

Dartmouth Castle, Dartmouth, Devon – Emergency Plaster Recording

South West Archaeology Ltd. 21.11.2016

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Project Background

South West Archaeology Ltd. was approached by Matthew Brooke of English Heritage (the Client) to undertake emergency recording work on the first floor plaster ceiling within Dartmouth Castle, prior to its replacement. While the ceiling was replaced in the 20th century, a series of scratch marks were replicated from an earlier ceiling, and partition marks are evident. This abbreviated record provides a succinct record of the recording undertaken, and is intended to inform and guide repair and replacement work on the site. The work took place in August 2016 and the recording work was undertaken by E Wapshott. The camera used was a Pentax K100D using a Pentax 18-55 lens.

Site Location

The Castle is located to the western side of the estuary of the River Dart on a slight promontory just north of Castle Cove. Dartmouth Castle faces east across the open water towards Kingswear Castle. The building is dug into/set into the bedrock, flanked on the landward side by the Grade I Listed church of St Petrox, and on the seaward side by an 19th century look-out tower and large battery and further earlier 14th century 'Fortalice' castle walls.

Site History

Dartmouth Castle was developed in the late 15th century (1480s-1490s). It is of double tower plan, with the earlier round tower developed out of an earlier 14th century fortification. The round tower was part of a chain boom defence across the estuary, with a windlass to raise and lower the chain. A square tower was later built to the south-east for cannon, the masonry of the two towers merging at the higher level. A square stair projection on its south wall rises to the roof which was used as a lookout point. The upper two floors provided barrack accommodation. Open batteries to either side of the tower were heavily remodelled in the 18th century. The 'castle' was built to protect the mouth of the river, and the form of the castle was defined by its artillery function and it is in fact better described as 'fort', rather than a 'castle'.

Description

Recording was undertaken within the later square section of the castle, part of the structure that was used as a barracks. The 'square' tower is in fact rectangular, measuring c.7.25x5.3m, with a square stair turret on the south wall rising to the crenellated roof above. To the south-west there are the remains of a hooded fireplace. The north-west part is open to the interior of the round tower, and the whole area is accessed via a modern timber staircase in the north-east corner. The first floor and timber work were largely replaced in the 20th century.

The encased steel RSJ supporting the roof structure were installed in the 20th century for structural reasons. Several massive historic oak beams survive; the one in the square tower has stepped roll moulding runs. As the current ceiling is at a higher level, the large socket pegged holes in this beam for on-side joists are visible. The plaster ceiling, of lime plaster mixed with grit or sand and horse hair over wooden lathes, is also 20th century in date, but despite this it is of historic interest. It appears the 20th century conservators included details within the new lime plaster which they had noted on the older ceiling and these were contained within 'scratch marks'. These include: smoothed areas, finger marks, drag marks, scratches and finger holes. There are also painted marks recreated on the ceiling, recording the position of a historic partition.

Partition Marks

In the south-east corner there is a partition mark on the ceiling consisting of two bands of paint, one green/grey and one ochre yellow. The marks define a sub-square partition to the south-east corner, running from the south wall to the central historic beam, running under the beam and then back to the east wall. Both paint bands are slightly less than 20mm wide. A wide strip of grey paint is visible to the west on the surviving oak beam, suggesting that at some point most of the room had been painted in a grey and green colour scheme, typical of the 19th century, to which the original marks might be dated. The location of this paint – in the middle of the central beam – would suggest the presence of a prop prior to the replacement of the ceiling.

Other Marks

There are five areas where historic plaster marks were recreated in the 20th century (see Figure 1).

Area 1: The marks include some smoothed areas and an area of scratches, possibly where a tool may have been pulled or dragged through the plaster when damp.

Area 2: The marks include smudges and scratches in the plaster.

Area 3: The marks are located above the entrance to the stair turret. This area contains smoothed areas and a definite finger mark. There is a slight smooth indentation that might represent a hand or palm print.

Area 4: These marks are on part of the lime plaster encasing one of the steel RSJs that runs along the south wall. The marks consist of three finger holes. On the west wall adjacent to this area is the remains of the hooded fireplace and there is a window opposite within the south wall.

Area 5: These marks are in the north-east corner, now over the modern access steps. There is some scratch or drag marks and several smoothed areas.

