Bolsover Castle
Bolsover, Derbyshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

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Bolsover Castle
Bolsover, Derbyshire

Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief

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Executive Summary

This report documents archaeological monitoring of groundworks for the installation of two new interpretation signs at Bolsover Castle, Bolsover, Derbyshire. The work was undertaken in order to fulfil a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) (ref. S00217326) for the proposed works, as required by Historic England. The monitored works comprised three separate excavations split between two areas: the Great Court—a single post hole—and adjacent to the main entrance—two adjacent postholes.

The monitoring did not recover any significant archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits, features or finds. The lowest deposits encountered in all the postholes comprised packed levelling or made-ground deposits, whilst the upper deposits all represented modern landscaping or surfacing.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Outline

This report documents archaeological monitoring of groundworks for the installation of two new interpretation signs at Bolsover Castle, Bolsover, Derbyshire (Figure 1). The work was undertaken in order to fulfil a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) (ref. S00217326) for the proposed works, as required by Historic England.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The monitored works were situated within the grounds of Bolsover Castle (NHLE 1012496), centred at grid reference NGR SK 47200 70564. The castle is a scheduled monument and grade I listed building (NHLE 1108976). Three separate excavations were monitored, split between two areas: the Great Court—a single post hole—and adjacent to the main entrance—two adjacent postholes (see Figure 2 below for location).

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

It is considered beyond the scope of this work to provide a detailed analysis of all previous archaeological investigations undertaken at Bolsover Castle. A rapid appraisal of records available on OASIS identified that a series of excavations and watching briefs were undertaken in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The most pertinent of these comprised a watching brief of minor groundworks near the site entrance which recorded a range of medieval and post-medieval features (Sheppard 1999).

The site of Bolsover Castle includes significant architectural remains of the 17th-century country house, as well as the remains of the earlier 12th-century tower keep castle and even earlier 11th-century motte and bailey castle. The 17th-century house was built largely on the remains of the 12th-century tower keep castle, although foundations for this earlier structure still survive. The open areas of the inner and outer baileys—which have been left mostly undisturbed since the 11th century—likely contain the buried remains of structures associated with earlier periods of the castle's history. Associated features of both medieval and post-medieval date have been recorded in previous archaeological investigations within the grounds of the castle. The castle is both well documented historically and well known as belonging to William Peverel, William the Conqueror's illegitimate son (Historic England 2019). As a monument open to the public, it also functions as an important educational and recreational resource.

