval period, being connected to the hinterland by a sinuous pathway that led up the side of the Island towards the Inner Ward (Fig 3). It had also been thought that the Iron Gate was also utilised as a landing place during the earlier post-Roman occupation of the site.

Activity on the site during this early period has been confirmed by the results of this project which further supported the results of the archaeological recording work in 2006 which monitored the replacement of the wooden fence-line positioned along the path from the Inner Ward of the castle (SX 0508 8902) down to the Iron Gate (SX 0509 8915). That work identified seven man-made terraces cut into the hillside along the line of the pathway, and the route for the original access pathway up from the Iron Gate landing place to the post-Roman settlement (Fig 10).

Two of the terraces (Terraces 2 and 4) showed evidence of walling constructed upon them (Thorpe 2007; 2013) revealing potential evidence for buildings. The construction of these walls was similar to that seen in the excavations where post-Roman buildings had been excavated in previous work at Tintagel especially on Site C (Barrowman et al 2007).

A quantity of post-Roman imported Mediterranean pottery was also recovered from the area of the terraces: the varieties of wares present suggest that these terraces date from that period *circa* AD 550.

There was no direct evidence for the terraces having been utilised during the medieval period although some medieval pottery was found in this area of the Island, most likely derived from use of the path up from the Iron Gate at this time.

The possible walling found at the location for Step 9 (at SX 05077 89093) appears to lie on part of a man-made terrace (Terrace 4) that was identified during the earlier archaeological work described above. This walling runs along and perhaps marks the rear edge of this terrace (Figs 7, 8, 9 and 10)

Sixteen sherds of post-Roman imported amphora were also recovered from the steps along the path down to the Iron Gate (Appendix 1.) Eight of the sherds were of Bi (Late Roman 2) amphora; five were of Bii (Late Roman 1) amphora while three were undiagnostic. All were relatively small and showed signs of abrasion.

The greatest number of sherds (ten in total) came from Steps, 3, 4, 5 and 6. These steps all lie on Terrace 6 (Fig 10) that was identified in 2006. They are an addition to the collection of material (nine sherds) made at the time, which, apart from the Bi and Bii amphora, also included Biv amphora and a sherd of Native ware (in granitic fabric).

Steps 7 and 8 produced two sherds of Bi amphora and a single unidentifiable 'B' ware sherd. These two steps are located on Terrace 5 identified in 2006 (Fig 10). These add to the collection of nine sherds made from this terrace at that time, which apart from the Bi amphora also included Bv amphora, and a fine table ware African Red Slipped Ware ARSW (Hayes 1972; 1980). Two Imported Coarseware Fabrics (1 and 2) sherds and a sherd of Native ware, in granitic fabric were also recovered (Thorpe 2007; 2013).

The only evidence for the medieval occupation of the island came from the surface of the path at Step 4 where a sherd of Saintonge Polychrome ware was recovered, and from Step 13 where two sherds of South-western micaceous ware were found. All showed signs of abrasion. That from Step 4 could have been washed down the path from outside the Inner Ward which lies only 18m to the south, while those from Step 13 were probably derived from activity related to the Iron Gate. Both are 13th to 14th century in date (Allan 1984; 2000).

This project has further emphasised the extraordinary nature of the post-Roman occupation of Tintagel by demonstrating the great extent and density of the archaeological remains. It has shown once again that even small scale interventions have the potential for revealing structural elements and artefacts, most especially

sherds of Mediterranean imported ware that add piecemeal but significant new knowledge to the understanding of this important site. It has also demonstrated that virtually all areas of this site have the potential to be archaeologically sensitive.

7 References

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8 Project archive

The CAU project number is **HEXQPR146568**

The project's documentary, digital, photographic and drawn archive is maintained by Cornwall Archaeological Unit, Cornwall Council, Fal Building, County Hall, Treyew Road, Truro, TR1 3AY. The contents of this archive are listed below:

1. Projects file containing site records and notes, project correspondence and administration (146568).
2. Field plans and copies of historic maps stored in an A2-size plastic envelope (GRE 854/1- 3).
3. Digital photographs stored in the directory: R:\Historic Environment (Images)\SITES.Q-T\Tintagel Castle. Iron Gate footpath steps. March 2016 WB HEXQPR146568
4. English Heritage/ADS OASIS online reference: cornwall2-247853
5. This report text is held in digital form as: G:\TWE\Waste & Env\Strat Waste & Land\Historic Environment\Projects\Sites\Sites T\Tintagel Castle Projects 2016\Tintagel Castle Iron Gate Footpath watching brief 2016 HEXQPR146568\Report



