

# DUNSTER CASTLE INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS, DUNSTER, SOMERSET

(NGR SS 991 45 43456)

Results of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording

Scheduled Monument No. SM33039

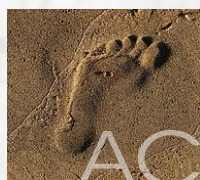
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On behalf of:  
National Trust

Report No: ACD1728/1/0

Date: May 2018



archaeology

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# DUNSTER CASTLE INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS, DUNSTER, SOMERSET

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The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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## Summary

*Archaeological monitoring and recording during small scale infrastructure works in five separate areas within the grounds of Dunster Castle, Dunster, Somerset (NGR SS 99145 43456) was carried out by AC archaeology between January and March 2018. Dunster Castle is a medieval castle come country home/mansion and protected as a Scheduled Monument (No. 33039).*

*Monitored works comprised the replacement of two sets of steps within the gardens to the northeast of Dunster Castle, the excavation of three pipe location test pits and a trench for a lightning rod located on its South Terrace. The groundworks associated with the installation of an electric gate on the vehicular access drive was also monitored.*

*The works exposed modern made ground and soil layers in all of the areas monitored.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Archaeological monitoring and recording during small scale infrastructure works in five separate areas within grounds of Dunster Castle, Dunster, Somerset (NGR SS 99145 43456; Fig. 1) was undertaken by AC archaeology between January and March 2018. The works that were monitored comprised the removal of two sets of steps along access paths through the gardens, pipe location test pits, lightening rod installation and installation of an electric gate. All works were undertaken within the Scheduled Area for Dunster Castle (Heritage List for England reference 33039).
- 1.2 The areas monitored for the removal of the steps and new electric gate were located within the grounds to the northeast of the castle, while the pipe-location pits and lightening rod installation works were situated on its South Terrace (Fig. 1). These were positioned between 54m and 47m aOD (above Ordnance Datum), with the underlying solid geology comprises sandstone of the Hangman Sandstone Formation ([www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk)).

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A castle at Dunster may have been present in the Saxon period, but it is first recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086. At this time it was held by the Norman Baron William de Mohun, whose family owned the castle until 1376, when it was purchased by the Luttrell family. Medieval documents indicate that in the 13th century the castle contained a chapel, hall, buttery, pantry, knight's hall, three towers containing various rooms and a prison in the Upper Ward. In the Lower Ward there were three towers including the gatehouse (Lyte 1909, 353).
- 2.2 The castle complex was altered in the 15th and 18th centuries. During the Civil War it was held by the Royalists, until capture by Parliamentary forces, when the outer defences were dismantled. In 1720 a path from the village up to the mansion was created.
- 2.3 Previous archaeological works include a programme of work associated with improvements to an existing pathway, from the west of the Castle Mansion to the Summer House, known as Bowling Green House, on the Tor summit, which was carried out by the National Trust (Papworth 2012) and AC archaeology (Cooke 2013). These works established the presence of earlier occupation layers containing a mixed

assemblage of finds: animal bone, clay tobacco pipe fragments, glass, metal, oyster shell, and medieval and post-medieval pottery. A later watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology (Hughes 2015), upslope from the 15th century gatehouse, during the replacement of a collapsed drain. This work revealed post-medieval and modern deposits, the artefacts recovered were animal bone, oyster shell and 20th century ceramic water pipe.

### **3. AIMS**

**3.1** The aim of the monitoring and recording was to preserve, by record, any archaeological features or deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the project. This was with particular reference to the potential presence of features, deposits or artefacts associated with medieval or post-medieval activity.

**3.2** More specific aims were to:

- Establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains;
- Determine the character, condition, date, depth, extent, nature and significance of any archaeological remains identified;
- Establish the nature of the activity associated with any recorded or hitherto unrecorded sites;
- Where appropriate, recover any environmental evidence from archaeological features associated with any recorded or hitherto unrecorded sites;
- Identify any artefacts relating to the occupation or use of any recorded or hitherto unrecorded sites;
- Provide further information such as a baseline digital record to help inform the nature of future management measures and interpretation of the wider area.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

**4.1** The monitoring and recording was undertaken in compliance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by the National Trust (2017). Attendance by the site archaeologist undertaking the monitoring was 'comprehensive' in accordance with the meaning of the term as defined in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' document *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (published December 2014).

