

## Excavation and Recording in the Norman Garden at Taunton Castle



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Somerset HER number: 42892

Scheduled Monument: Taunton Castle: a motte and bailey castle, part of the outer bailey, and Anglo-Saxon cemetery and a Civil War artillery platform (1013541)

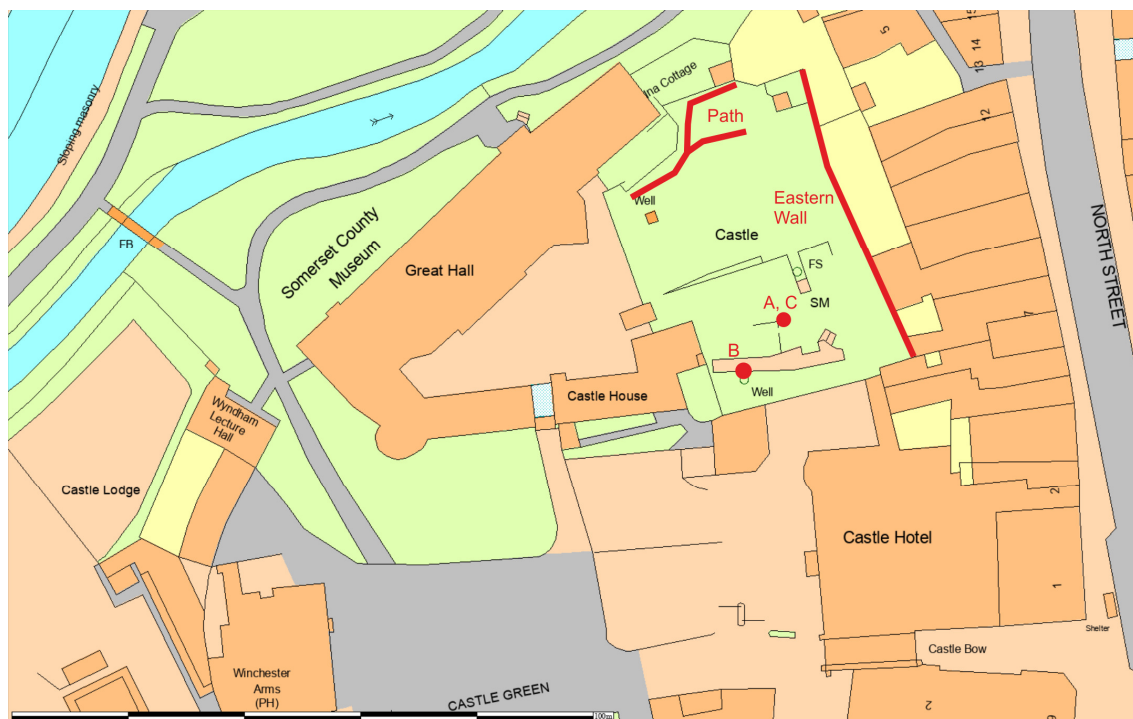
Site Code: TCK20

Museum Accession Number: TTNCM 92/2020

National Grid Reference: ST 226 246

Project Date: November-December 2020

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**Figure1:** Location of the excavations and monitoring in the Norman Garden. © Crown Copyright and database rights 2021 Ordnance Survey 100023366

Limited archaeological work was undertaken as part of works to repair the eastern wall of Taunton Castle and to restore the gardens. This involved the repair and repointing of much of the eastern wall, repairs to the medieval walls displayed in the garden and the creation of a more accessible route into the north end of the gardens. In the account below, the scheme of identifying the medieval walls by letters adopted by Rodwell (1984) has been followed.

### The Eastern Wall of the castle property.

This wall is recorded as having been rebuilt in 1893/4 (SRO DD/SAS/G733/1/1) and was not monitored in detail. The only feature to come to light was a brick-built fireplace belonging to a now vanished building in Ine's Garden.

### The Norman Garden

The garden is a construct of the 1930s incorporating sections of medieval masonry walls that had been discovered during excavations from 1924-30 (Webster 2016, 39-47). Following the decision in 1931 of the Ministry of Works not to take the ruins into Guardianship, the site of the excavations was let to the Castle Hotel for use as a garden. A scheme for landscaping was agreed on 4 January 1933, the lease to the hotel signed on 8 March and work was underway on 5 April (SRO DD/SAS/G/733/1/4). Before this, in the winter of 1932/3 a set of photographs was taken of the excavated area by Humphrey and Vera Joel, professional photographers from Hertfordshire (Webster 2016, 339). These show that the landscaping involved the movement of large amounts of spoil, the removal of unexcavated deposits in the area between Walls A and B, and the repair of several areas of walling. The work on the landscaping can be seen on aerial photographs taken in May 1933 by which time most of the southern area had been landscaped and turf was being laid. It is clear from these sources that further walling had been discovered during the clearance and there is a brief mention of it in the minutes of the SANHS development committee on 8 March 1933 when "another length of walling of poor construction had been found" and on 1 May: "Of the three pieces of poor walling in the central part of the excavations (south of the great wall with 18 offsets [Wall A]) it was decided that one should be demolished and the other two repaired as far as possible." (SRO DD/SAS/G/733/4/1). The "other two" must be Walls F and G; the location of the third wall is unknown.

