

Report 2577



nps archaeology

## Archaeological Watching Brief during replacement paving at Norwich Castle Mound

ENF 126253



**Prepared for**  
NPS Property Consultants Ltd.  
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July 2011



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BAU 2577

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Location: Norwich Castle Mound  
District: Norwich  
Grid Ref.: TG 2320 0840  
HER No.: ENF 126253  
SM No.: NF5  
OASIS Ref.: 105575  
Client: NPS Property Consultants Limited  
Dates of Fieldwork: 1–4 March, 19 and 21 April, 3 May and 6 June 2011

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was conducted for NPS Property Consultants Limited during excavations for a path and hard standing areas at the top of Norwich Castle Mound.*

*The excavations only impacted on the upper c.0.4m of deposits around the perimeter of the top of Norwich Castle Mound. From previous excavations it is known that the original surface of the mound is at some depth, and the current ground surface has been built-up over the centuries with rubble layers and make-up deposits.*

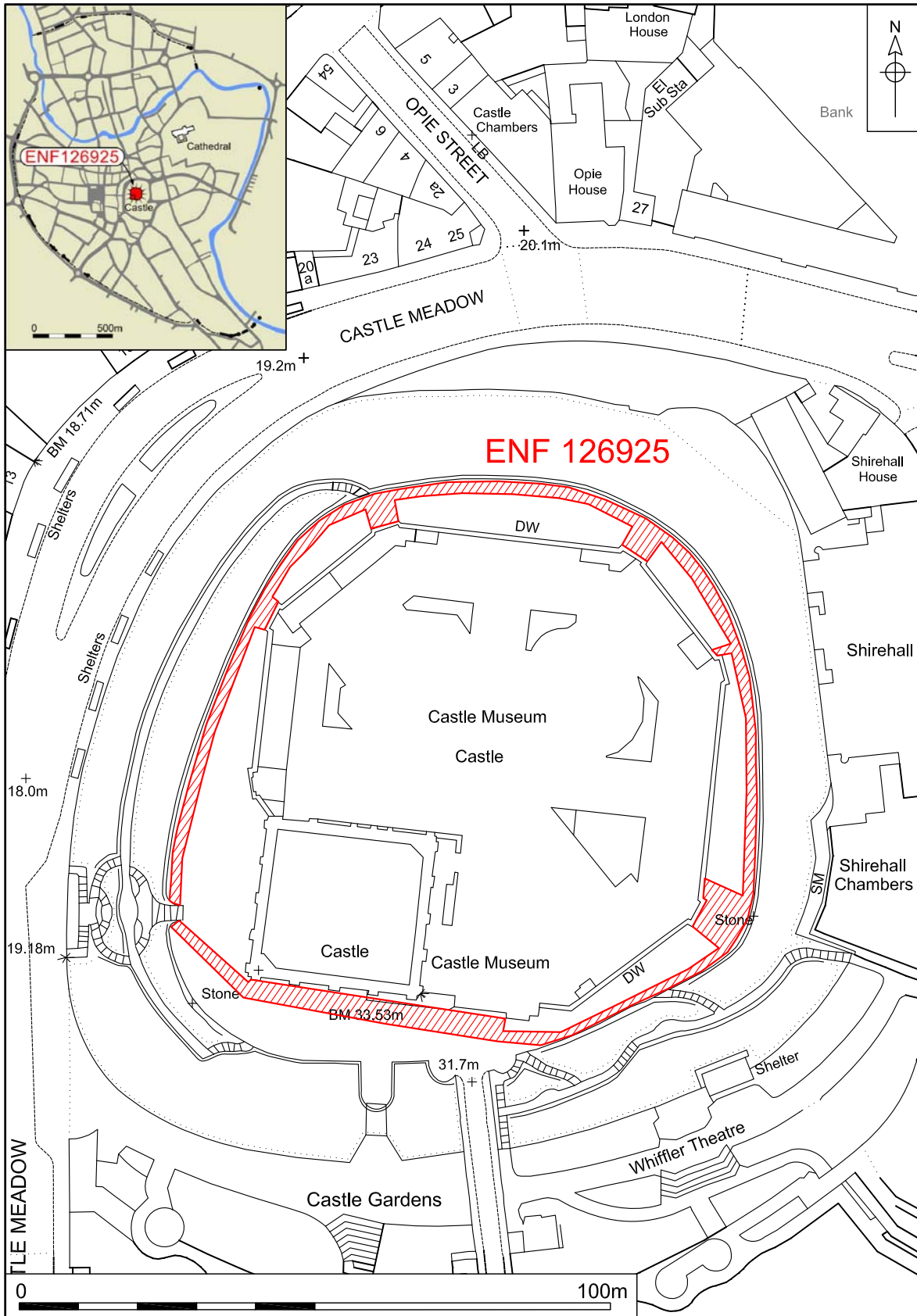
*No archaeological features were noted during this watching brief, and all of the layers encountered consisted of modern disturbance.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

