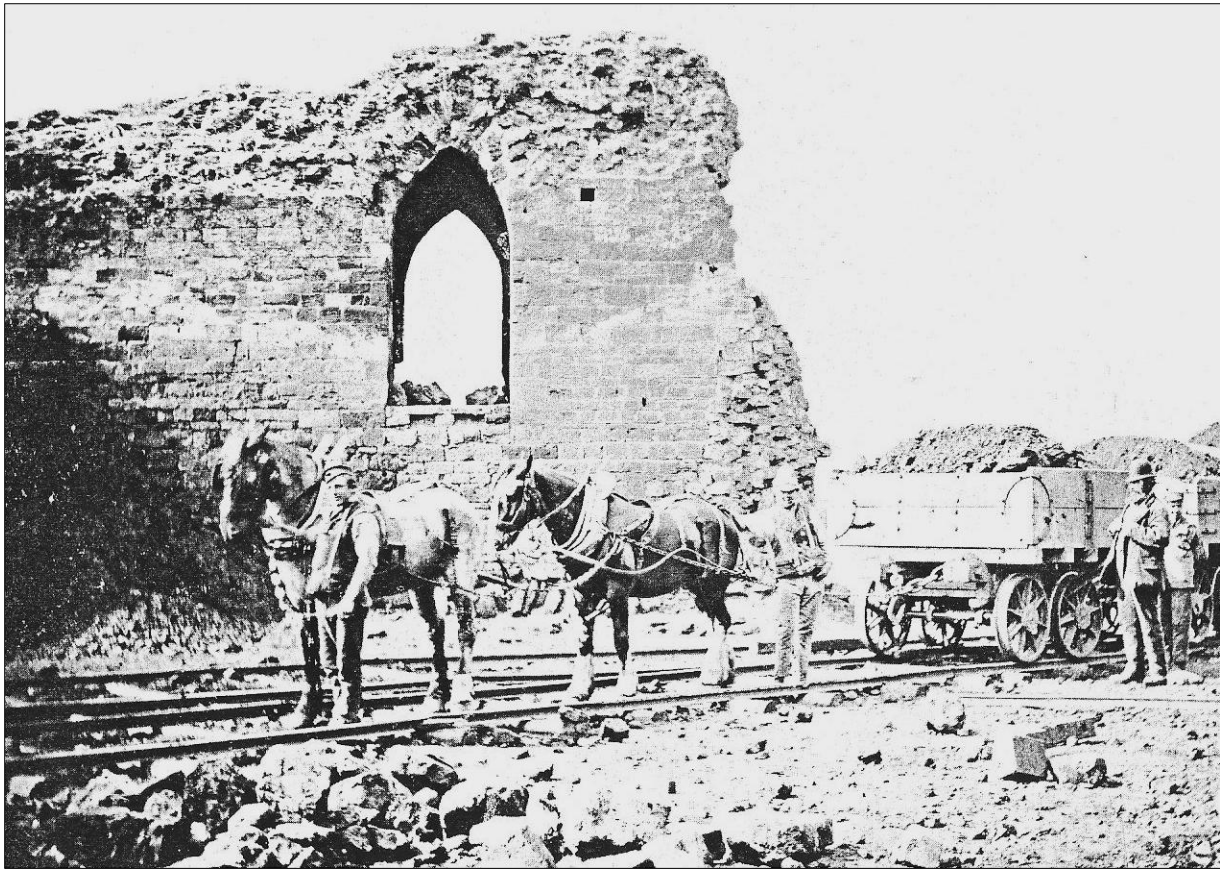


SITE OF NORTHAMPTON CASTLE

Ref. No. 2701

Evidence for application to revise schedule,
“Northampton Castle – SAM89
SP 748 604”.

The castle was largely quarried away in the 19th century and the northern arm of the River Nene realigned to make space for the construction of Northampton's Castle Railway Station.



Demolition of Castle west wall from the interior c1879.

