

PLYMPTON CASTLE, PLYMPTON, PLYMOUTH

(NGR SX 54407 55784)

Results of archaeological monitoring and recording

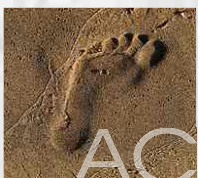
Scheduled Monument: Plympton Castle (National Heritage List
no. 1003865)

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On behalf of:
Westcountry Stonemasons

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archaeology

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1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 This report presents the results of archaeological monitoring and recording carried out by AC archaeology on 21 April 2016 at Plympton Castle, Plympton, Plymouth (SX 54407 55784; Fig. 1). The castle is designated as a Scheduled Monument (National Heritage List no (1003865). The archaeological investigations were carried out during consolidation works to the castle, and were commissioned by Westcountry Stonemasons on behalf of Historic England.
- 1.2 The castle is situated within the centre of the historic village of Plympton St Maurice, now subsumed within the wider Plympton suburb of Plymouth. It survives as a circular, steep-sided mound or motte surrounded by a partly buried ditch with a roughly rectangular bailey to the west defined by a substantially constructed rampart, and an outer ditch, which together cover approximately 1.4 hectares. On the summit of the motte are the remains of a circular masonry shell keep. The interior of the bailey is situated at a height of 30m aOD. The underlying solid geology comprises Middle Devonian Slate, a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 385 to 398 million years ago in the Devonian period. There are no recorded superficial deposits (British Geological Survey online mapping 2016).
- 1.3 The castle has been the subject of historical and archaeological research carried out by the University of Exeter, which was published in 1985 (Higham *et. al.* 1985). This paper forms the basis of the Schedule description and is summarised below.
- 1.4 The castle was established around 1100 by Richard de Redvers or his son Baldwin and surrendered to the royal army of King Stephen in 1136. In 1141 it was rebuilt by Baldwin de Redvers when his estates were restored by the Empress Matilda. It was confiscated by King John in 1204 but returned to Earl William de Vernon in 1205. The masonry castle probably dates to the 13th century and at some stage an inner tower (of which there are no above-ground remains) was built in the centre. It was besieged by Robert Courtenay on behalf of the Crown in 1224 and seems to have remained part of the Barony of Plympton and the Earldom of Devon until 1539 when the Courtenay estates fell to the Crown. It may also have been the site of a Civil War fort. Local tradition says the castle was abandoned in 1647, although there is no specific documentary evidence for this. It was subsequently neglected, although from the late 19th century repairs were made, and the interior of the bailey (and presumably part of the motte ditch) infilled.

2. SCOPE OF WORKS, AIMS AND METHODOLOGY (Plate 1)

- 2.1 The consolidation works comprised two elements. Firstly, replacement of stones displaced from the keep, and secondly, restoration of an unauthorised path on the northwest side of the motte and removal of a bank below the motte to deter future reuse of this path (Plate 1).
- 2.2 The aims were twofold. Firstly, to assist with the identification of displaced stones to allow their replacement within original voids in the shell keep. Secondly, to monitor and record the removal of the bank below the motte.
- 2.3 The works were undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (revised 2014), and the AC archaeology *Site Recording Manual Version 2*. Reference was made to the Higham *et. al.* paper; the illustrations within that article were used as a basis of for the drawn record, and are reproduced within this report.

3. RESULTS (Figs 1-2; Plates 2-12)

Replacement of displaced stones

3.1 The former locations of five stones were identified and these stones were replaced (Fig. 2). A number of other stones had been collected over recent years, but their locations could not be identified. This was mainly due to the fact that exposed lime mortar into which the stones had been bedded into had been eroded, either through natural processes or visitors walking on the wall tops.

3.2 The locations of the replaced stones are shown on Fig. 2. Stone 1 was located on the top of the northeast part of the wall, adjacent to the outer face (Plates 2 and 3). Stones 2 and 3 were located on the top of the southeast part of the wall; stone 2 within the core and stone 3 at the present face (Plates 4-6). Stones 4 and 5 were located on the south side of the wall, within a void in a plinth situated at the currently exposed base of the keep (Plates 7-8). Stones 1-3 were mortared into the wall, whilst additional packing was used around stones 4-5 to partially infill the surrounding void.