### Wall B

This wall appears to form the continuation of the southern side of the inner ward of the castle, though it is clear that it does not join the surviving wall that forms the south side of Castle House. Excavations in 2012-13 showed that the wall continued across the courtyard of Castle House on a line to the north of the inner gatehouse (Brigers 2013; Brigers and Webster 2016, 101-102). Rodwell (1984) suggested several phases of wall were visible in the masonry and postulated that a tower had been removed and gateway blocked.

Near the current west end of the wall, the southern facing stones are missing and the area has been landscaped as a rockery. As part of the management agreement for the garden, Historic England required this rockery area to be excavated archaeologically and for the wall face to be replaced with stonework set back slightly from the medieval face. Botterill's plan of 1928-30 (SANHS C10-1) shows the south side of Wall B terminating on the east side of the rockery area, just NE of a well which was discovered on 19 January 1929 (Webster 2016, 46).



**Figure 2:** Trench B showing wall cores and half-sectioned rockery walls and soil. Looking east.

This “end” may have discouraged Gray from digging further west, leaving this area to be cleared by the landscapers. They must have uncovered the continuation of the south face of the wall and converted the gap to a rockery rather than rebuilding. This indicates that the stonework from the missing area of face had been robbed in antiquity otherwise collapsed stones would have been found and probably reused. It is possible that this robbing took place during the original sinking of the adjacent well from a higher ground level and the stone robbed where it was accessible. It is not known when the well was dug but it had probably gone out of use by the time of the 1888 Ordnance Survey plan of Taunton as it is not shown.



**Figure 3:** The rockery area from the south-west with the 1930s well head to the right.

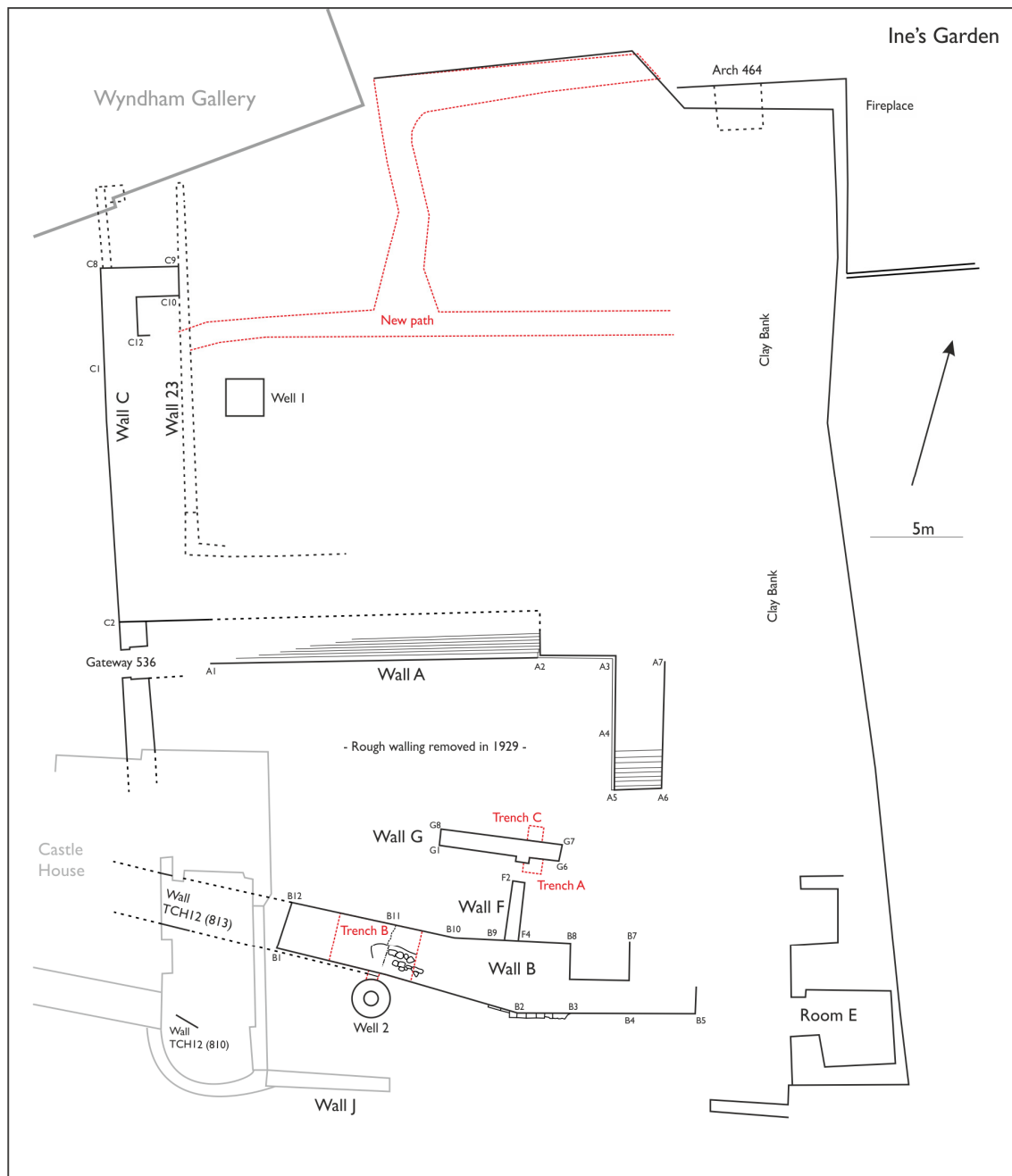
The rockery area was excavated on 10 and 12 November 2020 by James Brigers. The core of the wall was found to comprise red gravelly clay with occasional small pieces of stone. Two distinct but similar wall cores were recorded which confirms Rodwell’s interpretation that the wall was rebuilt from this point (B11).