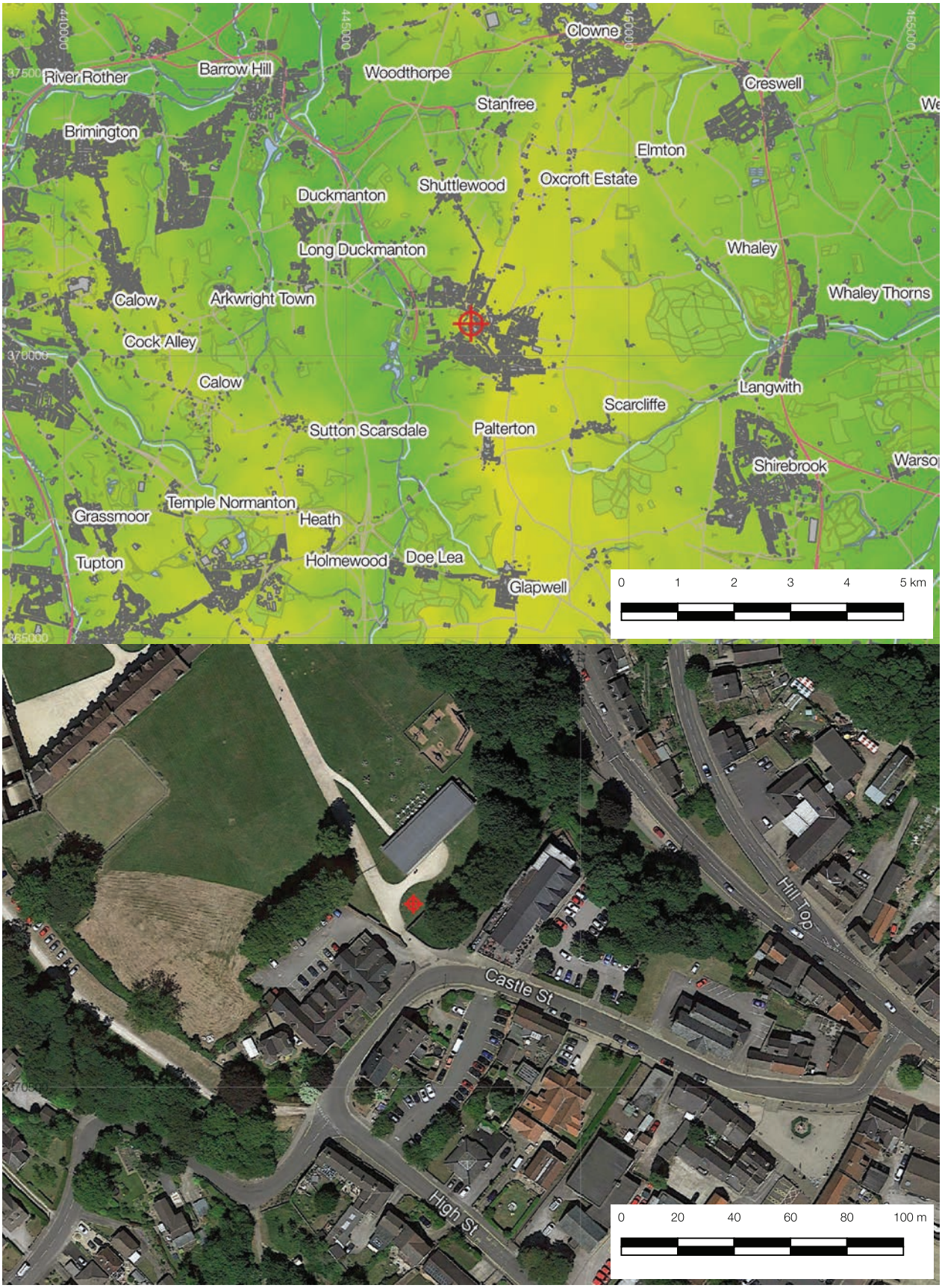