Assessment

All of the marks are very slight and the degree to which – in the absence of written confirmation – they accurately replicate historic plaster marks is difficult to quantify. The ceiling is modern and of little value in its own right, but the recreation of the marks, undertaken by 20th century conservators, lends it some historic (associative) value as it preserves some part of the narrative history of individual workers within the building. However, given this would be a replication of a replication, perhaps consideration should be given to adding or substituting modern markings (e.g. hand/finger prints of the current plasterers etc.).

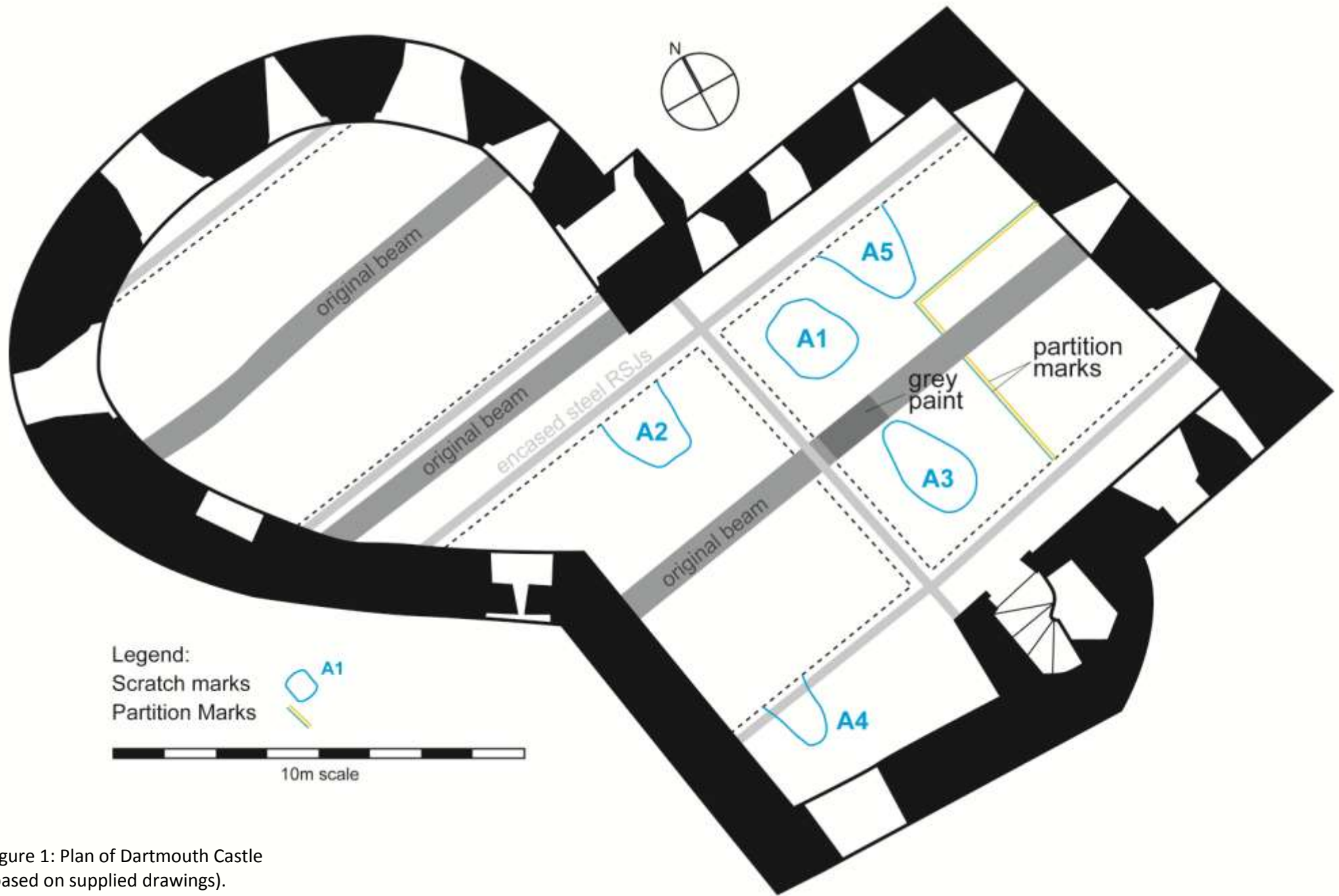


Figure 1: Plan of Dartmouth Castle (based on supplied drawings).



