

Dartmoor National Park Historic Environment Record

Civil Parish & District: Barnstaple, North Devon	National Grid Reference: SS 5559 3330	Number:
Subject: Archaeological monitoring and recording at Barnstaple Castle, Devon.		Photo attached: Y
Scheduled Monument Consent: 58716	Recipient museum: n/a	
OASIS ID: oakforda1-206343	Museum Accession no: n/a	
Contractor's reference number/code: OA1221	Dates fieldwork undertaken: 03/11, 07/11, 14/11, 18/11, 20/11, 24/11, 26/11/2014, 09/03/2015	
<p>Background: An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Oakford Archaeology between November 2014 and March 2015 during work at Barnstaple Castle, Devon (SS 5559 3330). The site (Fig. 1) lies in an area of high archaeological potential within Barnstaple Castle, a scheduled monument (SM 33062). The work was therefore required by English Heritage (EH) as part of scheduled monument consent.</p> <p>The Norman motte-and-bailey castle lies within the western corner of the earlier Anglo-Saxon burh and was probably built by the late 11th century, although it is not recorded in documents until the following century. The earth and stone motte stands to a height of c. 14m with a diameter of over 60m and retains masonry fragments from a shell keep, tower and stone walls descending the slopes of the motte. A document of 1274 indicates the presence of a hall, chamber and kitchen within the keep.</p> <p>Records suggest that by the reign of Stephen, in 1136, Barnstaple Castle was abandoned, although it was rebuilt shortly after in 1139 by Henry Tracy. In 1228 the defences were reduced in height on the orders of Henry III and the castle was in disrepair by the end of the 13th century. The whole site is recorded as utterly ruinous during the reign of Henry VIII. Castle House was built within the area of the bailey in the 19th century and the motte was landscaped and planted with trees. The mansion was demolished in 1976.</p> <p>Excavations conducted by Trevor Miles between 1972-5 on the northwest side of the motte revealed the presence of 105 graves forming part of a Saxon cemetery which was in use until the Norman Conquest. The bailey defences were also excavated at this time</p> <p>Results: The work comprised the hand excavation of two new paths, the reinstatement of a single erosion scar, and the rebuilding of two retaining walls (Fig. 2).</p> <p>Path 1: 100 0-0.15m+ mid to dark brown silty clay (topsoil)</p> <p>Path 2: 200 0-0.15m+ mid to dark brown silty clay (topsoil)</p> <p>Erosion scar: 300 0-0.5m mid to dark brown silty clay with leafmould (topsoil) 301 0.05-0.7m+ light to mid yellow silty clay, occas. small limestone rubble, occas. waterworn pebbles (castle mound deposit)</p> <p>Wall 1: 400 0-0.2m mid to dark brown silty clay with leafmould (topsoil) 401 0.02-0.7m light to mid yellow silty clay, occas. small limestone rubble, rare limestone flecks, occas.</p>		

waterworn pebbles, rare charcoal flecks, (castle mound deposit).
402 0.85-1.45m light to mid yellow silty clay (castle mound deposit).
403 0.2-1.5m modern intrusion
404 0.2-1.5m fill behind modern dry walling.

Wall 2:

500 0-0.2m mid to dark brown silty clay with leafmould (topsoil)
501 0.2-1.1m+ light to mid yellow silty clay, occas. small limestone rubble, occas. waterworn pebbles (castle mound deposit)

Conclusion:

The work exposed the earthen core of the Norman Castle mound. No structural features were identified and there was a complete absence of dating evidence. The core material is predominantly soil-based, suggesting that it came from the surrounding motte ditch. The small nature of the works didn't permit the identification of major periods of construction, and it must therefore be assumed that the core deposits are roughly contemporary.

Project archive and OASIS entry

Due to the limited nature of the findings a project archive will not be produced. A summary of the investigations has been submitted to the on-line archaeological database OASIS (Online Access to the Index of archaeological InterventionS).