Removal of bank

3.3 The bank was located to the south of the bench seat set into the northwest side of the motte, between the bench and the earthwork ditch around the motte. It measured 5.25m long by up to 1.80m wide, and 0.30m high on its north side but between 0.50m and 1.10m high on its south side where it slumped into the motte ditch (Plates 9-10). It had formed on a flatter earthwork on the northwest side of the motte, which overlaid the position of the bailey ditch.

3.4 The bank was removed using a tracked mini-digger fitted with a toothless grading bucket under the direct supervision of the site archaeologist. Removed spoil was reused as topsoil on the restored path to cover up gravel and sandbags that had already been laid. The maximum depth of the excavation was 1.30m adjacent to the motte, but elsewhere was shallower (Plates 11-12). The removed material consisted of soft grey-brown silty clay with variable frequencies of inclusions, and incorporated lenses of more compact stony silt. These consisted of small slate fragments, modern plastic and bottle glass, iron objects including wire, and clinker, none of which was retained.

4. COMMENTS

4.1 The consolidation of the masonry of the shell keep had limited success. The positions of only five stones could be identified. This was the first time in recent years that such an exercise had taken place, and was compromised by two factors. Firstly, due to the length of time since some stones had been displaced, their general position (e.g. findspots in relation to the upstanding masonry) was not generally known, and secondly the exposed mortar bedding had been eroded and therefore voids for the displaced stones could not be identified. It is recommended if practicable that future consolidation (or at least recording) takes place soon after stones become dislodged.

4.2 The removed bank was formed from material weathered down from the motte. It was of modern date and must have derived from later 20th-century material thrown up onto the side of the motte. The context for this is unknown, but could well be associated with the layout of the current walkways around the castle, including the hard paths and associated ramp up to the motte soft path and construction of the

adjacent bench seat. Only this modern material was removed, and the edge of the historic motte was not revealed, nor were any historic fills of the associated ditch.

5. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

- 5.1** In line with current museum archiving policy the results of the project will be held by Historic England and the Plymouth City Council Historic Environment Record in the form of this report and the associated OASIS entry.
- 5.2** The OASIS entry has been completed under the unique identifier 261540.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1** The project was commissioned by Westcountry Stonemasons and managed for them by Marcus Johnson, and for Historic England by Caroline Vulliamy. The project was managed and carried out for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The illustration for this report were prepared by Leon Cauchois. Thanks are due to the staff of Westcountry Stonemasons and Peter and the volunteers of the Tavistock Taskforce for their assistance on site.