Figure 2: 6060 View through from the round tower into the main chamber; viewed from the north-west.



Figure 3: 5991 The south side of the tower; viewed from the south west (scale 2m). The grey paint on the moulded oak beam and partition marks are indicated.



Figure 4: 5999 The south-east wall of the tower; viewed from the north-west (scale 2m). The partition marks are indicated.

Figure 5: R5997 The south-east corner of the tower; viewed from the north-west (scale 2m). The partition and scratch marks are indicated.



Figure 6: L6001 The north-east wall of the tower; viewed from the south-west (scale 2m). The partition and scratch marks are indicated.

Figure 7: R6025 The north-west wall of the tower; viewed from the south-east (scale 2m).



Figure 8: 6026 The north-east corner of the tower; viewed from the north-east.



Figure 9: 6022 The north-west corner of the tower; viewed from the south-east.

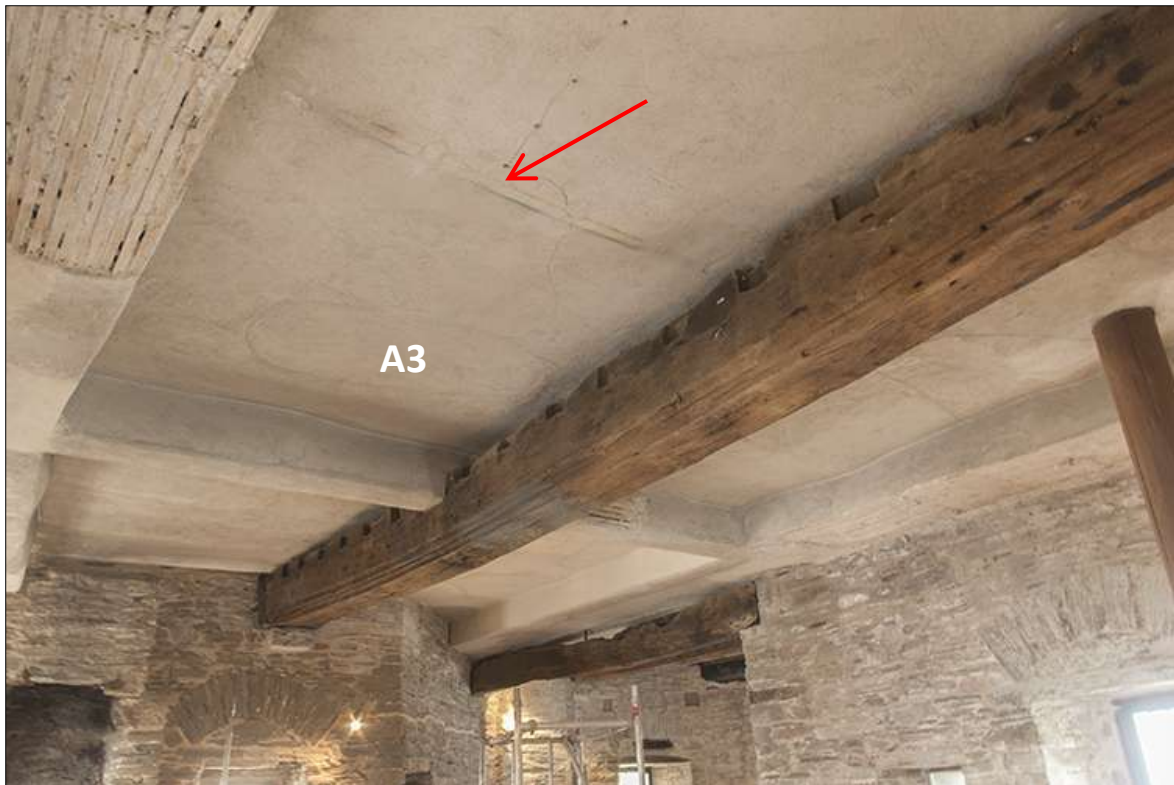


Figure 10: 6012 The ceiling of the north-western half of the tower; viewed from the south-east. The partition and scratch marks are indicated.



