

GLAMORGAN-GWENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
CHEPSTOW CASTLE**

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CHEPSTOW CASTLE WATCHING BRIEF

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Summary

During this Watching Brief on the excavation of a cable trench, excavated by Swalec, within the scheduled area of Chepstow Castle, four areas produced archaeological material. The first was located south of the Lower Bailey and consisted of collapsed masonry with attached mortar. This is most probably the result of collapse from the damaged wall of the Lower Bailey that is currently supported by two buttresses. The second area was located below the central tower of the Middle Bailey. A masonry wall was identified lying directly underneath the north edge of the current tarmac footpath. Neither the structure or the finds identified a use for this structure. The third area consisted of a layer of crushed mortar located at the base of the trench, south of the Great Tower. No other features were identified with this structure and no finds were retrieved from the context. The last area was located west of the southwest tower of the Barbican. A bank is currently visible on the ground and it is believed that this represents the location of a portion of the missing town wall. A large quantity of stone was identified within this portion of the trench, but no mortar or other material was associated with it.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

1.1 Development proposal and commission

The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust was commissioned by SWALEC (South Wales Electricity plc) to carry out a watching brief on the laying of new 11,000 volt cable within the scheduled area of Chepstow Castle, Gwent, in fulfilment of the conditions of Scheduled Monument Consent as granted by CADW. The purpose of the work was to record features of archaeological interest, uncovered during the course of this work

1.2 Specification for the assessment

No specification was set. The work was carried out in accordance with GGAT's Assessment Guidelines and Excavation Recording Manual that conforms to the Institute of Field Archaeologists standard.

1.3 Scope of the report

The report describes the physical environment of the site (section 2), a brief history of the site (section 3), and the fieldwork results (section 4).

1.4 Abbreviations used in the report

Sites previously recorded in the county Sites and Monuments Record are referred to by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and National Grid Reference (NGR). References to documents and published works are given in brackets: The full titles will be found in the bibliography. The site is number 274, and the archaeological deposits are identified by their three-figure context numbers; and heights are given in meters Ordnance Datum.

2. Physical environment

2.1 Topography

The site, centred at ST 533 941, lies to the north of the medieval town of Chepstow, between Bridge street and the River Wye. The site is situated in the dell of the castle between two outcrops of Carboniferous Limestone and follows the northern side of the current footpath that runs east-west.

2.2 Surface geology

The natural soil profile in the area is a shallow topsoil overlying yellow clay and lias. The predominant geology is limestone, and it can be expected that the Dell will show signs of silting.

3. Site History

3.1 Chepstow Town

Prehistoric

The area around Chepstow seems to have been well populated during the Iron Age, with substantial hillforts at Piercefield, Lancout and the Bulwarks, all adjoining the Wye and within 3km of the centre of the town (Shoemith 1991, 7).

Roman

No Roman occupation sites have been identified within Chepstow, (the centre of Roman occupation in the area being Caerwent) but numerous finds over the last century (predominantly coins) indicate a presence in the area. A further indication of possible occupation was excavated in 1973-73, south of the Priory church (Shoemith 1991, 35), and consisted of three 1st Roman cremations.

Medieval

This period is discussed below; except the origin of the name, Chepstow. Both the castle and town were originally called Striguil as noted in the Domesday book (apparently a corruption of the Welsh 'ystraigyl'- 'the bend'), and it was not until the 14th century that it became known as Chepstow, chepe being a market and stow a place (Shoemith 1991, 7).

3.2 Chepstow Castle (Fig.2)

Chepstow Castle was built in three main stages although other alterations were made over its 600 year inhabited history, ending in 1690.

In the Domesday Book of 1086, it is stated that William fitz Osbern was the founder of Chepstow Castle between 1067-71. This initial construction consisted of what is now called the Upper and Middle Bailey, the most impressive structure being the Great Tower. This stands on the highest point and consists of a rectangular hall keep.

