

Old Sarum Castle

Wiltshire

Archaeological Excavation and Recording of the Walls

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Figure 1. Site location.

Figure 2. Trench and wall location.

Figure 3. Wall 102

Figure 4. Walls 103 and 104

Table 1. Finds.

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by English Heritage to undertake an archaeological excavation of one wall, and to record two further walls within the inner bailey at Old Sarum, Salisbury. This was in response to conservation works being carried out on the monument.

The site (413800, 132700) is situated one mile to the north west of the city of Salisbury, overlooking the Valley of the river Avon.

One 2m x 2m trench was excavated at the north west corner of the inner bailey, and two walls were recorded to the east of the inner bailey after the concrete capping had been removed.

The core foundations of three walls were uncovered, together with some facing material. One wall appears to be an extension of Herelewin's Tower, while the other two comprise part of the Kitchen Tower and the main palisade around the building.

One sherd of medieval pottery was recovered, two pieces of animal bone, and some medieval/post medieval pegged roof tiles.

Acknowledgements

This archaeological excavation and wall recording was commissioned by English Heritage, and Quadron Services were the contractors on site.

The field work for this project was undertaken by Hannah Marriott, assisted by Laura Cassie. The report was compiled by Hannah Marriott. [] prepared the illustrations, and the project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Charlotte Matthews.

Old Sarum Castle Wiltshire

Archaeological Excavation and Recording of the Walls

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by English Heritage to undertake an archaeological excavation, and to record walls in Old Sarum Castle, Wiltshire (centred on 413800, 132700, hereafter ‘the Site’).
- 1.1.2 Old Sarum is an Iron Age hill-fort and medieval castle. The masonry from castle has been extensively robbed, and only the wall core and foundations remain.
- 1.1.3 The excavation and recordings were required in accordance with the recommendations surrounding the management of historic buildings. It was undertaken with a risk assessment produced by Wessex Archaeology (WA, 2000).
- 1.1.4 Three visits were made to the site on 29th January and the 18th and 19th February 2002. They were timed to coincide with the work programme of the contractors.

1.2 Location and Topography

- 1.2.1 Old Sarum Castle lies approximately one mile to the north west of the City of Salisbury, county of Wiltshire.
- 1.2.2 The Site lies at the end of Bishopsdown Hill (Figure 1), overlooking the valley of the River Avon, with its highest point lying at 90.10m aOD. Its geology consists of silty clay topsoils overlying chalk bedrock.
- 1.2.3 Trench One was situated to the east of Herlewin’s Tower, and wall recording was carried out at the joining of the Kitchen Tower wall and the main palisade around the bailey (Figure 2).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 Old Sarum is an Iron Age hill-fort, adapted into a medieval castle for defensive purposes. There is evidence of settlement from the Iron Age, with a pit remaining within the castle precinct, through to the Roman period where it was an important junction of Roman roads. There are the remains of a

Roman building also within the castle precinct. Although there is evidence of Saxon settlement in the area, there is no direct evidence that they lived within Old Sarum.

2.1.2 There are four main phases of building within the castle at Old Sarum. The first period was during the Late 11th or early 12th century. The Great Tower, the East Gate, and Postern Gate remain from this period. A second phase of building, around the same time, added the main courtyard and associated buildings, with the Great Chamber, the East Turret and Chapels, a well, and the Kitchen Tower and Herlewin's Tower.

2.1.3 A third phase of building occurred in the later 12th century adding the main palisade around the Bailey. From the 13th century onwards, a tower above the Postern, a Saw pit, the New Hall, the Bakehouse and stairs to possible cess pits were built.

3 AIMS

3.1.1 The aim of the archaeological investigation was to record the location, extent, date, nature, character and relationships of any archaeological evidence observed.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 All archaeological deposits and features were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording system. A drawn record was compiled, and tied to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. A full photographic record was also maintained using both colour transparencies and black and white negatives (on 35mm film).

