PRESS RELEASE

20 March 2024

Archaeologists begin excavations to uncover Sheffield Castle - the birthplace of the city - and invite the public to discover the site

- **Most extensive archaeological dig of Sheffield Castle ever undertaken to begin, including areas that have never been excavated before.**
- **Community invited to book a place to participate in the dig and to tour the site throughout April and May.**
- **Castle gatehouse to be preserved and displayed for the first time in four centuries as part of the Castlegate regeneration project.**

A team of archaeologists from Wessex Archaeology starts work next week excavating the site of Sheffield Castle. The 10-week dig is part of Sheffield City Council's Castlegate regeneration project. The excavation, overseen by construction engineering specialists, Keltbray, will uncover and preserve the castle's imposing medieval gatehouse. Hailed as the birthplace of the city, a section of the castle's remains will be permanently displayed for the first time in more than four centuries as part of a new public park.

Throughout April and May 2024, the community is invited to experience and discover the site's archaeology firsthand, through open days and opportunities to participate in the excavation for a day.

Left: Archaeologists record 19th-century remains at the Sheffield Castle site during trial excavations in 2018 © Wessex Archaeology. **Right**: An aerial view of trial excavations at Sheffield Castle in 2018 © Wessex Archaeology

During the dig, professional archaeologists will systematically excavate and record six meters of Sheffield's rich archaeological heritage, finally reaching the remains of the 11th to 17th-century castle where Mary Queen of Scots was infamously imprisoned by her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I, in the late 16th century.

> **Ashley Tuck, the archaeologist leading the dig on behalf of Wessex Archaeology**, said: *"Once a commanding* centre of power *for more than 600 years, the castle was left as a ruin*

by the Parliamentarians at the end of the Civil War as a symbol of its defeat. Since then, the remains of this once-dominating structure have lain hidden from public view. As someone who lives and works in Sheffield, it is a great honour to lead the team uncovering its remains, so we can learn more about its tumultuous history and allow it to once again take centre stage in the city."

As well as uncovering the massive foundations of the circular towers of the gatehouse, moat and drawbridge pier, the dig will uncover evidence of the site's varied and chequered past. Researchers hope to explore destruction deposits from the razing of the original motte and bailey castle by John D'Eyvill in the 13th century, the remnants of sieges between the Royalists and Parliamentarians during the Civil War, and the industrial remains of the steelworks that operated there from the early 19th century and was pivotal in propelling the city's growth.

Cllr Ben Miskell, Chair of the Transport, Regeneration and Climate Committee, said: *"The start of the archaeology at the Castlegate site is another fantastic milestone in our brilliant regeneration of the most historic part of our city. Uncovering Sheffield Castle will finally allow our residents and visitors the chance to see how the city started. Learning about the story of the castle is incredible but actually seeing the remains in person will take the experience to another level."*

"I would urge anyone who is interested to sign up for the site visits so you can be one of the first to see the incredibly exciting work. Castlegate is one of a number of regeneration projects we have in the city centre and show that Sheffield really is on the up."

Louise Pavitt, Managing Director for Highways and Local Government at Keltbray, said: *"Keltbray is excited to be supporting Sheffield City Council on this historic regeneration project that will permanently reveal sections of the old castle for the first time in over four centuries. We're excited that local people will be able to attend and learn more about the work that our industry does around cultural heritage."*

Archaeologists uncovered parts of the castle in the 1920s, then again during reconstruction works following WWII, and in 2018 Wessex Archaeology carried out trial excavation at the site which afforded glimpses of the moat and castle. The team will now go back to conduct the most extensive excavation that has ever taken place at the site. They will apply modern archaeological methods and scientific techniques to the study of the gatehouse and other castle remains, some of which have never before been excavated, to learn more about its construction and the people and historical events connected with this hugely significant site.