Figure 1. General site location

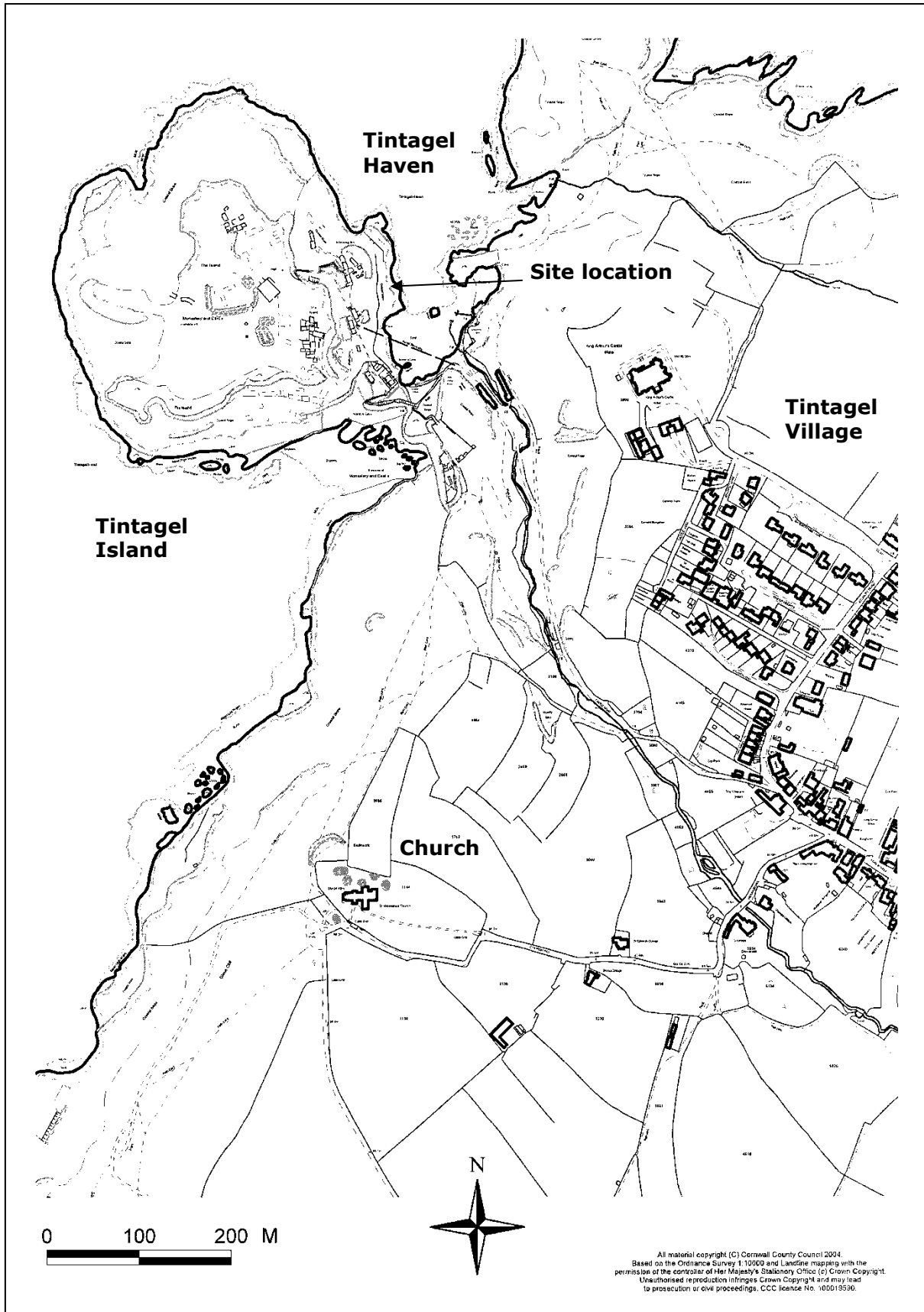


Figure 2. Detailed site location.