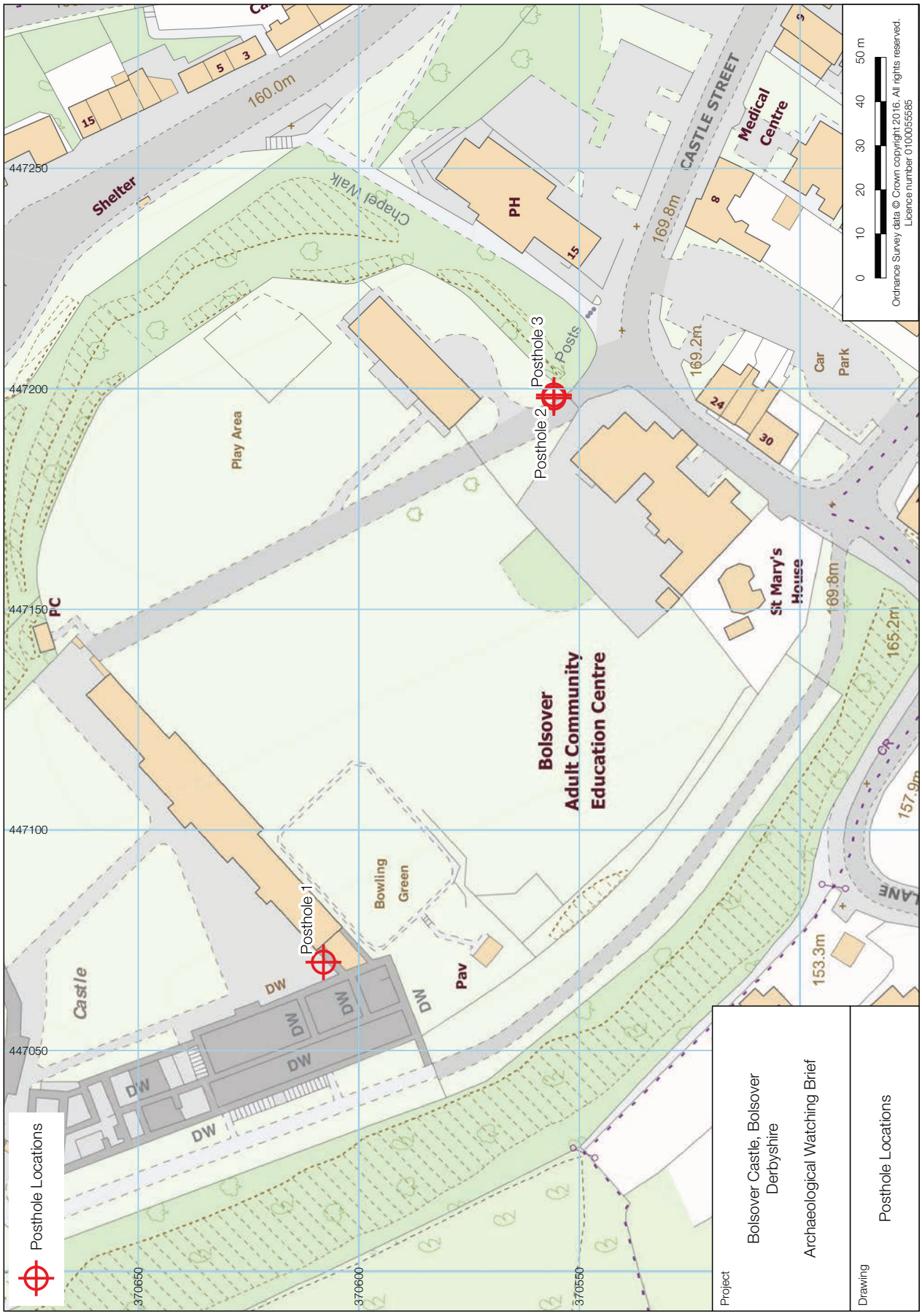


