

Castledykes, Dumfries

Archaeological Watching Brief

Data Structure Report



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Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on 9-10th February 2010 at Castledykes, Dumfries (HER ref.6142; NMRS ref. NX97SE2/0) by Andrew Nicholson, Dumfries and Galloway Council, during the excavation of a new cycle path route, from the eastern entrance driveway of the park, skirting the disused public toilets, to the eastern boundary wall of the park, where a new entrance is to be created through the perimeter wall to Glencaple Road. The work was undertaken as part of an application for scheduled monument consent for the construction. The excavations were undertaken by the works contractor using a small mechanical excavator with a toothless bucket, followed by cleaning-up and excavation by hand. The purpose of the watching brief was to determine the presence or absence of archaeological deposits in proximity to the ditch of the castle, and to obtain information relating to the landscaping of the linear bank which runs outside the castle ditch.

Historical background

William I took control of Lower Nithsdale around 1166, and erected a castle to the south of the burgh in c.1173, prior to his capture at Alnwick the following year. This is taken to be the 'Paradise Moat', the westernmost of the two earthworks within Castledykes Park. The royal castle, with its attendant chapel was constructed at Castledykes between c.1184 and c.1200. During the reign of John Balliol it was associated in wardenship with the castles of Kirkcudbright and Wigtown, and had a garrison of seventy-six men. In 1300 the 'castrum' was enclosed with a timber pele, around which another ditch was dug. The castle was seized by Robert Bruce in 1306 after he murdered John Comyn at Greyfriars in Dumfries, but held for only three weeks. It was surrendered to Bruce again in 1313 by Sir Dugal M'Doual, and was one of the castles in southern Scotland whose slighting was ordered on the release of David II in 1357. It was described as still ruinous two centuries later, in a mid sixteenth century report by an English agent, so appears to have never been rebuilt.

At some point in the late 18th century a "mansion house" (RCAHMS 1920) was built at the northern end of the earthworks (see Fig.1), and the grounds extensively landscaped (see Fig.2). The small stream which runs at the base of the ditch to the east of the earthworks was apparently culverted at this point, continuing northwards around the house before turning westwards – presumably along the former line of the defensive ditch, and drives, paths and other features added. The house was demolished in 1975, according to the Valuation Rolls for Dumfries, and the area subsequently landscaped again as a public park. It may be at this point that the eastern lodge on Glencaple Road was demolished, to be replaced by a public toilet block.

Whilst the southern mound is known as Castle Hill, it is probable that the mound immediately to the north, between Castle Hill and Castledykes, was also part of the fortifications, as it is bounded by the culvert which continues northwards from the extant ditch. It is not known whether this represents the castrum of 1300, or whether it was part of the original fortification and the castrum lies either further west, between the two mounds and the feature called The Saddle, or under the terrace on which the house sat.

Archaeological Background

Small scale excavations on the Castle Hill mound in 1953 revealed traces of walling, at the southern end of the mound, around the flagstaff. Some 20 pieces of pottery, mainly 13th / 14th century in date, were recovered and are now in Dumfries Museum.

The chapel, dedicated to St Mary, of the Castle of Dumfries is referred to in early 13th century documents. It was in use until the Reformation, and is mentioned as standing in the early 18th century. The well-preserved patch of walling located on the north-eastern portion of the mound, whose footings were excavated to a depth of three feet, was thought to represent an outbuilding of this chapel. A section was also put through the ditch, showing that one side was revetted with large stones and clay, and the other with small cobbles. Unfortunately the account does not specify which revetting is on the outer face, nearest the current excavation.

An archaeological watching brief during the erection of a lighting system alongside the path through Castledykes Park in 2003 located a small area of collapsed walling on the flatter ground between the two scheduled earthworks. No dating evidence for the structure was recovered, and a single piece of 13th century pottery was found elsewhere.



