

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 819

**Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at
The Castle Public House, Caister-on-Sea,
Norfolk**

38107 CBY

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October 2003

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Local Authority No.076759

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Location: Castle Public House, Caister-on-Sea, Norfolk
Grid Ref.: TG 5195 1231
SMR No.: 38107 CBY
Date of work: 12th November 2002, 13th May and 18th June 2003

Summary

An archaeological watching brief, occurring in three phases, was undertaken to observe groundworks for the development and extension of the Castle Public House in Caister. The work included the excavation of footing and soakaway holes and topsoil stripping. No features of archaeological interest were observed during the work although several sherds of pottery including prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval wares were recovered from unstratified deposits.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological watching brief was carried out at the rear and front of the Castle Public House in Caister-on-Sea (Fig 1 and 2) for Jonathan Hall Associates of Norwich on behalf of 'Fatso's' restaurants. The public house comprises two adjoined buildings, the northern one appearing older in date than that to the south. The building was being renovated and extended in order to develop into it into a family restaurant. The watching brief consisted of three separate visits by an archaeologist to supervise groundworks undertaken during the development.

The development work behind the building involved the excavation of ten footing holes for the stanchions. The size of the extension area under development measured approximately 8.0m by 20.0m (160m²), although the ten holes, each only measuring 1m by 0.5m, reduced the area of disturbance. The later phases of the watching brief involved the observation of topsoil being stripped from the front lawn of the property, an area of approximately 30.0m by 45.0m (1350m²) for the laying of a landscaped asphalt car park and the machine excavation of a soakaway pit near the road frontage of the property.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Method Statement for watching briefs prepared by Norfolk Archaeological Unit and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref: EJR 6/11/02).

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

The underlying solid geology of the area is Norwich Crag which is below an outcrop of Norwich Brickearth. The site is located on a slight rise although drainage of ground water from the site was poor due to underlying clay subsoils.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The proposed development is located within an area of probable Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon settlement which lies close to an archaeologically important sites, the Roman settlement of Caister, part of which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Roman Caister has been interpreted as a town and harbour regulating sea trade on the coastline, and also that it may form part of the 4th-century Saxon Shore defences and a continuation of the same defensive strategy as shown at Burgh Castle. Roman occupation and activity is usually not confined to an area within the fort defences and there is a recognised area of extramural settlement associated with the main structure. Saxon burial sites have been identified in the locality, mainly to the south of Norwich Road, the A1064, and to the north-east of the site (HER 13688). Additional Historic Environment Record references have been checked for the area in the vicinity of the site.

4.0 Methodology

To the north-east of the main building, three walls enclose an area that was once roofed but is now open and serves as a courtyard. It was the intention of the contractors, as part of the redevelopment of the site, to reinstate the roof which required stanchions to support it.

The footing holes for the stanchions were hand excavated by the contractors to a set depth of 0.60m and a dimension of 1.0m wide by 0.50m in length. The holes were excavated in intervals, set approximately 2m apart, against existing standing walls surrounding the open area at the rear of the house.

The topsoil strip of the front lawn area was undertaken using a JCB-type mechanical excavator which cut the turf to a depth of approximately 80mm over an area of approximately 1350m² under archaeological supervision. The spoil from the strip was inspected upon removal and consisted entirely of turf and topsoil.

The soakaway pit near the road frontage of the site measured approximately 1.0m² and was machine excavated to a depth of 1.85m. The resulting spoil was thoroughly searched by hand and by using a metal detector. Approximately 0.8m depth of builders gravel was placed into the base of the pit along with brick fragments before being backfilled with the initial spoil.

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

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

Site conditions during the first two phases of the watching brief were dull and overcast with regular, at times heavy, rain and sleet. This made the ground conditions waterlogged and muddy and towards the end of the first phase of the watching brief several of the footing holes were consequently half-filled with water.

5.0 Results

Phase 1

In the first phase of the watching brief, five footing holes (Holes 1-5) were excavated against the inside of the east wall of the open area. The 'topsoil' of the site consisted of a 20mm thick layer of dark silt clay containing brick rubble and wood fragments (1). All but one of the holes were dug down through a grey-brown clay sandy silt (2) which contained occasional chalk lumps and small flints. The hole at the south end of the east wall was excavated through approximately 0.30m of grey-brown sandy silt (3) and a very sandy soil containing chalk fragments (4) which may represent a backfilled deposit, possibly in connection with the footing of the wall.

