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Tickhill Castle Revisited: An Assessment of The Repair Strategy

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## Tickhill Castle revisited

On a recent revisit it was encouraging to see that conservation work carried out on a ruined South Yorkshire castle in the 1980s had stood the test of time.



*A doorway in the north bailey wall, before and after repair*

The early 1980s were troublesome times in South Yorkshire. Nestled between coalmining villages, Tickhill seemed an idyllic backwater, complete with duck pond and overgrown medieval castle. The miners' strike formed a curious context for a programme of repairs with pitched battles with the police at nearby Maltby and views from the castle motte towards the Nottinghamshire pits ignoring the call for strike action.

Although never formally open to the public, Tickhill Castle has been in possession of the crown since the middle ages as part of the Duchy of Lancaster. Established as a motte and bailey with timber defences by the De Buisli family, the castle will have had a significant role in the cruel subjugation of the north soon after the Norman Conquest. A stone gatehouse and polygonal keep were added in the 12th century, and the bailey encircled with a thick wall of local magnesian limestone. The proximity of the Great North Road added to the strategic importance of the castle and its use in most of the major medieval conflicts.

The castle was slighted after the Civil War but the large house within the bailey built by the Hansby family was allowed to remain. The keep was dismantled down to the plinth and the bailey wall was breached. Subsequently the castle was leased by the Lumley family, who was probably responsible for the insertion of Georgian windows on the front of the house and

the landscaping of the ruins. The Norman gatehouse, complete with crude figurines and diaper ornamentation, also managed to survive. It can be seen from the village duck pond. One suggestion is that some of the stonework for the gatehouse may have been from the church at nearby Dadesley, deserted after the conquest. Tickhill grew adjacent to the new castle.

It was not just the mining community facing great changes in the 1980s. The Tory government was making great changes to the civil service. The formation of English Heritage coincided with the restoration work at Tickhill. South Yorkshire County Council, initially responsible for the archaeological oversight, was under threat of abolition at the time. Initial discussions regarding the future of the castle began in 1983 between Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council and the Duchy of Lancaster. It was decided that a programme of repairs would be essential, whatever the long-term plans for the castle. English Heritage was brought in to the negotiations.

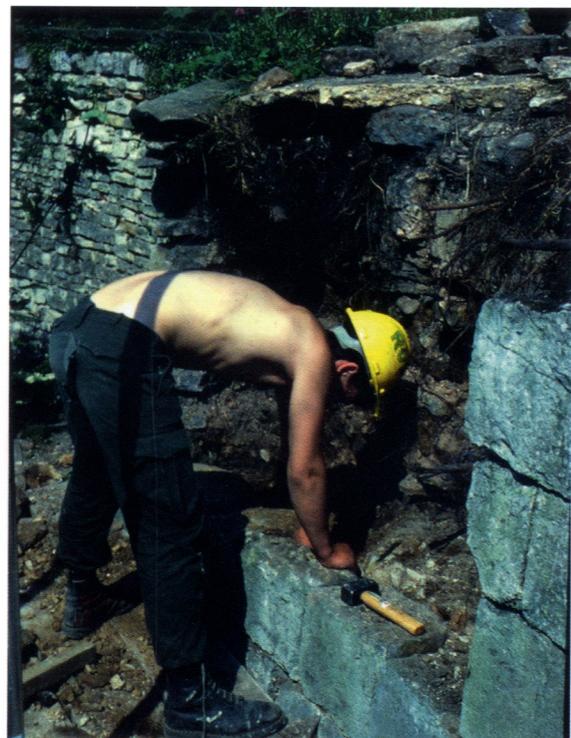
An imaginative scheme was set in place for a locally recruited workforce to be trained by the highly skilled English Heritage team inherited from the old Ministry of Works. Derek Latham Associates was given oversight over the applications for scheduled monument consent.

An untrained team of young surveyors was recruited



*Left: Recording the inside of the Gatehouse using planning frames*

*Right: Removing invasive root systems from the bailey wall beneath the old cement capping*



and funded by the Manpower Services Commission, and supervised by the author on behalf of the County Archaeological Service. The recording began in the late summer of 1983. Ten-metre stretches of masonry were drawn at 1:20 in advance of a phased repair, starting with the bailey wall. A manual system of drawing was used by creating a one-metre string grid across the walls and a wooden frame positioned in front of each square. The strings on the frames were at 20cm intervals to make it easy for the surveyors to record the information on graph paper. For taller sections of masonry a primitive form of rectified photography was used, with the grid transferred to the photographs printed up to 1:20.

The drawings were passed to Derek Latham Associates to form part of a repair specification, as part of the submission for consent. The young architect at Latham's was John Goom, a former SPAB scholar with a particular interest in mortars. After discussions with the training team and with advice from English Heritage specialist Ray Stockdale, a special mix was devised which included special lime imported from Italy. The rediscovery of pure lime mortars was still in its infancy, but there was a genuine desire to create a mortar that would be softer than the conventional practice of the time and to respect the physical properties of the magnesian limestone.

Earlier repairs to the castle had used cement-based mortars. The tops of the walls had been capped with a very hard mortar containing round quartzite pebbles, affectionately known as 'scabby cap'. It had been subject to significant splitting, caused by slight differential movement of the walls, and invaded by plants and trees, especially where the capping was thinned on top of the ashlar facings. One plant that had been particularly invasive was Valerian, whose large tubers

swelled as the plants died back each autumn. Trees had also become established on some of the masonry, requiring some of the ashlars to be removed for the core of the wall to be repaired. A system of letters was used to identify courses and each stone numbered to ensure correct reinstatement. The old capping was replaced by cambered stonework set in mortar 'rough racking', to ensure that water was kept away from the core of the walls.

Subsequent repairs continued until 1987 with the consolidation of the plinth that once supported the keep. The slopes of the motte were being badly affected by the weight of mature trees that were eventually felled. The slopes were consolidated using plants with well-developed root systems, such as periwinkle. Further work to the walls following a spiral path leading up the motte were carried out in 2005-6. Further repairs, including sock anchors to some of the curtain walling and consolidation of the brick wall to the rear of the house, were also carried out in this most recent phase.

Unfortunately, public access to the castle is still limited as the house within the bailey continues to be occupied as a private residence. But the gatehouse can be seen from close quarters from the road and there are occasional open days. It was on one such open day that some members of the team revisited the site and were able to make an assessment of the repairs carried out 25 years ago.

It was encouraging to see that the mortars used in the 1980s had stood the test of time and had prevented significant plant recolonisation. The replacement stone to the doorway through the curtain wall has also mellowed, while still evident as an honest repair. The more recent work from 2005-6 using authentic lime mortars appears to have been successful too.

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