

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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**A short report on two pieces of archaeological recording  
at Stokesay Castle, Shropshire, for English Heritage**

by  
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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## **A short report on two pieces of archaeological recording at Stokesay Castle, Shropshire for English Heritage**

### **Introduction**

This short report presents the results of two pieces of archaeological recording at Stokesay Castle, Shropshire, carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of English Heritage. The work, which was carried out in late February 1998, was located in the northern arm of the moat and the south tower (Fig. 1).

The circumstance of the first piece of work within the northern arm of the moat was the revelation of a brick-lined circular feature after its timber cover, which had become sealed by an accumulation of topsoil, gave way. The objective of the work was to both plot and record the feature, investigate by probing and excavation its depth and character and to record any dating evidence. In addition, it was necessary to assess the long-term stability of the feature and suggest how it may be made safe. The second piece of work was in the undercroft of the south tower, where the fireplace in the east wall was filled with material which had collapsed from the chimney above. The material was cleared from the fireplace and sifted to recover any artefacts of archaeological significance.

### **Results and recommendations**

A trial pit was opened around the brick-lined feature in the moat, and the overlying topsoil and degraded timber-cover removed. The remains of a rusted sheet of galvanised steel, which sealed the whole of the feature under the rotted timbers, were also removed. The topsoil contained a mixture of pottery of late-19th century, and recent, date, together with a few broken stone roof tiles, which had spilled from a pile of demolition material dumped into the moat over the curtain wall of the castle. The circular feature measured approximately 0.6m in diameter internally and was roughly 1m in depth, but was half-filled with loose soil and rubble (Plate 1). The sides were built of red brick laid in a single-brick-thick, stretcher bond wall which was not mortared together. The bricks were frogless, and measured nine inches in length by four and three-eighths of an inch in width and three inches in depth. The bricks, which were regularly-fired with very few inclusions and of a very uniform size, were probably mass-produced using a cutting rather than a moulding method. Traces of mortar adhering to the bricks indicated that they had been salvaged and reused. Three clay-pipe drains fed into the feature from the north, east, and west.

The feature is interpreted as a soak-away of fairly recent date, constructed to aid drainage from the moat. From a site management perspective, the soak-away probably still retains a useful function and is structurally sound. It is suggested that the soak-away be made safe by the provision of a drain-cover of an appropriate design and size. This would also allow regular maintenance of the drains.

The fireplace inside the south tower was cleared of debris which was sifted for artefacts of archaeological interest before disposal of the waste material in plastic bags (Plate 2). Apart from a mixture of soot and sand, several bricks and fragments of stone had dislodged from the chimney lining. This material had spilled into the fireplace after a lathe-and-plaster ceiling, which blocked the chimney, partially collapsed under the weight of the accumulated soot and debris (Plate 3). The bricks and stone fragments were bagged and placed in the store next to the toilets. A collection of pens and pencils, two broken bottles of 'Tizer' and 'Vimto', an empty packet of pre-government health warning Players No.6 and an empty box of pre-decimalisation Swan Vesta Matches, seems to indicate that it is possible for visitors to throw things down the chimney.

The accumulation of debris in the fireplace was due to the failure of the lathe-and-plaster blocking of the chimney. It is suggested that the part of this blocking which remains *in situ* either requires repair, or complete removal. The quantity of material which had accumulated in the fireplace would also suggest that the chimney-lining is in need of repair. After repair work on the chimney has been carried out the installation of an openable mesh grille in the chimney might be considered. This would retain ventilation through the chimney, thus diminishing problems with dampness, while catching any large objects thrown down, or becoming dislodged from the chimney. Any small material weathering from the chimney-lining could then be brushed regularly from the fireplace, which, combined with visual inspection, would also provide a warning of any imminent repair work being necessary.