Fig.1 Extract from John Wood's 1819 map of Dumfries and Maxwellton

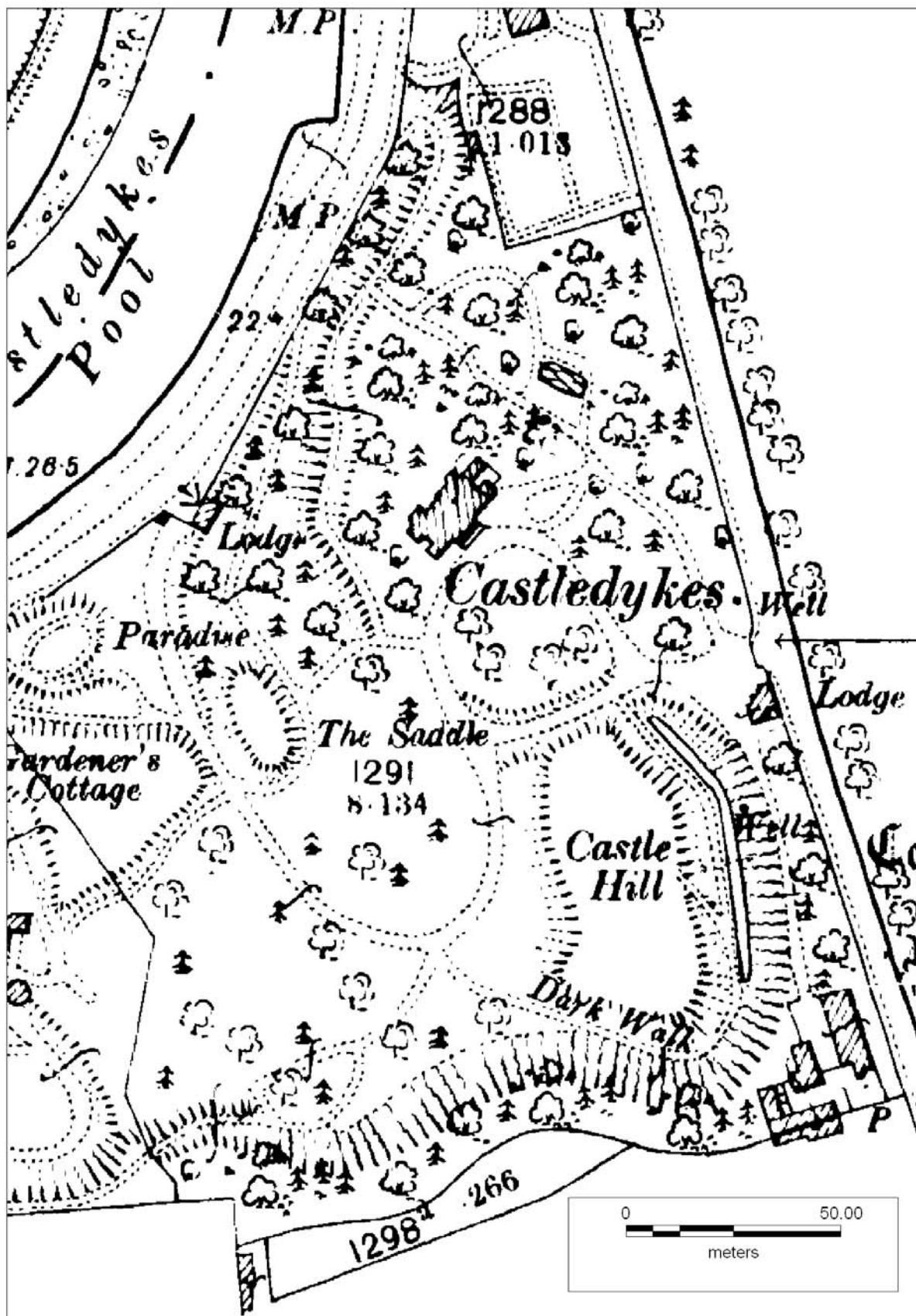


Fig.2 Second edition OS map (1896)

Observations

The excavation took place on the east side of Castle Hill, just outside the main defensive ditch, at the northern end of a raised bank running parallel to the ditch. The route angled south-south-eastwards from the entry drive, curving round the disused public toilet block to continue eastwards to the eastern boundary wall with Glencaple Road (Fig.3). The trench was 3m wide along the base, and with the sides sloped back at the eastern end, especially on the southern side where the bank was truncated (Fig.4). The partially excavated slopes are shown as hatched areas on the composite plan of the site (Fig.5). The site was stripped from the eastern wall back to the drive over the course of two days.