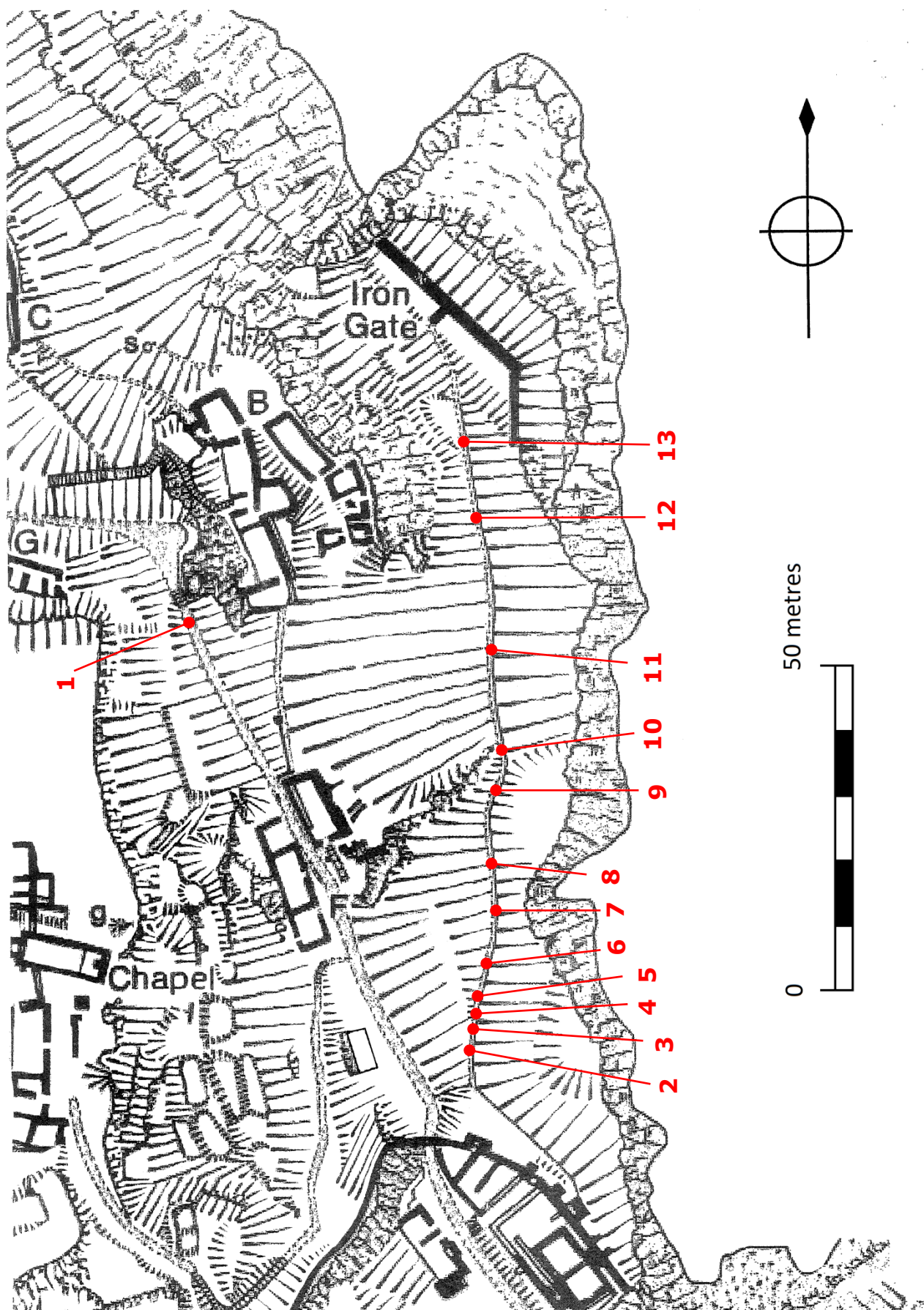


Figure 3. Site plan showing location of steps investigated during the watching brief (Based on RCHME survey 1985).



Figure 5. View of Step 7 looking north-east towards locations of Steps 8, 9 and 10. Edge of Iron Gate seen in the background.



Figure 4. Location of Step 1 looking north.



Figure 6. Location of Step 9 looking north-east.

