

GGAT 96 Excavation and survey at Oystermouth Castle

1. Project Title and Code Number

GGAT 96: Excavation and survey at Oystermouth Castle

2. Location

Swansea

3. Summary of project cost

Cadw grants in previous year

N/A

Funds from other sources in previous years

N/A

Grant requested from Cadw in forthcoming year

£

Projected grant request year by year

tbd

Expected income from other sources

Equivalent to £

4. Descriptions of sites and assessment of archaeological importance

A summary of the documentary history and a detailed description of the masonry remains of Oystermouth castle is provided by RCAHMW (2000, 248-72, from which most of this account is drawn. Little is known about the early history of the castle, from either physical remains or documentary sources. The builder was presumably William de Londres (d 1231), as his son Maurice de Londres is recorded as lord of Oystermouth in 1151 when he granted the advowson of the church to Ewenny Priory. RCAHMW considers it likely that its bailey is represented by 'the embanked outwork set on the lower saddle to the north', although Davies (2006, 2 & fig 1) thinks that this is more likely to be a post-medieval quarry. He suggests that the earthwork castle is more likely to have been a ringwork, given the rocky nature of the site, and that such a ringwork might be represented by 'the scarp above the courtyard'.

The castle itself does not appear in the record until 1215 when it was burnt as part of the campaign carried out against the Normans in Gower by Maelgwn ap Rhys and Rhys Ieuanc. The last member of the de Londres family, Thomas Maurice, is believed to have died with no heir at around that date, so the castle passed back to the lords of Gower, the de Braose, when it was returned by the Welsh. The earliest surviving stonework, in the keep, was probably already have been in existence by then: it is considered by RCAHMW to be of 12th century date, although it does not contain any characteristic features. Oystermouth was held by the de Braoses up to Alina, the last of the line, and then by her son John Mowbray and his descendants, apart from a hiatus in the second half of the 14th century when the Beauchamp Earls of Warwick were lords of Glamorgan. The de Braoses regarded their Gower base as one of their principal seats, and there is documentary evidence that they resided for at least some of the time at Oystermouth rather than Swansea. They would have been responsible for most of the rest of the surviving masonry structures. Alina is traditionally credited with building the chapel block, and the Decorated style architectural details of its architecture would certainly accord with her tenure of the lordship (1327-31). All the Mowbrays and Beauchamps were absentee lords, as is reflected in the minimal additions to the fabric after the construction of the chapel block.

In the post-medieval period the castle was held, still as part of the demesne of the lords of Gower, by the Earls of Worcester (later Dukes of Beaufort), apart from the period of

the Commonwealth when it was held by Oliver Cromwell. There is no evidence, however, that it saw any military action and there is no clear evidence either for any building work of post-medieval date. The Dukes of Beaufort continued to hold it until 1927 when it was bought by Swansea Borough Council. Clearance and restoration work was undertaken in the 1840s and 1870s by the antiquary George Grant Francis, including a careful restoration of the tracery in the chapel window. Further consolidation and restoration works were undertaken by the council after it acquired the castle (for example in 1997, Sell 1997), of which the current programme is only the most recent. The castle buildings occupy a spur the southern side of an amphitheatre-like public park on the hillside directly overlooking the sea which lies to the east; this spur continues southwest of the gatehouse, where it is known as The Knoll. There is another, saddle-shaped ridge to the east, with a mound known as Castle Tump on its southern summit. The bowl-like area between the two ridges is known as The Green. A programme of geophysical survey was carried out by Davies (2006) for the Friends of Oystermouth Castle. This examined four areas in, respectively, the inner courtyard, the exterior of the gatehouse and The Knoll, The Green and Castle Tump. The results from the inner courtyard were disappointing, and will not be discussed further here as this area will not be available for the proposed excavation. Variable results were produced from the other areas. None of the features noted by magnetometry seemed likely to be of archaeological origin, so the features in the following three areas were all located on the resistivity survey (numbers from Davies 2006).

- The outer wall of the exterior of the western drum tower of the gatehouse was clearly imaged as a low-resistance anomaly bordering a semi-circular high resistance anomaly (ii), probably representing a rock-cut foundation trench around a mass of rubble. What appeared to be its counterpart on the east was seen during a watching brief on the cable-trenches when the floodlighting was installed (Evans 1994, 6 & fig 4). A low-resistance anomaly on the far side probably represents the ditch (iii) separating the gatehouse from the rest of the knoll which probably served as a barbican. A couple of high resistance anomalies on the Knoll might represent buildings or piles of rubble (v), whilst a linear feature running parallel with it and to the east (vi) may represent a wall or track.
- Results on the Green were disappointing, probably due to the poor weather conditions. The only features that were imaged were probable modern cultivation marks
- On the Castle Tump ridge it proved difficult to distinguish whether the features imaged by resistivity were archaeological or geological in origin. The best candidate as archaeological features is a sub-oval area of high resistance of the northern summit (ix), because of its regularity.

Map regression carried out as part of the study also identified a medieval dovecot, shown on a 1802 map of properties belonging to the Beaufort estate (Davies 2006, 21). However, this was not picked up on the survey, possibly because it did not cover the relevant area.