**4.2** A small tracked mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket was used to remove the two sets of steps and for the installation of a new electric gate. The excavation of the three pipe location test pits and the new lightning rod were undertaken by hand. All works were directly supervised by the attending archaeologist.

**4.3** All deposits exposed during works were recorded in accordance with the standard AC Archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and with reference to AC Archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012).

## **5. RESULTS**

### **5.1 Dunster Steps 1 (Lower Steps)**

These consisted of 11 steps constructed from timber sleepers that were aligned northeast to southwest and measured 6.6m long (Plate 1). Following the removal of the existing steps, the groundworks comprised the excavation of an area measuring 1.6m wide that was dug to a depth of 0.23m below existing levels (Plate 2).

The area was excavated onto a mid brownish-red clayey-silt loam made ground deposit with abundant sub-angular gravel and occasional sub-angular pebble inclusions. This was overlain by a dark reddish-brown silty-clay with frequent sub-angular gravel, rare sub-angular cobble inclusions and modern brick and concrete fragments. No pre-modern archaeological features or deposits or finds were exposed.

### **5.2 Dunster Steps 2 (Upper Steps)**

Groundworks for Steps 2 comprised the excavation of an area measuring 4.5m long and 2.3m wide following the removal of the existing wooden sleeper steps (Plate 3). The area was excavated to a depth of 0.35m.

The area was excavated into a mid brownish-red clayey-silt loam with abundant sub-angular gravel and pebble inclusions. This was overlain by a 0.16m thick dark reddish-brown silty-clay with frequent sub-angular gravel inclusions (Plate 4). No pre-modern archaeological features or deposits or finds were exposed.

### **5.3 Pipe location test pits**

These were situated on the South Terrace and directly outside the Conservatory (Plate 5). The groundworks comprised the hand-excavation of three pits that measured between 1.25m and 3.3m long, 0.5m and 0.9m wide and up to 0.6m deep (Plate 6).

The pits were excavated into a mid reddish-brown sandy-silt loam with abundant, poorly sorted sub-angular gravel and pebbles and common sub-angular cobble and boulder inclusions (Plate 7). This was overlain by the current tarmac surface. No pre-modern archaeological features or deposits or finds were exposed.

### **5.4 Lightning rod installation**

The installation of new lightning rods on the South Terrace comprised the hand-excavation of a 1.30m long, 0.30m wide and 0.15m deep trench (Plate 8). This was excavated into a dark brown silty-loam garden soil and partially across a gravel path. No pre-modern archaeological features or deposits or finds were exposed.

### **5.5 Electric gate installation**

The groundworks for the new electric gate were located on the vehicular access road to the northeast of Dunster Castle. Groundworks comprised the excavation of two rectangular pits on either side of the road with a shallow linking trench (Plate 9).

The pits measured 0.9m long, 0.75m wide and 0.9m deep. These were excavated into a mid reddish-brown sandy-silt loam made ground with abundant sub-angular gravels and common sub-angular cobble and boulder inclusions. This was overlain by the current road surface.

## 6. COMMENTS

- 6.1 Monitoring of excavations across the five separate areas within the grounds of Dunster Castle consistently exposed modern made ground or soil layers at their lowest level. Despite the location of the excavations as within the scheduled area for the castle and in areas where there was the potential for medieval remains to be present, the limited nature of the excavations meant that no pre-modern deposits were exposed.

## 7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 7.1 The paper and digital archive is currently being held at the offices of AC Archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, under the unique project code of **ACD1728**. This will ultimately be deposited with The National Trust.
- 7.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier **311923**, which includes a digital copy of this report.

## 8. REFERENCES

British Geological Survey Online Viewer: [www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk).

Cooke, P., 2013, *The construction of steps to Dunster Castle Tor, Dunster Somerset: Results of an archaeological watching brief*. Unpublished AC archaeology report ref. ACD521/2/0.

