

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 1078

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at Norwich Castle
Mound, Norwich**

41733N

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Location: Norwich Castle
Grid Ref: TG 2323 0852
NHER No.: 41733N
SAM No.: 5
Date of fieldwork: 18th May 2005

Summary

During May 2005 Norfolk Archaeology Unit monitored the construction of two display boards at the Norwich Castle Mound.

A few fragments of medieval pottery were recovered from the make-up and topsoil, moreover the recently buried 19th-century 'Spanish Steps' were rediscovered during the works. No archaeological features were encountered.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) was commissioned and funded by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service to undertake an archaeological watching brief on the construction of two free standing display boards at the western side of the castle mound.

This archaeological watching brief was requested and undertaken as part of the planning conditions on the scheduled monument of Norwich Castle.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

(Fig. 1)

Norwich Castle mound is situated within the city centre of Norwich (centred at NGR TG 2323 0852) at the northern end of an escarpment. To the north and east is the valley of the River Wensum, while to the west lies the valley of the Great Cockey (which now flows underground). The Castle was constructed on an artificial hill (or motte) at this naturally prominent position by the Normans, so as to dominate its immediate surroundings.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The site was at one time part of the Late Saxon town of Norwich. Domesday records that 98 houses were destroyed to make way for the Royal Castle and its associated earthworks. Following the Norman Conquest work began on the construction of the motte in c. 1068. Present theory suggests that the original motte was smaller than seen today and housed a wooden keep, although no direct evidence for the keep has yet been found. Expansion of the mound and the construction of the stone keep probably started in the final years of the 11th century, ultimately making the new motte the largest in England. It is thought that the top of the motte housed not only the keep but also many other ancillary buildings.

It is worthy of note that the motte itself forms only a small part of the complete castle complex which at its most expansive covered an area of c. 23 acres. This royal castle was one of the largest and most impressive medieval castle complexes in England.

By the early 13th century the castle was used as a gaol (Green 1962) and in 1579 a new Shire House was built on top of the mound to the north of the Keep. This was severely damaged by fire in 1746, after which a new building was constructed. In the late 19th century new Shirehall Chambers were built at the bottom of the mound on its east side.

In 1792/3 a new gaol, designed by Soanes, was built within the gutted keep with additional buildings abutting its eastern side. During the years 1822-5 the gaol was again redesigned and expanded by Wilkins. These buildings form the main fabric of the Castle Museum as it stands today. In the years 1887-94 Boardman designed and oversaw the change of use from county gaol to museum. Most significantly in archaeological terms this included the removal of much material which had accumulated in the keep (Wallis 2003).

4.0 Methodology

(Figs 2 and 3)

The objective of this watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the construction of two free standing display boards at the western side of the castle mound (Fig. 2). This necessitated the excavation of three post-holes for each board to a depth of c. 0.7m (Fig. 3). The post-holes were excavated by hand by the signage contractors 'Signs Express' and were monitored and recorded by the author.

Spoil and exposed deposits were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using the NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

The locations for the display boards were surveyed by the author by a cable detector to scan for hidden services. Temporary edge protection was employed in the form of orange fencing and road irons due to the steep slope of the mound. The weather was fine and sunny.

5.0 Results

(Appendix 1)

Display Board A

Post-holes for this board were originally positioned 2.3m from the edge of the mound, however solid obstacles were encountered in the form of buried stone blocks ([03]) just 0.3m below the topsoil ([01]). These represent *in situ* remains of the 19th-century 'Spanish Steps' sealed below modern sandy make-up containing occasional small brick fragments and pieces of plastic rubbish ([02]). The post-holes were repositioned 3.5m from the edge of the mound further up the steeply sloping mound and carefully located so as to avoid a trench containing a plastic gas pipe. The post-holes were

each c. 0.35 sq. m and excavated to a maximum depth of 0.8m into the same modern make-up. Frequent large lumps of flint rubble with adhering cement were encountered by the most southerly of the three holes. A single sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from the spoil of this post-hole.

Display Board B

The post-holes for this display board were excavated 1.4m from the edge of the mound. They measured c. 0.35 sq. m to a maximum depth of 0.8m. Below 0.24m of friable topsoil ([04]) was a deposit of mid yellowish brown sandy loam mixed with crushed mortar flecks ([05]). Three fragments of medieval pottery were recovered from the spoil generated from this deposit.

6.0 The Pottery

(Appendix 2)

By Sue Anderson

Introduction

A total of four sherds of pottery, weighing 0.022kg, was collected during the watching brief, from two contexts ([02] and [05]) identified as modern make-up layers.

