

Farnham Castle, Farnham, Surrey

County Monument No 12848

Archaeological report on evaluation trenches along southern terrace wall

May 2006



David Graham

Introduction

On 29 March 2006 (letter ref HSD 9/2/8019) the Secretary of State gave consent to Farnham Castle Briefings Ltd to hand dig three small evaluation trenches immediately inside a section of the southern curtain wall that was showing signs of instability. The wall here retains the terrace to the south of the main castle buildings. The trenches were needed to allow a structural engineer to examine the stratigraphy inside the retaining wall and recommend appropriate remedial works. An archaeological condition was attached to the SM consent and this report covers the result of that element of the works.

The Trenches

Three trenches (labelled A, B and C on fig 1) were hand dug by staff from the castle along the western third of the southern retaining terrace wall and the open trenches were recorded by the author.

Trench A was located 4.6m east of the end of the curve at the southern corner of the circuit wall. The trench extended 0.9m back from the inner face of the wall and was approximately 1.2m wide. The eastern section showed that below the topsoil was a band of a gravel/tile/mortar mix which, in turn, overlay a loose deposit of largish clunch rubble and sandy mortar that continued below the bottom of the trench which had been dug to a depth of 0.9m.

Trench B was located 1.6m east of trench A, extended 1.43m back from the terrace wall and was 1.37m wide. The eastern section was basically similar to that of trench A, except that the greater 0.5m northwards extension of the trench revealed the presence of a brick wall. This ran parallel and to the north of the existing retaining wall, but had been largely removed during the digging of the trench, only remaining visible in section and running across the bottom of the cut.

Trench C was of a similar size to trench B and lay 8.85m to the east of it, more or less opposite the western side of Wayneflete's Tower. Once again the eastern section was stratigraphically similar to those of the other trenches, except that, in this case, the parallel inner wall had been left intact (figs 2, 3 & 4). It (context 8 on fig 2) was constructed of hand-made, wire-cut bricks (9½ x 4½ x 2½ inches) laid in a modified English Garden Wall bond and mortared together with a buff-coloured mortar. The bulk of the fill to the south of the wall again consisted of a loose mix of clunch rubble and sandy mortar (context 6), while to the north of the wall (context 7) the fill consisted largely of soil with the occasional lump of clunch. A band of deliberately mortared clunch (context 5) had been poured between the top of the wall and the loose clunch deposit (context 6), presumably either to act as a filler or possibly as a footing for a wider above-ground extension to the wall. A layer of soil (context 3) overlay contexts 5 and 6 and perhaps represents a past ground surface associated with the existing retaining wall. In any event, at some stage this layer was capped with a band of gravel and tile (context 2), in turn to be covered by the existing topsoil (context 1). Though slightly amorphous, the area above the wall (context 4) appears to be a demolition deposit, probably associated with the removal of the upper levels of the wall.

