

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

Report No.381/01

May 1995

Tamworth Castle, Staffordshire:
A Report on Watching Briefs of Drainage Works
on the Motte and Coach House

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Peter Leach (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516

Tamworth Castle, Staffordshire: A Report on Watching Briefs of Drainage Works on the Motte and Coach House

1.0 Introduction

The following short report combines discussion of the results from two archaeological watching briefs conducted during groundworks for new drainage at the Grade I Listed Building and Scheduled Ancient Monument of Tamworth Castle (NGR SK 20630394). The archaeological work was carried out by personnel from BUFAU during April and May 1995, at the request of the Duvall Brownhill Partnership and on behalf of Tamworth Borough Council.

The first new drains were to run from a point on the west side of the outer perimeter wall of the castle down the motte to join a second new drain, running south from the Coach House, at a man-hole situated northeast of the Holloway Lodge. This first new drain, down the motte, reused as much as possible of a pre-existing drain-cut, whereas the drain from the Coach House was entirely new. The existing storm drain connection to the main sewer beneath the Holloway was also reused in order to further minimise disturbance to archaeological deposits.

2.0 The Watching Briefs

The principle objective of the watching briefs was to obtain a record of any archaeological deposits disturbed during the excavation of the drainage trenches, as required by the Scheduled Monument Consent for the works. The excavation of the drainage trenches was undertaken by separate building contractors with whom it was arranged that excavations were regularly monitored by BUFAU. A photographic, written and drawn record was prepared for each section of drain trench after excavation. The results obtained during the watching briefs are outlined below.

3.0 Results (Figure 1)

3.1 Drain System 1: The Motte

The drain system here consisted of a central main drain down the motte bank, and two feeds which ran along the perimeter wall of the castle into a collector manhole situated at the top of the main drain, adjacent to the outer castle wall. The main drain-fall was dug inside the pre-existing drain-cut wherever practical, to minimise disturbance to archaeological deposits. However, slight diversions were necessary in places where trees had grown over the old drain-line. These deviations are shown on Figure 1.

The drain trenches were c.0.5m wide and between 0.3m and 0.8m in depth. The collector manhole at the top of the motte measured 1m by 1.2m and was c.1.2m in depth. At these depths the deposits exposed in the trench sections consisted of either a deep band of humic topsoil, or a mixture of this soil with brick, mortar and stone within the backfill of the earlier drain cut. Towards the top of the motte a red clay layer with grey patches and flecking was exposed in the very bottom of the drain trenches, which presumably represented the redeposited material from which the motte was constructed. The topsoil mantle increased markedly in depth down-slope as a result of natural geomorphological processes including soil creep and hill-wash, such that the drain trenches did not penetrate beyond this topsoil/colluvial layer towards the bottom of the slope.

3.2 Drain System II: The Coach House

The second new drain from the Coach House began near the bottom of a flight of steps adjacent to the eastern jamb of a central doorway to the building. From this point the drain followed a southerly course for a distance of c.28m, until connections were made to the first drain-run down the motte, and the main sewer to the Holloway.

About 2.7m south of the Coach House there was a dog-leg in the drain line under the centre of the northernmost of two moulded stones set horizontally in the ground, presumably to act as a retaining wall to prevent the encroachment of the motte onto the brick-paviour yard in front of the Coach House. Closer inspection indicated that the two moulded stones were probably re-used window mullions just under 2m in length and 0.5m in width, with traces of whitewash surviving in patches on the inner face of the mullions (see inset sketch in Figure 1 and photographic Plates 1 and 2). Hill-wash had almost buried these features to such an extent that, prior to the excavation of the drain-run it was not possible to discern their original function. The two mullions were photographed, and sketches made of their cross-section and location. However, no further recording was carried out at this time because the two mullions were not affected by the groundworks for the drain. (A further record was subsequently compiled by the Staffordshire County Archaeology Officer, Mr R.Meeson).

After the dog-leg, the drain-cut continued to the east of the stone mullions which were seen to rest on a continuation of the brick-paviour surface outside the Coach House. This surface was buried under hill-wash deposits. Here, the drain trench cut through the paved yard-surface. The paviments were set on a buried topsoil surface seen in the sections and bottom of the drain trench. About 7m from the Coach House the buried paviments were laid against the lower courses of an east-west aligned wall constructed from header-bonded, machine-cut, blue engineering bricks. South of this wall a second, lower, but disturbed, pavement surface was overlain by a concrete spread, 1.8m in length. Removal of the concrete revealed it to be the capping of a large circular well approximately 1.1m in diameter - the change in height of the pavement surface probably providing a ledge around the well-head. The well was lined with machine-cut bricks crudely laid on edge, the bricks measuring 9 x 4 x 3 inches. The lining was only one brick thick (Plate 3).