Figure 1 Site location


Posthole Locations
Posthole 1
Posthole 2
Posthole 3
Bolsover Adult Community Education Centre
Castle
Bowling Green
Play Area
Chapel Walk
Shelter
PH
Medical Centre
CASTLE STREET
Car Park
St Mary's House
Posts
160.0m
169.8m
169.2m
165.2m
153.3m
157.9m
447250
447200
447150
447100
447050
370650
370600
370550
0 10 20 30 40 50 m
Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright 2016. All rights reserved. Licence number 0100055585
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Posthole Locations

2. Results

Monitoring of the excavations was carried out on the 18th July 2019 by Jim Brightman of Solstice Heritage LLP. All excavations were hand-dug under supervision of a suitably qualified archaeologist. Following excavation, relevant areas were cleaned and recorded. A summary of the methodology is included as Appendix 1.

2.1 Great Court

Posthole 1 was excavated in the southern corner of the Great Court, in the crook defined by the Riding House Range and the Terrace Range, and adjacent to the entrance to the visitor toilets (447070.029,370608.019). The posthole measured 0.2 m diameter in plan and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.42 m. A sequence of three deposits was recorded within the posthole:

- (001) was the uppermost deposit, comprising crushed and compacted limestone surfacing for this section of the courtyard and measuring 50 mm in thickness.
- (002) comprised a compacted hardcore layer 250 mm in thickness and representing the main made-ground deposit of the modern courtyard surfacing. A fibre membrane was encountered at the base of this deposit.
- (003) was a mixed made-ground deposit beneath the fibre membrane and continued to the base of the dig at 0.42 m below ground level. It comprised a mixed clay-sand with inclusions of small stones as well as fragments of coal. It represents an earlier episode of landscaping in the Great Court, though no small finds were recovered to date this deposit.

