

FURTHER EXCAVATIONS AT TAUNTON CASTLE, 1964

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Before the conversion, in the autumn of 1964, of the former entrance-hall of Taunton Castle into an extension of the Society's Library, considerable repairs were necessary. These included a new floor and the replacement of decayed plaster on the walls. An opportunity was thereby afforded to carry out a small excavation and to examine any exposed masonry before the walls were replastered.

Extensive alterations were carried out by Sir Benjamin Hammet between 1785 and 1789, when he converted this part of the Castle into the Judge's Lodgings.¹ A new floor was made 1 ft. 6 in. below the medieval level, though excavation was carried down an additional nine inches or more, in order to take the joists supporting the floorboards. Nearly all medieval features were obliterated or masked.

The objects of the 1964 excavation were to determine:

1. The relation of the structure of the entrance-hall to the twelfth-century subvault on the north-west and to the adjoining range on the south-east.
2. The date of its construction.

The St. George Gray Room, as it is now called, is situated at the angle between the Camera (now the Somerset Room) and the Chapel (now the Society's Library) ranges,² where the course of the Inner Moat changes from E.-W. to SE.-NW. Its internal plan is a parallelogram with sides about 15 ft. 6 in. by 14 ft. 6 in. (Fig. 1 a), the longer walls forming the north-west and south-east sides. It is roofed with a barrel-vault of stone, exposed when the post-medieval plaster was channelled for electric wiring; its axis is NW.-SE.

The NW. wall, which is five feet thick, is pierced by a contemporary doorway opening into the subvault of the Camera,³ which has been attributed elsewhere to the episcopate of William Giffard (1107-1129).⁴ It is part of the structure of the subvault.

The SW. wall, which is six feet thick, contained a doorway (now a window), which opened into the garden on the site of the Inner Moat, filled in *c.*1790.

The south-east end of the room now terminates in a round-headed arch, nearly as wide and high as the room itself; it opens into the Chapel range and the SW. round tower (now the Committee Room).

The NE. wall varies in thickness from a little over ten feet at its north-west end to eight feet at its south-east end. Its exterior face, which forms the south-west side of the Inner Bailey, is in line with the north-east face of the wall dividing the Great Hall from the Camera and its subvault. Its interior face is parallel with that of the

¹ C. A. R. Radford and A. D. Hallam, *Proc. S.A.S.* 98 (1953), ii, 77.

² *Ibid.* 56.

³ *Ibid.* 61.

⁴ *Ibid.* 62.

