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**Archaeologists discover Norman bridge during dig in Chichester’s Priory Park**

Archaeologists working in Chichester’s Priory Park have uncovered the remains of a military causeway or bridge that would have led to the city’s Norman castle.

The team from Chichester and District Archaeology Society, led by Chichester District Council’s archaeologist, James Kenny, made the discovery during a current excavation in the park, which will finish on Monday 3 June. On **Saturday 1 June**, the team will hold a public day where people can come along and hear James speak at **10am, midday** and **3pm** about what has been found.

This is the seventh dig that James has led to help uncover the secrets that lie beneath this fascinating site. “We have been continuing the work that we did last year, focusing on the park’s Norman history, and we’ve been fortunate enough to uncover the structure of a bridge that would have spanned the ditch surrounding the central mound, or ‘motte’,” explains James. “This is an exciting discovery because this is the first time since the Middle Ages that people have been able to view what would have been a very impressive military defensive system.”

“As part of the excavation, we have found key architecture that would have formed the structure of the bridge, including a robust corner block — or ‘quoin’ — made of limestone, which would have been imported for the purpose. We have also discovered putlog holes, which are holes that oak beams would have been inserted into to help form a scaffolding system that would have been used while building the structure. The level of the putlog holes indicate that the ground level at the time would have been at least six feet lower, but could have been much deeper.

“The structure is extremely impressive and solidly constructed. Norman soldiers would have used this bridge as a means of protecting the city’s castle. They would have crossed the bridge on wooden beams over the masonry — on foot, by horse, or with carts — and then removed the beams after use so that invaders wouldn’t be able to cross to the motte. Our finds indicate that the bridge may have been constructed in phases as the Normans settled and the castle was used on a more permanent basis.

“Our work has been informed by a series of geophysics and ground-penetrating radar scans that were carried out in 2022, which indicated a large structure and helped us to pinpoint where we should be digging. It’s very rewarding to be able to include the wider community in what we are doing and help people understand the amazing history under their feet.”

The public are invited to attend an open day in Priory Park on Saturday 1 June to hear James talk about the finds at 10am, midday and 3pm. Over the past week, the team has also welcomed a number of community groups including the history class at Chichester College; Chichester Young Archaeologists; and the Brighton Young Archaeologists group.

Last year, in addition to discovering the remains of the ditch that has become the focus of this year’s dig, the team uncovered the foundations of a building that was part of a medieval Franciscan Friary. During this year’s dig, artifacts have been unearthed that appear to be related to the monastery, including fragments of decorative floor tiles — also known as ‘encaustic tiles’ — from the late medieval period, along with roofing materials and other floor tile remains that are thought to be from the Tudor period.

The motte and bailey castle was probably built directly after the Norman Invasion in 1067 or 1068 by Earl Roger Montgomery. He was one of the most important Norman barons, in charge of most of what would become West Sussex.

Only a small part of the motte remains today, but back then it would have been a significant structure — four or five times bigger than it is today — and probably comparable in size to the one at Arundel Castle. Chichester’s castle was intended to intimidate the Urban English population and to dissuade them from rebelling against their new Norman lords.

People can find out more about the work of the Chichester and District Archaeology Society at: [**www.cdas.info**](http://www.cdas.info)

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