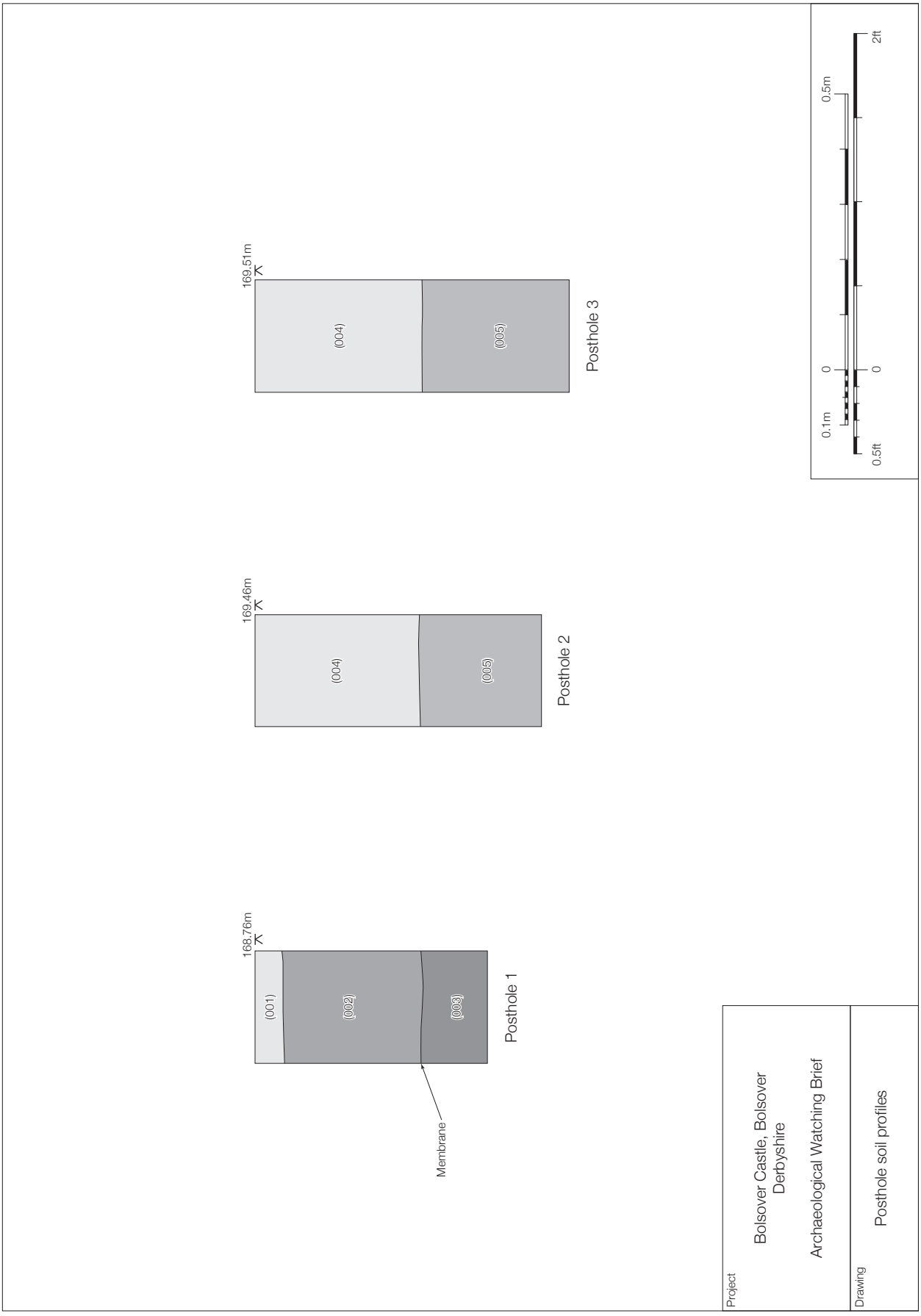
2.2 Main Entrance

Postholes 2 and 3 were excavated adjacent to each other close to the entrance to the castle. Both postholes measured 0.2 m diameter in plan (Posthole 2: 447197.951, 370555.519; Posthole 3: 447198.617, 370555.768). Posthole 2 was excavated to a depth of 0.52 m below modern ground level, and Posthole 3 was excavated to a depth of 0.57 m. Both postholes displayed the same simple sequence of deposits:

- (004) comprised a turf and loamy topsoil, 300 mm in thickness. The landscaping along the adjacent wall behind the visitor centre suggests this is relatively recent imported material.
- (005) sat beneath the topsoil and comprised a stony and relatively well-packed layer of broken and fractured stone in a sandy loam matrix. It continued to the base of the dig. The deposit may be the remains of a demolition spread, but given the amount of landscaping in the area it is considered more likely to represent levelling or surfacing dating to a relatively modern period.

Figure 3 Posthole 1 in the Great Court (scale = 0.4 m)

Figure 4 Postholes 2 and 3 close to the site entrance (scale = 0.4 m)


169.51m
(004)
(005)
Posthole 3
169.46m
(004)
(005)
Posthole 2
168.76m
(001)
(002)
(003)
Posthole 1
Membrane
0.5m
0
0.1m
0.5ft
0
2ft
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Posthole soil profiles

3. Discussion

The monitoring did not recover any significant archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits, features or finds. The lowest deposits encountered in all the postholes comprised packed levelling or made-ground deposits, whilst the upper deposits all represented modern landscaping or surfacing.

4. Sources

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Appendix 1 - Methodology

Aims of the Project

The overarching aim of the watching brief was:

- To ensure that significant archaeological remains were not destroyed without first being adequately recorded.

The objectives of the watching brief were:

- To record, excavate and environmentally sample any archaeological deposits of significance observed during the groundworks;
- To establish the date, character and significance of any archaeological and palaeoenvironmental deposits, including in relation to other similar features within the area;
- To ensure there is a permanent record of the work undertaken deposited with the local Historic Environment Record (HER) and made available online;
- To ensure all work is undertaken in compliance with the *Code of Conduct* of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CfA) (2014a) and the CIfA *Standard and Guidance for Watching Briefs* (2014b);
- To ensure compliance with the required Scheduled Monument Consent and WSI.

Archaeological Monitoring

Three separate excavations were monitored, split between two areas: the Great Court and close to the current site entrance. All excavations were hand-dug under supervision of a suitably qualified archaeologist. Following excavation, relevant areas were cleaned and recorded. All fieldwork and post-excavation reporting/archiving was undertaken in line with the agreed Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Snowden 2019).

Recording Methodology

Where archaeological features and deposits were encountered, these were recorded to the standards outlined in the relevant CIfA *Standard and Guidance*. All features and deposits were recorded on *pro forma* record sheets, drawn in plan and section at a suitable scale and photographed. In addition to any specific features or deposits, a general record of the trench stratigraphy was made on *pro forma* record sheets, a soil profile drawing for each of the excavations was made at a suitable scale and photography was completed. The photographic record of the monitoring was undertaken in high-resolution digital format. Survey control was established using a Leica Smartrover survey-grade GPS with an accuracy of ±10 mm. All field drawings were made in pencil on drawing film and form part of the overall project archive. There were no significant constraints on the fieldwork. It is not considered that any constraints have affected the value or diminished the accuracy of the results of the monitoring.