Recorder:

MFR Steinmetzer (Oakford Archaeology)

Date sent to HER:

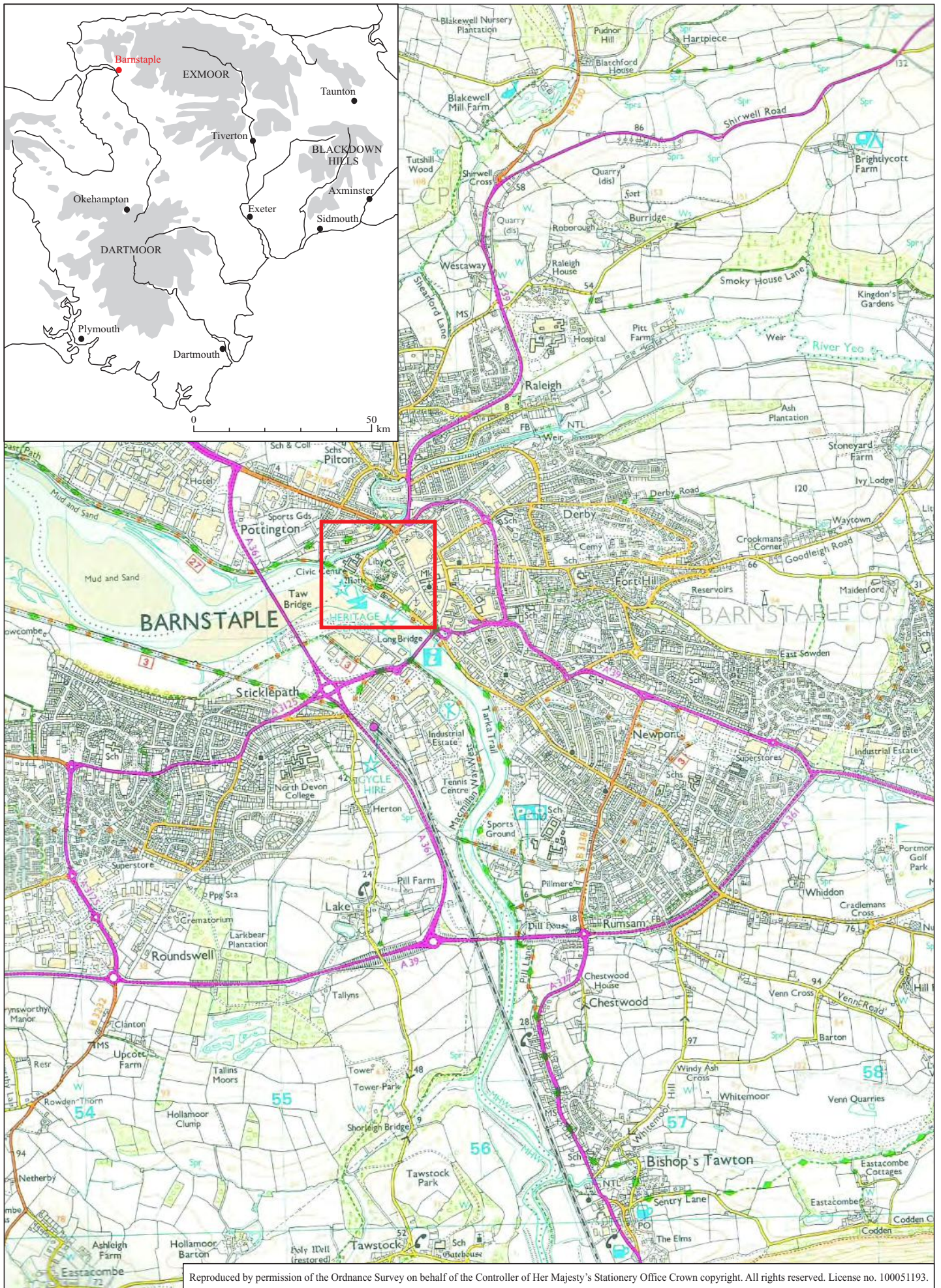


Fig. 1 Location of site.