References

- Davies, W, 2006, *A report on geophysical surveys at Oystermouth Castle, Swansea, Gower* (unpublished report prepared for the Friends of Oystermouth Castle)
- Evans, E M, 1994, *Excavations at Oystermouth Castle Swansea, West Glamorgan* (GGAT unpublished report no. **1994/023**)
- RCAHMW, 2000, *An inventory of the ancient monuments in Glamorgan. Vol II1 part 1b: Medieval secular monuments: The later castles from 1217 to the present.* Abertyswyth
- Sell, SH, 1997, *Oystermouth Castle repair work* (GGAT unpublished report no. **1997/075**)

5. Nature of threat and likely extent and timing of destruction

The castle is currently in urgent need of repairs. A scheme of work funded by the HLF has been agreed, and this will include the provision of a visitor centre which will be constructed in the basement of the chapel to replace the previous demountable hut. This scheme of works will take five years to complete. The repairs and new building work will be carried out by construction professionals, and it is a condition of the SMC that the archaeological work that will be required in connection with them will be carried out by professional archaeologists. Visitor services for the castle are provided by the Friends of Oystermouth Castle, a very committed and active volunteer group. Cadw and Swansea City Council are concerned that the group does not lose its cohesion during the period of the repairs.

The masonry structure of the castle has been studied in detail by RCAHMW (2000, 249-71), but the exterior of the castle is less well understood. The RCAHMW account limits mention of the surrounding earthworks to a paragraph on the area to the north, interpreted here as probably being the earth and timber castle. However, it does not describe them. They are represented on the plan on p 251 of the *Inventory* by hachures. No other part of the surroundings of the castle has been the subject of a detailed topographic survey. Geophysical survey has provided some information as to possible structures outside the castle, but ground-truthing is required. Further geophysical survey under more suitable weather conditions might also produce further information.

We therefore propose to carry out a total station survey of the open area surrounding the castle. This will also be used to inform the location of future excavations.

On the basis of what is already known from previous geophysical and topographic, there are three areas in particular where excavation would be particularly useful:

- ❑ The earthworks to the north of the castle, presumed by RCAHMW to be the defences of the outer bailey, but as a possible quarry by Davies. Excavation would determine which of these is correct.
- ❑ The area to the south of the eastern tower wall of the gatehouse (the Knoll). Excavation could help to resolve the question of the construction status of the tower (ii), and ascertain whether the ditch that appears to be shown in the geophysical survey (iii) can be located. Further south on the knoll, a possible wall (vi) and possible area of structural debris (v) were located. The Knoll has also produced a parchmark, and there is a section of possible wall further south
- ❑ The Castle Tump ridge. This has also produced possible areas of archaeological origin on its northern (ix) and southern (xi) summits.

Location of trenches on the Knoll, and on Castle Tump ridge in particular, would be better targeted once the topographic survey has been completed.

Because the castle surroundings are a public place, the council requires that all excavation under 0.5m (6") in depth should be enclosed within security fences. For this reason it has been decided that excavation should concentrate on a single area, to minimise cost and disruption. The easiest area to fence will be the Knoll, where existing boundaries can be utilised, and where there is the most certain prospect of positive archaeological results and therefore of public engagement. We therefore propose to excavate two trenches on the Knoll, one to examine the gatehouse and ditch, and the other to examine features identified by geophysical survey on the Knoll. It may be necessary to subdivide the first because there is a floodlight in this area. Given our estimates of how large a workforce that can be accommodated with the supervisory staff available (see below), we suggest that the area of each trench be 4x20m, the exact configuration to be decided following the topographic survey of this area.

Depending upon the success of the excavation proposed for this year, it may be possible to look at the other areas in subsequent years

