

CASTLE HOTEL - BANGOR
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING &
MONITORING OF DEMOLITION (G1332)

REPORT NO. 188

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

CASTLE HOTEL - BANGOR
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING &
MONITORING OF DEMOLITION (G1332)**

prepared for Watkin Jones & Son Ltd

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning permission was given in 1994 for the demolition of the Castle Hotel and the erection of a new retail centre and carpark. A planning condition was imposed by Arfon Borough Council, on the advice of Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Services, which required the implementation of an adequate programme of archaeological recording during development.

1.2 Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) submitted a Project Design and costs to Watkin Jones and Son Ltd for carrying out the recommended archaeological works. These were accepted, and Gwynedd Archaeological Trust were contracted to carry out the required archaeological work on the site. This work took place between June and November 1995.

2.0 PROJECT DESIGN

The aims of the project were to:

- (i) monitor the demolition of the hotel, so that a better understanding could be gained of the evolution and date of the structure;
- (ii) examine the ground surface underneath the existing floor layers to see if there was any evidence of earlier structures or remains;
- (iii) evaluate the archaeological potential of the carpark at the rear of the hotel, to see if further archaeological work would be necessary.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Stage 1 A photographic record was made of the standing structure as demolition progressed using 35mm format in black and white negative and colour transparency film. A written record was also produced, noting any architectural/historical details as they came to light, and annotating existing plans provided by Watkin Jones and Son.

3.2 Stage 2 Archaeological excavation and recording of the below ground surface features was undertaken once demolition had taken place and the floor slabs lifted. Archaeological features were recorded by photograph and scaled drawing and their location recorded by total station survey.

3.3 Stage 3 A watching brief was undertaken, on the site of the carpark at the rear of the hotel. This entailed the monitoring of soil disturbance at relevant times.

3.4 The photographic record All photographs were taken on black and white film (Kodak Tmax 400 ASA). General views were taken to place the feature/structure within its setting. Where appropriate external and internal elevations were taken as close to a 90 degree angle to each elevation as possible. Detailed views were taken of features where informative. All, besides a number of general views contain a scale such as a 1.0m or 2.0m ranging rod marked into 0.5m sections. Selected views have also been taken on slide film (Kodachrome ASA 200).