The holes reached the underlying natural at an average depth of 0.55m. This was a sandy marl with moderate flint and chalk lump inclusions. The footing of the east standing wall was observed and consisted of 2 courses (approximately 0.30m deep) of compact flint cobbles. Beneath the cobbles was a mid grey clay silt subsoil which appeared undisturbed. The cuts of the footing holes extended for approximately 0.40m under the wall foundations in order to tie in the concrete fill of the stanchions.

No features were observed in any of the holes against the north wall. Four sherds of unstratified pottery were recovered from the fill of one of the footing holes (Hole No. 2), which lay 0.65m to the south of the north wall, and one sherd of unstratified pottery was recovered from Hole No. 1, which lay at a distance of 0.35m to the south of the north wall. Nothing, however, was found in the remaining holes on the east side.

The remaining five holes (Holes 6-10) were excavated against the wall of the house, and were spaced out in similar intervals to the first holes. Two of the holes in the south-east corner of the site were cut through concrete. The holes were excavated to the designated depth of 0.60m and approximately 0.40m beneath the footings of the house wall. The base of the house wall consisted of brick foundations resting on a mid grey clay silt, much the same undisturbed subsoil as seen beneath the courtyard wall to the north. The natural sandy marl was reached at an average depth of 0.55m along the line of holes.

Although no archaeological features were observed in any of the holes next to the house, the flint foundation of a walled up chimney breast in one of the holes, no. 8, close to the rear door of the house was seen at a depth of approximately 0.20m below the existing base of the house wall. The footing hole here had to be excavated to a depth of 0.80m in order to go beneath the flint foundation in order to tie in the roof stanchion.

Four sherds of pottery were recovered from the fill of the footing hole in the north-west corner of the site (Hole No. 6). These were unstratified and retrieved from the soil arisings.

Phase 2

The stripping of the lawn and garden to the south of the main building was undertaken in order to establish a car park which was to extend to a point approximately 12.0m north of the Norwich Road frontage. The ground in the northern half of the lawn was stripped to a depth of approximately 0.08m which was not deep enough to expose the underlying subsoils. The topsoil was a light brown sandy silt with occasional small stones. The soil underlying this when stripped was the same

colour and consistency and was evidently the same deposit. Consequently no deposits of archaeological interest were disturbed.

Due to the topography of the ground, the southern area of the garden was stripped to a depth of approximately 0.15m. This removed loamy garden soil and revealed patches of clay within a clayey silt makeup deposit containing fragments of brick rubble, plastic pipe, concrete and other modern debris.

At the far south of the site, 11.35m to the north of the Norwich Road frontage, a modern brick hardcore foundation was uncovered at a depth of 0.18m between the eastern site boundary and the driveway. This had apparently been the base of a building that had previously stood on the site. The depth of the strip stopped at the modern building debris and so consequently no features or finds of archaeological interest were observed. The brick rubble also indicates that the ground in this area had been disturbed previously, albeit to an unknown depth.

Phase 3

The excavation of the soakaway was situated in an area of the site which lay approximately 7m to the north of the Norwich Road. The modern building rubble seen in Phase Two of the watching brief was observed in the first 0.45m depth of the excavation, and consisted of brick, wall and roof tile and fragments of concrete hardcore, possibly representing a previous hard-standing for vehicles. Beneath this lay a loose mid grey brown sandy silt of 0.6m thickness containing occasional flint pebbles and frequent root traces. An indistinct interface separated this deposit from the underlying natural sand which was observed at a depth of 1.05m down from the surface. The natural was further excavated to a total depth of 1.85m. No features of archaeological interest were observed in the sections of the pit during the excavation.

The spoil from the pit was searched by hand and by using a metal detector. Several iron nail fragments and some modern metal debris resulted from the detector. The hand search revealed seven fragments of modern glazed ceramic and a single piece of Romano-British ware consisting of a narrow round pot base with broken fluted sides.

6.0 The Finds

A total of nine sherds of pottery were recovered from unstratified contexts in the area of the extension to the north-east of the building. Four of the sherds were from the Early to Middle Iron Age and were flint-tempered wares containing, in three of the sherds, coarse flint inclusions. The fourth sherd contained sparse flint inclusions and had been oxidised on its external surface.

The remaining pottery consisted of two body sherds of Local Medieval Unglazed Ware, dating to the 11th to 14th centuries; a single sherd of Late Medieval Transitional Ware from the 15th to 16th centuries, two fragments of 16th- to 18th-century Glazed Red Earthenware strap handle, possibly from a chamberpot and a substantial fragment from the lower part of a plain folded pedestal beaker, weighing 250g. The vessel is in a locally made greyware fabric, and dates to the 3rd to 4th centuries.