At the east end of the excavated area, on the south side, a large cut was evident that appeared to have been made to provide a setting for a line of stones in the rockery and further modern disturbances were excavated to the west of this. A small trench was extended to the well which recorded an offset foundation-course comprising vertically-sided stones. Where seen these were mortared with cement and must have been disturbed by landscaping or later gardening activities as was the single surviving course of the battered wall stones above. Some difficulty was found in relating these to the drawings produced by Rodwell (1984) and it appears that the courses on either side of the rockery are misaligned by one course on the drawing, possibly because his datum does not appear to be level.



**Figure 4:** Wall B from the west showing the foundation course exposed by gardening at B2.

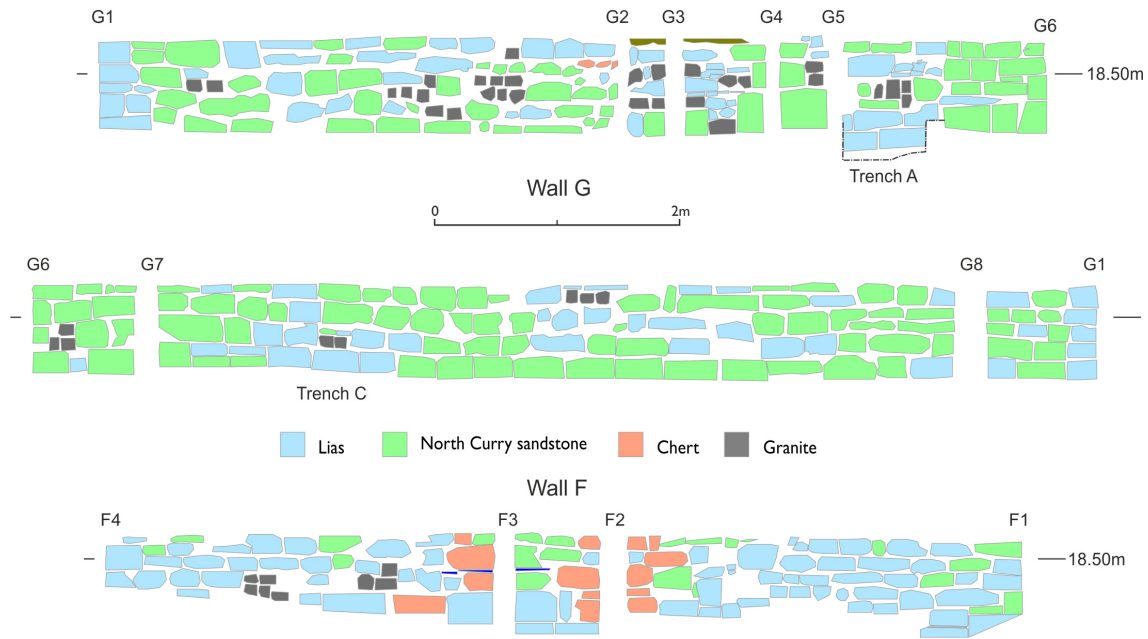
After the end of the excavation, gardening work to the east uncovered a foundation course beneath the topsoil. Only the tops of the stones were observed but four well-dressed blocks were visible parallel to the wall from B2 to B5 and extending slightly beyond B2 as the rebuilt wall line diverged northwards. It seems likely that this foundation continued eastwards before the realignment when it was lifted for reuse. At the east end, the blocks were more irregular in shape, possibly from in situ damage, at B3 which appears to be the west side of an infilled gateway.