Small Finds

Given the relatively small size of the area to be monitored, all small finds were to be initially retained and bagged by context for assessment at the post-fieldwork stage. Should an unexpected quantity of material be uncovered that was deemed to be of little significance then this was to be noted but not retained, subject to the agreement of the project management team and relevant archaeological curator. Small finds were to be handled, packed and stored in accordance with the guidelines in *First Aid for Finds* (Watkinson and Neal 1998).

In the event that finds of 'treasure' were uncovered then the local Coroner was to be informed and the correct procedures were to be followed as outlined under the Treasure Act 1996. In the event of human remains being uncovered, including evidence of cremations, these were to be initially left *in situ,* protected and covered from view. Should removal of the remains be deemed necessary then a licence was to be obtained from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) prior to excavation proceeding. Exhumation of human remains would then proceed in accordance with the MoJ licence and all health and safety regulations and guidance.

Scientific and Palaeoenvironmental Sampling Strategy

Given the uncertainty of the presence or level of archaeological remains likely to be encountered as part of the monitoring, the general aim of the scientific and palaeoenvironmental sampling strategy was: 'To provide information on the nature of human activity and the past environment in the immediate area, in relation to the archaeological deposits uncovered during the project'.

Health and Safety

All archaeological work was undertaken in a safe manner in compliance with the *Health and Safety at Work Act* 1974. A full risk assessment was undertaken in advance of the commencement of work, a copy of which was available on site for the duration of the fieldwork.

Small Finds Processing

All finds were to be processed and catalogued in line with standard guidance documents including *First Aid for Finds* (Watkinson and Neal 1998) and the *Standard and Guidance for the Collection, Documentation, Conservation and Research of Archaeological Materials* (CIfA 2014c).

Special Assessment and Analysis

After processing, artefacts and ecofacts were to be quantified and assessed to provide an overview of their potential to meet the aims and objectives of the project. This was to be undertaken by a relevant specialist as agreed in the WSI, and include a statement on the potential and requirement for further analysis. Where extensive analysis was recommended, and justified by the potential of the assemblage or sample, then this was to be undertaken after agreement with the project management team and relevant archaeological curator.

Archiving

The lack of material archive arising from the monitoring works means that this report is submitted as the primary record of the work undertaken. This report will also be made available as part of an OASIS record for the project.

Chronology

Where chronological and archaeological periods are referred to in the text, the relevant date ranges are broadly defined as follows:

- Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age): 1 million–12,000 BP (Before present)
- Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age): 10000–4000 BC
- Neolithic (New Stone Age): 4000–2400 BC
- Chalcolithic/Beaker Period: (2400–2000 BC)
- Bronze Age: 2000–700 BC
- Iron Age: 700 BC–AD 43
- Roman/Romano-British: AD 43–410
- Early medieval/Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Scandinavian: AD 410–1066
- Medieval: AD 1066–1540
- Post-medieval: AD 1540–1900
  - » Tudor: AD 1485–1603
  - » Stuart: AD 1603–1714
  - » Georgian: AD 1714–1837
- Industrial: 1750–1900
  - » Victorian: AD 1837–1901
- Modern: AD 1900–Present

Assumptions and Limitations

Data and information obtained and consulted in the compilation of this report has been derived from a number of secondary sources. Where it has not been practicable to verify the accuracy of secondary information, its accuracy has been assumed in good faith. Any information accessed from external databases (e.g. NLHE, HERs) represents a record of known assets and their discovery and further investigation. Such information is not complete and does not preclude the future discovery of additional assets and the amendment of information about known assets which may affect their significance and/or sensitivity to development effects. All statements and opinions arising from the works undertaken are provided in good faith and compiled according to professional standards. No responsibility can be accepted by the author/s of the report for any errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by any third party, or for loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in any such report(s), howsoever such facts and opinions may have been derived.

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