About 1115, Henry I granted Chepstow to the de Clare family, and it remained with them for most of the century, under the ownership of Gilbert de Clare until 1148, and then Richard de Clare until 1176. In 1176, when Richard died, the castle was passed to his daughter Isabella (Knight 1986, 5)

When Henry II became king, he married Isabella to William Marshall in reward for William's loyalty; the ownership of the castle then passed to him. William was a notable castle builder,

and he rebuilt the east curtain wall of the castle, with two round towers. This period of building saw the introduction of a fine creamy-yellow Jurassic limestone from the Bristol area, chosen because it could be easily carved, unlike the grey-white Carboniferous Limestone on which the castle was built.

William died in 1219 and was succeeded by his sons, all of whom had died childless by 1245. On the death of the last Marshall, their lands were divided amongst their sisters, Chepstow passing to the eldest, Maud, and on her death to her son, Roger Bigod II, earl of Norfolk. In 1270 he died and his lands including Chepstow were passed to his son Roger Bigod III who took an active interest in the marcher lordship. He not only strengthened the castle, especially the Barbican, but also surrounded Chepstow with a town wall (enclosing 53 hectares [130 acres] with a wall 1,217m in length).

Work on the castle was halted due to Welsh rebellions, but was resumed about 1278 when construction of a new hall range commenced in the Lower Bailey. This was followed between 1285-93 by Marten's Tower and between 1293-1300 by the enlargement of the Great Tower.

On the death of Roger Bigod the III in 1306, Chepstow passed into the hands of the king, who in turn granted Chepstow to his half-brother, Thomas de Brotherton. In 1338, the castle passed to de Brotherton's descendant Thomas Mowbray, duke of Norfolk. In 1403 his son John was ordered to garrison the castle against Owain Glyndwr, but in the event Owain's advance halted at Usk.

In 1485 the castle passed into the hands of William Herbert, Earl of Worcestershire and passed through his family (later the Dukes of Beaufort) until 1914. In the sixteenth century more alterations were made in the form of accommodation and to reflect the more peaceable age large windows were inserted in several parts of the castle.

During the Civil War the castle was in the hands of the Royalist, Henry Earl of Worcester. In 1643 the Parliamentary General William Waller advanced into Wales, but was unable to capture Chepstow Castle and was forced to retreat. In 1645, however, the king's position became hopeless, and, with the help of heavy artillery, the Royalist defenders of the castle were forced to surrender.

In 1646, during the second Civil War, the castle was seized by a local Royalist, Sir Nicholas Kemeys, who, when confronted by Cromwell's army (on its way to reduce Pembroke), refused to surrender. As a consequence, Cromwell left Colonel Ewer and his regiment (including heavy cannon) to reduce the castle, eventually breaching the wall near Marten's Tower, on the south side of the castle.

After the war, the lands of the Marquess of Worcester were declared forfeit, and Chepstow Castle was granted to Cromwell. The south wall was strengthened and the parapets of the wall were remodelled for muskets.

Chepstow remained a military garrison until 1690. Parts of the castle, including Marten's Tower, were still roofed and floored in the nineteenth century and part of the hall block in the Lower Bailey housed a resident custodian until the 1950s, when the owner made the predecessors of Cadw guardians of the monument.

4. Excavation results

4.1 Method

The fieldwork involved the excavation of a single trench by JCB and mini-digger. This trench followed the footpath to the south of the castle, and was cut through the entire length of the Scheduled area. The width of the trench was 0.30m, and it was excavated to a typical depth of 0.70m.

4.2 Features identified (Figs.2 and 3)

- Area 1:** This area of activity was located below the south wall of the Lower Bailey (Figs.2 and 3). The topsoil (001) was grass covered, consisted of a dark brown silty loam, and was 0.15m deep. Beneath this was a red-brown silty loam (002) 0.46m thick. Underlying 002 was an area of collapsed masonry (003) with white lime mortar attached to, and surrounding, the uncut Carboniferous limestone blocks. In addition, a small quantity of the yellow Jurassic Limestone was also identified.
- Area 2:** This area was located below the central tower of the Middle Bailey, north of the current footpath. The main features were uncovered in a slight deviation in the proposed line of the trench, cut to avoid a large concentration of tree roots. The footpath (004) consisted of tarmac overlying a rubble foundation (005) while, to the immediate north, the stratigraphy was similar to that mentioned above. The grass covered, dark-brown silty loam topsoil (006) was 0.14m deep and overlay the red-brown silty loam subsoil (007) that was 0.45m thick. A single wall (008 [Plate 1 and 2]), 2.7m in length (exposed) was uncovered; it was made of limestone with a lime mortar, 0.40m high (remaining), and lay underneath the rubble foundation 005. As a consequence, the context 007 abutted the wall 008. Also abutting the wall were three large stone slabs (009) that underlay 007. Underneath the stone slabs (009), and the wall (008), was a natural deposit of silty clay with embedded limestone (010). No mortar or finds were associated with this context.
- Area 3:** This area was located below the Great Tower. The dark brown topsoil (011) was 0.18m deep and this overlay the red-brown subsoil (012) that was 0.45m thick. Underlying this was a compacted layer of lime mortar (013), 2.10m in length. No other associated structural evidence was identified.
- Area 4:** This area was located west of the southwest tower of the Barbican. Before excavation a bank was identified

