

EHBG



ST BRIAVELS CASTLE, ST BRIAVELS, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Installation of Interpretative Panels

for English Heritage

S32156

May 2012

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Archive will be deposited with English Heritage

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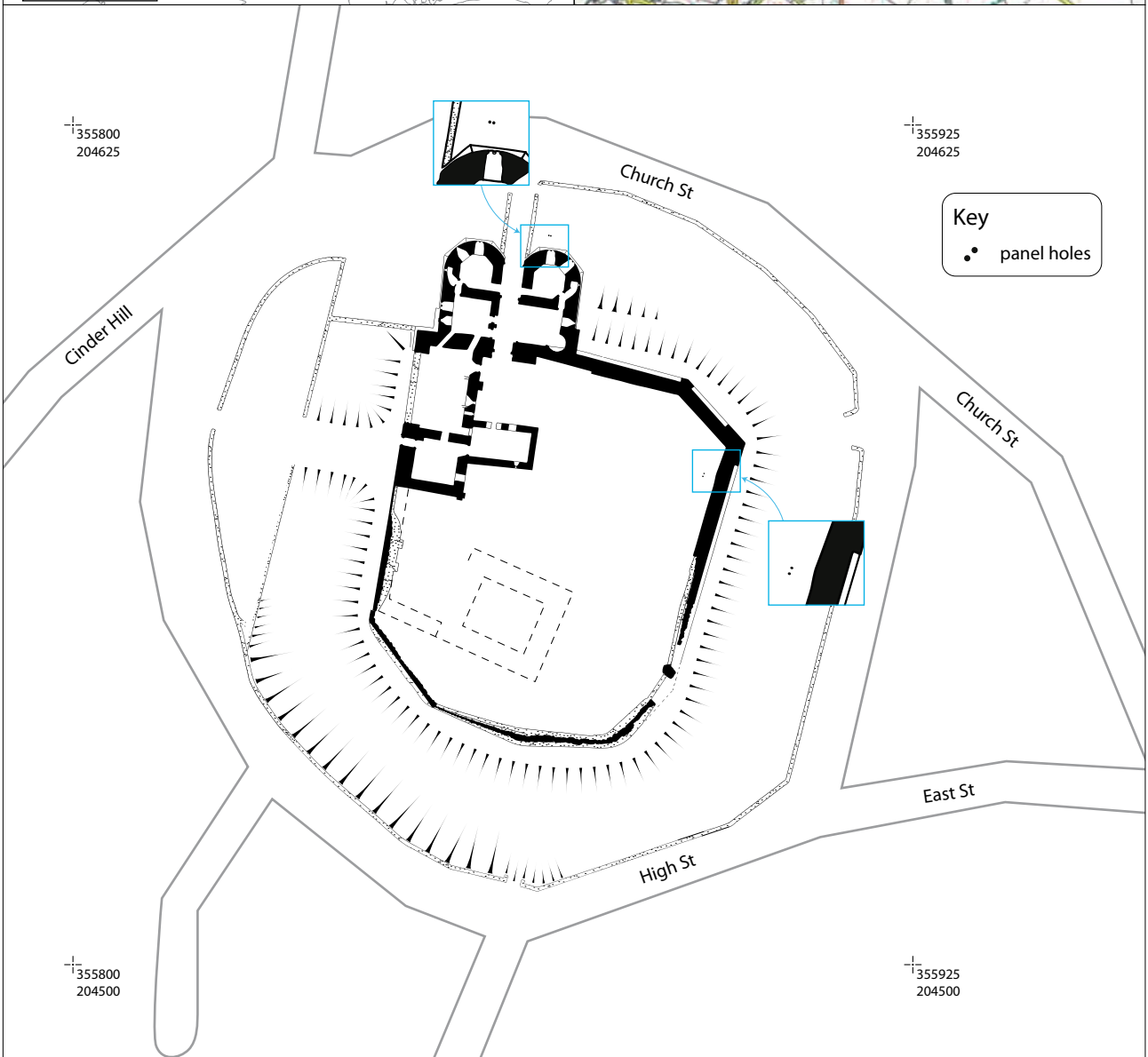
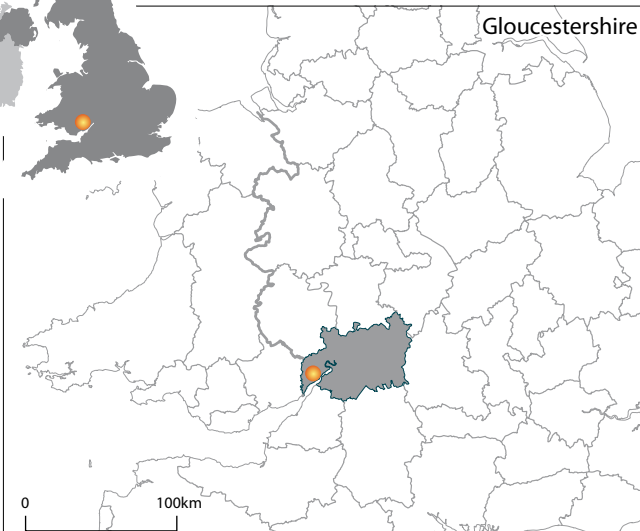
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Illus 1
Site location

ST BRIAVELS CASTLE, ST BRIAVELS, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Installation of Interpretative Panels

Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd conducted a watching brief at St Briavels Castle, Gloucestershire, during ground works for the installation of external panels and plinths. This site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Grade 1 Listed Building.