The site at present can be considered as being in two parts; the larger part, to the west of St. Andrew's Road and a smaller part to the east. In the 19th century the river was shifted west and the high ground on which the then ruins of the Castle stood was lowered and a terrace created that became St. Andrew's Road. The land to the east was largely left undisturbed. During the period of demolition local antiquarians and surveyors recorded much that was uncovered and a large quantity of

finds were saved that are now in Northampton Museum. Between 1961 and 1965 an archaeological excavation was conducted on part of the surviving Eastern portion.

It appears that it has been assumed that: -

- The 19th century construction of the railway station resulted in the total removal and destruction of all of the western part of the Castle*.
- The excavations in the 1960s uncovered all that was to be found in the eastern part.

The only structure that is visible today of part of the Castle is the Postern Gate built into a wall that is part of the boundary of the station. This gate was dismantled from its original position and rebuilt along with the wall in the 19th century; the wall appears to be also built of re-used Castle stone.



View of Postern Gate and the wall built from Castle stone.



I refer you to Mr. Brian Giggins' dissertation of 1999 prepared for his MA in Archaeology & Heritage, "Northampton's Forgotten Castle". Mr. Giggins has re-examined all the material available, documentary, physical and archaeological and has come to the conclusion that there are several areas in the large western area where more features could survive – such as remains of an earlier Motte and clues as to the position of the Saxon defences. The only area Scheduled at present is a small piece of land to the north-west corner of the St. Andrew's Road and Black Lion Hill junction. It seems the reason that this area was listed was because it was thought to be the only part on that side of the road of the original land surface. However, the area marked as '11' on Giggins' plan (page 5) could also be original even if it only represents a substantial part of the original ground level.

Mr. Giggins has also indicated on his plan several points to the east of St. Andrew's Road that have not been investigated.

Reference to my composite plan (page 6) based on the 19th century surveys and the 1960s excavation shows the 'Old Position of River' and '2' on Giggins' plan indicates the possible positions of the old river bed and Anglo-Saxon defensive earthworks. Re-development of the railway station would be an opportunity to find out more of the nature and extent of the Saxon defences and in both cases, the defence ditch and the river bed could yield valuable environmental information from the silts of these periods.

Mr. Giggins ends his dissertation with: -

"Despite its linear nature, the site of Northampton Castle has the potential to be a historic resource which can be used to illustrate the history and development of the town from its Saxon origins to the expansion associated with the increasing use of the railway in the 1888's. It offers the owner, Northampton Borough Council, the ability to reverse the years of neglect that has fostered increasing vandalism on the site. With community involvement and sympathetic interpretation they could create a 'corridor of Northampton history' incorporating the castle's defences, royal apartments and the gatehouse with Thomas Becket connections. The opportunity is there

to reverse the decline that makes this Northampton's forgotten castle."