4.2 Trench Excavation and Wall Recording

4.2.1 A 2.2m by 2m trench was excavated at the point where a wall was to be built. It extended from the edge of the existing wall, to the edge of the slope of the Bailey. Turf and topsoil was removed by hand, and set aside for reuse. It was excavated to a depth of 200mm, or down onto the existing footings, whichever was sooner.

4.2.2 The concrete capping was removed from the wall of the Kitchen Tower, and the main palisade, by Quadron Services, using mechanical breakers. An area of 2.2m x 0.80m was removed. The area was then cleaned and recorded by hand.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Stratigraphy

5.1.1 The general stratigraphic sequence encountered during excavation was topsoil (**101**) overlying the walls. No chalk was encountered, as a sufficient depth was not reached

5.2 Trench Excavation

5.2.1 1.20m by 0.90m of wall foundations **102** (figure 3), were uncovered during the excavation of trench one. Only one course remained of this wall foundation. It consisted of randomly coursed flint nodules c. 0.20m, bonded with a orangey brown sandy mortar. It was orientated NW-SE. It petered out towards the north where the path and slope are situated.

5.3 Wall Recording

5.3.1 The historic core of two walls was uncovered and recorded. 0.80m x 0.80m of wall **103** (figure 4), was uncovered. Five courses remained of this wall foundation, with a height of 0.60m. It consisted of randomly coursed flint nodules c. 0.20m, bonded with a light yellowish brown sandy mortar. It was orientated N-S, and could be seen to continue further to the north. Two sandstone blocks, c. 0.20m x 0.30m, were uncovered on the west side of the wall foundations. It was capped with a flint and concrete mix.

5.3.2 1m x 0.40m of wall foundation **104** (figure 4), was uncovered and recorded. It consisted of randomly coursed flint nodules c.0.20m, bonded with a light yellowish brown sandy mortar. It was difficult to see how many courses remained, as the exposed section sloped downwards, and the mortar was fairly well preserved. The wall had a height of 0.60m, and was orientated E-W. It was capped with a flint and concrete mix.

5.3.3 The point where walls **103** and **104** meet was revealed to be concrete capping.

6 FINDS

6.1.1 One sherd of medieval shell and flint tempered pottery was recovered from the topsoil **101**, above wall **102**. Animal bone and medieval/post medieval pegged roof tiles were also recovered from **101** within this trench.

Table 1: Finds by context (number/weight in grammes)

Context	Description	Animal Bone	CBM	Pottery
101	topsoil	2/3	5/141	1/10

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1.1 The archaeological remains uncovered during this excavation have provided further insight into Old Sarum, as well as clarifying positions of known existing walls.
- 7.1.2 Wall **102** is the previously unmapped wall footing of the eastern wall of Herlewin's Tower, which has been partially destroyed by the path and erosion. It is probable that it would have originally extended NW for a further 2-3 metres, which would allow for a rectangular shaped tower at this NW corner of the palisade.
- 7.1.3 Wall **103** is already located on maps, and is the foundation of the western corner of the Kitchen Tower. The full extent of this wall was not previously known, and this recording cannot give a definite extent either. The wall extended out under the path, which is only c.0.30m from the edge. Therefore, it is probable that the wall extended out beyond the edge of the bailey today, as erosion and land slip can clearly be seen on the slopes beneath this wall. However, if we assume that the north wall of the tower is the same width as the south wall, then it probably only extended a further 0.20 – 0.30m. The sandstone blocks recovered are probably remains of the original facing material.
- 7.1.4 Wall **104** is also already located on maps, and is the foundation of the main palisade wall. This foundation is a lot narrower than both walls **102** and **103**. It is unclear whether this is due to a certain amount of destruction by the concrete capping, or signifies a narrower wall. Walls **102** and **103** were both built in the second period of building in the late 11th early 12th century. Wall **104** was built in the late 12th century, and may suggest that this later period of construction was not built as substantially. As the concrete capping has destroyed the relationship between walls **103** and **104**, any more evidence as to these walls has been lost.
- 7.1.5 The finds recovered were from the topsoil, and therefore cannot be relied upon for dating evidence. However, the pottery dates from the medieval, and pegged roof tiles came into circulation c.1250, therefore they are indicative of general settlement activity around this period.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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