### **Acknowledgements**

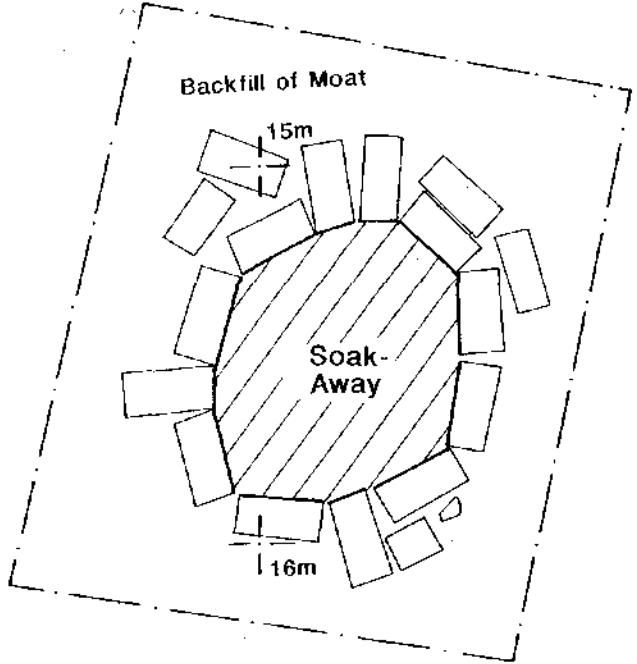
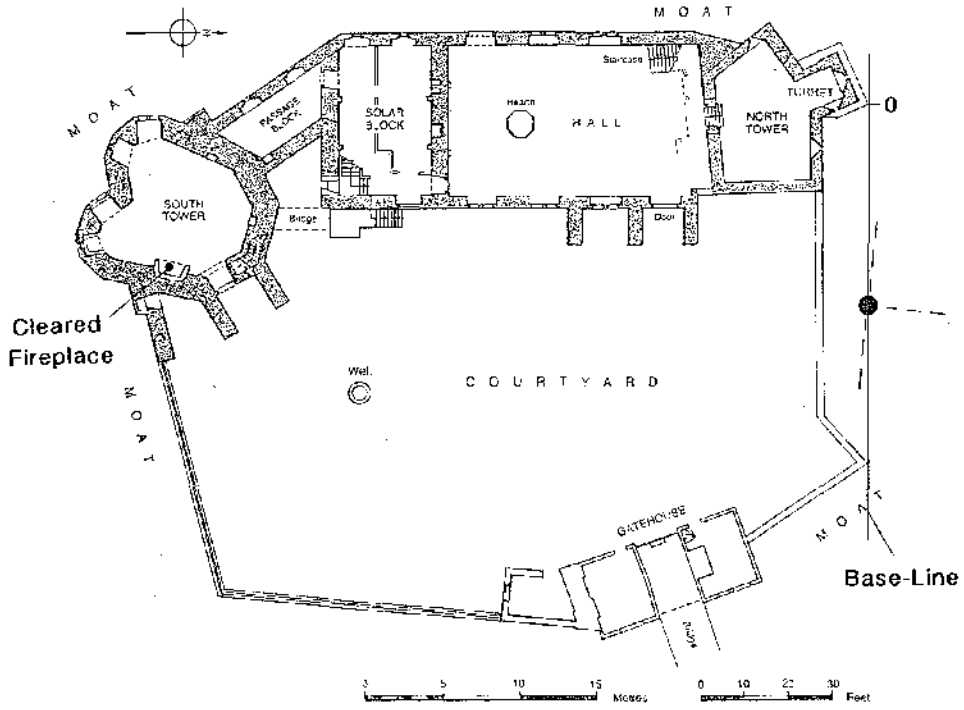
This report was written by Steve Litherland, who also carried out the on-site work. The figure was drafted by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to Anthony Fleming, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage, who commissioned the work, and the staff at Stokesay Castle. The location plan of the soak-away was superimposed upon the plan of Stokesay Castle in the English Heritage guide to Stokesay Castle (Munby 1993, 3).

### **Reference**

Munby, J. 1993 *Stokesay Castle*. English Heritage.

### **Figure and Plates**

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Fig. 1  | Location plan and detail of soak-away                 |
| Plate 1 | Soak-away   |
| Plate 2 | Fireplace, after cleaning                             |
| Plate 3 | View of damaged lathe-and-plaster blocking of chimney |






