



**Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at  
St. Marys Church, Portchester, Hampshire, PO16 9QW**

August 2023

## NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

*This document sets out the results from an archaeological watching brief at St Marys Church, Portchester, Hampshire, during works to repair a leaking water pipe. It was carried out on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2023 by West Sussex Archaeology Ltd on behalf of St Marys PCC. The results revealed a series of post-1820 make-up layers cut by the water pipe trench, an earlier archaeological excavation trench, and a possible investigation trench seeking the water pipe.*

## BACKGROUND

### Topographical Background



Figure 1 Site location. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068

1. St Marys Church lies within the south-east corner of Portchester Castle at the north end of Portsmouth Harbour in Hampshire, at the tip of the promontory on which the settlement of Portchester now lies (see Figs. 1 & 2). It lies at 5m aOD and is centred at OS grid reference SU 6252 0449. The underlying geology is the Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation overlain by River Terrace Deposits.

### Project Background

1. St Marys Church have been permitted, under Class 5 Consent (No.S00244487) from Historic England, to excavate a targeted trench in order to repair a leaking water main. West Sussex Archaeology Ltd (WSA) was appointed by St Marys PCC to write and submit a method statement (WSA 2023), which was approved by Iain Bright (Historic England). This report details the results of the ensuing archaeological work, which was carried out on the 21<sup>st</sup> August 2023 by George Anelay of West Sussex Archaeology Ltd. The project archive will be deposited with English Heritage.





**Figure 2** Site location. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068

## Historical Background

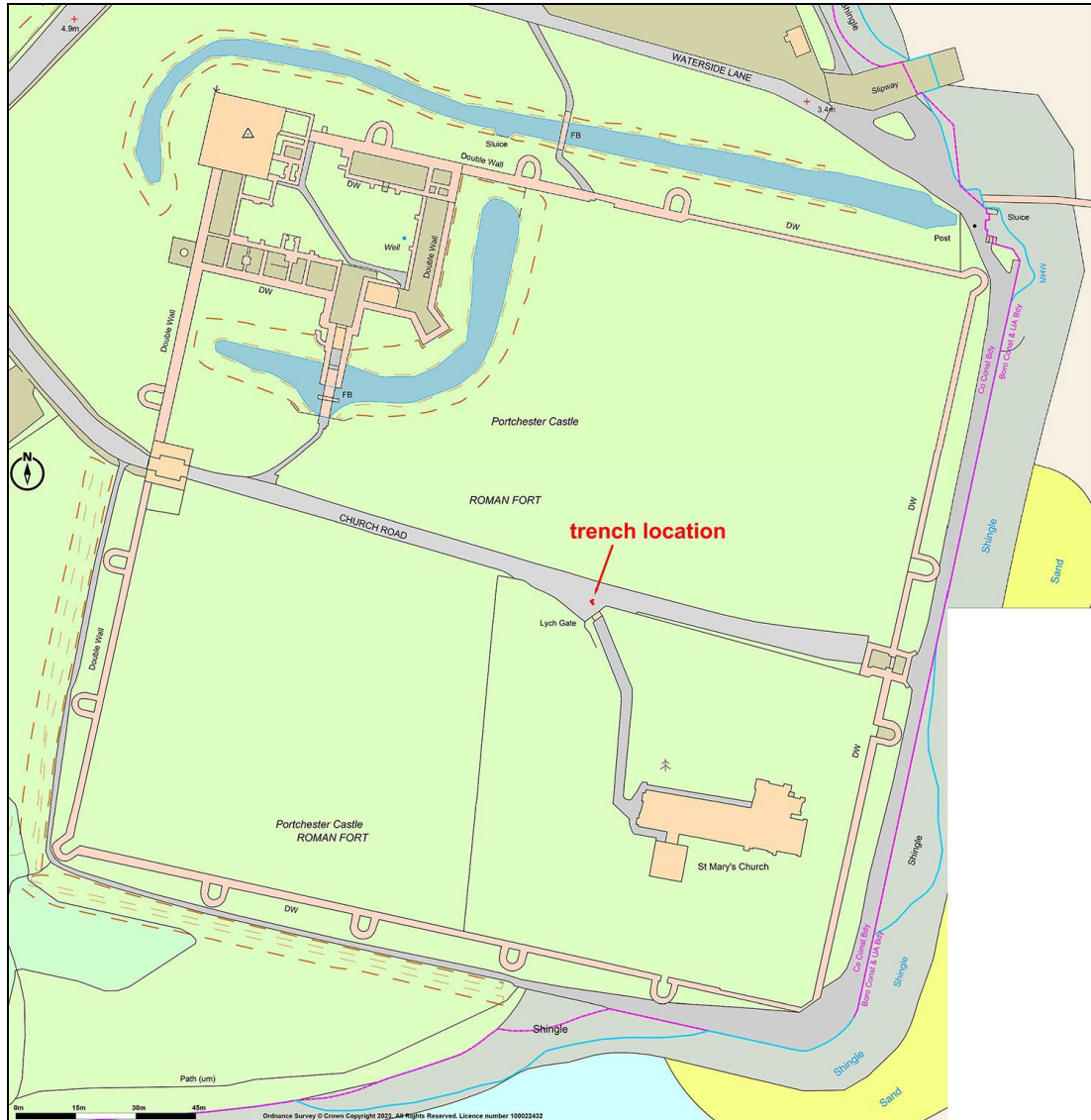
1. Portchester Castle was begun as a Roman fort, one of the series of coastal forts now known as the Forts of the Saxon Shore. These forts were built over the course of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD to meet the threat presented by Saxon pirates, who were then raiding the south coast of Roman Britain. We have no clear evidence for the date of the original fort, but coins found on the site date it to after about AD 268. The Roman fort here seems to have been fairly constantly occupied up to the end of Roman Britain in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.
2. The walls of the Roman fort seem to have housed a community for most of the long period between the end of Roman rule and the Norman conquest of 1066. Evidence of four huts with sunken floors, a well, and signs of ploughing, datable to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, has been found. In the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries a number of timber houses and ancillary buildings were built, perhaps forming two residences. Around the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century there seems to have been a break in