Context	Fabric	Sherd count	Sherd weight (kg)	Description
02	Medieval coarseware?	1	0.006	Slightly calcareous medium sandy fabric, oxidised internally, reduced and sooted externally. Possibly Late Saxon/Early medieval.
05	Medieval coarseware?	2	0.007	Medium sandy sherds, one oxidised, abraded.
		1	0.009	Slightly tapering bead rim with hollow, jar or jug. May be an unusual Thetford Ware form, or possibly Flemish blue-grey ware (12th century).

Table 1. Pottery quantified by context

Methodology

Quantification was carried out using sherd count and weight. A full quantification by fabric, context and feature is available in the archive. All fabric codes were assigned from the Suffolk post-Roman fabric series, which includes Norfolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Midlands fabrics, as well as imported wares. Form terminology follows MPRG (1998). Recording uses a system of letters for fabric codes. Standard pottery quantification forms were used.

Discussion

None of these sherds could be positively identified. All were in medium sandy fabrics, some with sparse inclusions common to local wares, such as chalk or ferrous fragments. Their fabric is closer to Thetford-type ware, early medieval and non-local medieval wares than to Norwich local medieval unglazed wares (LMU). It may be that they are medieval but pre-date the use of LMU within the city. This seems unlikely, however, as Jennings (1981) dates the beginnings of LMU to the 12th century or earlier. The rim form ([05]) is unusual for any period, but may be a Late Saxon type if it is not a non-local or imported medieval vessel. Overall, an 11th- to 12th-century

date for the assemblage would seem probable, but a later date cannot be ruled out. These sherds were residual within these modern make-up layers.

7.0 Conclusions

The excavation of the post-holes for the display boards disturbed modern deposits on the surface of the castle mound. The 'Spanish Steps' were encountered by the initial attempt to excavate the holes for Board A. The Spanish Steps are not shown on the 1885 OS plan, however, are shown on the 1889 plan by Collins (published by Jarrolds). The steps were constructed as part of the redevelopment of the Castle to serve the Museum which opened in 1894. The steps were notoriously steep and were closed at various times for repairs. The steps were temporarily reopened to provide access to the Castle during the works on the Castle Mall in the late 1980s (Barbara Green pers comm). They were buried after this final use. The larger fragments of masonry encountered were probably created when a plastic gas-pipe was laid across the location of the steps.

A few fragments of medieval pottery of a probable 11th- to 12th-century date were recovered from the spoil generated from the works but were all found residually in modern deposits.

Acknowledgements

The monitoring and recording was conducted by the author. The pottery was examined by Sue Anderson of CFA Archaeology Ltd. This report was illustrated and produced by Julie Curl, edited by Alice Lyons. The project was overseen by Jayne Bown. Special thanks are due Barbara Green for her time and assistance.

Bibliography

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
01	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
02	Deposit	Make-up	Modern
03	Masonry	Stone steps	Victorian
04	Deposit	Loam	Modern
05	Deposit	Make-up	Modern

Appendix 2: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
02	Pottery	1	0.006	Medieval
05	Pottery	3	0.016	Medieval