The drain trench continued to cut through topsoil and colluvial deposits south of the well, apart from where the topsoil had been buried by a clay bank between 5m - 10m from the southern end of the drain-run (Plate 4). Just to the south of this bank, and also c.5m from the end of the trench, a cast-iron base for a broken-off column or pole lay against the western side of the trench. This was probably Victorian in date (Plate 5). The connection to the main sewer under the Holloway and to the new drains from the castle was made in a manhole at the south end of the trench. Again this did not penetrate beyond the topsoil/colluvial mantle.

3.3 Finds

Relatively few artefacts were recovered during the watching brief, a reflection of the failure of groundworks to penetrate significant archaeological layers, and the nature of the excavations. A few hand-made brick fragments were recovered near the outer perimeter wall, while downslope a few sherds of willow-pattern pottery were recovered. In addition, fragments of building stone were found, although none was moulded or worked.

4.0 Summary

The watching brief on the drainage works at Tamworth Castle has demonstrated that the groundworks for the drainage scheme have not disturbed any significant archaeological deposits. This is a justification of the strategy of confining excavation as far as practicable to any pre-existing drain-cuts.

In addition, an insight has been gained into the process of the colluvial erosion down the slope of the motte. It would appear that archaeological deposits at the foot of the motte are protected by hill-wash deposits at least 1m in depth. Equally, the depth at which the redeposited red-clay horizon was found at the top of the motte would indicate that there is no immediate threat to archaeological deposits here through their erosion downslope - the tree cover upon the motte may be a significant factor in this respect.

Finally, it would appear that the design of the gardens at the foot of the motte has changed markedly this century. In part, this is due to the gradual encroachment of hill-wash deposits over features at the foot of the motte, but equally the garden design appears to have become less formalised with curving grass verges and fence-lines replacing earlier, and straighter, divisions, which are probably late-19th century in date.

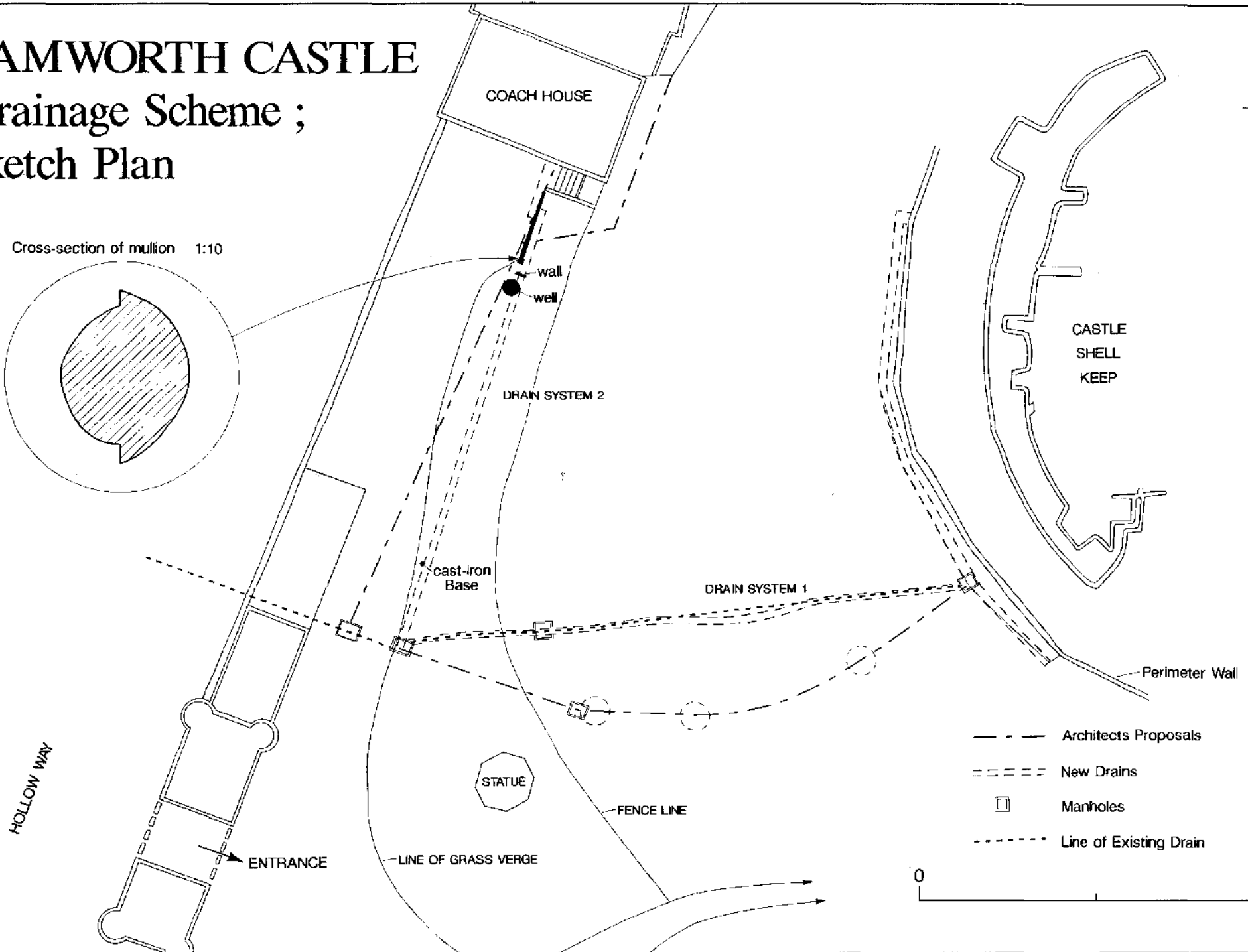
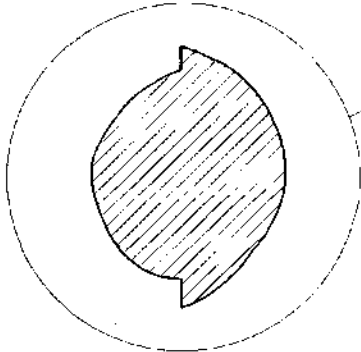
5.0 Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was carried out by Steve Litherland and Jon Sterenberg of Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Steve Litherland produced the report, and the figure was prepared by Mark Breedon. The assistance of Staffordshire County Archaeology Officer R. Meeson and David Lowe of the Duvall Brownhill Partnership is gratefully acknowledged, as is the co-operation of the groundworks contractors for the scheme. The archive will be deposited with the Tamworth Castle Museum.