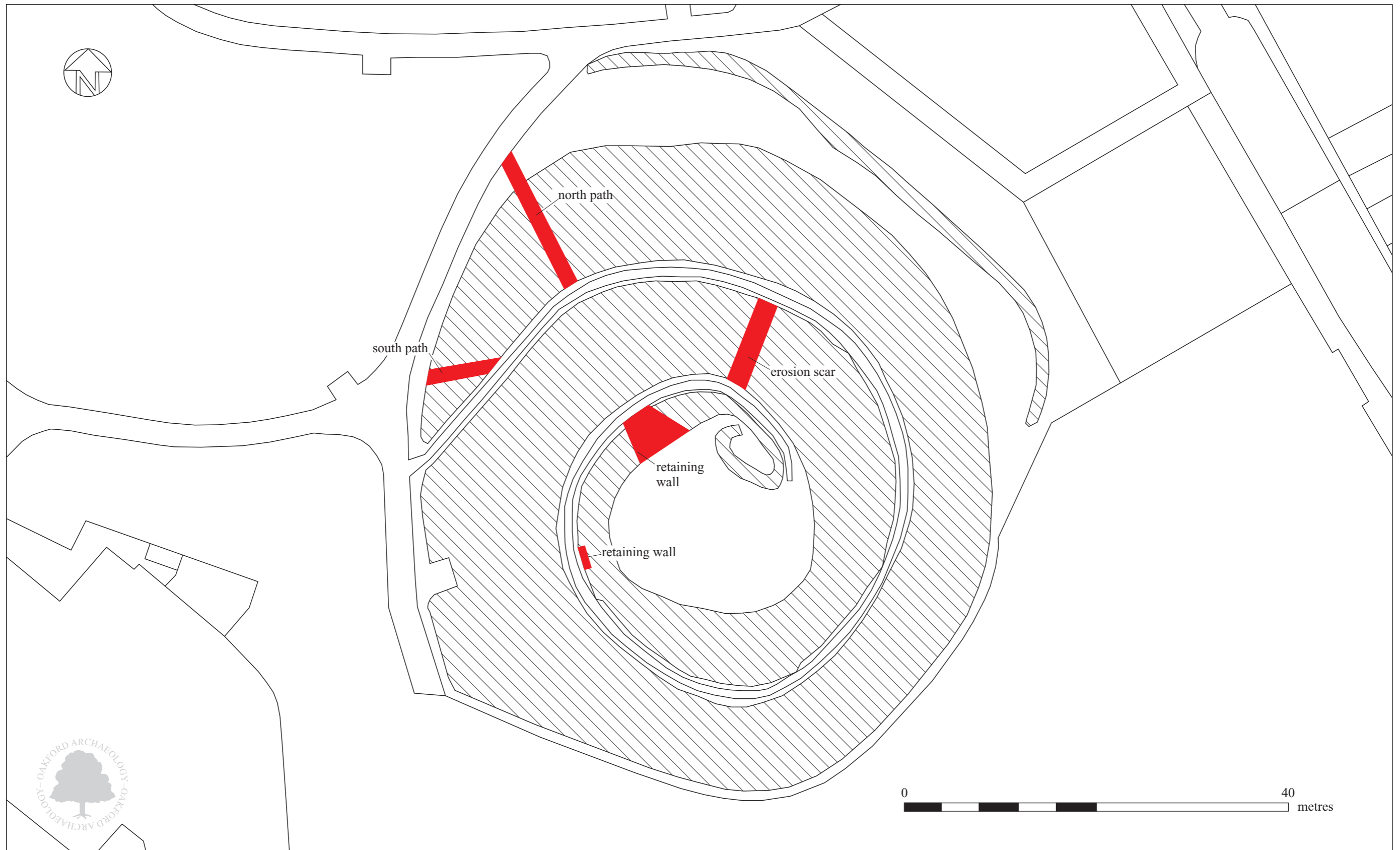


Fig. 2 Plan of Barnstaple Castle showing location of observations.