No deposits or finds of archaeological significance were observed during the work.

1. INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was carried out at St Briavels Castle, Gloucestershire, in response to Scheduled Monument Consent (certificate number S32156) granting the undertaking of ground works for the installation of two external panels and plinths (Illus 1).

St Briavels Castle (NGR 355861 204560) is located on the northwestern side of the village of St Briavels, on the edge of a ridge at c.200 m above the River Wye. St Briavels lies close to the Welsh border and some 10km northwest of Lydney. Underlying geology comprises limestone of the Avon Group. The castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (MNR 1017371) and a Grade 1 Listed Building. The upstanding remnants of the castle are currently used as residential accommodation for a youth hostel.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

St Briavels Castle was built in the early 12th century. Miles of Gloucester, hereditary Sheriff of the county and later Earl of Hereford, had custody of the castle in 1130 till his death in 1143. The castle was inherited by his son, Roger, 2nd Earl of Hereford. At the end of 1144 Henry II became King and following a dispute with the King, Roger lost the Forest of Dean and St Briavels Castle – which thus became a Royal property.

St Briavels Castle was used as a royal hunting lodge. It occupied a strategic military position and was also an administrative centre. Later under Edward I it became a centre for the manufacture of crossbow bolts (quarrels) using iron from the Forest of Dean. The treaty of Rhuddlan in 1284, which effectively ended the long series of Anglo-Welsh wars, helped to bring more order to the area. A major campaign of rebuilding work began

in 1292 with Edward I adding the massive twin-towered gatehouse to the castle. During the next two centuries the castle and the profits of the Forest, were appurtenant to the offices of constable of St Briavels and warden of the Forest. During the 14th century the castle began to fall into decline, although the chapel was restyled during the 17th century.

St Briavel's was not involved in any action during the Civil War. Many of the buildings were demolished in the 18th century. The remainder became a court and a debtors' prison. The prison came under scrutiny by the reformer John Howard though use as a prison did not cease until 1842. The surviving buildings became a Youth Hostel in 1948.

A number of below ground investigations have been undertaken previously across the site (Boucher *et al.* 2010, p.29). Two excavations and several watching briefs involved ground works and revealed evidence for multi-period buried stone structures relating to the earlier occupation and development of the site (although, two watching briefs recorded no archaeological deposits).

3. METHOD

Work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the Inspector for Ancient Monuments, Hugh Beamish. Monitoring took place on the 11th of May 2012. Excavation of four small roughly circular holes – two at each panel location (maximum diameter 0.24m) – was undertaken by the contractor under direct archaeological supervision (Illus 2 & 3). Excavation took place by hand to a depth of 0.5m.

All recording followed standard archaeological guidelines as set out by the Institute for Archaeologists. Contexts were



given unique numbers and recording was undertaken on pro forma record cards that conform to accepted archaeological norms.

Photographs were taken throughout using 35mm monochrome and colour slide film while digital photographs were taken on a 7.2mm camera for illustrative purposes. Registers were kept for context records, photographs and drawings.

4. RESULTS

At both panel locations the deposits revealed were very similar. The removal of the overlying turf revealed a dark brown silty clay deposit with infrequent stones. No archaeological features were observed or disturbed in the course of work at St Briavels Castle.

5. CONCLUSION

There was considerable potential for archaeological remains of medieval date to be disturbed during ground works at St Briavels Castle however the area excavated was presumably of insufficient size and depth to reveal any such remains. Superficial deposits both within and outside of the defences appear to be similar in nature.

6. ARCHIVE

The project archive will be deposited with English Heritage Archive, Swindon.

7. REFERENCES

- Boucher, A, Morriss, R K & Smith, H 2010 *St Briavels Castle, St Briavels, Gloucestershire: Conservation Plan for English Heritage*, Archaeological Investigations Ltd.
- Crooks, K 2010 *St Briavels Castle, St Briavels, Gloucestershire – Installation of Interpretative Panels*, Written Scheme of Investigations for Archaeological Watching Brief, Headland Archaeology Ltd.
- ‘St Briavels’, *A History of the County of Gloucester: Volume 5: Bledisloe Hundred, St Briavels Hundred, The Forest of Dean* (1996), pp.247–271, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=23262>> (accessed 21 May 2012).

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Illus 2

Groundworks for panel 1



Illus 3

Groundworks for panel 2



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