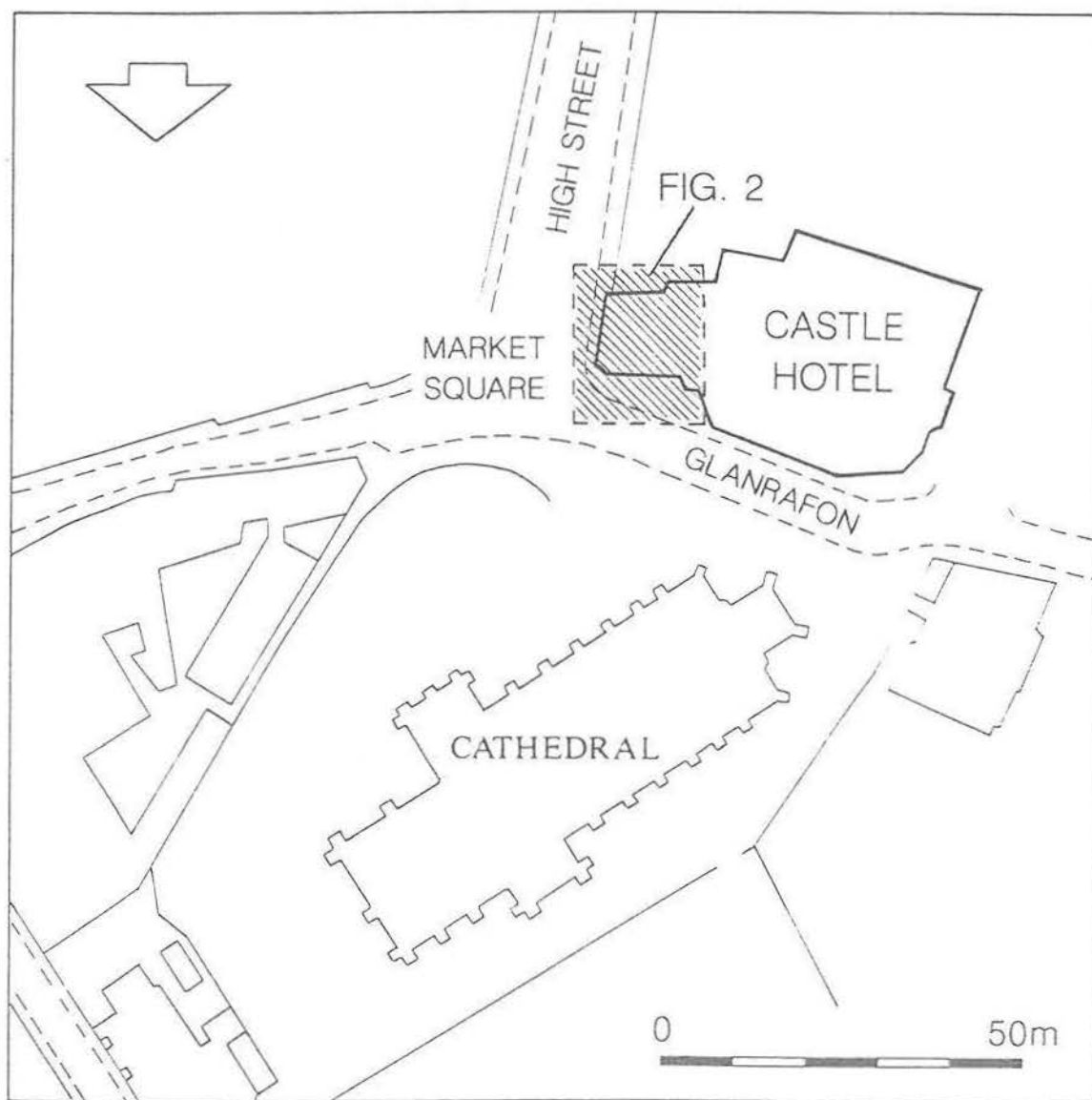


Fig. 1 Location plan.