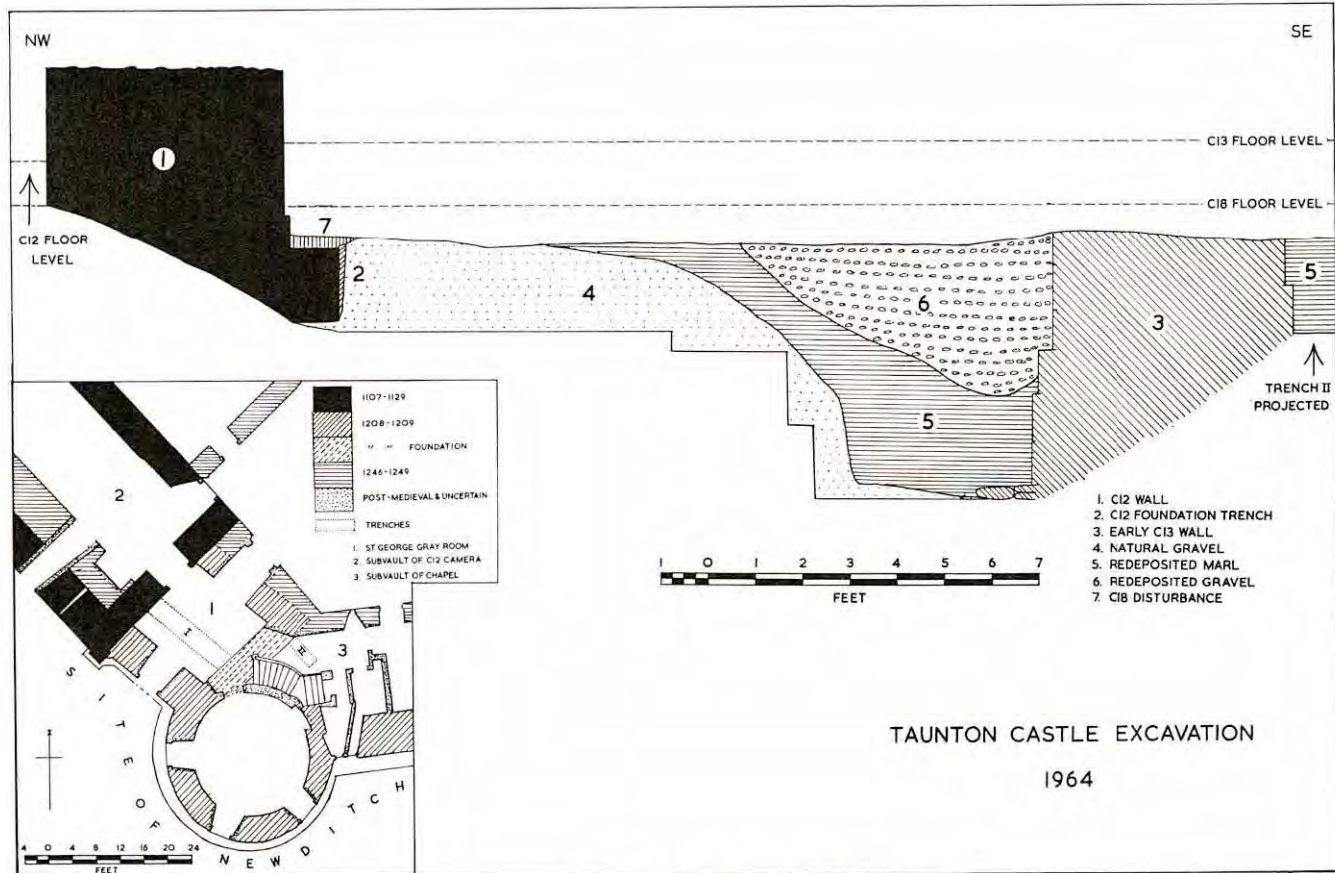


FIG. 1a. (below left) Plan of S.W. part of Taunton Castle.
b. (above) Trench I, section through St. George Gray Room.

SW. wall (Fig. 1a). It is pierced by the nineteenth-century front door, which is itself on the site of an earlier opening. The south-east return of the doorway is partly faced with Ham stone ashlar with diagonal tooling. The ashlar facing extends 3 ft. 5 in. from the inner face of the wall, into which it is bonded. A scar at the base of the ashlar marks the original floor level. Removal of plaster revealed an area of brick patching 1 ft. 6 in. wide, which was succeeded on its outer side by 3 ft. 9 in. of lias rubble, now, for the most part, concealed by the nineteenth-century Ham stone door-case (Pl. VII b).

The present width of the doorway is seven feet. Inspection of the masonry showed that the original opening had been widened, as the corresponding ashlar facing, which would have been expected on the north-west return, was missing. The existing return is faced on its inner side with post-medieval brickwork 4 ft. 8 in. wide, which is continued round the corner along the inner face of the wall for a distance of 1 ft. 7 in. The remaining 4 ft. 11 in. consists of lias rubble, cut off on the outer side by the Ham stone door-case. The significance of the brick patching will be referred to later.

The removal of the eighteenth-century wooden floor exposed the footings of the walls for most of the way round. It also revealed the foundation, 4 ft. 10 in. wide, of a wall extending across the room beneath the archway at the south-east end. The masonry of this foundation was bonded into the NE. and SW. walls, and was therefore contemporary with them. The responds and soffit of the arch were, on removal of some of the plaster, seen to be of brick. This work must be attributed to Hammett, who, in the course of his alterations, evidently replaced the SE. wall by an arch, perhaps to make a more spacious staircase-hall.

The doorway in the SW. wall, leading into the garden, was also brick-lined, and cut the original footing. This must also be attributed to Hammett.

Plaster was removed from the north-west ends of the NE. and SW. walls respectively at their junction with the twelfth-century NW. wall. In both cases a straight joint was disclosed (Pl. VII a). This part of the Castle, then, must post-date the twelfth-century subvault of the Camera.

A *terminus post quem* has therefore been established for the construction of this building. More precise dating is possible.

1. The difference in orientation of this part of the Castle in relation to that of the Camera and again to that of the Chapel range and Inner Gatehouse must have been governed by the course of the Inner Moat, which has been shown elsewhere to be datable to 1208-9⁵ and to be equated with the 'New Ditch' of the Winchester Pipe Roll for that year. The tooling on the Ham stone dressings of the outer arch of the Inner Gatehouse — the inner arch is late medieval — and the style

⁵ *Ibid.* 68-70.

of the arch itself point to a date close to that of the 'New Ditch', so that there can be little doubt that the curtain wall on either side of the Inner Gatehouse can be identified with the 'New Wall' of the Pipe Roll.

2. The ashlar facing on the south-east return of the NE. doorway has been shown above to be contemporary with the wall, and therefore with the building. The diagonal tooling on the ashlar should be compared with that on the Ham stone dressings of the arch of the Inner Gatehouse rather than with that on the twelfth-century doorway opening into the subvault of the Camera as previously suggested.⁶

We can then date the building to 1208-9, since its SW. wall is part of the 'New Wall' and its SE. and NE. walls have been shown above to be contemporary with the 'New Wall'.

