

Castle Pinckney Work Continues: Testing and Monitoring During the Down Season in 2020

By John Fisher

Readers of the December 2019 *Legacy* (Vol. 23, No. 2) will recall the successful September 2019 field school season at Castle Pinckney, in Charleston Harbor. The field school was a joint endeavor of the University College London (UCL) and SCIAA, funded by the Archaeological Research Trust (ART), The Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology (SPMA), and University College London (UCL). The field school excavated three large units on the upper level of the fort, defining looter pits and components related to the post-Civil War lighthouse, the Civil War batteries, and barracks (Figure 1), and earlier military occupations. Following the field school, ART funded lab work and analysis of the Castle Pinckney collection,

conducted at SCIAA by myself and Tim Pieper. An article concerning the field school, authored by co-director Giles Dawkes and myself, was published in the *Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology's Newsletter*, Issue 86 (Dawkes and Fisher 2019). This was followed by a Twitter conference involving a question and answer session about the site.

Later in the Fall of 2019, the landowners, the 501c Castle Pinckney Historical Society, expressed interest in further volunteer-based field work. Over several weekends, and one more extensive volunteer effort, two exploratory trenches and more than 20 shovel tests were excavated by volunteers (Figure 2). The trenches were placed from the

evidence provided by shallow shovel testing done over a period of several weekends to assess high probability areas for intact fortification features. This work was largely in anticipation of the second UCL field school season scheduled for September 2020, with a focus on establishing excavation goals. The success of the 2019 season drew strong interest at UCL, and the 2020 season was booked almost immediately. In March, however, the current pandemic resulted in the postponement of all field work by UCL for the school year. Thankfully, the second season (of three) was re-scheduled for 2021.

The 2019 field school and the subsequent volunteer work have



Figure 1: "Castle Pinkney [sic], Charleston, S.C., August 1861, barracks." (Photo from the Library of Congress, <https://lcn.loc.gov/2013651614>, accessed September 4, 2020)



Figure 2: Tim Pieper helps to expand and clean an exploratory trench dug by volunteers earlier in the year. (Photo by John Fisher)

located artifacts and features from every significant period of occupation of the site, including some large and remarkable discoveries that I hope to be able to reveal in the next issue of *Legacy*. Volunteer work has now resumed at Castle Pinckney and will continue through Fall 2020, to continue documentation and definition efforts in preparation for the 2021 field

school season. Work will then pause, as before, to permit the lengthy nesting season of the large pelican population that occupies the fort for much of each year. Felicia Sanders of the SC Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and a team of wildlife conservation workers have closely monitored the well-being of the pelicans, and after the 2019 field work, they

installed secure coverings for our deeper units that might have been hazardous for the nesting birds.

The Castle Pinckney Project and the Castle Pinckney Historical Society are indebted to the ART, UCL, SC DNR, SPMA, Civil War ordnance scholar Jack Melton, and Scott Harris of the College of Charleston. Without their support, our research on this significant landmark would not be possible. The Project is still largely a volunteer effort however, and we are seriously in need of additional funding to continue research and conservation efforts at this National Register site (Figure 3). If you would like further information about supporting the Castle Pinckney Project, please contact the author.

References

Dawkes, Giles, and John Fisher 2020 "From American Revolution to Civil War: The fort of Castle Pinckney, Charleston, South Carolina." *Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology Newsletter* 86: 9-10.



Figure 3: View from the original wharf showing the condition of the War of 1812-period walls. (Photo by John Fisher)