TENBY CASTLE 2007 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF UNSTABLE BANKS



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TENBY CASTLE 2007 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF UNSTABLE BANKS

By Pete Crane BA Hons MIFA

Illustrations by Hubert Wilson and Pete Crane

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This report has been prepared by Pete Crane

Position: Senior Archaeologist

Signature Date

This report has been checked and approved by Nigel Page

on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Position: Head of Field Services

Signature Date

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report

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Cover Plate: Trench 1 under excavation. View SW

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SUMMARY

Two trial trenches were excavated to investigate ground slippage on steep slopes both within and below the walls of Tenby Castle (NGR SN 13700053). One trench revealed a Victorian stepped retaining wall, and the other trench contained a probable feature of unknown age but possibly dating at least to the castle period or earlier.

INTRODUCTION

This project was undertaken to look at two areas on the north and south sides of Castle Hill that had apparent unstable banks which had been showing slippage recently (Fig. 1). It was proposed therefore that two evaluation trenches be dug to investigate what was happening at these locations and the potential implications for any archaeological remains should consolidation of these banks be necessary. Tenby Castle (NGR SN 13700053) is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Pemb No 163) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Pembrokeshire County Council obtained consents from both Cadw in respect of the SAM, and the Countryside Council for Wales regarding the SSSI before this work commenced.

As the scope and results of this project are limited it is not intended here to go into detail of the topography and history of Tenby and its castle. While a small booklet on the town's history was published some time ago (Davies 1979), more detailed accounts are contained within an unpublished report (Soulsby and Jones 1975) and "The Towns of Medieval Wales" (Soulsby 1983).

Tenby Castle is sited on a promontory, now known as Castle Hill, surrounded at high tide on all but its eastern side. Even on this eastern side the ground slopes downwards before joining the mainland at Castle Square, making this site naturally well defended. Although, as yet, there is no evidence that this site dates back to the Iron Age, it would be a likely location for a promontory fort of such date. One Roman coin has been found on the site and this may indicate its possible occupation in the Romano-British period. The Welsh name for Tenby, Dynbych y Pysgod ('little fortress of the fish', Tenby Town Council web site) appears in the 9th century (Soulsby 1983, 250) and suggests the presence of a fort in the pre-Norman period, although not necessarily on the site of the castle.

The Castle was already in existence in the mid-12th century, as it was attacked in 1153; it was destroyed in 1260 and rebuilt in the 1280s. It appears to have been abandoned for military use in the early 1400s until it was re-fortified during the War of the Roses (1455-1487) and further repaired at the time of the Spanish Armada 1588. During the Civil War the castle was held for the king before being taken in 1644 by the Parliamentarians. Three years later the Royalists regained the castle but were forced to surrender after a hard siege (Soulsby and Jones 1975, 39). It would appear that, unusually, the castle remained relatively intact after the Civil War. An interior building now houses the town museum, and a small double tower survives, but there is little else left of the internal buildings. The gatehouse and a fair amount of the curtain wall also remain but have been heavily repaired in parts.

On the castle summit, in addition to the small twin towers, is the moderatelysized dwelling of the former Coastuard House, and a large monument to Prince Albert, who died in 1861; and was commemorated here in 1865. It is probable that around this time much of Castle Hill was landscaped with paths around the caslte, turning it into a small park. A bandstand was added later in 1891 on the south eastern end of the promontory.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Work was undertaken between 5th and 9th of November 2007. The weather was reasonable except for one day of strong winds and heavy rainsqualls; this hindered, but did not affect the work.

Both trenches were hand dug, mostly using mattock and shovel and then hand cleaned with trowel and hand brush. After excavation the trenches were backfilled and re-turfed. The turf on trench 1 was very rough and not enough remained to cover the entire trench, but the turf on trench 2 was much better and the trench was completely recovered.

Trench 1 (Fig. 1 and cover photo) was located on the north side of the castle, running from the top of the slope below the summit platform to 1.5m short of the path. This slope was very steep, being just under 45°. At the top of the slope the trench was 1.5m wide to enable safe footing when starting the trench, while lower down the slope the trench was narrowed to 1m wide, and in the lowest part a 0.5m slot was excavated down to bedrock, in order to reduce backfilling and any subsequent settling of the backfilled material. The trench was 4.3m long with a maximum depth of 1m and had a fall of 5m (Fig. 2). The west side of the trench was in line with the lowest step on the west side of the Prince Albert Memorial.

Trench 2 (Fig. 1) was positioned 1m to 2m east of the line of the east end of Coast Guard House and 7m to 10m to the south, placed at the western end of an apparent ground subsidence. Initially the trench was 3m long and 1m wide but this was extended to 2m wide on part of its western side.

Results Trench 1 (Fig. 2)

Bedrock was only encountered in the northern end of the trench, with the rest of the trench only excavated to expose a stepped retaining wall (104). The surface of the bedrock was uneven (Plate 1) and appeared to be limestone. Above this was a layer (107) of reddish brown silty clay with rare slate fragments and mortar flecks. Overlying 107 was a gritty deposit (106) containing a large amount of grey roof slate fragments particularly towards its northern end. Above 106 was a layer (105) of slightly reddish grey brown silty loam that appeared to be a buried soil horizon. This appeared to have been cut by the construction of the stepped retaining wall (104) (Plates 2 to 4); although there was no visible separate foundation cut for the wall it is possible that the lower 'facing' stones were laid against the edge of the construction trench.