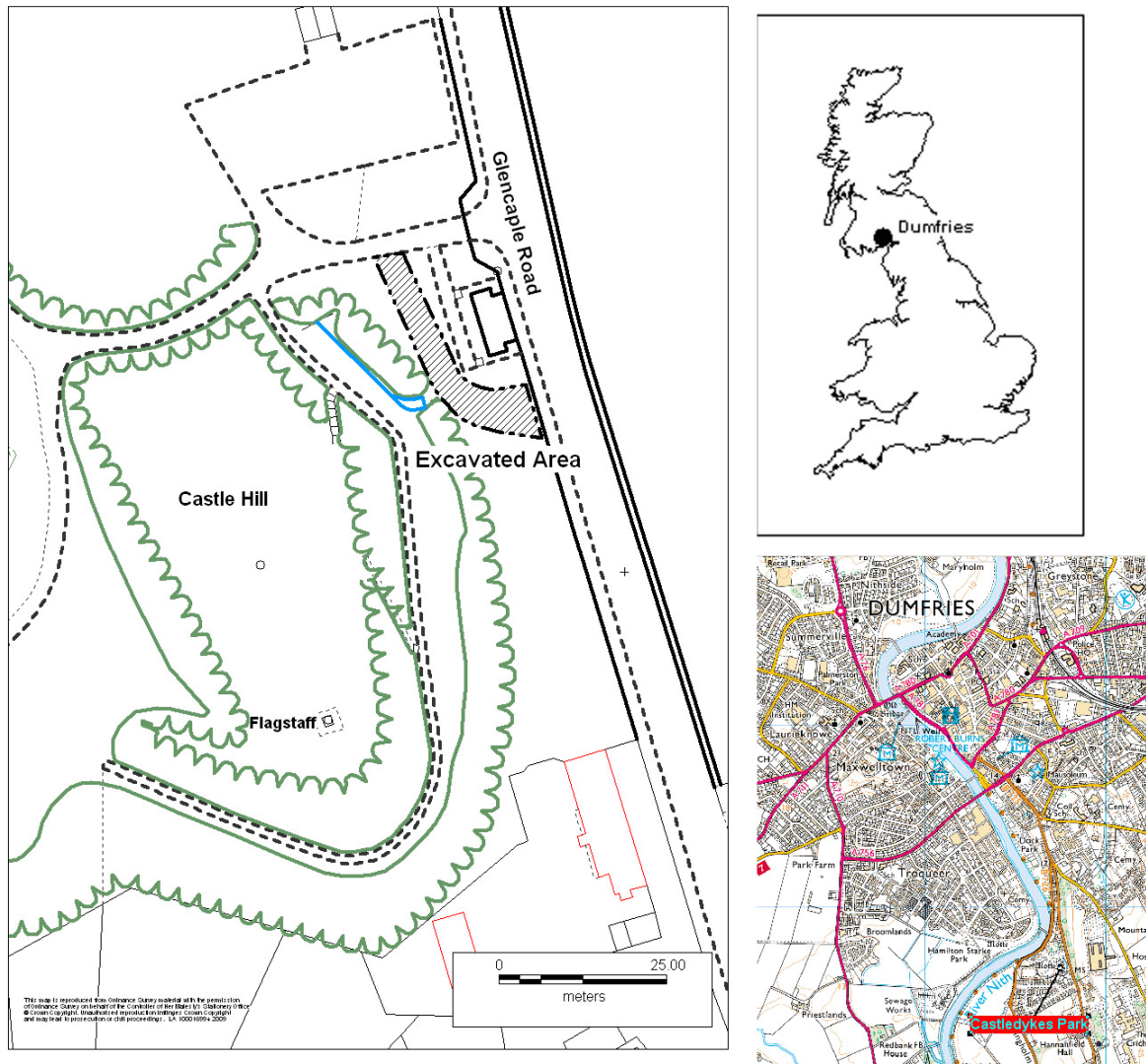


Fig.3. Location of excavation



Fig.4 Eastern terminus of excavation, showing profile of soil removed and partially excavated sides

The topsoil was stripped back to reveal a subsoil (2) of red-brown sandy soil with grey-brown clayey patches, and stones up to 320mm – mostly sandstone and water-worn cobbles.

In the northern section of the east end, a layer of cobbles (3) set in a firmer red-brown soil was noted at 0.4m depth. There were signs of tree roots, surviving as grey irregular bands within the layer. The two sherds of 19th century pottery recovered from this deposit were found within the area of root disturbance.

The northern and western sides of the cobble layer appeared to have been truncated by a layer containing a greater mixture of clayey patches, lenses of darker grey-brown soil, and larger stones (8). Two sherds of 18-19th century pottery, and the remains of a shoe heel, were found in this deposit, which may represent the infilling of the cut for the culvert drain which emerges into the defensive ditch to the west of the excavated area.