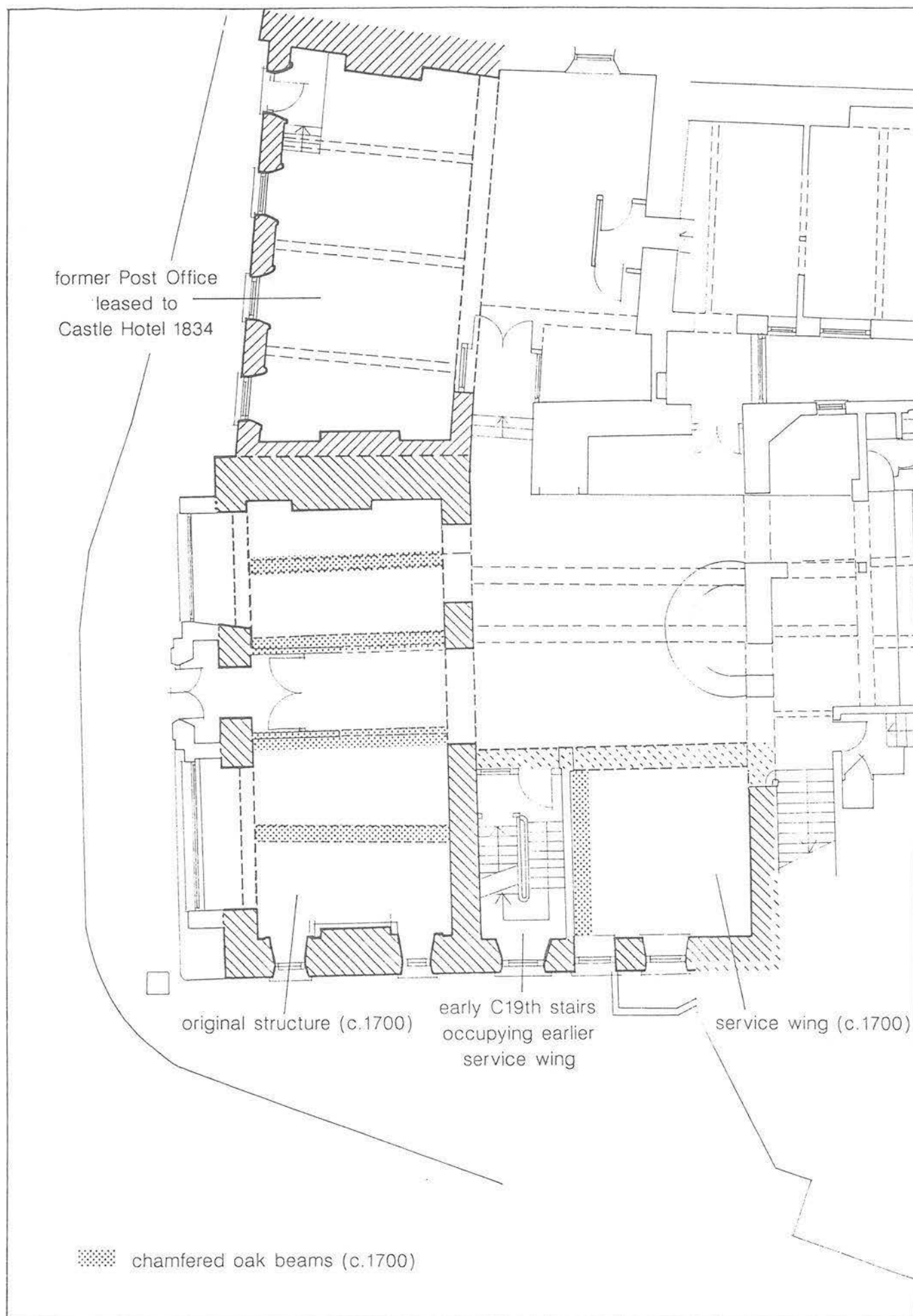


Fig. 2 Plan of part of Castle Hotel site.
(Taken from plan provided - scale 1:200)

4.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 Development of Bangor

Though archaeological evidence confirms human settlement in the immediate area from the Neolithic period, Bangor dates its origins to the establishment of a monastic settlement by Deiniol in the sixth century AD. By the twelfth century this had become the focus for a territorial diocese on the European model, and around it grew the nucleus of the present town. Expansion of the slate trade from the late eighteenth century, combined with improved transport on the route to Ireland in the nineteenth century, represented by Telford's road and the Chester and Holyhead Railway, engineered by Robert Stephenson, made Bangor a commercial settlement as well as an ecclesiastical centre, though its ancient role as a centre of learning was revived by the establishment of the Normal College in 1858 and the University College of North Wales in 1885.

4.2 The Castle Hotel: History

A building is shown on the site on John Speed's map of 1610, and documentary references appear to date from 1691 (Ellis-Jones). A survey of Bangor published in 1721 (Brown Willis) mentions the Bishop's gaol ("now fallen down") situated "hard by the Cathedral churchyard gate", but exactly where that was is not known, although underneath the former ballroom has been suggested as a possibility (*ex info* Mr T Roberts). That same survey observed that "The Towne of Bangor ... is well accommodated with Inns" (Davies 122), and quite possibly the later castle hotel already served as an inn by that date. It may have been the "very mean Inn" which Samuel Johnson patronised on way down to Llyn with Mrs Thrale in 1776 (Bristow 45). Over a hundred years later a local newspaper claimed it as the oldest in Bangor (NWG, 15.07.1824), but gave no authority for this assertion. It is only in 1792 that there is any definite documentary evidence for the building serving the needs of travellers, under the management of James Hutchings (Ingman 1949 38). A Literary Society was formed there on 17 January 1810 which numbered Dafydd Du Eryri among its members (Ingman 1949 39).