on a north-south alignment, that ended west of the Upper Gatehouse, and that disappeared south of the footpath. The topsoil (014) was 0.13m thick, and overlay the red-brown subsoil (015) that had a depth of 0.49m. Within the lower 0.20m of 015, abundant Carboniferous Limestone boulders were identified along with a small quantity of Jurassic Limestone. No mortar was identified from this context. Underlying this was the silty clay (016), again with frequent Carboniferous Limestone.

5. Finds:

- 002:** Modern glass
Oyster shell
Animal bone
Local red earthenware
Modern stoneware
- 007:** Alloy sheet fragment
Iron guttering bracket
Animal bone
Concrete with bitumen coating
Slate fragment
- 012:** Large iron spike
Oyster shell
Animal bone
Pantile
Local red earthenware
Modern ceramics

All those finds that are currently datable are of a modern date.

5.1 Mortar Samples

- 003:** Large lump of mortar (maximum thickness 0.35m), consisting of three layers of mortar:
- a: soft red-brown sandy mortar with charcoal flecks
 - b: hard white lime mortar with lime lumps
 - c: soft grey-brown sandy mortar with charcoal lumps
- 008:** Mixed hard grey-brown mortar with stones and soil lumps.

Discussion

003 is probably from a plastered wall; groups a and c are characteristically pre-1700 (early post medieval). Mortar b, if used structurally, would be typical of the later 18th century, although it could be earlier if used for a special purpose (eg wall plaster).

008 is characteristically early 19th century in date.

6. Conclusions

6.1 The excavation identified 4 areas of archaeological interest.

Area 1: The collapsed masonry and lime mortar found within the base of the trench in this area is possibly the result of damage caused during the siege of 1646, or part of the subsequent re-build (that is damaged due to subsidence).

Area 2: The wall and flagstone floor located in this area would suggest the presence of a building. The dimensions of the excavated trench, however, make positive identification impossible.

Area 3: The compacted lime mortar surface in this area again suggests a floor, but if this is the case, the absence masonry rubble within this area, suggests that the structure was wooden.

Area 4: This trench was cut through a bank thought to enclose the remains of the town wall. Although a large quantity of stone was uncovered in this area, the absence of mortar would suggest that this is a natural deposit. This is not to say that a portion of the wall does not exist in this area, but that the excavation did not locate it.

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Appendix one

**Archaeological Investigation
Specifications**

Chepstow Castle Watching Brief

No specification was set. The work was carried out in accordance with GGAT's Assessment Guidelines and Excavation Recording Manual that conforms to the Institute of Field Archaeologists standard.