It must be emphasized that this dating applies to the ground floor only; the Ham stone window dressings of the Camera, part of which occupies the upper floor, are of a different type and indicate a date of construction approximately the same as that of the Great Hall: i.e. 1246-7.⁷ The same considerations apply to the Chapel range; here the tooling on the Ham stone dressings of the surviving contemporary window in the N. wall of the subvault of the former Chapel is comparable with that on the window dressings in the Great Hall and Camera. This dating is confirmed by the Pipe Rolls, which record the building of the Camera in 1247-8 and the Chapel in 1248-9.⁸

The presence of brick patching, referred to above, on the north-west return of the present front doorway can be explained as making good after the removal, when the opening was enlarged, of the ashlar facing, which would have been, like that on the opposite return, bonded into the wall. Its width in the return, 4 ft. 8 in. corresponds closely with the thickness of the uppermost surviving course of the SE. wall. The brick patching next to the existing ashlar facing on the south-east return, the width of which, added to that of the ashlar, amounts to 4 ft. 11 in., could be interpreted as the filling of the scar made when the Ham stone door or window case was removed (VII b).

The external face of the NE. wall is flush with that of the Camera above. The latter can now be dated to 1247-8. The NE. wall of the ground floor must then be composite, as the ashlar facing on the inner side of the present entrance is manifestly earlier in style than the window dressings in the Camera above, and has, in fact, been shown above to be datable to 1208-9. The outer edges of the brickwork patching in the returns of the entrance indicate, it is suggested, the junction between the two components of the wall. This gives a

⁶ *Ibid.* 62.

⁷ *Ibid.* 70, where the date is given as 1245-6. Mr. T. J. Hunt informs me that the work was actually carried out in 1246-7.

⁸ I am indebted to Mr. Hunt, for this information.

thickness for the earlier part of the wall of between 4 ft. 8 in. and 4 ft. 11 in., which is closely comparable with that of the SE. wall, the uppermost surviving part of which is 4 ft. 10 in. thick.

When the Camera was reconstructed in 1247-8 it was extended beyond its twelfth-century subvault in a south-easterly direction, the early thirteenth-century building becoming the subvault of the extension. If the extension had followed the lines of its subvault the resulting Camera would have had a very awkward shape. By continuing the line of its NE. wall in a straight line to the south-east a far more commodious chamber was formed; but to support the extension of the NE. wall it was necessary to add to the thickness of the wall of the subvault below it (Fig. 1a). The difference in alignment of the NE. wall of the subvault and of that of the Camera accounts for the diminution in thickness of the composite wall as it is followed to the south-east.

The dating of the building to the first decade of the thirteenth century (nearly thirty years before the rebuilding of the Camera) does not in itself invalidate the suggestion made elsewhere⁹ that it served as a fore-building containing a staircase leading to the twelfth-century Camera. In order to test this a trench was dug from the base of the NW. wall to the foundation of the SE. wall (Fig. 1 b). No traces of foundations were revealed on the line of the trench, nor did inspection of other parts of the floor disclose any.

Trench I, when completed, showed that the twelfth-century NW. wall was built on undisturbed river-gravel. The footing projected 1 ft. 3 in. from the face of the wall; its uppermost course had been cut back in the eighteenth century to within two inches of the face. The base of the wall was 3 ft. 7 in. below the thirteenth-century floor level. The section in the trench showed that the surface of the natural probably sloped gently from the NW. wall. At about 8 ft. the gradient increased, perhaps indicating the position of the tail of the pre-Conquest bank discovered under the Great Hall in 1952. At about 10 ft. 6 in. this slope was cut by the foundation trench of the SE. wall. The foundation of the SE. wall was built of lias and had a stepped footing. Its base was seven feet below the thirteenth-century floor level — that of the twelfth-century NW. wall was only 3 ft. 7 in. below.¹⁰ The foundation trench and the sloping ground had been levelled up with a quantity of re-deposited marl, containing occasional human bones, with a final layer of sterile river gravel, to the thirteenth-century floor level.

It was not possible to continue the trench on the other side of the wall, owing to the presence of the modern stone staircase; but a small trench (Trench II) was dug, through redeposited marl, at the north-east end of the other side of the wall to a depth of two feet.

⁹ Radford and Hallam, *op. cit.*, 61-62.

¹⁰ A section of this foundation has been left exposed in a concrete-lined pit under the floor of the St. George Gray Room.

This exposed an offset one foot below the uppermost surviving course of masonry. On the assumption that there were one or more lower offsets, as on the other side, the thickness of the wall at its base would be about six feet.

The junction of the SE. wall with the adjacent N. wall of the subvault of the Chapel is obscured inside and out by eighteenth-century facing; but it has been shown above that the Chapel range (except for the curtain wall against which it is built) can be dated to 1248-9.

The building sequence can now be summarized as follows:

1. The construction of the subvault of the Camera, *c.*1107-1129.
2. The excavation of the 'New Ditch' and the building of the 'New Wall', including the St. George Gray Room, 1208-9.
3. The reconstruction and extension of the Camera, with the thickening of the NE. wall of the subvault of the extension and the thickening internally of the SW. wall of the twelfth-century subvault of the Camera to take the barrel vault, 1247-8.
4. The construction of the Chapel range, 1248-9.

The writer carried out this excavation on behalf of the Governing Body of the Somerset County Museum and the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. He wishes to thank Mr. R. C. Sansome and Mr. C. A. Cookson for all the assistance they gave him, and also Mr. J. D. L. Fleetwood for making a photographic record.