A watching brief was undertaken during excavation of a shallow, long linear trench to accommodate hard standing areas and access paths at Norwich Castle Mound (Fig. 1).



Plate 1. The site, looking south



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:1000

This work was undertaken to fulfil a Scheduled Monument Consent set by English Heritage (Ref. S00005326) and a Project Design prepared by NPS Archaeology (Ref. BAU2577). This work was commissioned by NPS Property Consultants Ltd and funded by Norfolk County Council.

This programme of work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010).

The site archive is currently held by NPS Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS), following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

## **2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The geology and topography of the Castle site are given detailed analysis within East Anglian Archaeology 132: *'Norwich Castle: Excavations and Historical Survey, 1987-1998: Part I: Anglo-Saxon to c.1345'* (Shepherd Popescu 2009).

The site of Norwich Castle is to be found on a spur of high ground, a chalk ridge which runs into the city from the south, commonly known as the Ber Street Ridge (Shepherd Popescu 2009, 41). The area slopes to the north and east towards the River Wensum, and to the west to the valley of the Great Cockey stream. The height at the top of the motte is around 27m OD. The surface geology of the area is of sand and gravel, with an underlying geology of Beeston chalk overlain by Norwich crag.

No natural deposits were encountered during this watching brief, only layers of made ground and rubble.

## **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **3.1 Prehistoric and Roman**

The prehistoric and Roman periods in Norwich are represented more through a low background 'noise' of finds, rather than any solid excavated archaeological evidence. From the vicinity of this site a barbed and tanged arrowhead of probable Bronze Age date was recovered from the north-east bailey of Norwich Castle, polished flint axes were found at King Street (NHER 254) and Bedford Street/Little London Street (NHER 479), and as Shepherd Popescu states 'a few other sites producing low numbers of worked flints and occasional sherds of pottery'. Excavation at the site of the Millennium library (NHER 26437) located to the west of the Castle, near to the market place, recovered several prehistoric features, including Bronze Age and Iron Age quarries, and several finds of Mesolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age date. There can be no doubt that the Norwich environs would have been an ideal place for settlement in the prehistoric period, with its location near to several watercourses, interspersed with high ground.

The focus of Roman occupation in the area was *Venta Icenorum* at Caistor St. Edmund 5km to the south of Norwich. This was a centre for the Roman occupation in a large part of Norfolk, and was linked to the area that subsequently became Norwich by roads which headed north through the river valley.

### **3.2 Early and Middle Saxon**

Early and Middle Saxon evidence near to Norwich Castle is scant. Part of a cremation urn was found just to the north of the Castle, adjacent to the church of St. Michael at Plea (NHER 425). Early Saxon pottery was also recovered from the north side of the Cathedral Close (NHERs 44, 46 and 280). It is thought that Norwich has coalesced from several smaller settlements that were extant during the Middle Saxon period, mainly focusing on the river; these were Westwick, Coslany, Conesford, Needham and Northwic. The settlement of Needham, the largest of the settlements is believed to have been located where the Castle fortifications were subsequently situated (the 98 houses recorded as being destroyed by the construction of the Norman Castle (Ayers 2003) could represent a later manifestation of part of this settlement). Finds of Ipswich-ware pottery in the vicinity support the view that settlement existed in this area during the Middle Saxon period.

### **3.3 Late Saxon and Viking**

After years of raiding, Vikings made East Anglia their home; Edmund, the last East Anglian king had been defeated and the Danelaw was created. The period of Danish occupation lasted from c.870-c.917, and may have assisted in Norwich's emergence as a town, with a possible fortified burh established on the north bank of the River Wensum. It is, however, in the 10th century that Norwich really grows and at this time also acquires a mint. The area was re-conquered in 917 by Edward the Elder but by the 990s Viking raids began again in earnest, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Garmonsway 1972) records that in 1004 King Swein of Denmark came to Norwich with his fleet, and completely ravaged the town. At the Norman conquest Norwich's population was recorded to be between 1,320 and 1,518 inhabitants; clearly indicating town of some importance even before 1066.