The cobbles came down onto a layer of reddish-pink clay with numerous small pieces of red-pink sandstone (4), which was devoid of finds. This deposit had a relatively level upper surface, lying 0.6 m below the surface at the north and 1.55m below the surface to the deeper-excavated south, at the eastern end of the excavation trench, and may be natural.

In the south-eastern corner of the site, the reddish-pink clay was cut by a trench (5), which became visible as a series of voids along its northern edge. At the extreme eastern end this was filled with a mid grey-brown silty soil, with very few, small stones (6). This silty soil also occurred in two other smaller patches, both around voids on the northern edge of the cut. This silty soil was excavated to a depth of 0.5m, and was still continuing downwards. The presence of the excavation edge, and the fact that it continued well below the level required for the path construction, meant that it was not pursued any deeper. A corresponding southern edge to the cut was located, and traced along the edge of the excavation, revealing a consistent width of close to 1.2m for the feature, which continued westwards for at least 7.6m. There was a slight indication that the northern edge of the cut turned northwards at its western end, but this was obscured by a later cut for an electric cable (9).

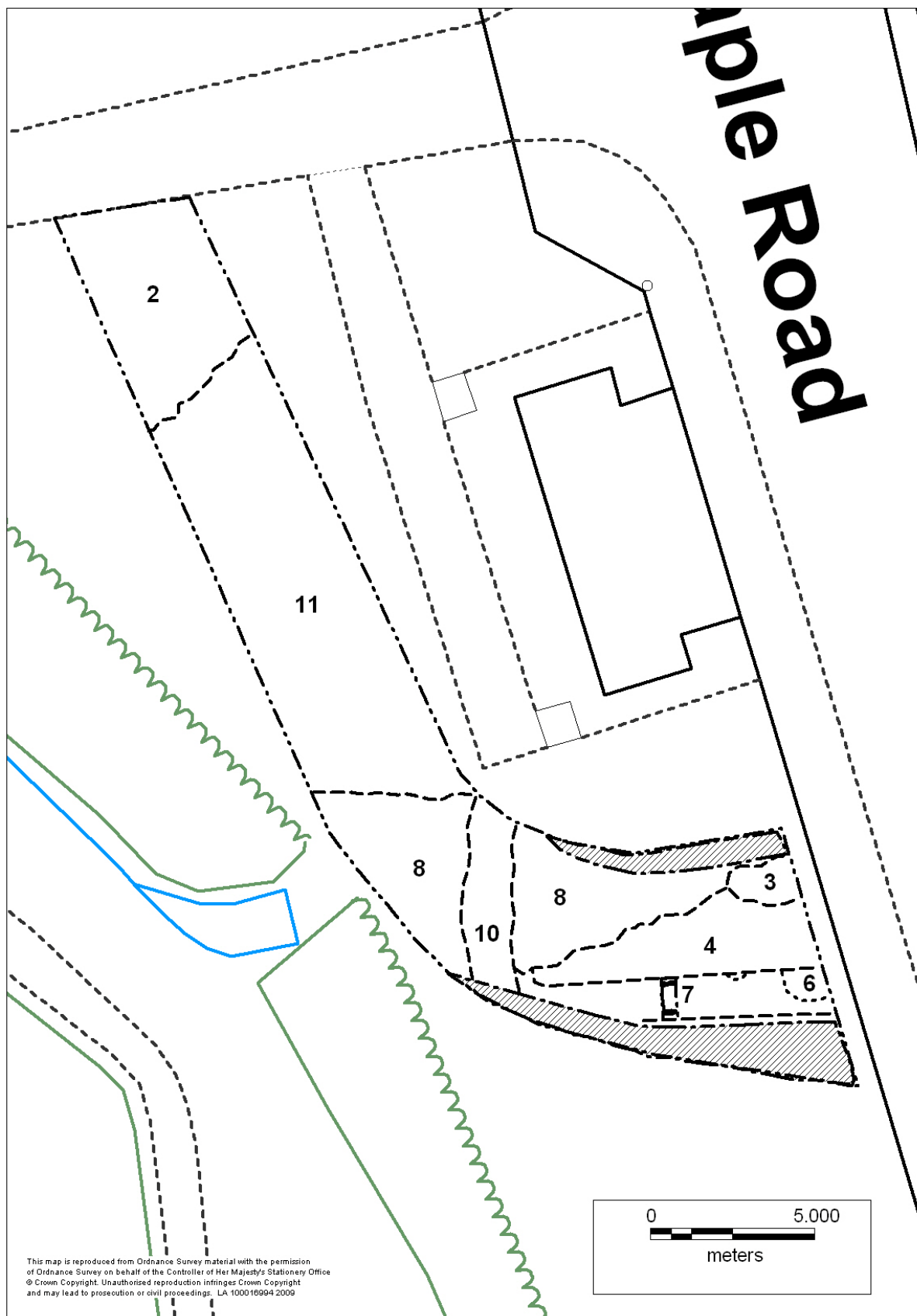


Fig.5 Composite plan.