In the early years of the nineteenth century, Bangor went through a period of rapid expansion, prompted by its growing importance as a slate port (Hyde Hall 1809-1811, 149). In 1810 the building, then known as the Eagles Hotel, was sold by John Jones of Bryncir to Hutchings together with 59 acres of land (Ingman 1949, 39) but it changed hands again very quickly; by the year following another new owner, William Williams, had renamed it The Mitre, and two years later he was announcing that "he had built entirely new stabling with stalls for 40 horses, together with a large coach house etc, and improved the interior at a considerable expense, 30 bedrooms being fitted up with new and elegant furniture" (RCAHM). Between 1815 and 1822 Williams renamed it Castle Inn, and it seems to have acquired its most recent name between 1835 and 1837 (Ingman 1949, 39).

Despite his extensive refurbishment, William Williams sold up in 1830 and five years later one Richard Rowlands was in possession. It was while he was licensee that permission was granted to raise the roof of an adjacent dwelling house "so as that the front thereof be brought level with the Castle Hotel and the cornices thereof be made to correspond with those of the Castle Hotel" (RCAHM). Nevertheless, his reign was a brief one; by 1837 Henry Bicknell, tenant of the Penrhyn Arms was landlord, a member of a family prominent in the local hotel trade (Ingman 1949, 39-40). A Charles Bicknell, probably his son, was landlord in 1856, and John Denman is recorded as licensee thirty years later (Ingman 1949, 40).

With regard to its small size and comparative remoteness, Bangor was well served by coaches in this period, even before the construction of the Telford road and bridges; the Chester and Holyhead mail coach first took to the road in 1786 (Davies 122), and by the end of the first decade of the following century daily services connected Bangor with Chester, Shrewsbury and London (Hyde Hall, 1809-1811, 150). There had been a Postmaster at Bangor since 1710-11 (Davies 121), and 1718 Bangor deposed Beaumaris as the Post Office town (Davies 122). The

Post Office had been established in an adjoining building, formerly a print works, to the south around 1812 by John Rasbrook, who, on his retirement in 1834, leased the premises to the Castle Hotel.

By the time of the tithe map of 1840 a building is shown on the site of the present rear service wing, and a rear south-west wing to the north front wing has disappeared. The market-day print of 1856 (reproduced in White 1994 fig 12) shows the north wing with a central Doric porch.

Rebuilding took place in 1931 by Richard Hall, the Bangor architect, which involved reconstruction of the front entrance, and the addition of the art-deco touches to the dormer gables. The hotel closed in 1989.

4.3 Development of the building (after RCAHMW)

The first phase of the building comprised a north front wing of the late 17th/early 18th century, made up of hall and parlour, and entered by opposed doors into a cross-passage and with a rear service wing flanking the yard. The house was probably of two storeys with cellars beneath. It is likely that the thick walls and rough chamfered beams survive from this phase.

The second phase in the buildings history comprised the early-19th century remodelling by William Williams, including additions, probably a second floor. The geometric stair was probably added at this time, together with many of the present sash windows and several of the present six-panel internal doors on the upper floors. The stable accommodation was also enlarged, to an extent which may be illustrated by the John Wood plan of 1834.

Further alterations occurred from the 1830s to the mid 19th century. The hotel was transformed into a grand hotel, through the amalgamation and raising of the adjoining Post Office building on the south, and the construction of the present adjacent rear service wing, containing store rooms at cellar level, kitchen at ground floor level and servants' quarters on the first floor, possibly as shown on the Tithe plan of 1840. The type of masonry is not unlike early to mid-19th century structures, for instance, in Pembroke Royal Dockyard. The Dockyard area was further extended, and by 1889 it had acquired its present shape on plan, with the exception of rear accretions to the north wing, which began to appear by 1913.