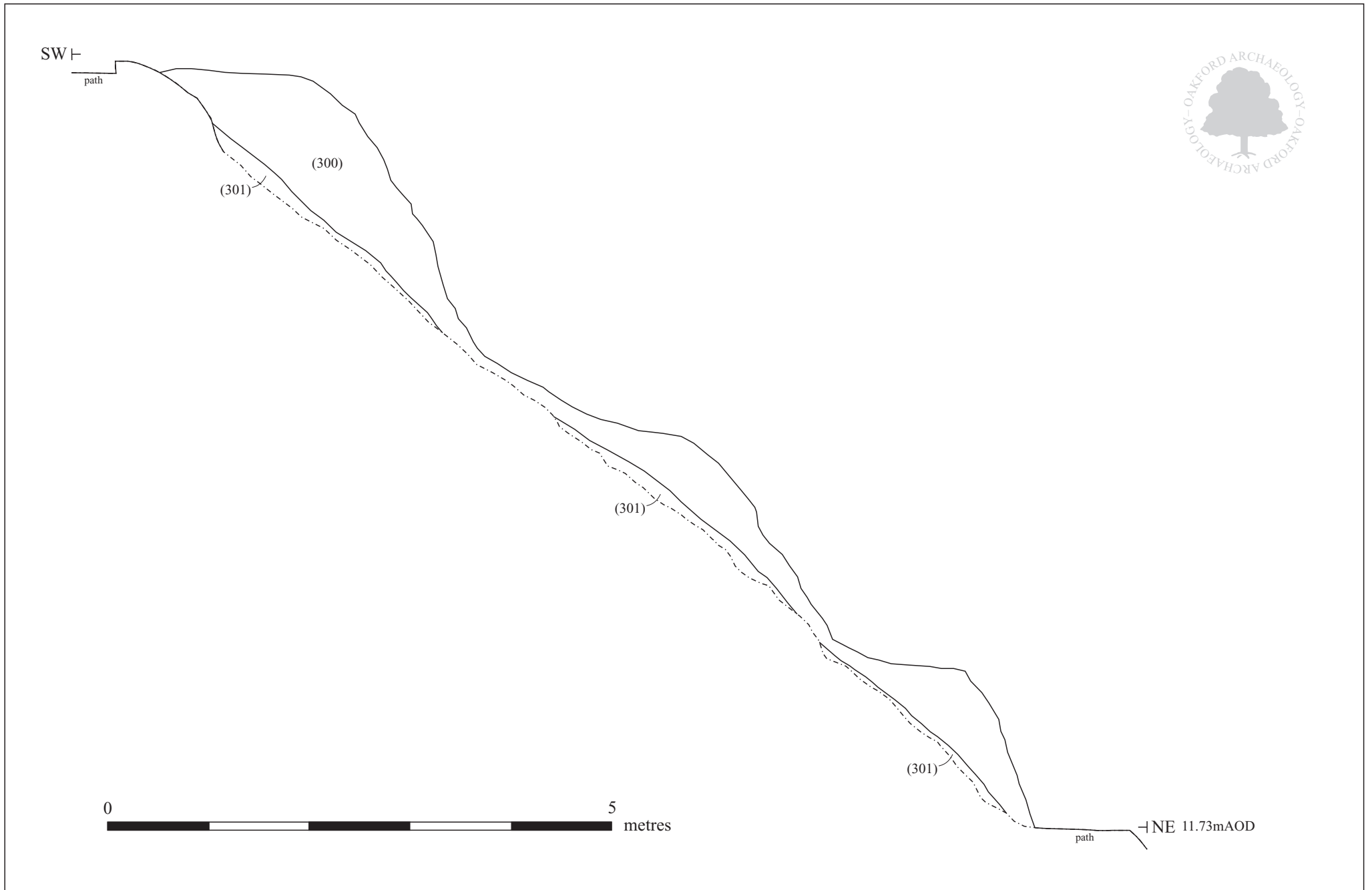


Fig. 3 Section across Castle mound scar.