**Figure 5:** Plan of the Norman Garden showing areas monitored and features recorded. After Webster (2016), Figure 8.3

### Wall F

The remains of a low wall running from the rear of Wall B towards Wall G where there is a doorway 1.0m wide. The wall is 3.3m long, 0.7m thick and 0.8m high and was recorded photographically and stone-by-stone drawing. The large amounts of cement mortar made identifying the edges of stones difficult. The Joel photographs of 1932/33 show the wall was about twice as high (1.5) when first exposed but they only show the southern end; the north end was still hidden in an unexcavated baulk. Wall F butts against Wall B but has a similar broad foundation-offset on its east side. This has been pushed away from the wall by tree growth but this movement shows that these foundation



**Figure 6:** Walls F and G. Note, stone identification and shape definition was hampered by cement mortar areas, severe erosion and vegetation.

stones provided little support for the actual wall, a style of construction also seen in the foundations of Wall C to the west (Webster 2016, 60).

### Wall G

The remains of a low wall in the lower lawn of the keep garden. It is 6.5m long, 0.9m thick and about 0.75m high and was recorded photographically and stone-by-stone drawing. It has clearly been rebuilt since discovery, possibly substantially. The stone is North Curry sandstone and Lias, both of which have weathered badly. Large amounts of cement mortar have been added to fill gaps widened by erosion and the stone has then eroded more. Several areas have been patched with granite cobbles. A broader foundation can be seen at the current ground level along the north and east faces. Probing indicates that it is not present on the other two sides. On the south side a short length of wall projects to form a doorway with the north end of Wall F.

The wall was not recorded by Gray and the area is shown as unexcavated in the 1932/3 Joel photographs. The wall must have been discovered during the landscaping work in 1933. It is visible in photographs taken during the landscaping work as a well-built wall of neat, coursed blocks and a concrete cap. This neat appearance may suggest that the wall is almost entirely a creation of the landscaping, built off medieval foundations. Its present condition makes it look much older. The presence of granite sets may indicate repairs at the same time (1962) as the path behind Wall C was infilled as similar sets were found there. Examination of the core of the wall during repair and repointing showed that there was an original core associated with yellowy brown lime mortar.

Two small trenches were excavated to north and south of the wall to see if any stratigraphy remained that would help to understand and date the wall. These both showed the same two deposits below the topsoil, a layer of mixed material, including pale yellow sandy mortar and distinctive flecks of hard Mercia mudstone. This butted against the wall foundations and is probably to be interpreted as 1930s trample from the landscaping before topsoil was introduced. Below this was a layer of demolition rubble. This ran under the wall, and on the south side the wall seemed to

be supported on a deposit of crushed stone that formed part of the same deposit. This same hard layer of demolition rubble has been seen during gardening activities in this area and towards Wall A suggesting the dismantling of a substantial building before Wall G was constructed. No dating evidence was recovered.

### Graded path at North End of Garden

Excavation of a machined trench to remove the steepest part of a garden path was monitored. At the east end this encountered a very large dump of red clay, presumably the same as the one recorded by Gray and dated by him to the Civil War. The trench penetrated about 25cm into the clay at maximum but no change in the deposit was noted and no finds recovered. The middle part of the path was raised by spoil dumping and the western extent of the clay was not seen. At the eastern end, limited exposure showed a more mixed deposit which from its location should be the backfill of one of Gray's trenches.

An additional length of path was decided at a later date and the initial groundwork for this was monitored. It exposed a mixed deposit of rubble by the gate to Ine's Garden which contained blue transfer printed pottery of 19<sup>th</sup>- or 20<sup>th</sup>-century date. This suggests that it is likely to have been deposited in the landscaping operations in the 1930s. Further to the west, the path level rose and no further deposits were disturbed.

### Conclusion

The recent works have disturbed very little significant archaeology, and in consequence have added little to our knowledge of the castle. The rebuilding on a different alignment of Wall B has been confirmed and an explanation for the origins of the rockery area proposed. Walls F and G have been shown to have been substantially rebuilt during the 1930s landscaping which, together with Gray's excavation, removed most of the archaeological stratigraphy without record.

### Acknowledgements

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