The remainder of the linear feature was filled with a grey-brown, slightly clayey soil, with a number of small-medium stones (up to 150mm) and occasional charcoal flecks.



Fig.6 Section through linear cut 5

The top 0.2m of the fill were removed across the entirety of the site, to take it down to the depth required to lay the new cycleway. The rest was left in situ, covered by redposited material grading the sides of the cut (Fig.4, on right).

As it was not possible to fully excavate this feature, there are at least two possible interpretations for it. It may be a large field drain, buried below later landscaping, with the sandstone slab representing a capstone. The postulated northwards turn at the western end of the feature would, if it were real, lead it to the later covered culvert. A second possibility is that it is a robber trench from a wall. No finds were recovered from the fill.

As noted above, the western end of the feature was truncated by a cut (9), containing a dark grey, clayey fill (10) and an old electricity cable, possibly from a former street light at the corner of the path to the toilet block.

A section, 0.4m wide, was cut across the linear feature to determine its depth and profile. The sides of the cut were nearly vertical, a feature already noted in the voids to the east. At a depth of 0.52m lay a large sandstone slab, 0.7m wide and 0.2m thick, whose western edge was just visible (Fig.6). Excavation down either side of this was possible for a further 0.2m, beyond which it was not possible to proceed, though the cut obviously continued downwards.

Fig.7 Linear cut 5, looking eastwards (note voiding collapse at eastern end)



As the cycleway excavation turned northwards, the cut was much shallower, with only the topsoil being removed. A mixed deposit (11), with dark-brown clayey soil, patches of yellowy clay and numerous stones (up to 350mm) may represent the demolition debris from the removal of the former lodge house. At the very northern end of the trench, the topsoil came off onto a subsoil of red-brown sandy soil with grey-brown clayey patches, and stones up to 200mm, which was very similar to that noted at the south-eastern end of the site.

Conclusions

The watching brief indicated the presence of archaeological stratigraphy below the topsoil, despite previous tree cover and landscaping activities. A large linear cut feature, aligned east-west, was uncovered at the southern edge of the site, below the northern end of the raised bank east of the defensive ditch. Its date and function are unclear.

Appendix A.

List of Contexts

1. Topsoil
2. Subsoil
3. Stony surface at east end
4. Red sandstone and clayey soil – natural?
5. E-W linear cut: cuts 4
6. Silty fill of 5 at NE end
7. Slightly clayey fill of 5
8. Mixed, dark deposit: under 2 and 11; cut by 9; over 3 and 4
9. Cut for power cable
10. Fill of 9
11. Mixed soil and stone, demolition?: under 1 and 2; over 8
12. Boundary wall
13. N-S linear cut for 12

Appendix B

Photographic Log

Photo No.	Description	Taken From
DSCF4534	East end prior to excavation	W
DSCF4535	Stony layer 12	N
DSCF4536	Stony layer 12	S
DSCF4538	Stony layer 12 showing tree roots	S
DSCF4539	Stony layer 12 showing tree roots	W
DSCF4540	Silty deposit 6 partly removed after voiding collapse	N
DSCF4541	Fills 6 and 7 within linear cut 5	W
DSCF4542	Silty deposit 6 partly removed, voiding collapse within cut 5	SW
DSCF4543	Partly excavated transect across linear cut 5, as stone first exposed	E
DSCF4544	Transect across linear cut 5	W
DSCF4545	Close-up of transect across linear cut 5	W
DSCF4546	Close-up of transect across linear cut 5	W
DSCF4547	Linear feature 5	W
DSCF4548	Close-up of fill 7 and transect across linear cut 5	W
DSCF4549	Linear cut 5, showing transect & voiding collapse	W
DSCF4550	Linear cut 5, showing transect & voiding collapse	W
DSCF4551	Close-up of transect across linear cut 5 after cleaning	E
DSCF4553	Close-up of transect across linear cut 5 after cleaning	E
DSCF4554	Close-up of transect across linear cut 5 after cleaning	E
DSCF4560	West face of wall, showing profile of removed deposits	W
DSCF4561	West face of wall, showing profile of removed deposits	W