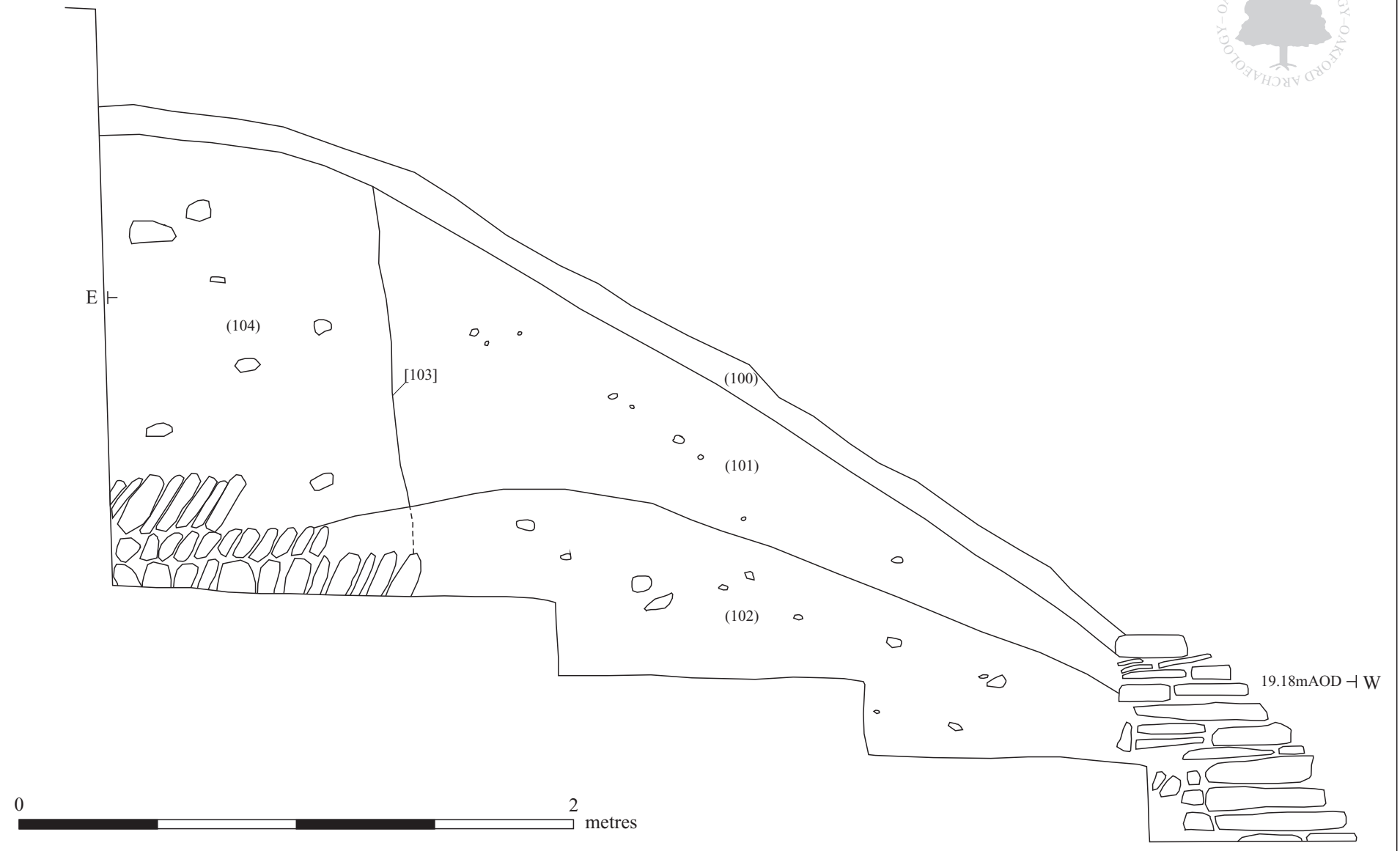


Fig. 4 Section through Castle mound deposits.



Pl. 1 General view of Barnstaple Castle. Looking southeast.



Pl. 2 General view of Barnstaple Castle. Looking northeast.



Pl. 3 General view of re-instatement works. Looking south.



Pl. 4 General view of re-instated Castle mound scar. Looking south.



Pl. 5 General view of wall prior to re-building. 2m scale. Looking south.



Pl. 6 Section through mound deposits. 2m scale. Looking south.



Pl. 7 General view of bench recess prior to re-building. 1m scale. Looking east.



Pl. 8 Section through homogeneous mound deposit. 1m scale. Looking northeast.



Pl. 9 General view of southern path. Looking east.



Pl. 10 General view of northern path. Looking northwest.