occupation, with extensive dumping of rubbish over the sites of earlier buildings. In AD 904 the Bishop of Winchester gave the fort to the English king Edward the Elder. Following this, the fort became a *burh* – one of a series of fortified places which protected the kingdom from Viking attack. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century a large hall, a courtyard and a stone tower were built within the fort. This suggests that an important man and his family lived here. After the Norman Conquest, Portchester Castle was given by William I to one of his Norman supporters, William Mauduit. By the time Mauduit died in about 1100 he had probably laid out the castle's inner bailey or courtyard in the north-west corner of the larger Roman enclosure. Initially, this bailey probably comprised an outer ditch with a timber palisade, and may have included the first phase of the Norman keep. At some point in the early to mid-12<sup>th</sup> century the keep was raised dramatically. An Augustinian priory was also founded within the Roman fort's walls in 1128. This community moved to nearby Southwick in 1150 and its residential buildings were demolished, but their church still stands as St Marys church. Later in the 12<sup>th</sup> century stone domestic buildings seem to have been built within the inner bailey, with two single-storey ranges on the west side, a hall over a vaulted basement on the north, and a single storey range on the south-east side next to the gatehouse. Edward II remodelled the main Roman gates, the Landgate and Watergate, and the forebuilding of the keep was enclosed with new structures. Richard II rebuilt the inner bailey as a miniature palace in 1396–9, creating a grand series of royal apartments around its south and west sides. The eastern ranges of the inner bailey were completely remodelled by Sir Thomas Cornwallis, the last constable of the castle.

3. In 1632 Charles I sold the castle to a local landowner, Sir William Uvedale, whose descendants, the Thistlethwayte family, still own it today. Portchester Castle was first used to house captured enemy soldiers in 1665, when England was at war with the Netherlands. The government rented the castle from its owners and housed about 500 Dutch prisoners here. It was used as a prison again during all the major wars of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, mainly to house French captives. During the War of Austrian Succession (1740–48) Portchester housed around 2,500 prisoners – about a quarter of all the prisoners of war in Britain. The most important period in Portchester's history as a prison was that of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars of 1793–1815. Portchester was one of 12 main prisoner-of-war depots in Britain, and housed up to 8,000 prisoners at any one time. The last prisoners left the castle in May 1814. After the prisoners left, the army abandoned the castle, and returned it to its owners, the Thistlethwayte family, in 1819. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the castle became a tourist attraction. In 1926 the Thistlethwaite family decided to place the site in the guardianship of the Ministry of Works as an ancient monument. In the 1920s and 1930s the Ministry cleared vegetation, repaired the walls and excavated the castle's moats. Between 1961 and 1979 the castle was the scene of major archaeological excavations directed by Professor Barry Cunliffe. In 1984 the site came into the care of English

# WEST SUSSEX ARCHÆOLOGY

Heritage. (Paras 1-6 above, all taken from: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/portchester-castle/history-and-stories/history/>) Since the 1961-79 Cunliffe excavations a number of small-scale watching briefs have been undertaken in and around the Castle, although none within the immediate vicinity of the lychgate.