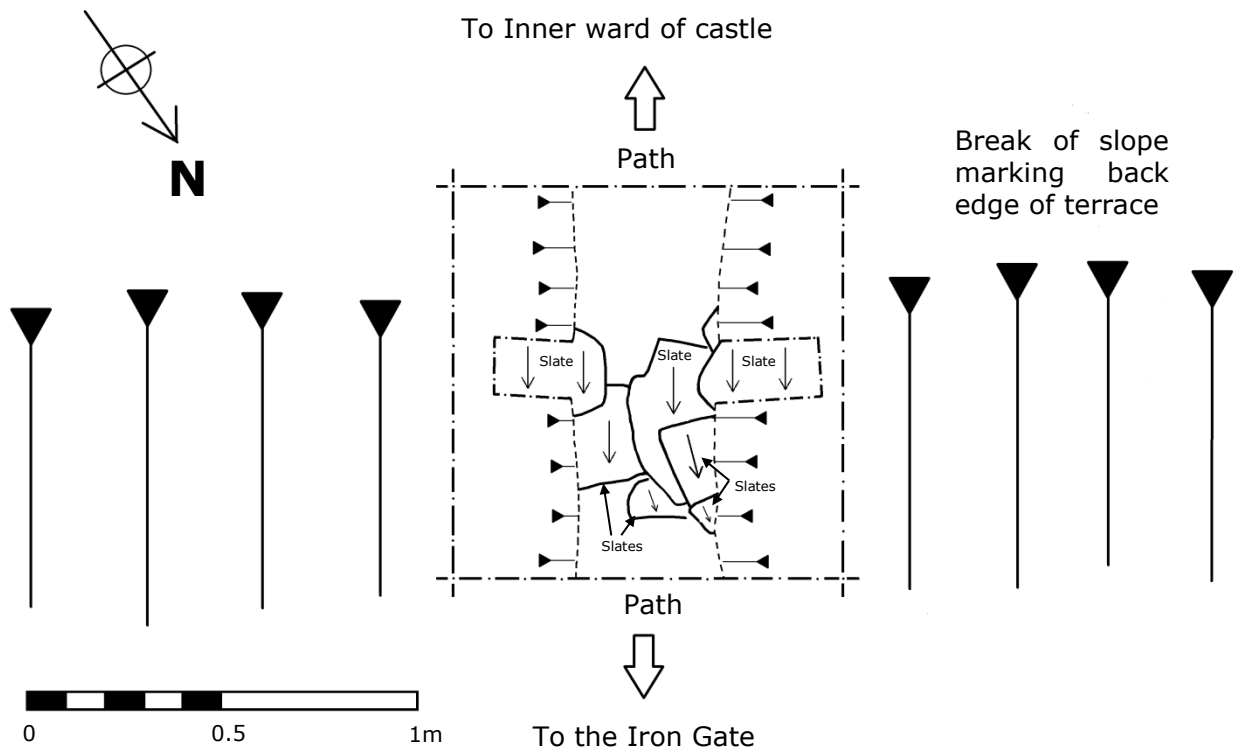


Figure 7. Plan of Step 9 showing possible post-Roman slate walling.



Figure 8. View of Step 9 showing possible post-Roman walling, looking north-east.



Figure 9. View across Terrace 4, looking south-east. Note quarried rock face to the right marking the back edge of terrace.