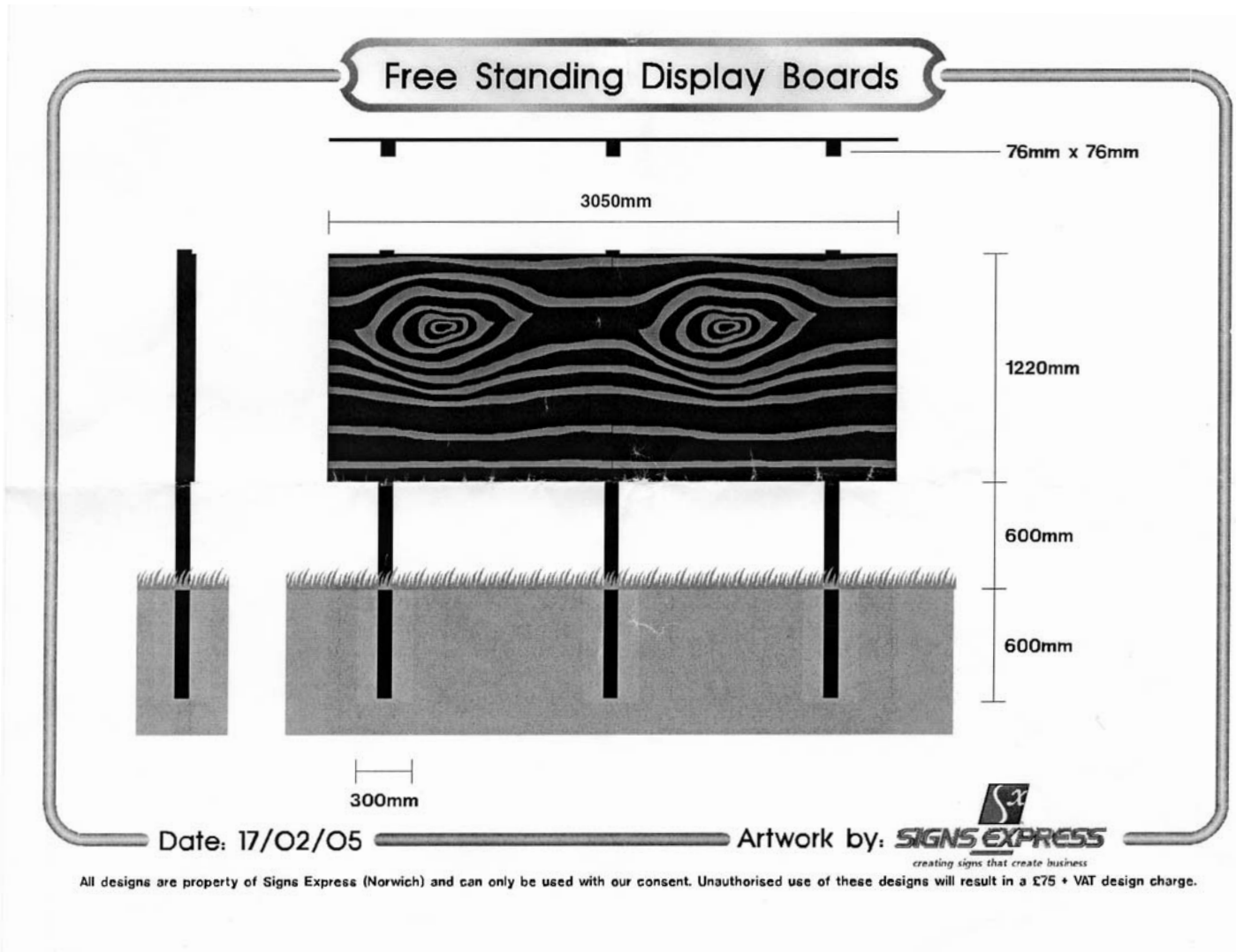


Figure 3. Design of display board

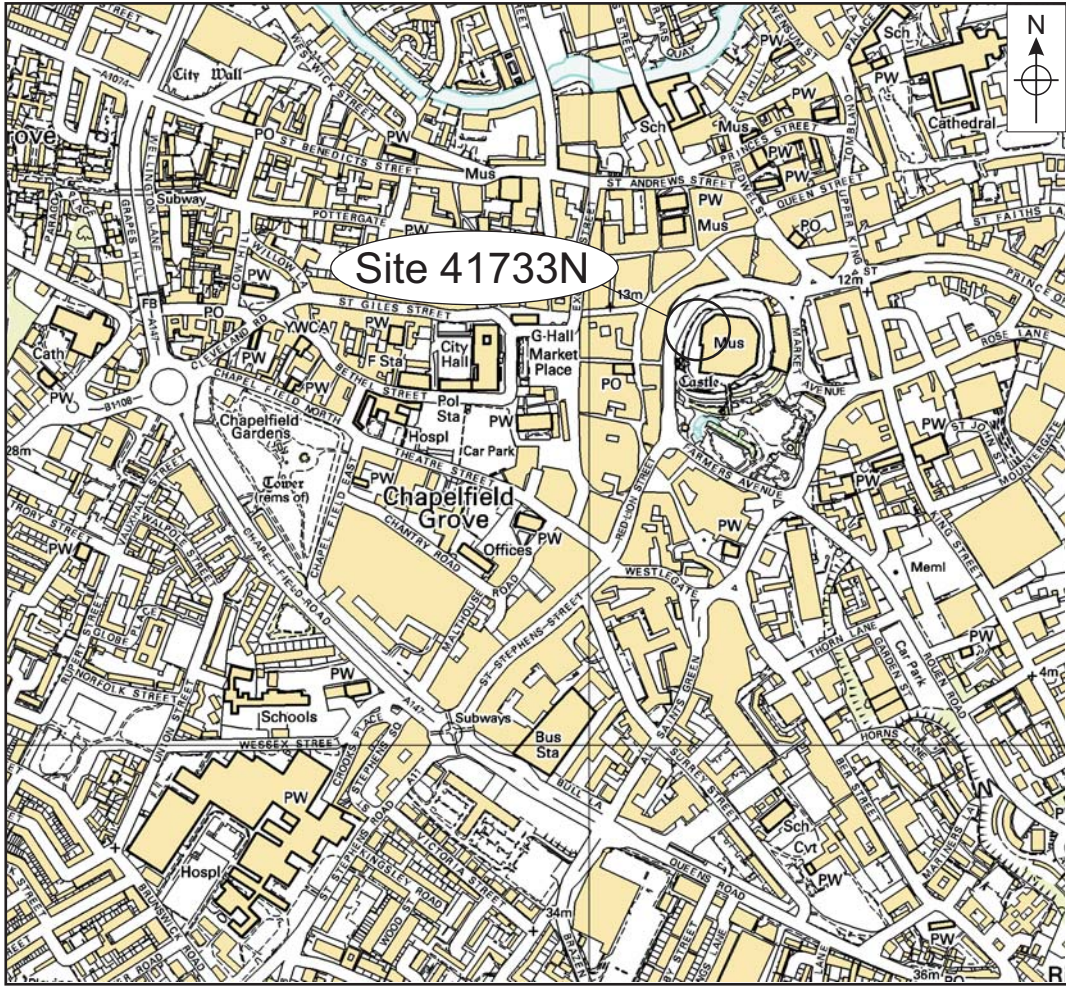


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