**Figure 3** Portchester Castle showing the location of the excavated trench © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068

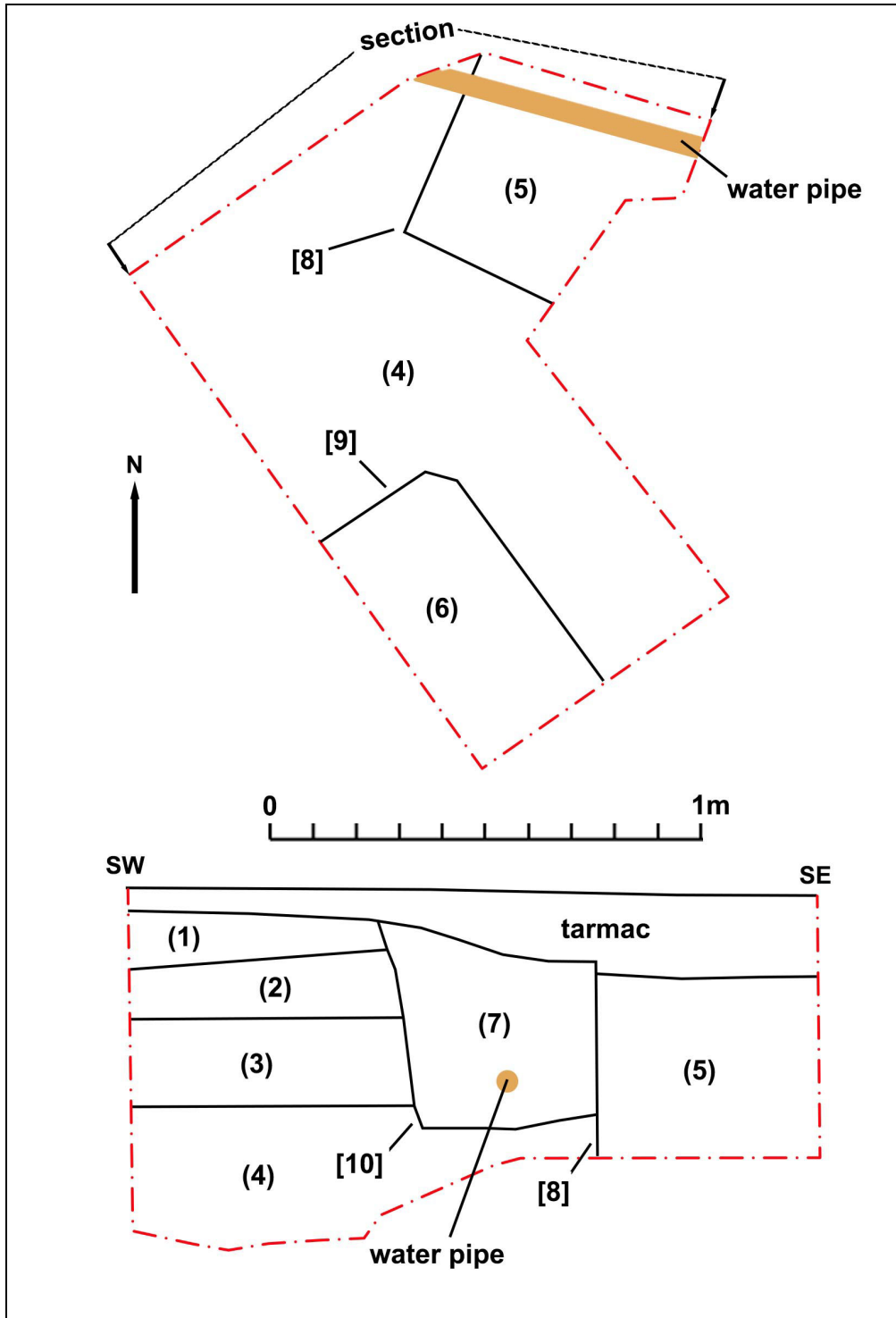
## RESULTS

1. A single trench was hand-dug c.2m to the north-west of the lychgate of St. Marys church. It was initially 1.4m north-west to south-east and 0.7m north-east to south-west, but an extension c.0.6m long was added of its north-east side when it was discovered that the leak lay just outside the original trench. The initial trench was taken to a depth of 0.8m, with the extension to 0.6m. The leak was found to emanate from a small circular hole within the rusted cast iron water pipe.



# WEST SUSSEX ARCHÆOLOGY

- Five layers of deposits were found within the trench as a whole: at the surface was the modern tarmac, below which was its substrate, composed of brick and tile rubble (1); below this was a mid-grey/brown silt (2) containing frequent flints, over a yellow sandy gravel (3), c.0.2m thick; the lowest layer revealed was a mixed layer composed of dark brown silt and yellow sandy gravel lenses (4) which extended below the base of the trench.