The final major changes to the hotel prior to its closure in 1989 occurred c. 1931 under the Bangor architect Richard Hall; these comprised alterations to the ground floor, possibly to the basement and to the third floor in the north front wing and the second floor in the south front wing.

5.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING - RESULTS

5.1 Previous Archaeological Investigation

A pre-determination evaluation of the proposed development was carried out in January 1990 and the results described in *Archaeological Evaluation of the proposed development at Castle Hotel, High Street, Bangor (G1203)* (Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report, 1990). This was commissioned by the Enterprise Trust, through their agents James Brotherhood of Chester, ahead of previous proposals to develop the Castle Hotel site. Two trenches were excavated in the courtyard of the Hotel, but the floor of the courtyard was resting directly on natural clay, and no archaeological deposits were found. It was suggested in that report that the site of the buildings fronting on to the street was the most archaeologically sensitive area.

5.2 Examination of the Standing Remains (Stage 1)

The archaeological recording of the standing building concentrated on the earlier phases *i.e.* the original north wing with its associated rear service wing. Details were noted for other areas, notably the south or former Post Office wing, where they were considered to be relevant to the understanding of the building's development.

Basement: the basement under the original north wing was divided into two rectangular cells, one to the north and the other to the south, by a thick east-west wall. The south room contained two roughly chamfered ceiling beams, orientated east-west, and still, as far as it was possible to ascertain, *in situ*. A probable similar beam in the north room had been replaced with a steel girder. The cellars were found to be sunk into the natural clay.

Ground floor: the north wing had three (originally four) E-W orientated chamfered ceiling beams, each one c. 26cm high by 30cm in width, arranged roughly equidistant from one another. The eastern ends of the centrally located beams were found to be resting on steel girders. The removal of modern casing revealed sloping chamfer stops to all three beams, each with a 6cm chamfer. The chamfer stops on the parlour beam were more elaborate, with a curve to the sloping stop. The beam located over the parlour retained in addition to chamfer stops, two paired rectangular mortise holes situated towards the centre. An additional chamfer was arranged centrally before the fireplace on both sides of the beam over the hall. The beam on the south side of the former cross-passage retained evidence for a post and panel partition along its northern face, with at least four open-side mortises visible, each c. 40cm wide and hewn out of the lower angle of the beam's north side, and as a result interrupting an earlier chamfer. The mortises are likely to have taken the upright members of former partition. A later, probably 19th century partition beam, with three narrow rectangular mortise slots was found adjacent to the north side of the cross-passage, beneath a modern lath and plaster ceiling.

An area of walling to the west of the hall fireplace had been rebuilt with a mixture of stone and brick and a small square serving hatch inserted, later also blocked.

The rear service wing, now housing an early 19th century geometric staircase was found to retain a roughly hewn beam arranged north-south, its south end supported by a steel girder, put in to replace the south wall. The beam, which is 20cm in width, has a crude chamfer along its east edge (probably matched by another on its west, but obscured by the stairs) and a rectangular mortise socket a third of its length from the north wall.

First floor: four stop-chamfered beams cross the width of the north wing (east - west) at regular intervals of approximately 1.65m. The beams (27cm wide by 24cm deep) are similar to those on the ground floor with plain chamfer-stops. The lintels to doors and windows were found to be of reused timber, many containing round slots, possibly for wattle staves.

There is a further chamfered beam in the first floor ceiling of the rear service wing, similar to the beam on the ground floor and arranged roughly central on a north - south orientation.

Low in the south gable-end wall to either side of the projecting chimney breast in the south wing or former Post Office are two symmetrically placed brick relieving arches. The arches probably indicate the position of former window openings on the ground floor. There are further blind window bays in the upper storeys to the west of the chimney breast, while to the east there are indications of a matching window bay on the first floor, though now blocked and concealed.

Second floor: the upper sides of the four chamfered beams over the first floor of the north wing have a mortise slot at either end indicating the position of former roof principles. The mortise slot is rectangular (33cm long, 8.5cm wide and 12cm deep) with a gradual angle to the base of the slot. This suggests that the building was originally two storey, with cellars.