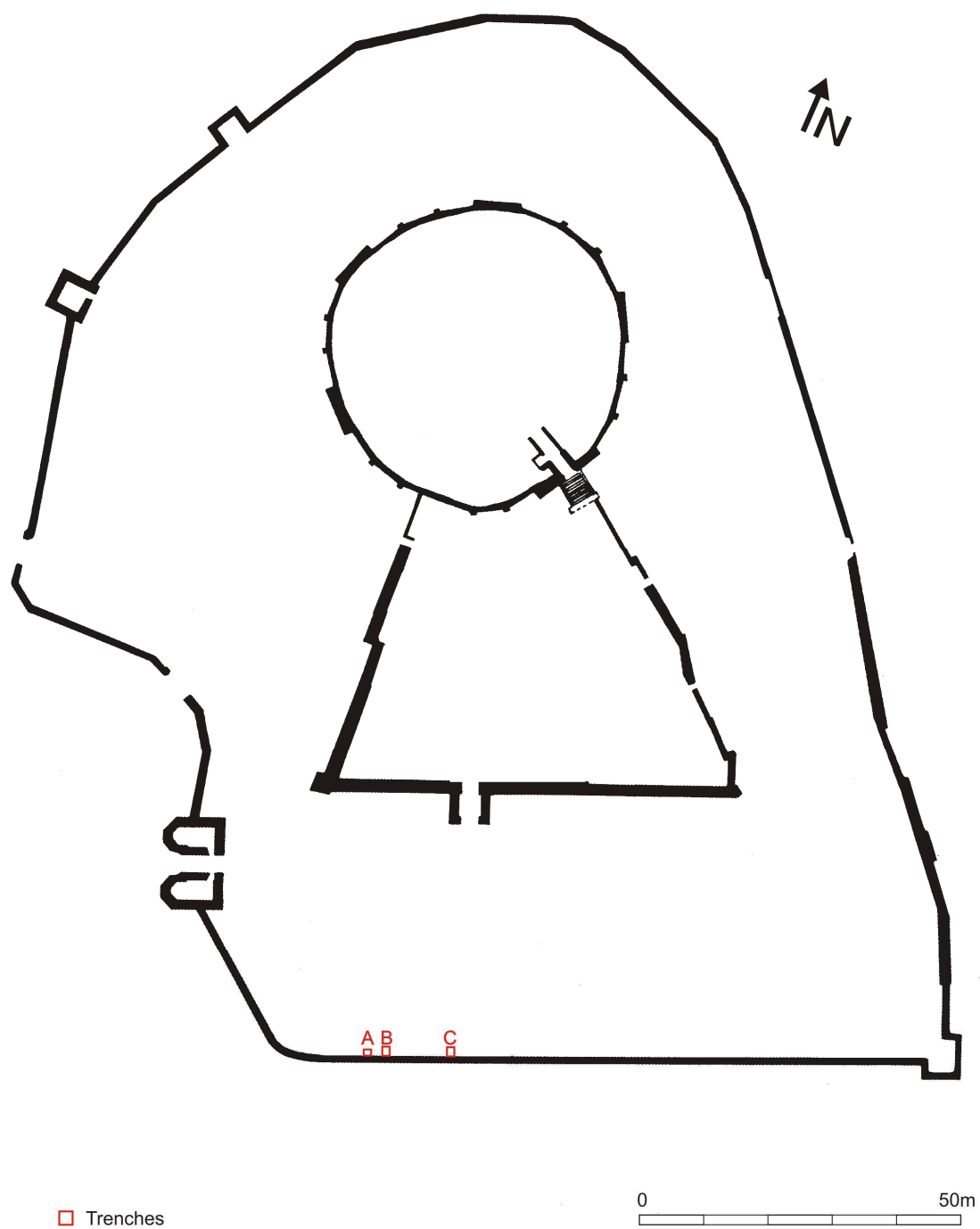
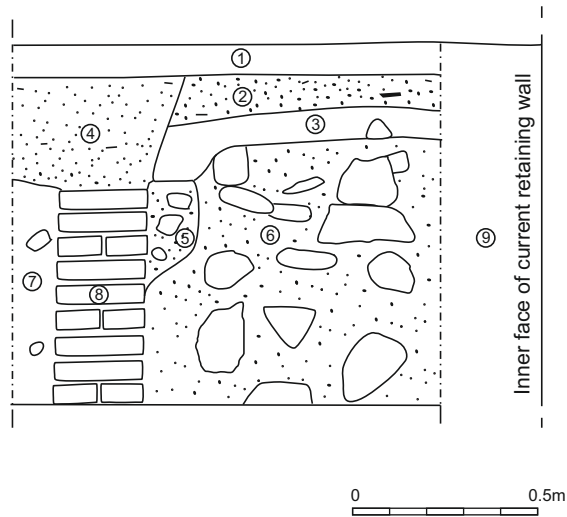


Fig 1 Farnham Castle. Location of exploratory trenches to rear of southern retaining wall



- 1 Topsoil
- 2 Gravel/tile/mortar
- 3 Soil
- 4 Loose mortar demolition layer
- 5 Mortared rubble infill
- 6 Loose backfill of clunch rubble and sandy mortar
- 7 Soil/clunch rubble mix
- 8 Brick wall
- 9 Unexcavated baulk

Fig 2 Farnham Castle. Trench C eastern section



Fig 3 Farnham Castle. Photograph of wall (Context 8) in trench C



Fig 4 Farnham Castle.
Photograph of trench C eastern
section; wall (context 8) on left.



Fig 5 Farnham Castle. 1830 engraving

Conclusion

The brick wall, visible in the two larger trenches, running parallel to and just over a metre north of the existing retaining wall, is almost certainly the remains of an earlier, now fossilised, retaining wall. While no precisely datable material of any sort was recovered, the size and nature of the bricks are not inconsistent with a construction period in the late 17th or 18th centuries. An engraving dated 1830 (fig 5) of the front of Farnham Castle shows a retaining wall that is visibly different from the one that exists today and it may be that the recently discovered brick wall represents part of this structure. A careful examination of the clunch rubble that formed part of the rubble infill between the two walls failed to produce any evidence that the stone had been worked. It is therefore unclear where this material came from, but it may relate to some phase of demolition works at the castle.

As the three trenches were all dug to a depth of 0.9m it is not possible to say what happens below this level, except that both the brick wall and its associated deposits appear to continue to greater depths. Nor is it clear from the trenches whether the existing retaining wall or its predecessor follow the line of the medieval curtain wall or whether the latter lies further to the north under the present lawn.