7. SOURCES CONSULTED

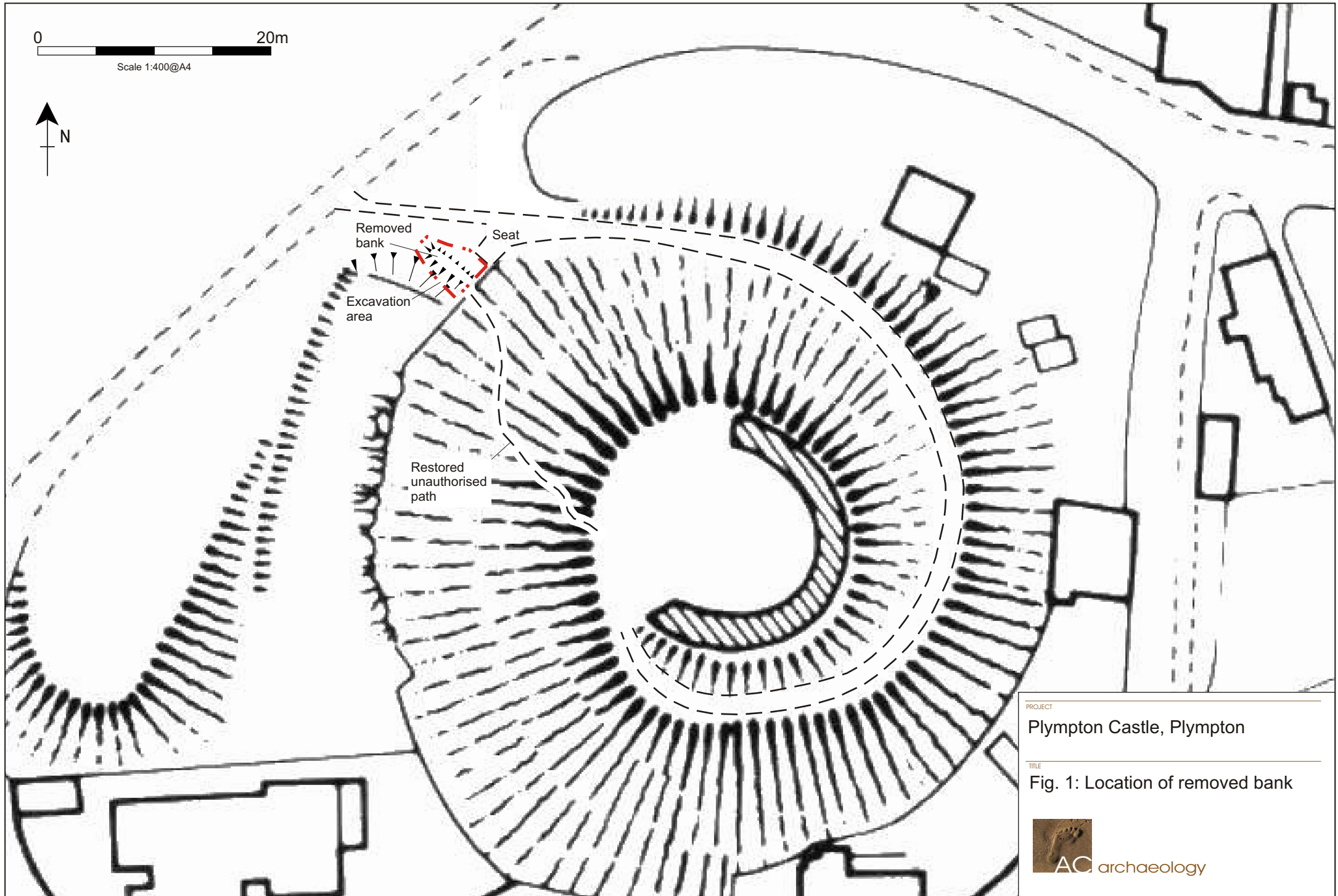
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British Geological Survey online viewer
<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

National Heritage List for England
<https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

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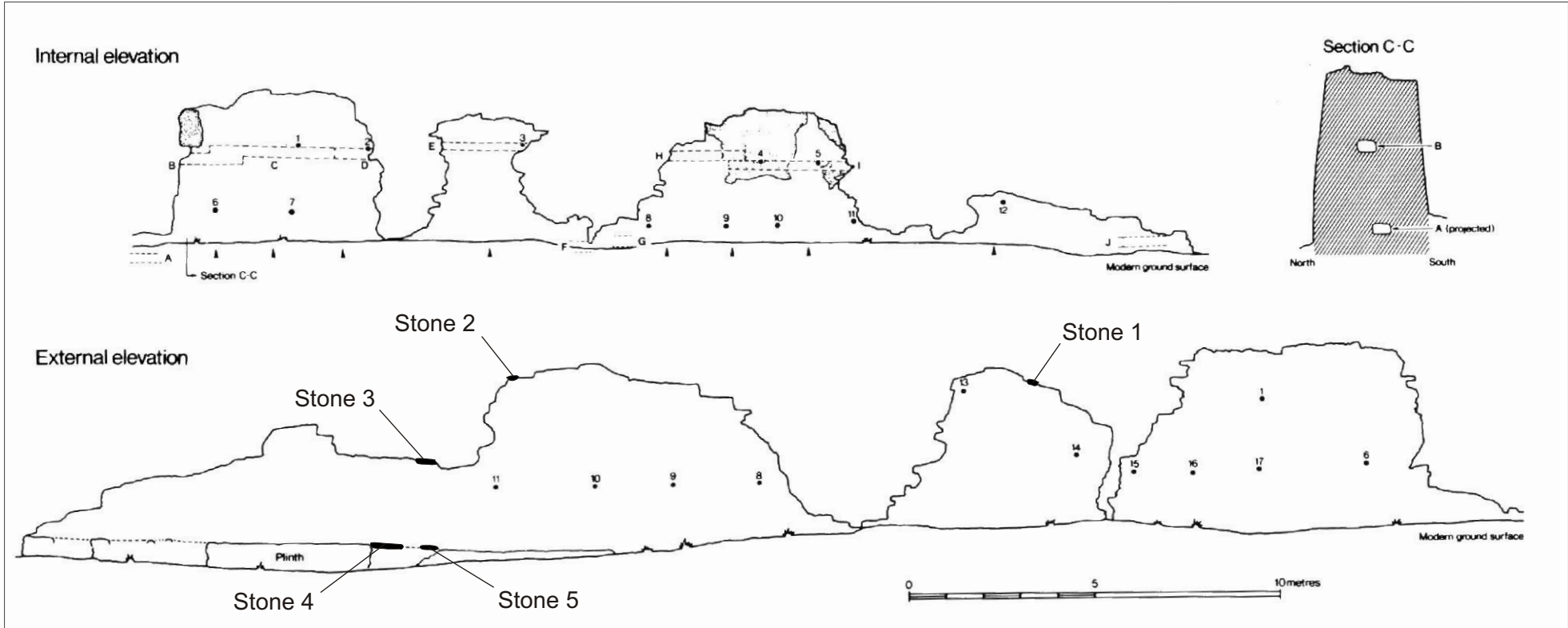
Plympton Castle, Plympton