**Figure 4** Plan and section of the excavated trench



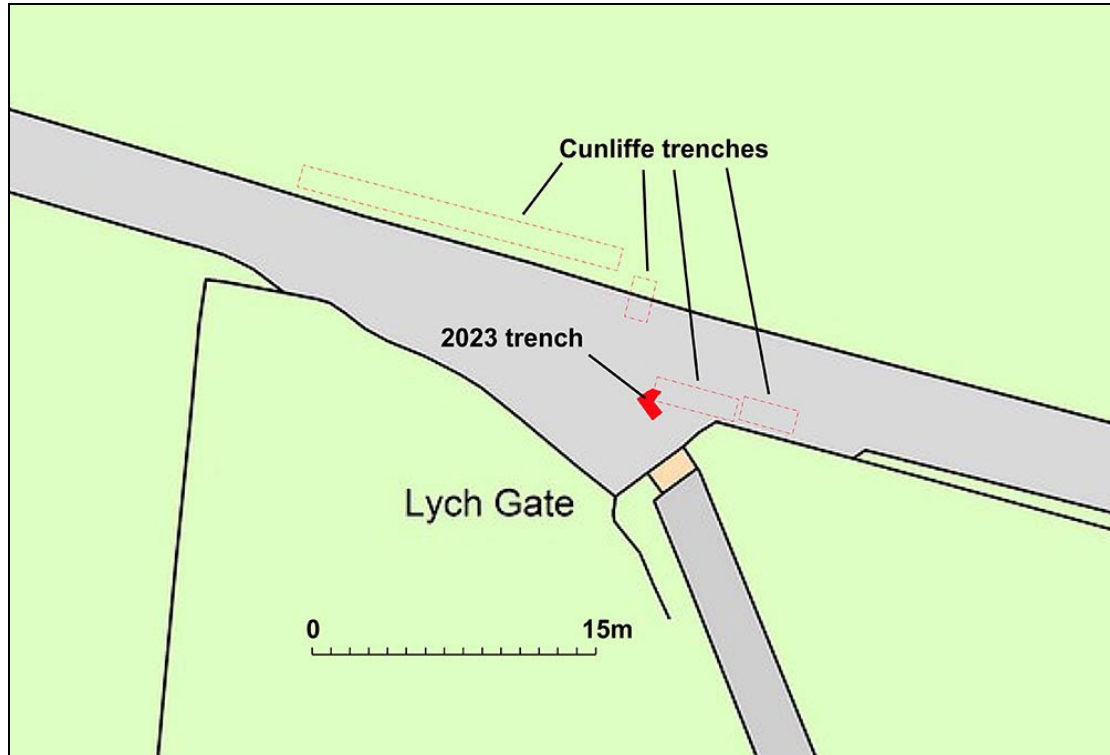
**Figure 5** Southwest face of the excavated trench showing the five make-up layers, with Feature [9] cutting them to the left

3. Cut into the above layers were three modern pits, the earliest of which was the trench for the water pipe [10] which was filled with a mid-grey/brown silt (7) containing flint and occasional tile and brick fragments. Cutting this pipe trench was the corner of a later feature [8] filled with dark brown silt with frequent flints (5). A second similar feature [9] lay in the south corner of the trench, filled with similar material (6). The first of these [8] matches up with the position of the southwest corner of one of Cunliffe's trenches excavated in 1966 (Cunliffe, B. 1975, p.184-5 & Fig.107). The second would appear to be the edge of another trench dug in modern times, with local anecdotal opinion being that it is one of several pits dug in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to locate the position of the water pipe.

## CONCLUSION

1. The excavated trench did not extend to the undisturbed natural, but instead lies within a series of make-up layers all of which contained tile and brick fragments. Unfortunately the published details of Cunliffe's 1966 trenches do not include any indication of the depth from the modern ground surface to the natural geology, although c.20m to the west it was recorded to be 1.2m, with 1.05m of post-1820 deposits extending down from the existing ground surface (*Ibid.*, Section 15). It would seem probable therefore that the layers recorded in the 2023 trench are of a similar nature, with any undisturbed Roman, Saxon or medieval deposits relating to the fort and later castle lying at a greater depth.





**Figure 6** Plan of Cunliffe's trenches in relation to that of 2023 © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cunliffe, B 1975 *Excavations at Portchester Castle Volume 1: Roman* Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London No.XXXII.

West Sussex Archaeology Ltd 2023 *Method Statement for an Archaeological Watching Brief at St. Marys Church, Portchester, Hampshire* Unpublished.