7.0 Conclusions

The lack of features observed in the footing holes of the extension and the evidence of undisturbed ground beneath the wall foundations indicates that in these areas at least no features of archaeological interest had been disrupted. The medieval and post-medieval pottery recovered from the two holes to be expected in an area with a high instance of historical activity.

The prehistoric pottery found near the north corner of the house is of two distinct types from approximately the same date. The pottery may indicate the presence of prehistoric activity in the immediate area, although none were observed during the watching brief. Alternatively, the pottery may be residual and perhaps brought in to the site with make-up to level the ground.

The topsoil strip of the area to the south of the building produced no evidence of archaeological deposits due to the shallow depth of the groundworks. Modern building rubble and debris further to the south of the site indicates the presence of a relatively recent structure near the frontage of the road, since demolished, and soil laid down for landscaping.

The Romano-British ware which came from the spoil of the soakaway pit was likely to have been made locally and dates from the 3rd to 4th centuries. Fragments of this type of pot are relatively common on Romano-British sites of the era, where generally only the thick base of the pot survives.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the managers of 'Fatso's' restaurants and their construction team, particularly Patrick and Brian, for their assistance and co-operation.

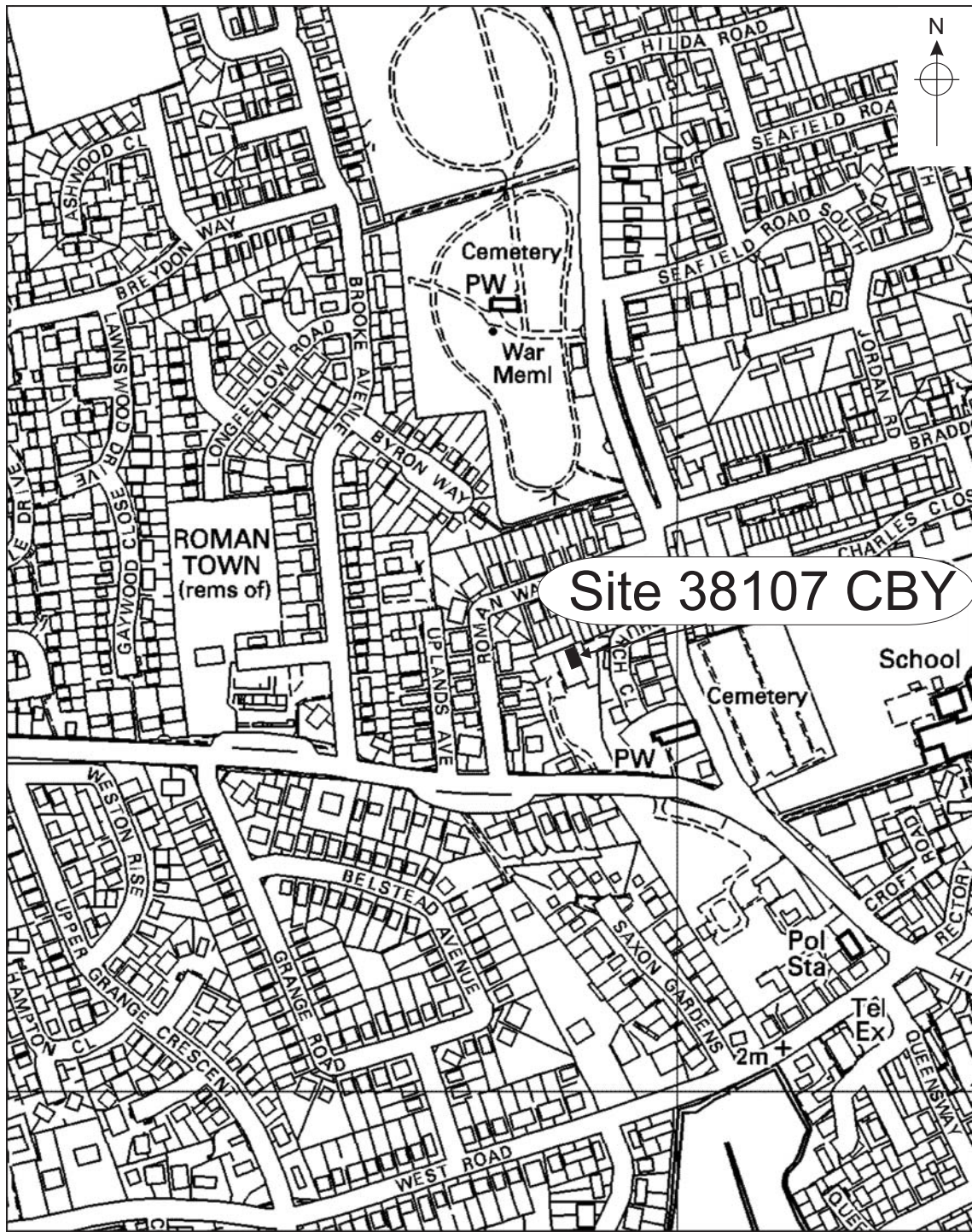
The pottery was processed by Lucy Talbot and assessed by Richenda Goffin and Sarah Percival. Historical Environment Record information was provided by Jan Allen of NLA. The report was illustrated and produced by Maggie Foottit and edited by Andy Shelley.