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Fig. 1: Location of removed bank



AC archaeology



PROJECT

Plympton Castle, Plympton

TITLE

Fig. 2: Location of consolidated stones



AC archaeology



Plate 1: View of the motte from the bailey showing location of restored path, looking southeast



Plate 2: General location of stone 1 looking east viewed from within the keep

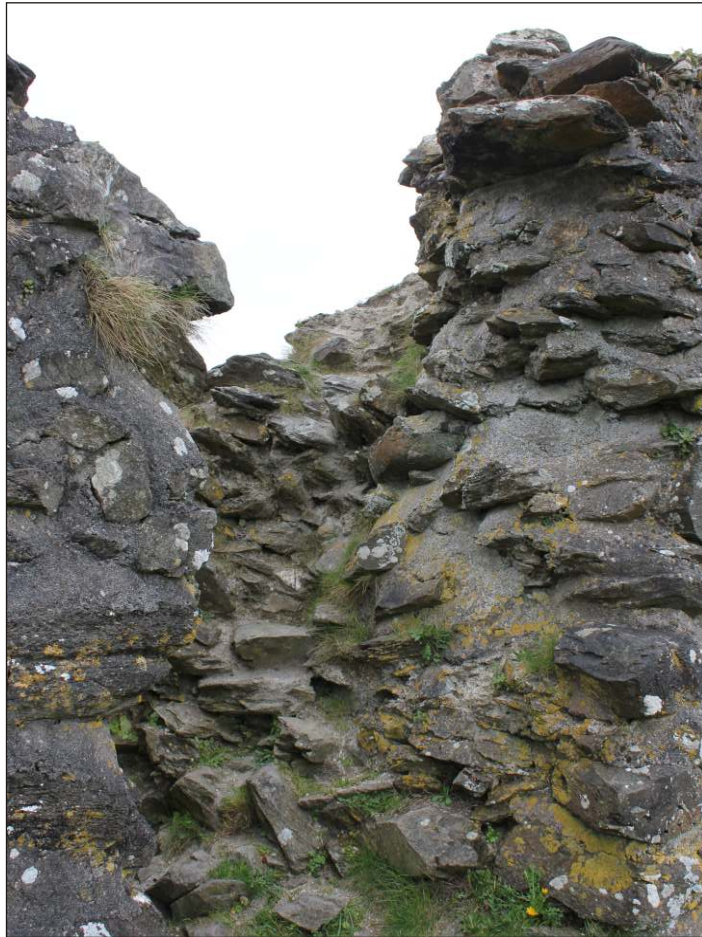


Plate 3: Location of stone 1 prior to consolidation, looking east



Plate 4: General location of stones 2 and 3 viewed from within the keep during replacement of stone 2, looking east



Plate 5: Stone 2 following consolidation, looking north



Plate 6: Stone 3 following consolidation, looking southeast



Plate 7: General location of stones 4 and 5, looking east-northeast



Plate 8: Stones 4 and 5, test fitting prior to consolidation, looking northeast



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Plate 10: The bank prior to removal, looking northwest. (1m scale)



Plate 11: The bank during latter stage of removal, looking east. (1m scale)



Plate 12: The bank during latter stage of removal, looking northeast. (1m scale)

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