### **3.4 Medieval**

The Norman Conquest of 1066 brought great changes to the whole country, and Norwich was no exception. Ayers (2003, 54) states that 'The Castle, a royal rather than a baronial foundation, was probably under construction before the end of the 1060s', making Norwich Castle a very early intimation of Norman power. This first building was a timber and earthwork affair, construction of which entailed the demolishing of at least 98 houses. In 1075, the Constable, Ralph de Guader, rebelled against the king, and the Castle must have been in sufficient a state to withstand the ensuing siege. In the end the rebels surrendered, and were duly punished, by maiming and banishment: the Conqueror was unforgiving. Before the end of the 11th century a massive remodelling in stone of the Castle and its defences was carried out. The Castle has undergone numerous episodes of construction work; a more detailed history of the Castle and its defences can be found in Ayers (2003) *Norwich 'A Fine City* and Shepherd Popescu's account of the excavations prior to the construction of the Castle Mall shopping centre in *Norwich Castle: Excavations and Historical Survey, 1987-98* (2009).

### **3.5 Post-Medieval and Modern**

Norwich Castle may have always had provision for detainment of prisoners, but it is in the 15th century that reports appear of prisoners being detained in the keep.



By 1707 the keep was said to be in such a state of disrepair that prisoners were escaping, which led to improved maintenance. In 1792 the prison was rebuilt, with a new block of prison offices and accommodation. The interior of the keep was gutted, and three cell blocks, three stories high, were built inside. The centre of the keep was kept open to the elements and used as an exercise yard. In 1824-8 the prison was rebuilt again and although the cells were still kept within the keep, other prisoners were housed in outbuildings. The prison continued in use until 1887, when a new building on Mousehold Heath was finished, and prisoners were transferred there. The Castle became a museum in 1894, a purpose that it still holds today.

The Castle mound itself has witnessed changes over the years. The construction of the Shirehall in 1822 and extensions in 1906 and 1999-2001 caused the mound to be cut back. A widening of the street now called Castle Meadow in the late 1920s led to the building of a brick and flint retaining wall (Ayers 2003, 57).

#### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this watching brief was to mitigate the impacts of the proposed works in line with the Scheduled Monument Consent i.e. by recording archaeological remains that may be exposed during works associated with introduction hard standing areas and access paths on top of the Castle Mound.

The Brief required that constant archaeological monitoring take place during all groundworks prior to construction of new hard standing areas outside fire doors and to provide egress for disabled persons around the top of the Castle Mound. Excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB excavator operated under constant archaeological supervision.

No environmental samples were taken due to the lack of suitable deposits and no finds were recovered.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NPS Archaeology *pro forma*. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Colour, monochrome and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate.

Site conditions were good, with the work taking place in fine weather.

#### **5.0 RESULTS**

The site formed a continuous loop around the perimeter of the top of the Castle Mound, and measured 2m in width, with a depth of around 0.4m. The site did not uncover any features of an archaeological nature; the only layers encountered were disturbed make-up and rubble deposits. No finds were recovered and no context numbers issued.



Plate 2. The site, looking west towards City Hall

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The Castle Mound has been investigated archaeologically on several occasions, demonstrating that the earthwork sitting astride a chalk ridge was made of chalk itself and that it had been modified on several occasions (Wallis, in prep).

Numerous small-scale interventions have also taken place in response to the changing needs of the Castle and its environs. Penn (1999) located the top of the original earthwork motte in two trenches on the top of the mound at 2m below current ground surface, well below the depth reached on this occasion. A watching brief monitoring the erection of CCTV cameras around the perimeter of the Castle Mound in 2010 (Sillwood) and Penn's trenches also located a brick and flint wall containing iron railings which had been recorded by Shelley (1995) during consolidation work. The current intervention adds nothing new to the knowledge of the Castle and its environs, being too shallow to locate any archaeological features.

## **Acknowledgements**

The author acknowledges the assistance of other members of NPS archaeology staff during this watching brief, including David Adams, Andrew Phelps and Stuart Calow, for their attendance on the site.

The figures were produced by David Dobson and the report was edited by Jayne Bown.

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