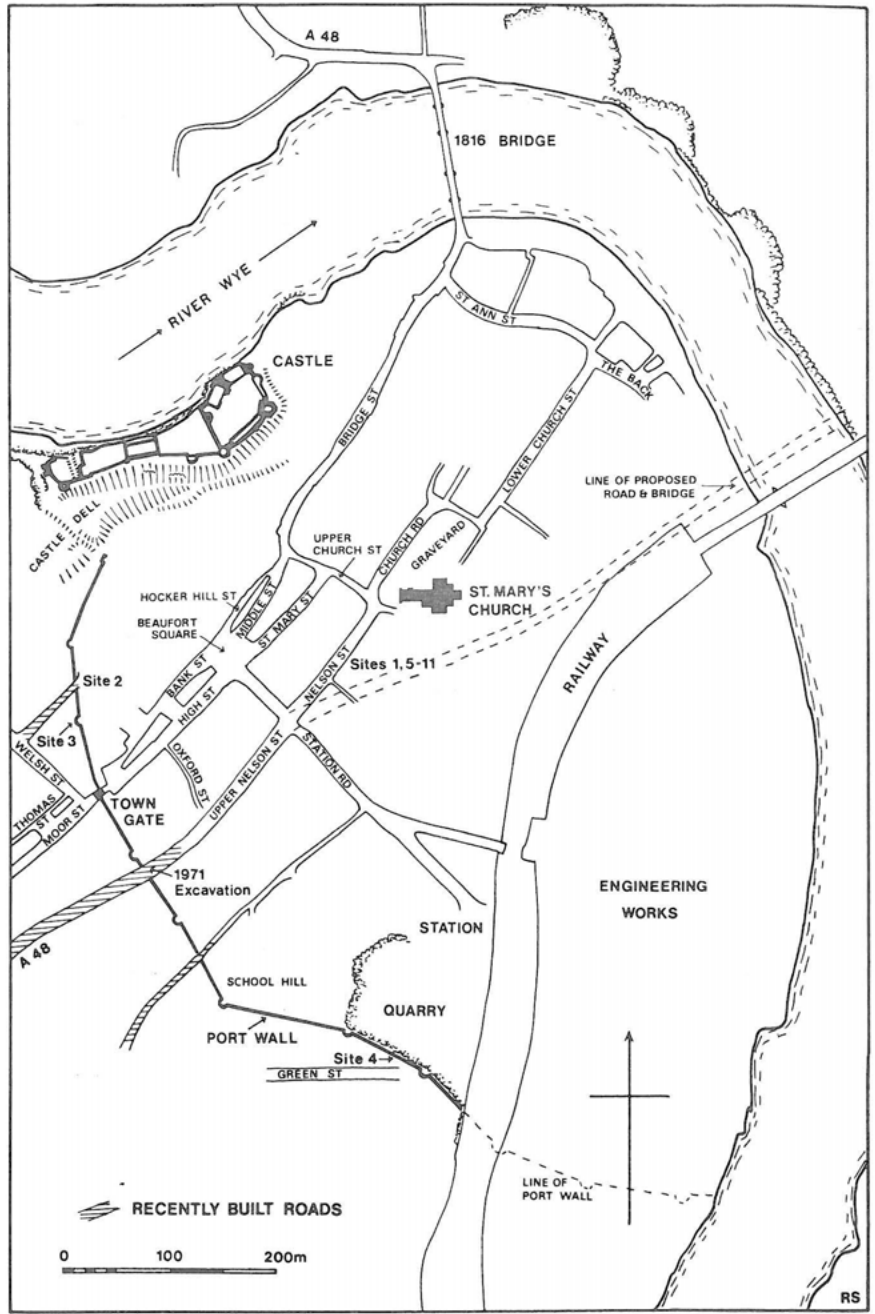
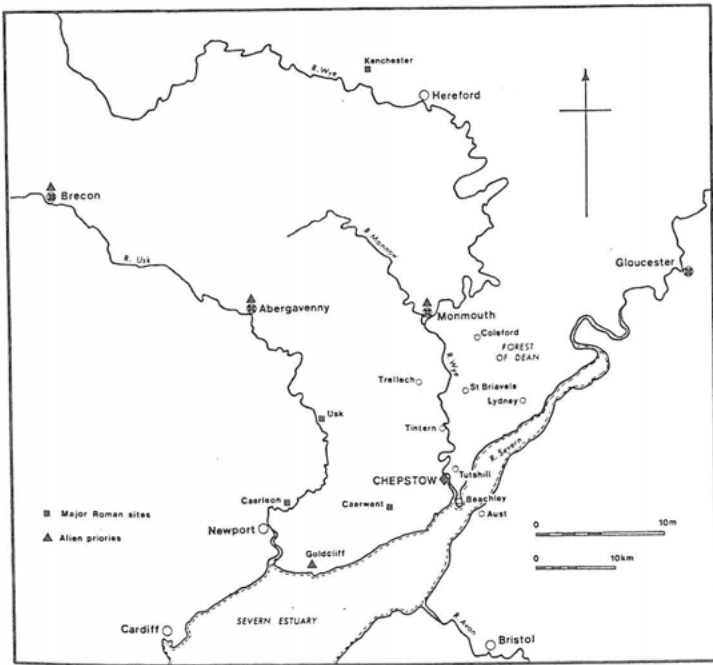


Figure 1: Location plan (after Shoemsmith 1991).