6. Objectives

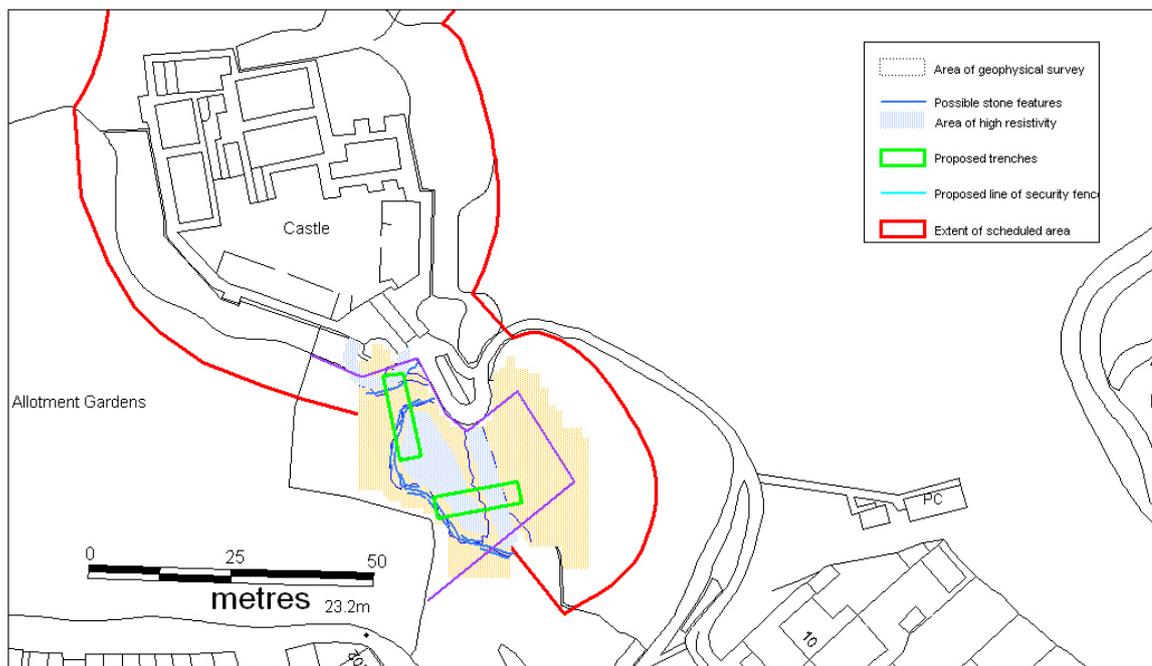
Archaeological objectives

- ❑ Total station survey to produce a plan of the open area surrounding the castle.
- ❑ To examine the site of the presumed outer wall of the eastern tower of the gatehouse and its ditch
- ❑ To examine other possible feature on the Knoll identified by geophysical survey

Outreach objectives

- ❑ To introduce students and members of the community to archaeological survey and excavation techniques
- ❑ To provide the opportunity for members of the public to visit the excavation
- ❑ To inform the public about the history and archaeology of Oystermouth Castle

The proposed time-slot for the excavation, from Monday 29th June to Friday 17th July, when there are no other events scheduled to take place in the castle grounds, is largely within term time. We therefore expect that visitors during weekdays will largely be retired and unemployed adults, and organised school parties. Weekends will provide greater opportunities for a wider range of people to visit: we therefore intend to work a seven-day week. We intend to provide wide-ranging information for members of the public and school parties who come to view the site, including site tours, exhibitions of finds and posters. The Friends of Oystermouth Castle have offered their visitor centre as a base for this service, and will supply site guides.



Oystermouth Castle Proposed Location of trial trenches

The extent of public participation in the fieldwork will be limited by numbers of experienced archaeologists available for supervision. We aim for a ratio of no less than one supervisor to six inexperienced people on site, and one to ten with finds washing. Subject to public consultation in the months leading up to the fieldwork, we would anticipate a limited wish to take up places for hands-on experience by the public during the week, when the students would be on site. During weekends, when the students are not on site, we would aim to be able to offer hand-on experience for a larger number of people.

7. Proposed work programme

Identified tasks

Archaeology

- Set up excavation, including liaison with Swansea City Council on Health and Safety matters
- Total station survey of open area around castle
- Excavation of selected geophysical features and earthworks
- Wash finds
- Catalogue finds
- Collate records
- Prepare interim site narrative
- Identify finds specialists
- Obtain appraisals of different classes of finds (unquantified)
- Write initial post-excavation research design

Outreach

- Contact schools and community groups
- Prepare and produce press releases
- Prepare and produce flyers and posters
- Provide information for daily dig diary
- Update of website on daily basis
- Produce/print activity pack for children
- Display finds and excavation information for visitors
- Provide tours of the excavation site for visitors
- Pottery display, finds identification for visitors

8. Specialist requirements

Possible input from Cadw's environmental contract may be required during the excavation phase. Input from specialists of medieval finds will be required during the post-excavation assessment phase but is currently unquantified.

9. Proposed timing of work programme

Fieldwork during June and July 2009. Initial post-excavation assessment to follow in third quarter.

10. Presentation of results

- Blog
- Public lecture
- Grey literature report
- Publication report in suitable journal
- More general article for *Gower*
- Exhibition for new visitor centre

PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN
OYSTERMOUTH CASTLE EXCAVATION PROJECT— GGAT 96

TASK	TIMING (COMING YEAR)												TIMING (YEAR)				PRODUCT	TARGET DATE	
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	AMJ	JAS	OND	JFM			
Publicise project and set up		■	■															Site ready for survey and excavation	31/03/08
Carry out EDM survey			■	■														Raw survey data	31/07/08
Download and process EDM survey			■	■														Processed and interpreted survey data	31/07/08
Excavation of two trenches			■	■														Excavation records, site drawings, finds	31/07/08
Initial finds processing			■	■														Clean, bagged, labelled finds	31/07/08
Prepare post-excavation assessment (note 1)							■	■	■	■	■							Interim report, catalogues, post-excavation research design, identification of relevant specialists	31/01/09
Integration of survey data into excavation results										■								Integrated survey/excavation plans	31/01/09
Post-excavation programme													■	■	■	■		Report for publication; archive posted on internet	tbd
Cost profile (Cadw funds)																		Total cost to Cadw	
Annual cost profile (Cadw funds)													tba					Other funds	
Funds from other sources																		Total cost	£tba