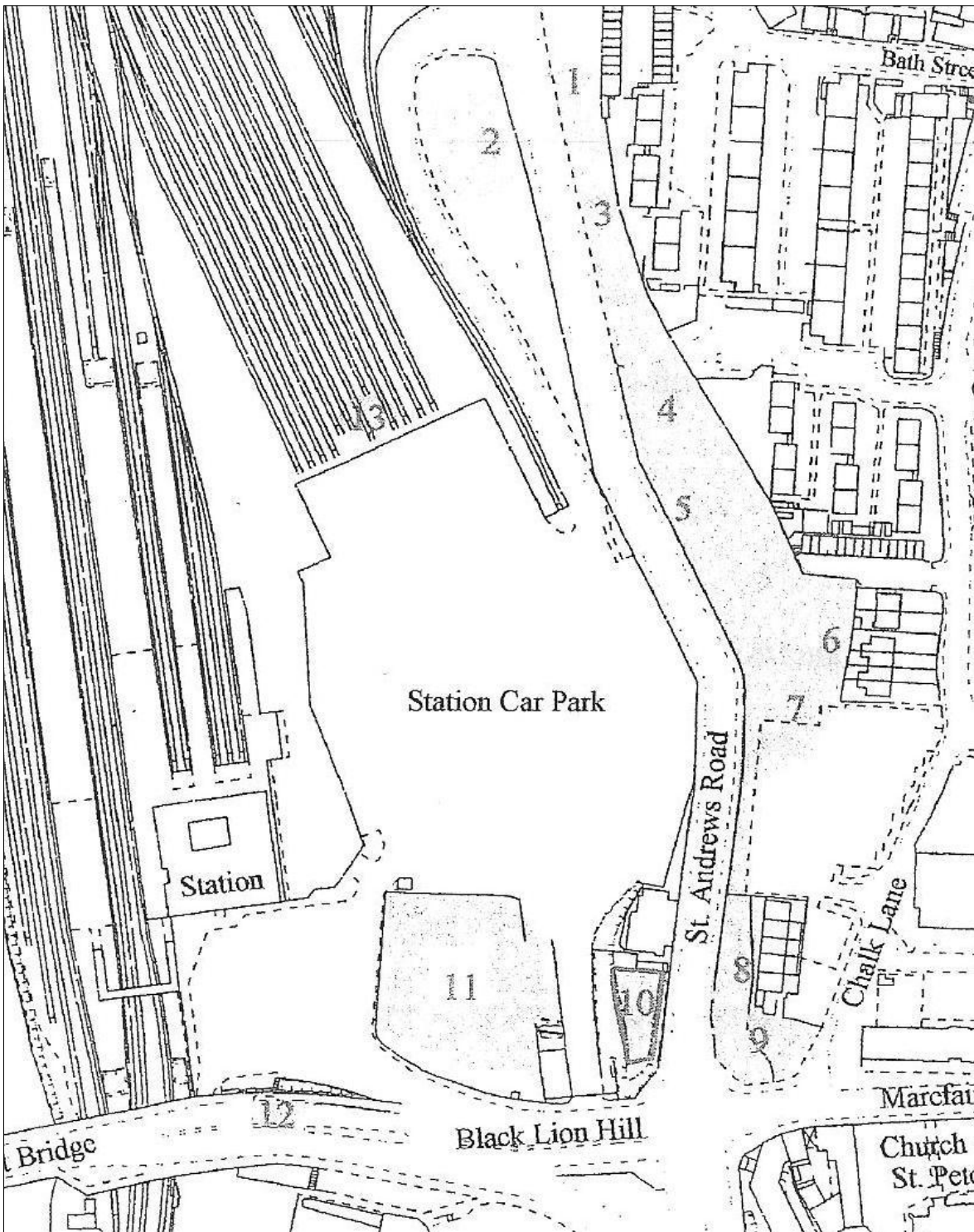
It is felt by the Friends of Northampton Castle (FONC) more protection of what remains to the east of St. Andrew's Road is required and at least the opportunity to investigate specific areas and in general in the area to the west in event of a development of the Railway Station site. Also preservation, even if moved to a new position, of the Postern Gate and associated stonework.

*Recent research has found the following information: -

Quote from 'The Ruins of the Old Castle Northampton' *Association of Architectural Societies Reports and Papers* 15. Law E. 1879-80.

"The excavations were commenced on the western side of the site, and have been carried down to a depth required to form the plateau of the new railway station. This plateau is *within a few inches of the bottom of the footings of the old wall, greater part of which is now removed.*" (My italics).

"The old wall" referred to here is probably the substantial, buttressed wall to the north-west which included the recovered Postern Gate and featured in so many of the old photographs. What is clear is that some of the Castle does remain beneath the site of the present station and car-park.



Mr. Giggins' plan showing archaeological sensitive areas.1999

NORTHAMPTON CASTLE



Composite Plan.

Black lines: Modern Ordnance Survey 2500 Plan.

Blue: Based on a survey by Messrs. E. F. LAW & Sons 1863 and 1879 made during the levelling of the site and construction of Castle Railway Station.

Red: Features uncovered during Archaeological excavations 1961-5.

J. A. SMALL BSc (Hons). Dec. 2011.