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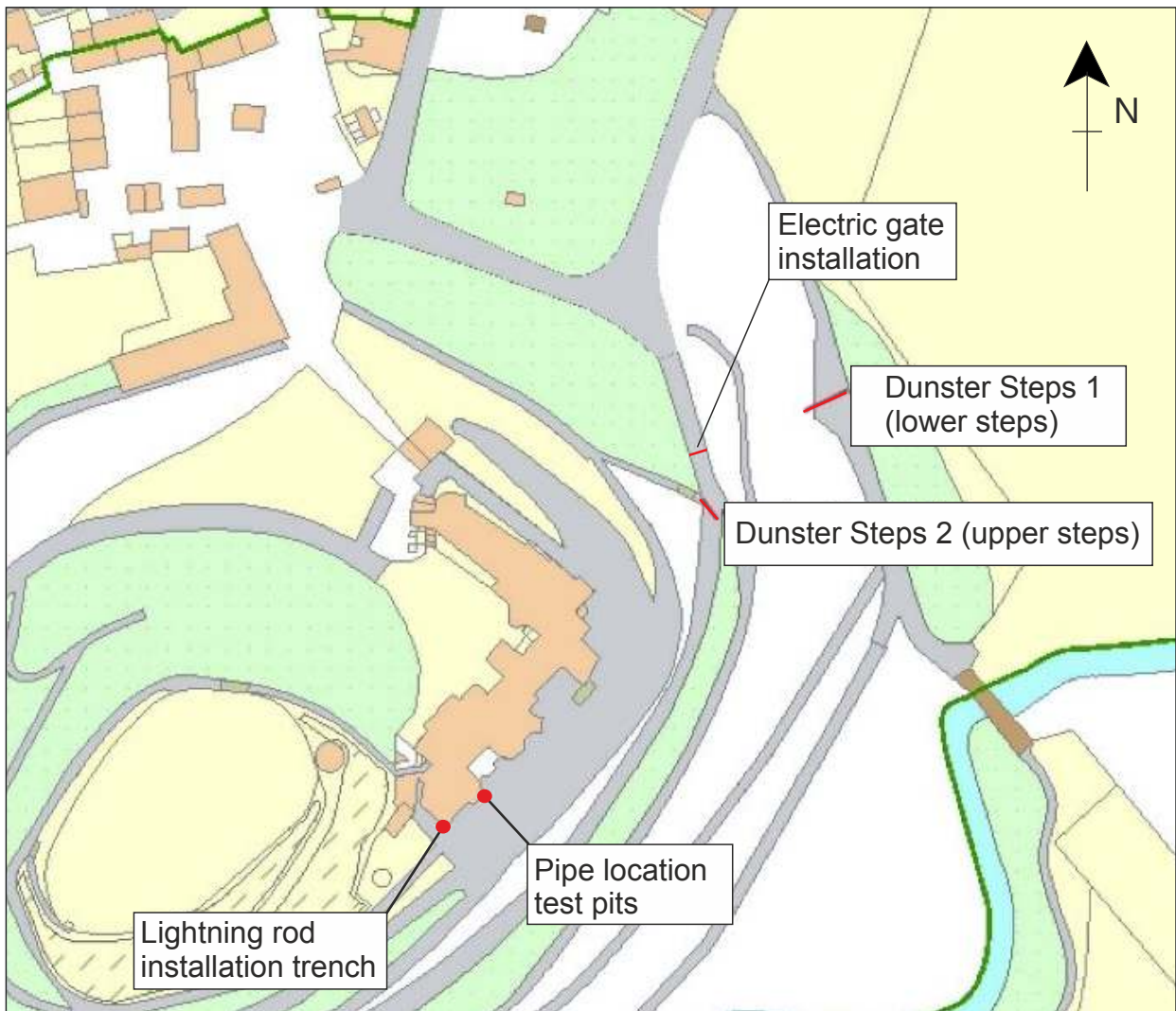
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Map prepared by The National Trust



PROJECT

Dunster Castle Infrastructure Works, Dunster, Somerset

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site and areas monitored







Plate 1: Pre-works view of Dunster Steps 1 (Lower Steps). View to southwest (scale 1m)



Plate 2: Working view during removal of Dunster Steps 1 (Lower Steps). View to south



Plate 3: Pre-works view of Dunster Steps 2 (Upper Steps). View to northwest



Plate 4: Dunster Steps 2, showing made ground layers. View to southeast (scale 1m and 0.4m)



Plate 5: General view of pipe location test pits, on South Terrace. View to northeast



Plate 6: Showing pipe location test pits. View to northeast (scale 1m)



Plate 7: Showing section of a pipe location test pit. View to southeast (scale 1m)



Plate 8: Lightning rod installation trench. View to northeast (scale 0.3m)



Plate 9: Electric gate installation works. View to south (scale 2x1m)

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