TAMWORTH CASTLE

Drainage Scheme ; Sketch Plan

Cross-section of mullion 1:10



- — — Architects Proposals
- - - - - New Drains
- Manholes
- · - · - Line of Existing Drain



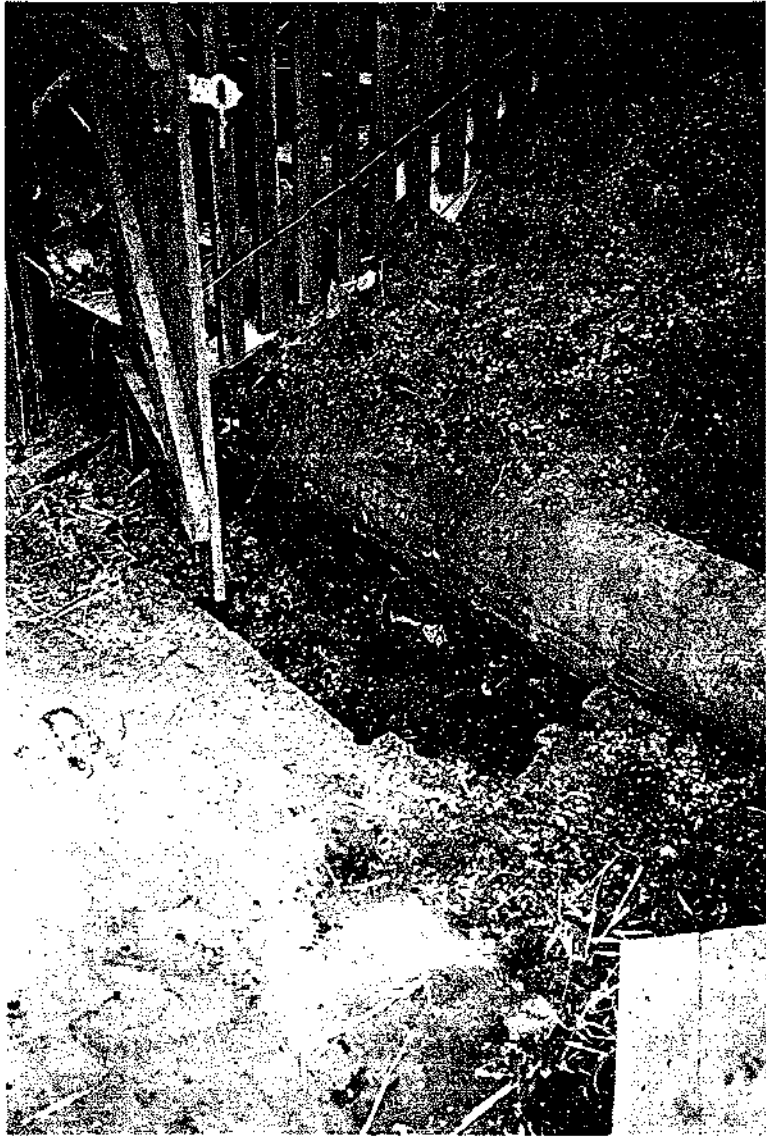


Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5