-  Brick
-  Soak-Away
-  Clay-Pipe Drains

Fig.1

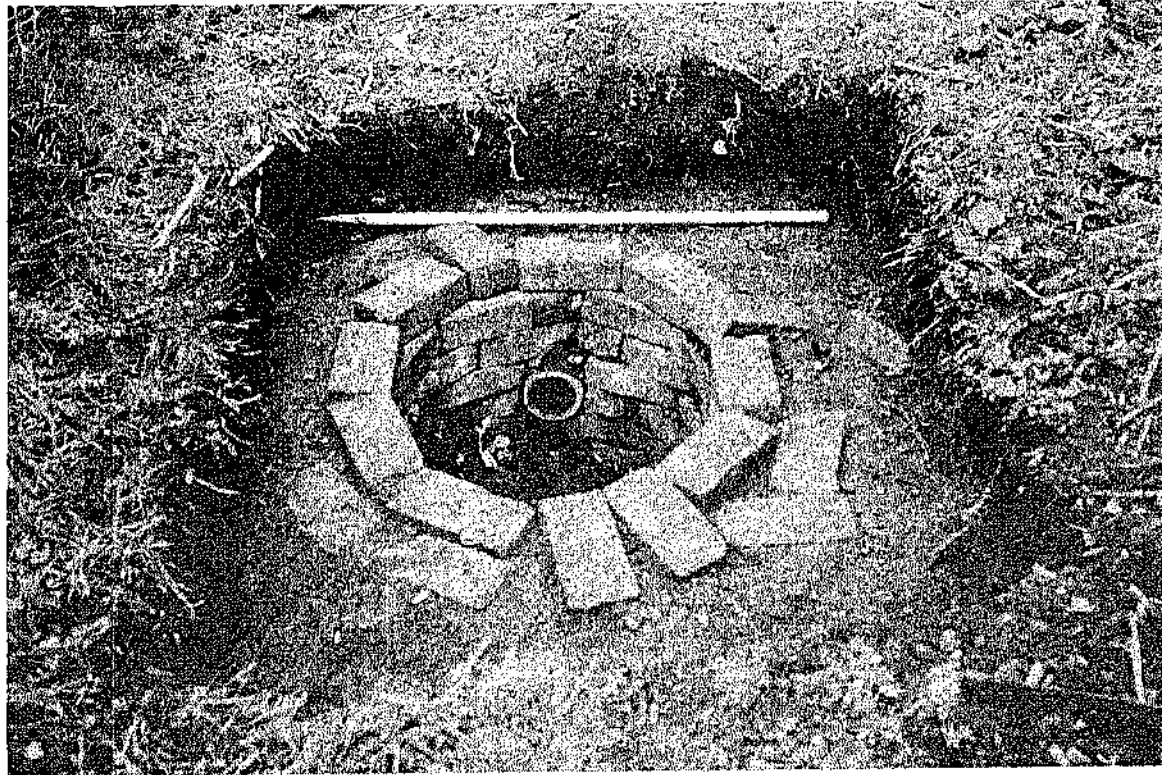


Plate 1