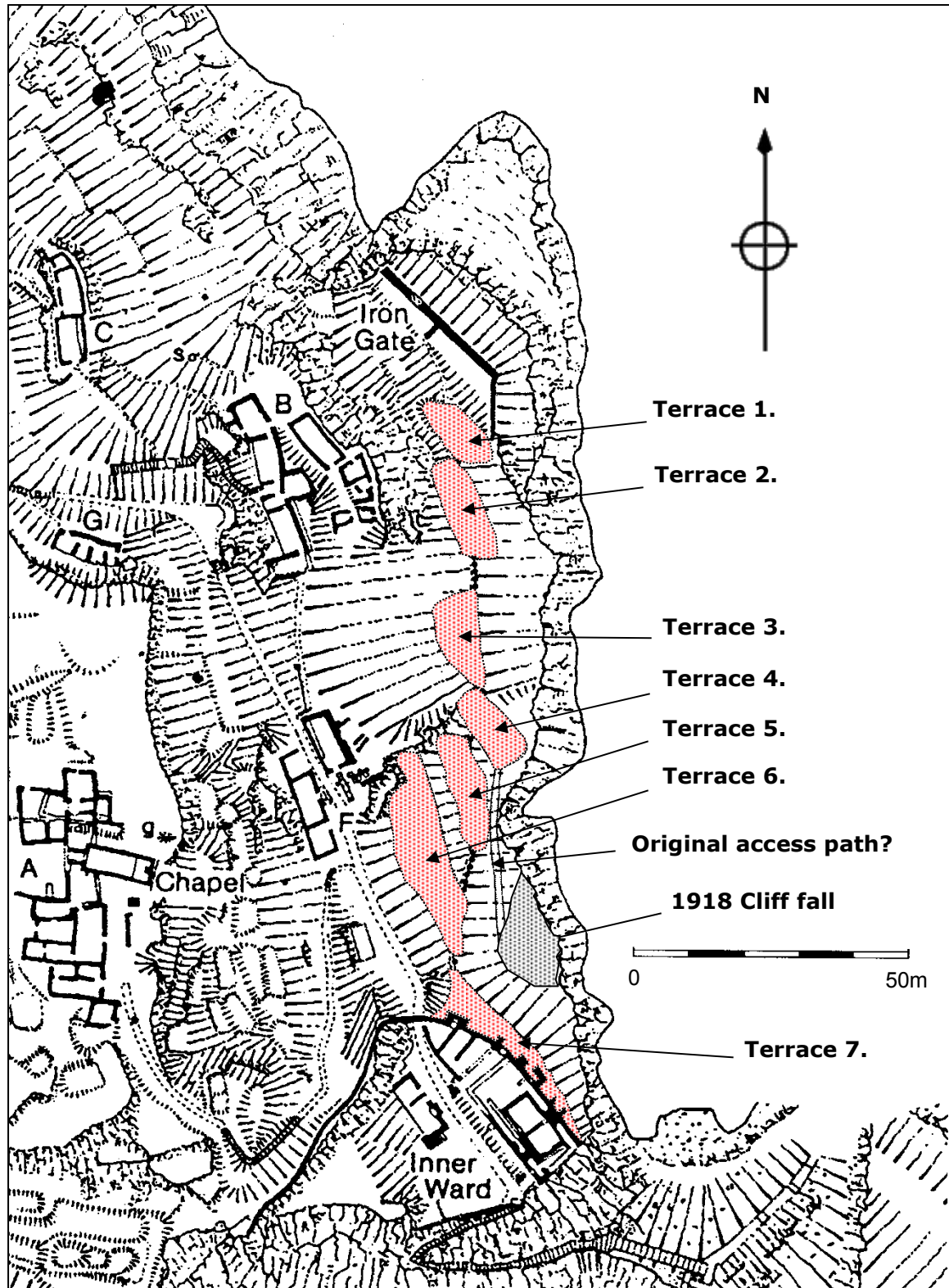


Figure 10. Interpretive map showing terraces and other features identified during archaeological work in 2006 (Based on RCHME survey 1985).

9 Appendix 1. Finds U/S Unstratified

Step number	Context	Description	Date
Step 3.	U/S	1 small abraded sherd of Bii amphora.	Post-Roman 5 th to 7 th centuries AD.
Step 4.	U/S	1 medium sherd of Bi amphora. 1 small sherd of Bii amphora.	Post-Roman 5 th to 7 th centuries AD.
Step 4.	Surface of path	1 sherd of Saintonge Polychrome ware.	Medieval. 13 th to 14 th centuries AD.
Step 5	U/S	1 small sherd of Bi amphora.	Post-Roman 5 th to 7 th centuries AD.
Step 6	U/S	3 small bodysherds with grooved decoration Bi amphora. 1 rimsherd Bii amphora. 2 small bodysherds Bii amphora.	Post-Roman 5 th to 7 th centuries AD.
Step 7	U/S	1 small sherd of Bi amphora.	Post-Roman 5 th to 7 th centuries AD.
Step 8	U/S	1 bodysherd Bi amphora. 1 undiagnostic 'B' ware sherd.	Post-Roman 5 th to 7 th centuries AD.
Step 13	U/S	1 bodysherd Bi amphora. 2 undiagnostic 'B' ware sherds.	Post-Roman 5 th to 7 th centuries AD.
Step 13	U/S	2 co-joining neck sherds South-western micaceous ware.	Medieval. 13 th to 14 th centuries AD.

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