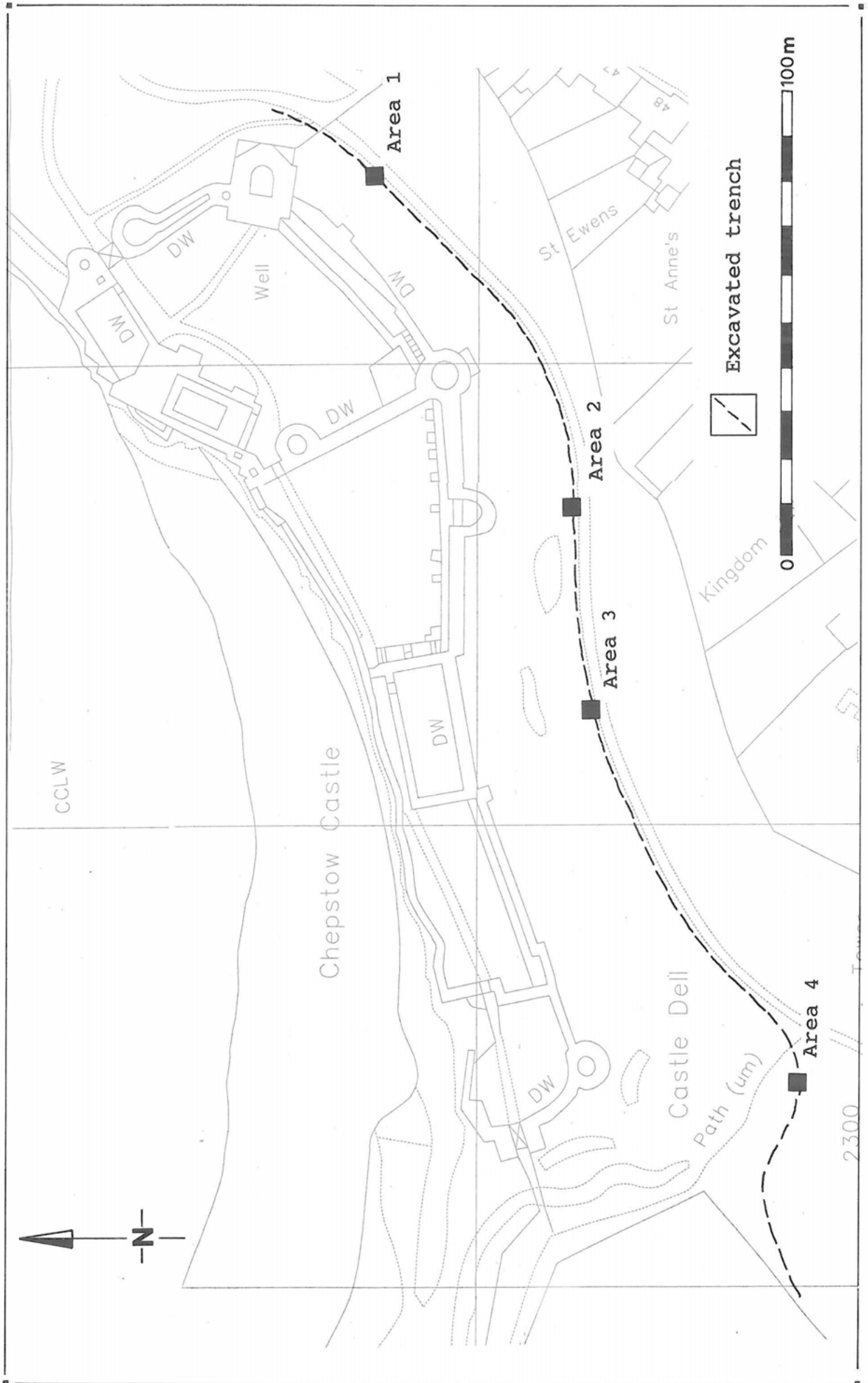


Figure 2: Trench location and site identification.

