**Norwich Castle: Excavations and Historical Survey, 1987-98, Parts I and II (2009) by Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NA) and Norfolk Historic Environment**

“In response to the threat of the its redevelopment for a retail centre – named Castle Mall – a large scale excavation was undertaken by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit between 1987 and 1991.”

(The reasons for the location of the site within its surroundings)

“The city is dominated by two areas of high ground: Mousehold Heath to the north-east and the long stretch of the Ber Street ridge to the south… The Norman castle was placed at the end of the Ber Street ridge, where the underlying geology is Beeston chalk overlain by Norwich crag (a Pleistocene deposit of sands, gravels and clay).”

“…in the Liber Eliensis (Book of Ely) in the 980s when the Abbot of Ely was purchasing land in Cambridge (he) was assured ‘that Cambridge and Norwich and Ipswich and Thetford were of such liberty and dignity and if anyone bought land there he did not need witnesses’. This implies that Norwich had acquired considerable statues by the late 10th Century.”

“Norwich was selected as the site of a major royal castle between c.1067 and 1075 due to a combination of financial, political and geographical factors. By the time of the Conquest, it was the fourth largest town in England and undoubtedly there was also a symbolic aspect to the construction of its castle.”

“Domesday Book (1086) records a figure of between 1,320 and 1,518 inhabitants, suggesting a real figure of between five and ten thousand. Domesday also records between forty-nine and fifty-four churches and chapels…”

“Domesday Book describes the settlement of the relevant area of Norwich prior to the construction of the castle and indicates a total of 98 properties on the selected site, suggesting that the castle was built upon a fairly densely settled part of the pre-Conquest town.”

“By 1066, the borough of Norwich was large and thriving; the mercantile centre of a rich agricultural area, with numerous churches. It had become the fourth largest town in England, its population probably numbering between 5,000 and 10,000.”

“Many Norman castles were sited on interfluvial ridges scapred to form the base of the motte with a series of transverse earthworks used to define baileys. The siting of Norwich Castle was influenced by the position of the Great Cockey stream, which had previously formed the western boundary of the main focus of Late Saxon settlement.”

(When and why people first created the site)

“Castles were the bases for the advance of the Norman Conquest and were also sited in vulnerable areas, of which East Anglia was one: ‘the strategic importance and military vulnerability of East Anglia must have been apparent to the English government throughout the eleventh century’ (Heslop 1994)”.

“Norwich’s large population would have provided a ready-made workforce. Little wonder that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle speaks of a populace ‘greatly oppressed…with castle-work’”.

“Norwich’s first castle probably consisted of a timber tower or ‘donjon’ on a small motte, protected by a palisade, with a ditch isolating it from the slope of a hill.”

(The ways in which the site has changed over time)

CASTLE

“A masonry great tower or donjon (often previously termed the ‘keep’) probably replaced its timber forerunner on an enlarged motte between c.1094 and c.1121-2 and the castle’s earliest use as a royal residence is documented in the early 12th Century.”

“Construction of the castle increased Norwich’s status and it now became the Norman centre of royal power and administration for Norfolk and Suffolk, a role which continued in varying form until 1805. As at many major castles, Norwich would have fulfilled the combined roles of high status residence, military strongpoint, judicial centre and seat of local government, armoury, gaol and treasury… Norwich Castle’s large defensive circuit would not only have housed the garrison, probably sizeable at the outset, but also provided a place of refuge for local burgesses, their goods and livestock. The castle baileys were occasionally used as a shelter by the city’s Jew’s, who were the king’s property and the sheriff’s responsibility, and were largely housed in a ‘Jewry’ to the west of the castle.”

PRISON

“The new gaol occupied the whole of the upper baily (i.e. the top of the Castle Mound) and was surrounded by a castellated wall of Aberdeen granite twenty feet high, leaving a space about twenty feet wide of a public promenade round the edge of the mound.”

SHIREHALL

“A new Shirehall was built near where the old civil war platform had been at te foot of the north-east part of the Hill. The neo-Tudor building by William Wilkins junior (built 1822-23) was constructed just before the main entrance and perimeter wall of the gaol (c.1825). It was first used in 1823. Two new wings were added in 1846 and it was enlarged again in 1886… The County Court continued to site here for another 20 years until a new Crown Court was built near Whitefriars Bridge. (It has) now been converted to form offices fot the Norfolk Museums Service.”

(The diversity of activities and people associated with the site)

“The donjon was used mainly as a prison by c.1300, a role which was to continue until its conversion to a museum in 1886. Prisoners had been held there, however, since the reign of Henry I (1100-1135), considerable expenditure on the gaol having been made in the late 12th and 13th centuries.”

“A small group of burials was recorded at the top of the castle mound, comprising the remains of seven prison inmates (six adults and a child) who had been buried little ceremony during the 17th Century.”

“Although limited in terms of structural remains, date from the late 11th and 12th centuries at Castle Mall indicates crop-processing and storage, limited amount of both ferrous and non-ferrous metalworking and other craft activities, notably including bone-, horn- and antler-craft – working along with leatherworking, textile working and brewing.”

(Significant times in the site’s past: peak activity, major developments, turning points)

“In 1075 the Earl of East Anglia, Ralph de Guader/de Gael, married Emma, the daughter of William Fitz-Osbern and sister of Roger of Breteuil, Earl of Hereford. With another of William’s barons (Earl Waltheof), Ralph and Roger, who were perhaps resentful of interference from royal sheriffs, conspired at the wedding feast to rebel against the King when he returned abroad. Lanfranc, the archbishop-regent, was warned of the rebellion and excommunicated Roger whose army was contained west of the Severn. The other two intended to join forces at Cambridge bur Ralph was defeated on his way there and withdrew to Norwich. Lanfranc assured the king in a letter that he could deal with the remaining rebels and set siege of Norwich castle for a period of three months:

‘They pursued Ralph the Breton to his castle but could not capture him. Then concentrating the forces they besieged and attacked Norwich, encouraging their friends by their bravery and military skill, and harrying their besieged foes by continual assaults with every kind of engine of war. For three months they continued their relentless pressure, wearing out the enemy. The avenging army was daily strengthened by reinforcements, and an abundant supply of food and other necessities was provided for all their needs so that they could continue the siege indefinitely. When Ralph of Gael realised the he was shut in without hope of receiving any help from his accomplices, he entrusted the defence to a loyal garrison and himself took to the sea and boarded a ship to seek help in Denmark.’

“Ralph escaped down river to secure his lands in Brittany, leaving his bride in charge of a large force of his Breton followers. After the siege, Lanfranc was obliged to allow the Bretons to depart honourably when famine threatened. He was then able to garrison the castle with three hundred of his own men-at-arms. He wrote to William again:

‘Norwich Castle is surrendered and the Britons (Bretons) who were in it and hand lands in the English land, life being granted wot them with limbs have sown that within forty days they will go out from your Kingdom and moveover they will not enter it without your license. And those who without land served Ralph the Traitor and his associates for money have obtained by many prayers the space of one month to do this. In the same Castle have remained… 300 men in armour with armour with them, with Crossbowmen and many artificers of machines. All noise of wars is quiet in the English land.’ “

(The significance of specific features in the physical remains at the site)

“Raw material imported to the site during construction of the castle would have included those deriving from local sources such as timber, flint lime, sand and gravel. Vast quantities of stone were also imported, principally fine limestone from Caen, Normandy, as well as Barnack from Northamptonshire, brought to the site via a canal at Pull’s Ferry… Resurfacing of the donjon conducted in the early 19th Century primarily used Bath stone by also employed Clipsham and York stone for architectural details.”