

The Kitchen Annex

By Steve Linnane, BA

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Photograph: Douglas T

Davies

The Discovery of the Bread Oven

Prior to the excavations, there was absolutely no indication that any structure existed in this area and the most we might have expected was a series of trackways leading to the Keep.

The discovery of a bread oven built into the western curtain wall consequently came as something of a surprise. Further excavation revealed a floor surface constructed of limestone slabs. Spread across the surface was a layer of ‘hammer scale’ and ash, very rich in pottery and other finds – strong evidence that the area had been used as a smithy.

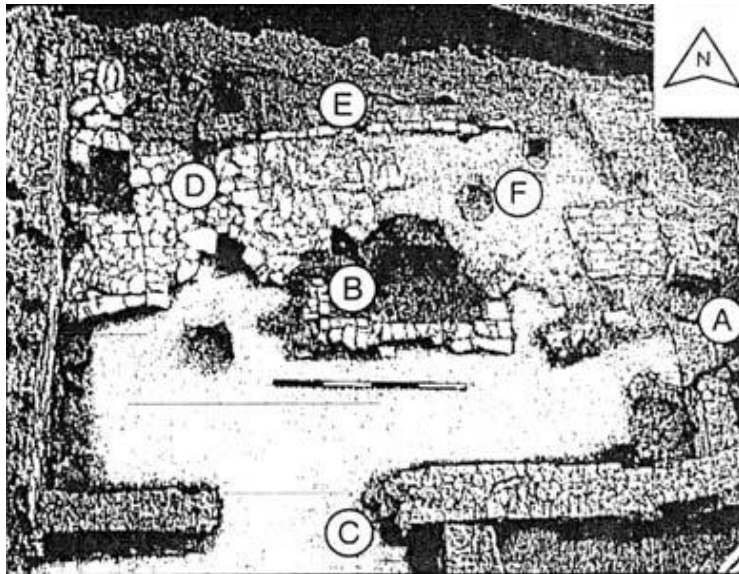
At first we connected these finds with some surviving 18th century engravings which depicted a chimney stack standing as high as the Keep. The Keep was slighted in 1647 and it seemed highly likely that the area had been taken over for industrial purposes after the castle’s abandonment in 1750. Analysis of the finds revealed that this was incorrect, in fact we were examining a Civil War deposit indicating that the Royalist garrison was using this building for repairing weaponry. The building was destroyed along with the Keep in 1647.

The kitchen was initially constructed in the late 15th century and consisted of a square limestone chamber erected on the side of the motte, connected to the Keep by a fairly narrow flight of steps. There was a small doorway in the

eastern wall. A most interesting feature of the building's construction was the incorporation within the walls of timber beams. The beams seem to have been intended to strengthen the structure, possibly acting as a cantilever, balancing the weight of the back (south) of the building against that of the front (north) thus ensuring that the kitchen did not slide down the face of the potentially unstable motte.

Excavation of the two kitchen levels.

Archive Photograph



Late 15th century kitchen

A: East doorway

B: Central hearth

Mid 16th century kitchen

C: Stair to Keep

D: Limestone flags

E: North wall fireplace

F: Embedded cooking pots

At this time the kitchen had a central hearth; at first this was built of limestone flags but it was later repaired with bricks. The existence of a central hearth

suggested that the kitchen was single storied with a smoke hole in the middle of the roof. Frequent repairs to hearth and floor indicate that the kitchen was heavily used at this time.

In the middle of the 16th century the Duke of Northumberland was responsible for the major rebuilding of the domestic range in the castle courtyard. Archaeological excavation has revealed that the Duke was responsible for large scale refurbishment both within and around the Keep. In the process he remodelled the kitchen.

The new kitchen had a floor of limestone slabs and the fireplace was now moved to the north wall, being constructed of tile and limestone with a red sandstone kerb. The height of the chimney, previously mentioned, suggests that the kitchen was given a first floor. The staircase leading to the Keep was entirely remodelled, the new steps being much wider and having a platform half way up to provide access through the sally port in the western curtain wall. At or around this time the door in the eastern wall was blocked, as also was the bread oven.

Once again the Kitchen seems to have been heavily used with repairs made to both floor and fireplace. It seems highly likely that when the lord of the castle was not in residence the steward or constable would have resided in the Keep, requiring a much smaller household to maintain than if he had occupied the main building range in the courtyard. It is this usage throughout its life that created the vast quantities of bone and other debris which we are presently excavating on the motte side.

One interesting aspect of the kitchen's occupation was the habit of embedding cooking pots into the floor surface, in one instance a stone quern or mortar was so embedded. In the days when waist-level hobs were not available, presumably a floor level water supply may have been appreciated.

All the evidence suggests that during the Civil War the Keep was used as a command centre. The excavation of hammer scale indicates the kitchen was an area for the repair of weapons; likewise lead drips in the fireplace within the Keep indicate the produce of musket shot.

In 1647 the Keep was partially destroyed and with it the kitchen, all except the

lofty chimney which survived to be depicted in romantic engravings of the castle.



The chimney