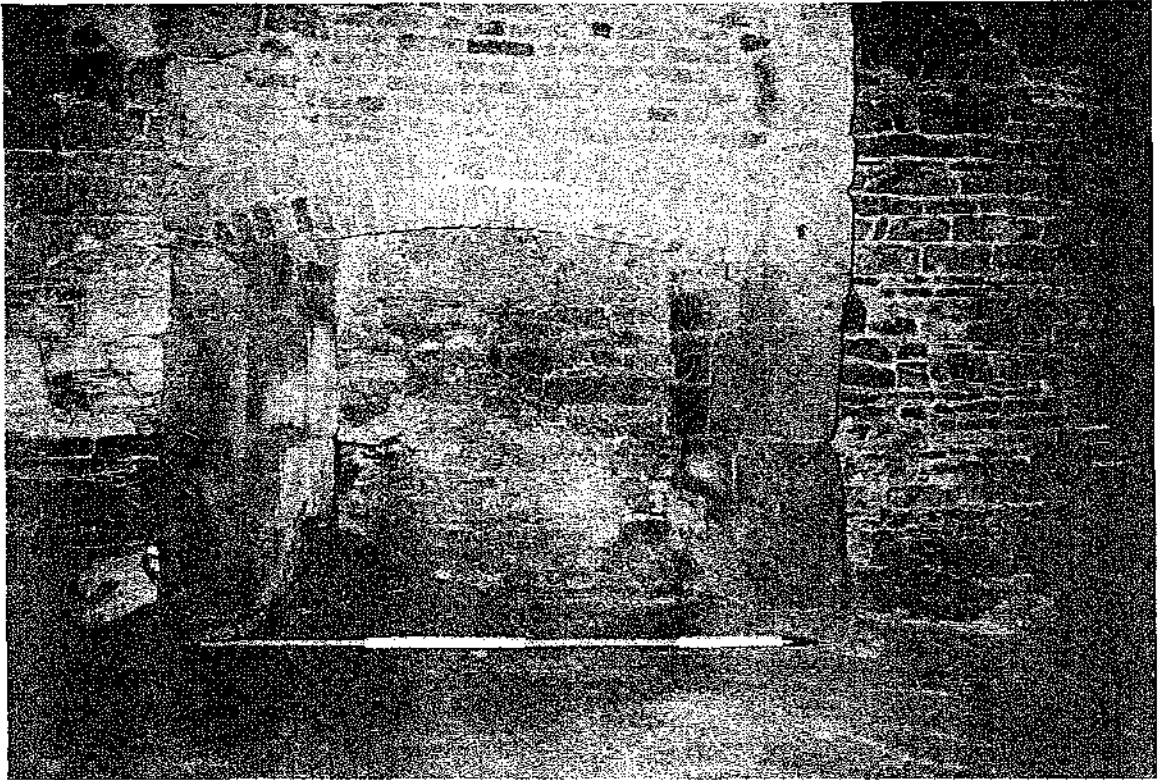


Plate 2

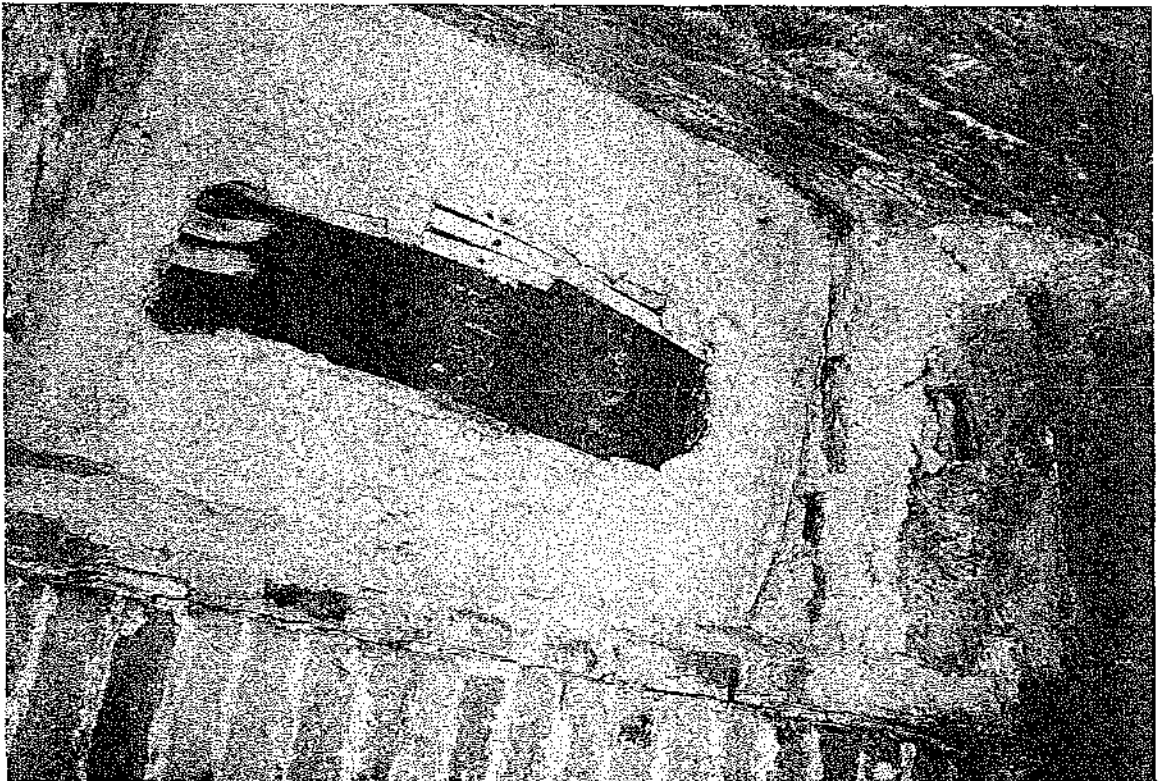


Plate 3