Local Authority No.100019340

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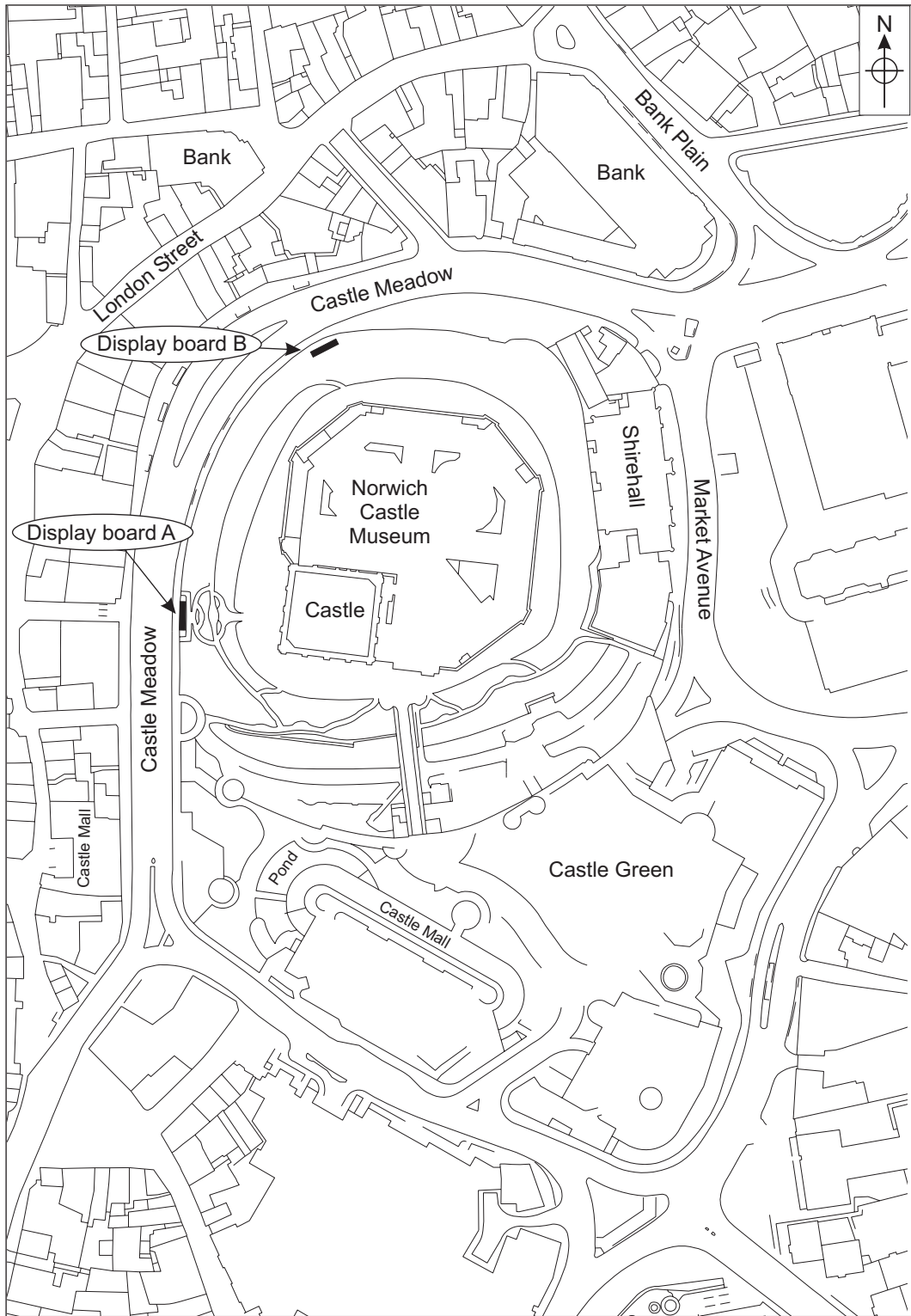


Figure 2. Location of display boards. Scale 1:2000