Figure 11: 6054 The ceiling of the north-eastern half of the tower; viewed from the south-west.



Figure 12: 6011 Detail of the grey paint on the original moulded oak beam, which appears to correspond with the re-established partition marks on the ceiling; viewed from the south-east.

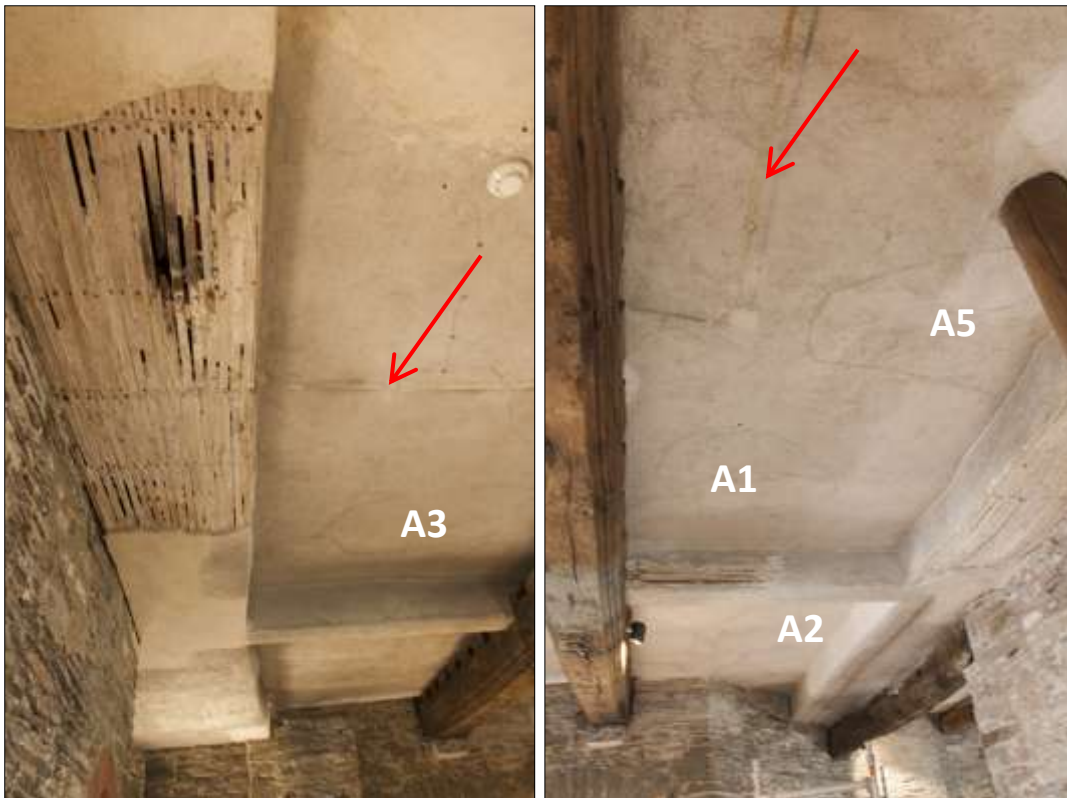


Figure 13: L6017 The ceiling of the southern part of the tower; viewed from the north-east. The partition and scratch marks are indicated.

Figure 14: R6019 The ceiling of the northern part of the tower; viewed from the north-east. The partition and scratch marks are indicated.



Figure 15: 6041 Detail of the partition marks south of the moulded oak beam; viewed from the north-west (scale 10cm).



Figure 16: 6045 Area 1 scratch marks; viewed from the north.



Figure 17: 6020 Area 2 scratch marks; viewed from the north east.



Figure 18: 6094 Area 2 scratch marks; viewed from the east.



Figure 19: 6079 Area 3 scratch marks; viewed from the west (scale 10cm).



Figure 20: 6027 Area 3 scratch marks; viewed from the south (scale 10cm).



Figure 21: 6021 Area 4 scratch marks (indicated); viewed from the north-east.



Figure 22: 6050 Area 4 scratch marks/finger marks; viewed from the south.



Figure 23: 6084 Area 4: detail of fingerprint (indicated) (scale 10cm).



Figure 24: 6051 Area 5 scratch marks; viewed from the west.