The outer walls narrow at first floor level, indicating a different phase of building. The north wall of the service wing also changes in width at the junction of the first and second floors, altering from 90cm to c. 55cm, visible in the window reveals of the stair window. In addition to the variation in the thickness of the walls, a marked difference in the style of the masonry is visible at this level, with the use of higher quality stone blocks and slight dressing of quoins in the upper storey.

Third floor: on this floor of the north-wing the remains of 19th century roof trusses could be seen preserved within the wall between rooms 33 and 34 (room numbers as on the plans supplied by Watkin Jones and Son Ltd); these presumably went out of use following the 1930s refurbishment. At the south end of this floor (*i.e.* south wall of room 30) this roof line is also visible as a diagonal line in the north wall between the fireplace and the east wall.

5.2 Examination of the Sub-surface Remains (Stage 2)

The recording of features discovered during ground disturbance following the demolition of the Castle Hotel is included in the following section. A programme of monitoring was established to determine the survival, nature and extent of any archaeological deposits which came to light as the result of ground works.

It was revealed that earlier ground surfaces had been removed during the construction of the building in c.1691 and by the subsequent additions and alterations. The levels of the top of the natural sub-soils were recorded, and these showed that the original ground surface probably sloped down steeply from the south both towards the cathedral and the Adda.

A number of stone lined culverts, associated with the Castle Hotel, were noted crossing the site. In addition two features of archaeological interest were noted in the south-west corner of the development area, approximately 10 m from the tower of the cathedral. A stone lined field drain of probable medieval or early post medieval date, 0.5 m wide and 0.4 m deep, was orientated north-west to south-east for a distance of 0.85m. This in turn had been cut into by a shallow circular pit, 2m in diameter and 0.85 m deep. This pit contained a quantity of pig bones within the lower fill with two sherds of 13th century pottery. These sherds of pottery were well abraded, implying that they had been in the ground for some time prior to deposition, and their presence within the context of the pit fill should be regarded as secondary. This merely infers that the shallow pit had been filled at any time after the 13th century up to the 16th or 17th century when the buildings noted on Speed's plan of 1610 are likely to have been constructed. Both the pit and the field drain were disturbed by the foundations of the demolished buildings and their fills were sealed by surfaces associated with those buildings. The upper surface of the pit fill lay 1.5 m below the cleared rubble surface. A section was drawn to scale to illustrate the relationship between these features, and their position recorded.

5.3 Watching Brief (Stage 3)

A watching brief was undertaken during the removal of the upper layers of the former council carpark to the rear of the Castle Hotel, to identify and record any surviving archaeological remains. The hard standing of the carpark was found to overly 19th century mixed deposits lying directly on the natural clay, including a shallow pit containing 19th century bottles. It is likely that this area originally formed part of the open element of the burgage plots in the area, and was built over during the latter part of the 19th century. It seems also probable that the sudden difference in ground surface height between this area and the ground surface beneath the hotel itself is due to the naturally sloping ground being cut away and levelled up in preparation for building construction during the 19th century; this has been further accentuated by the levelling of the area for the carpark, with the result that any earlier features have been removed.

6.0 SUMMARY

An examination of the former Castle Hotel during demolition confirmed the existence of an original rectangular structure of four bays, two bays occupied by a hall, and the lower two bays occupied by a parlour and a cross-passage. This structure was of two storeys with cellars, and the chamfered beams on the first floor contained mortise sockets angled for roof trusses. There was also evidence for another room behind the hall, in the position latterly occupied by the geometric stair. These structures all date to about 1600.

Monitoring of the layers immediately below the floor slabs of the former hotel revealed that the building of the hotel had removed all former traces of earlier buildings, with the exception of a stone-lined drain and a pit containing two pieces of Medieval pottery.

The former council carpark had been levelled to create level building areas during the latter part of the 19th century, and later for the carpark itself, and no features of an earlier date survived.

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