Martin Gorman, Chair of the Friends of Sheffield Castle, said: **"***We are really excited that Wessex Archaeology is starting the excavations of the Castle and look forward with huge anticipation to what might be found. Whilst we know part of the gatehouse exists, we don't know how extensive the Castle remains are, so it will be a great opportunity for us to learn more and for volunteers to be involved in finding out what actually lies under the surface"*

SHEFFIELD CASTLE EXCAVATION EVENT LISTINGS

Sheffield Castle Open Days and Excavation Tours

FREE, booking required. For more information and to book visit www.wessexarch.co.uk/events

Saturday 4 May 2024, 11.30-12.30, 13.30-14.30 and 15.00-16.00
Saturday 18 May 2024, 11. 11.30-12.30, 13.30-14.30 and 15.00-16.00
Friday 31 May 2024, 11.30-12.30 and 13.30-14.30

Join us to explore the excavations of Sheffield Castle and tour the site. This is a unique opportunity to see a live archaeological dig and learn about Sheffield's history. Archaeologists will be on hand to showcase and chat through their latest findings.

This event is outdoors. Please dress appropriately and wear sturdy footwear. All children must be accompanied by an adult. Due to the nature of the site, there are uneven surfaces throughout. If you have specific access needs, please contact us prior to your visit.

Sheffield Castle Excavation Experience

FREE, booking required. For more information and to book visit www.wessexarch.co.uk/events

Monday 8 April to Wednesday 5 June, from 09.50-15.30. (*Dates for April have been released. Watch this space for May dates.*)

Join us and help to excavate the remains of Sheffield Castle! This is a rare opportunity to experience a live archaeological dig and discover Sheffield's heritage first-hand.

Participants will be outside digging for much of the day, so please dress appropriately for the weather. All volunteers must wear steel-toe-cap boots. If you do not have your own, we have limited sizes that can be borrowed.

If you have any questions regarding event bookings, please email sheffieldcastle@wessexarch.co.uk.

To keep up to date with the dig visit www.wessexarch.co.uk or follow the action on social media @wessexarch #SheffieldCastle.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

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For event booking enquiries please contact sheffieldcastle@wessexarch.co.uk.

Images

A selection of images and footage is available to use for free in relation to this story crediting © Wessex Archaeology. Online, we ask that you link to www.wessexarch.co.uk.

About Wessex Archaeology

Bringing together leading minds and practitioners in the sector, Wessex Archaeology is a trusted archaeology and heritage service provider and educational charity. From our network of international offices, we work in partnership with our clients to deliver sustainable solutions to manage the historic environment - above ground, below ground and underwater. We are committed to our social impact. This means using the knowledge and connections we make through our commercial activities as a catalyst to engage the communities in which we work. Follow us on social media @wessexarch

Sheffield City Council

Founded in 1843, Sheffield City Council is the local authority for the city of Sheffield. The Council consists of 84 elected councillors covering 28 wards and serves just over 580,000 people according to information from 2019. The City Council has embarked on an ambitious regeneration plan for the city centre and the city including transforming buildings, transport and streets into a thriving, energetic place for people to live work and play.

About the Castlegate Regeneration Project

The Castlegate area of Sheffield dates back to the 11th century with Sheffield Castle widely regarded as the birthplace of the city. It is the point where the River Don and Sheaf meet with the Sheaf giving the city its name. As part of the transformation, the remains of the Castle will be put on public display for the first time in centuries. Castlegate forms part of the wider 'Gateway to Sheffield' project and will create a brand-new public space on the site of the old Castle Market, which closed in 2013 and was demolished in 2015. The project will include an events space believed to be on the site of the old 17th-century bowling green, along with the reopening of the River Sheaf and displaying the remains of Sheffield Castle.

About Keltbray

Keltbray is a leading UK specialist construction engineering and infrastructure services business, offering a uniquely integrated delivery capability spanning key phases of the client value chain – design management, civil engineering, geotechnical, construction waste management, demolition, and decommissioning, piling and reinforced concrete structures, remediation, rail and highways infrastructure, power distribution, transmission and substations, public realm and renewable energy services.

The company was founded in 1976 and is privately owned, directly employs over 2,000 people, and is a key delivery partner to prestigious public and private sector customers, contributing to the development and maintenance of Britain's rapidly changing economic and social infrastructure.

Keltbray provides certainty of delivery to meet the exacting needs of diverse and complex projects in complex, safety-critical markets. Its professionally accredited teams take pride in delivering safely and sustainably to specification, on time, to budget, and with care for the environment and our communities.