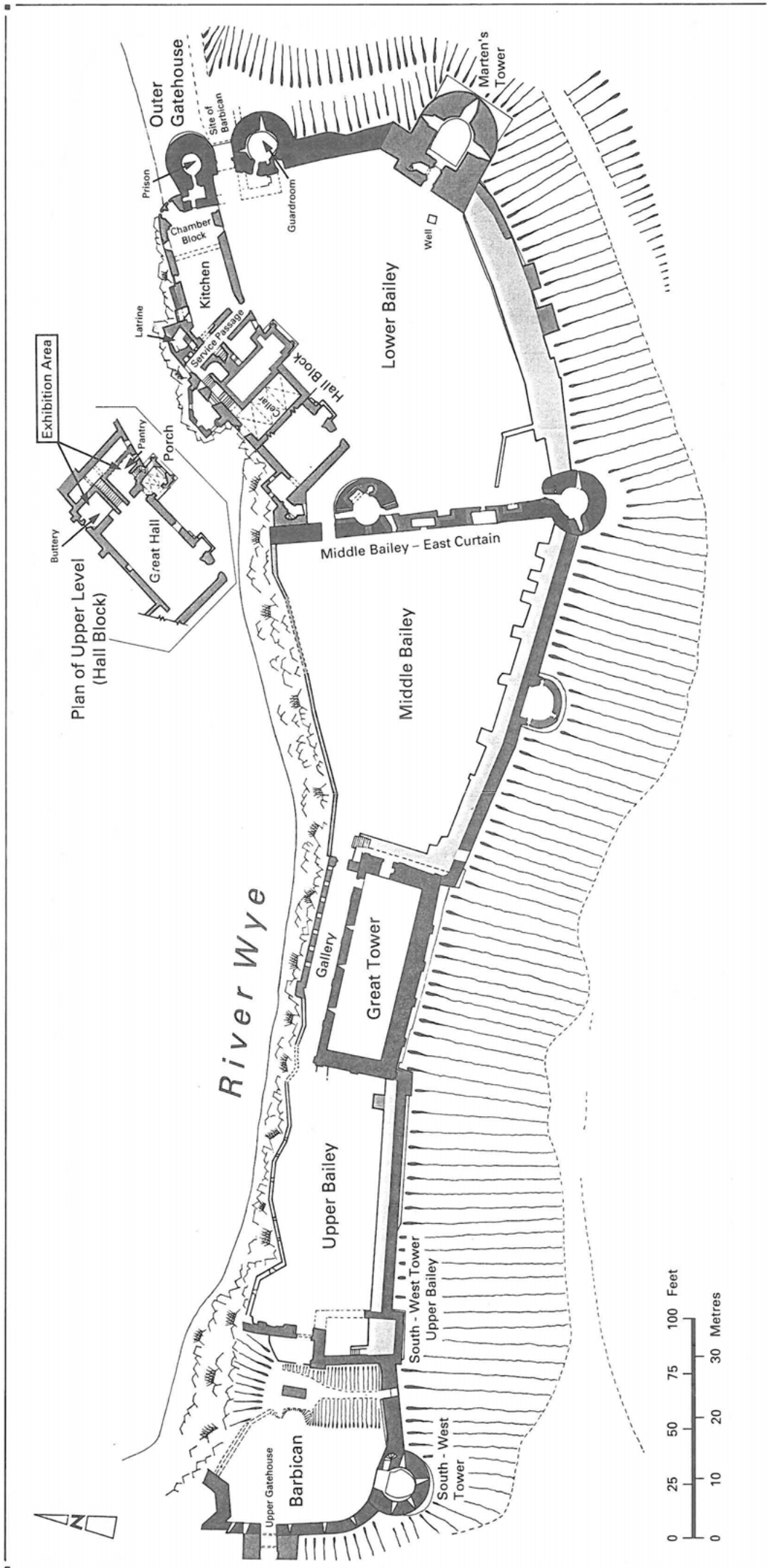


Figure 3: Chepstow Castle (after Knight 1986).



Plate 1: Section of wall located in Area 2.



Plate 2: Remains of the wall and flagstone floor in Area 2