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Deposit	Modern 'topsoil'	Modern
2	Deposit	Subsoil	Post-medieval
3	Deposit	Subsoil	Post-medieval
4	Deposit	Backfilled foundation deposit	Post-medieval

Appendix 2: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Location	Date
Unstratified	LMU	Body sherd	2	0.011	Hole No.2	11th to 14th century
Unstratified	LMT	Body sherd	1	0.002	Hole No.1	15th to 16th century
Unstratified	GRE	Handle strap	2	0.053	Hole No.2	16th to 18th century
Unstratified	FLINT	Body sherd	3	0.016	Hole No.6	Early to Middle Iron Age
Unstratified	FLINT	Body sherd	1	0.017	Hole No.6	Early to Middle Iron Age
Unstratified	GREY	Beaker	1	0.250	Soakaway	3rd to 4th century AD



0 500m

Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

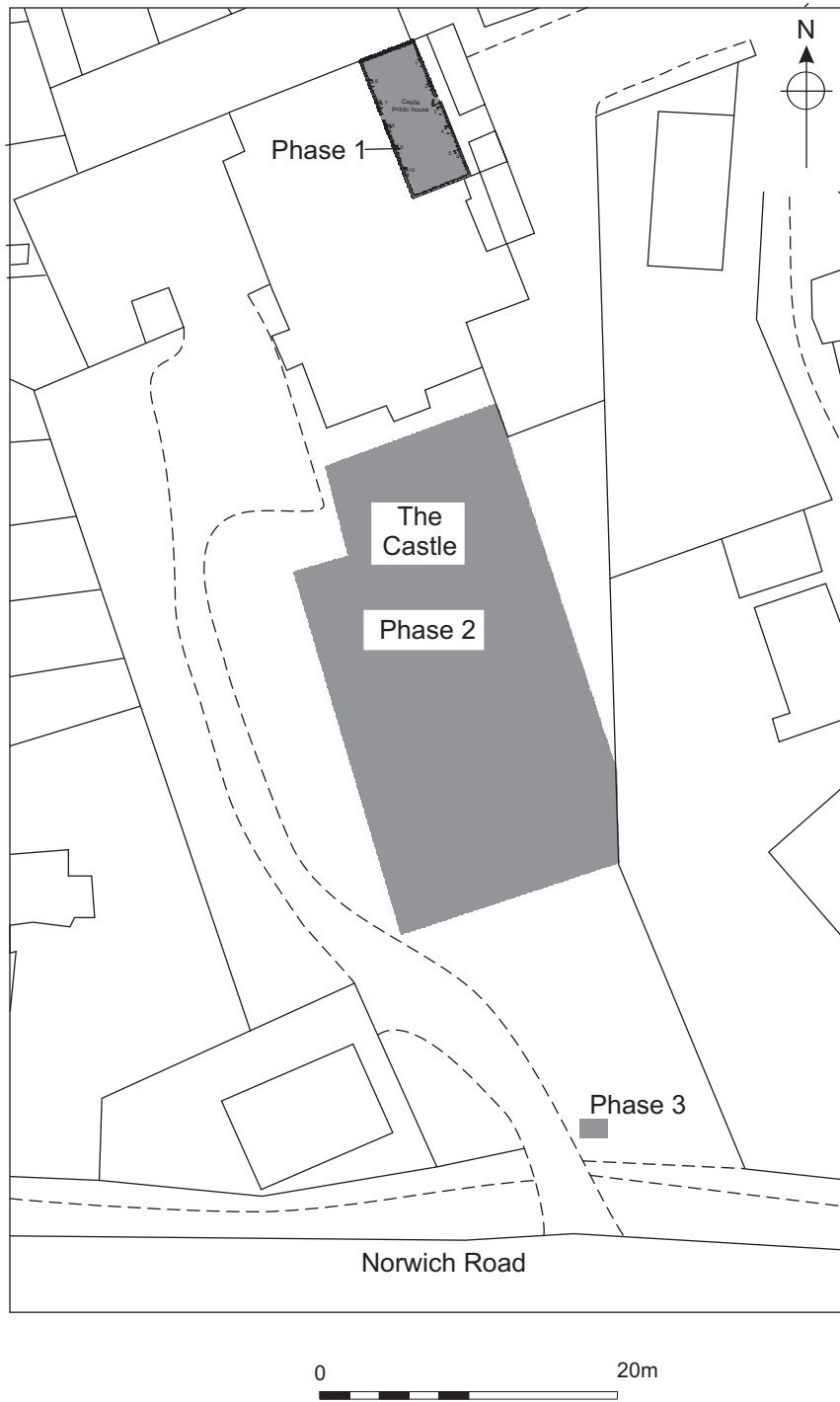


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500

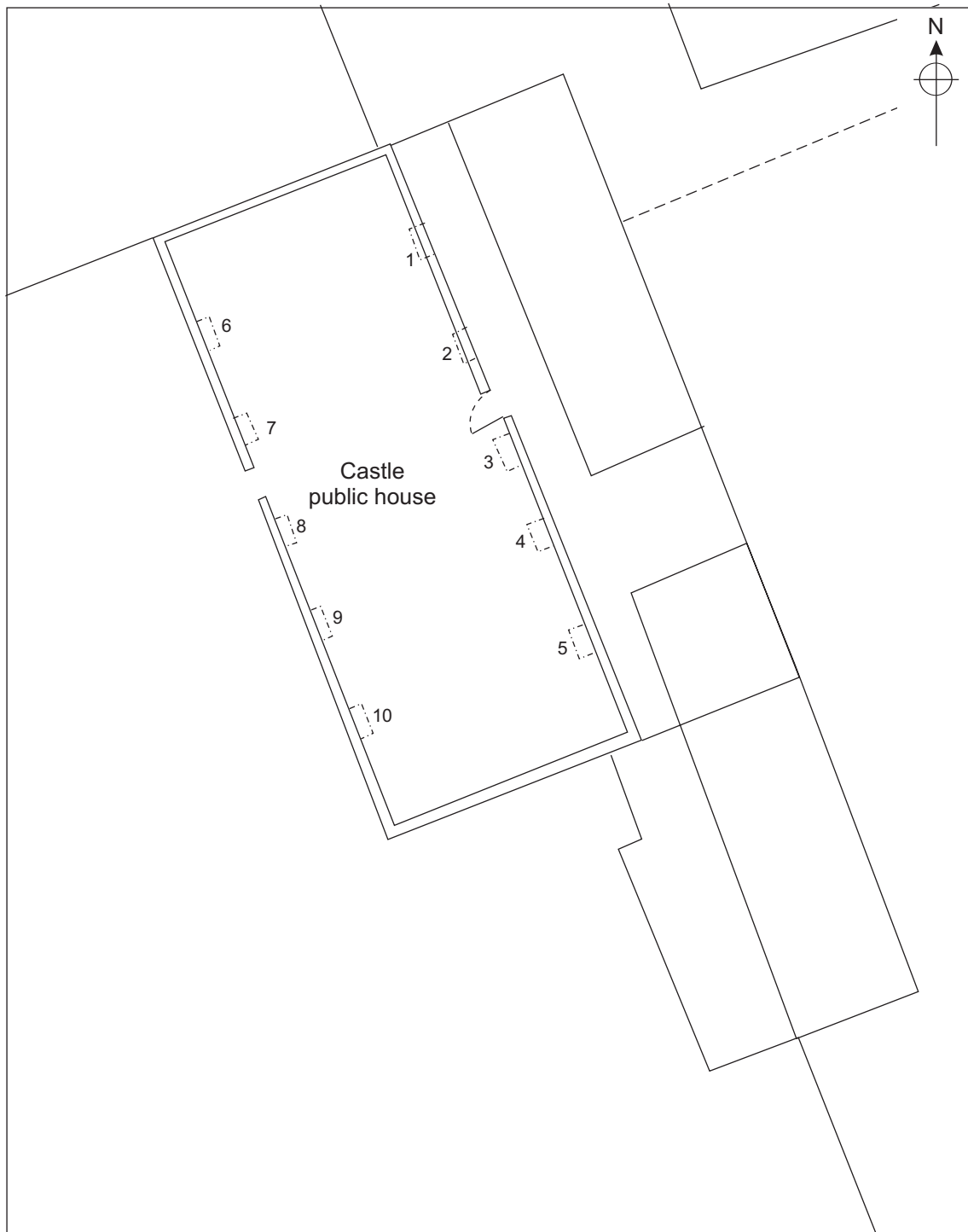


Figure 3. Stanchion hole location. Scale 1:200