This stepped retaining wall (104) was built of local stone and bonded with a hard, off-white-grey mortar. This walling was roughly faced and coursed with mortar protruding from some of the joints, and the steps of the wall were different in height and depth. Above the retaining wall there was a sloped layer (103) of slightly reddish grey brown sandy silt loam containing a reasonable amount of angular stones, some of which were quite large. Overlying 103 was a thick layer (102) of fine sandy silt loam topsoil with few stones capped by rough turf and sea kale. This upper layer and, to some extent, the layer below (103) were disturbed by animal burrows and roots.

Results Trench 2 (Figs. 3 and 4)

The whole of the trench was excavated down to the uneven bedrock (Plate 5). The bedrock appeared to be cut by a feature (206) that seemed to have been dug utilising the natural joints in the rock. There may have been a small channel in the base of this feature (Fig.3 and Fig. 4). There were no signs of any tool marks in the sides or base of 206. The northern portion of the base of 206 was covered by a primary fill (205) of reddish brown sandy silt containing a reasonable amount of grit and small angular stones, similar to the bedrock. Above 205 was a small deposit (204) of grey brown silt with a lot of medium angular stones and a smaller amount of grit. Overlying both 204 and 205 was a layer of grey brown silt with a lot of small to medium sized angular stones and grit (202); this fill also

contained a clay pipe stem and an iron nail or rivet. Above 202 was a small deposit (203, Fig. 4, 305) similar to 202 although with fewer but larger stones. Overlying this fill and the bedrock outside of possible feature 206 was a layer (201) of topsoil containing some post-medieval and recent china fragments, which was covered by a reasonable depth of turf.

Finds

Only a sample of modern china was retained from the topsoil (101 and 201), the rest being discarded on site along with sweet wrappers and similar detritus.

101

Pottery 1 neck body sherd of green glazed jug. Gravel ware indeterminate probably late medieval or early post medieval China 2 sherds 1 blue and white the other red transfer ware Clay pipe 1 fragment of stem Mother of pearl fragment, possibly part of a button Oyster shells 2 Penknife with plastic mock bone or wood handle

106

Roof slate, grey with single hole, appears complete, 205mm long, 141 wide, 10mm thick discarded.

201

Pottery 2 sherds of brownish green grey gravel free jug? Post medieval Pottery? 1 sherd now in two bits of worn red fabric. Date uncertain but probably post medieval. China 1 sherd of tin glazed ware, 2 sherds of blue and white transfer printed ware, 1 plain white sherd, 2 yellow and? white sherds Clay pipe 1 fragment of stem Glass 1 top of bottle, 19th or early 20th century Oyster shell 1 Penknife, small with bone handle, 19th or early 20th century

202

Clay pipe 1 fragment of stem Iron nail or rivet

DISCUSSION

Trench 1

It is uncertain if the surface of the bedrock had been artificially altered and a much larger area would probably need to be uncovered than the 0.5m slot excavated, to ascertain if this was the case. The layer (107) above could certainly be natural but disturbed by roots and animal burrows.

The gritty layer with a lot of roof slate fragments (106) would appear to be the remains of a demolition layer, given the number of slate fragments. After this deposit, there would appear to be a time of stability when turf accumulated (105).

The stepped retaining wall, although of solid construction, was so uneven and poorly pointed it would suggest that none of it was ever intended to be seen. It would appear that this retaining wall was an essential support for the construction of the platform on which the Prince Albert Monument, dedicated in 1865, stands. The material above the stepped retaining wall, consisting of soil with large stones (103), was probably deposited soon after the wall's construction and may have been covered in soil (102) and turfed. There was considerable evidence of rat burrows in this topsoil (102) that extended occasionally into the layer below. These upper two layers above the retaining wall appeared to have be settling rather than slipping to any extent.

Trench 2

The cut (206) does not appear to be a natural feature and its function could not be ascertained; much of it probably lies outside the trench and is possibly partly destroyed where a seating area has been terraced back into the slope. Its primary fill (205) appeared to have been re-deposited natural. The lack of topsoil in primary fill 205 suggests that this feature predates the Victorian landscaping in the castle and could even pre-date the castle. The small deposit (204) would appear to be a spill of stones weathered from the exposed bedrock on the side of 206. However, the main fill or layer (202) in the feature would appear to be Victorian. The topsoil contained modern material but also a few fragments of medieval pottery.

CONCLUSION

In both trenches it appears that the soil had settled rather than slumped. The retaining wall in Trench 1 is in good condition, but where the upper section has been revealed it may need attention if left exposed for any length of time. It may be worth considering building up the soil where the top of the retaining wall is exposed (although this may affect the SSSI) or monitoring any erosion of this area and re-pointing the exposed retaining wall as necessary.

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ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

The finds and archive will be deposited at Tenby Castle Museum



Figure 1: Location, Castle Hill and Trenches 1 and 2



Figure 2: Trench 1 main section



Figure 3: Trench 2 plan (simplified bedrock)



Figure 4: Trench 2 sections



Plate 1: Trench 1, bedrock below scale. View S. Scale 1m



Plate 2: Trench 1, upper (south) part of retaining wall 104. View W, Scales 0.5 and 1m



Plate 3: Trench 1. Middle part of retaining wall 104. View W. Scales 0.5 and 1m



Plate 4: Trench 1, lower (northern) part of retaining wall 104. View W. Scales 0.5m and 1m



Plate 5: Trench 2, as excavated. View W. Scale 0.5m