

EXCAVATIONS AT THE MOTTE, WESTON TURVILLE MANOR, 1985

PETER A. ST J. YEOMAN

Limited rescue excavation bisected part of the Motte ditch. An E-W profile of the ditch was obtained. This was 8 m wide × 2 m deep, with stepped sides and a dished base. The primary filling contained waterlogged organic material and two dressed voussoirs of twelfth-century date. The castle mound is in a good state of preservation, standing to a height of 4 m with a circular summit, 23 m in diameter. The ceramic evidence from the ditch coupled with the nature of the ditch infilling would seem to uphold the documented slighting of the defences in 1173-74 by command of Henry II. Further dumps were deposited during the later manorial development of the site in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Introduction

One of the finest motte and bailey castle earthworks in the county is situated a few metres from the Manor House at Weston Turville (SP 859104) and 150 m from the parish church of St Mary's (Pl. XV). The site is 6 km SE of Aylesbury on the E side of the Vale, close to the edge of the Chilterns (Fig. 1). Although sited on Gault Clays the motte lies at the edge of a gravel spread, on which the main area of the village is sited. It stands in the flood plain of a large stream which separates it from the large modern village of Weston Turville to the NW.

A proposed development, which would impinge upon part of the motte base and back-filled ditch, prompted a three-week rescue excavation as a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent (S.A.M. no. 61, Bucks). This work was commissioned by HBMC and executed by the author for the Buckinghamshire County Museum.

There are at least four other earthwork castles within a 12 km radius, all tentatively dated to the first half of the twelfth century (Fig. 1). They are generally small mottes like Weston, with the exception of the much larger

Bolebec Castle, Whitchurch (RCHM 1913, 327). The motte and bailey at Weston is the earliest feature of a complex palimpsest of earthworks, and is seen in plan as a figure-of-eight with the mound, or motte, in the N part. The castle was transformed into a moated manorial enclosure, probably during the thirteenth century, when the functional onus swung away from defence to a greater administrative and residential role. A further moat was added on the E, followed by another to the SE, culminating with the much later rectilinear enclosure to the E of this, probably built in the seventeenth century.

During all this time the site of the manor house remained constant; centrally placed within the original bailey where the first seigneurial lords' hall would have stood. The motte was the last place of defence should the castle be attacked, and would have been crowned with a simple timber tower probably based on four or six massive oak posts, encircled by a palisade built around the summit lip (Brown 1954, 27).

The present state of the mound is fairly good, although the shallow angle of the upper slope,

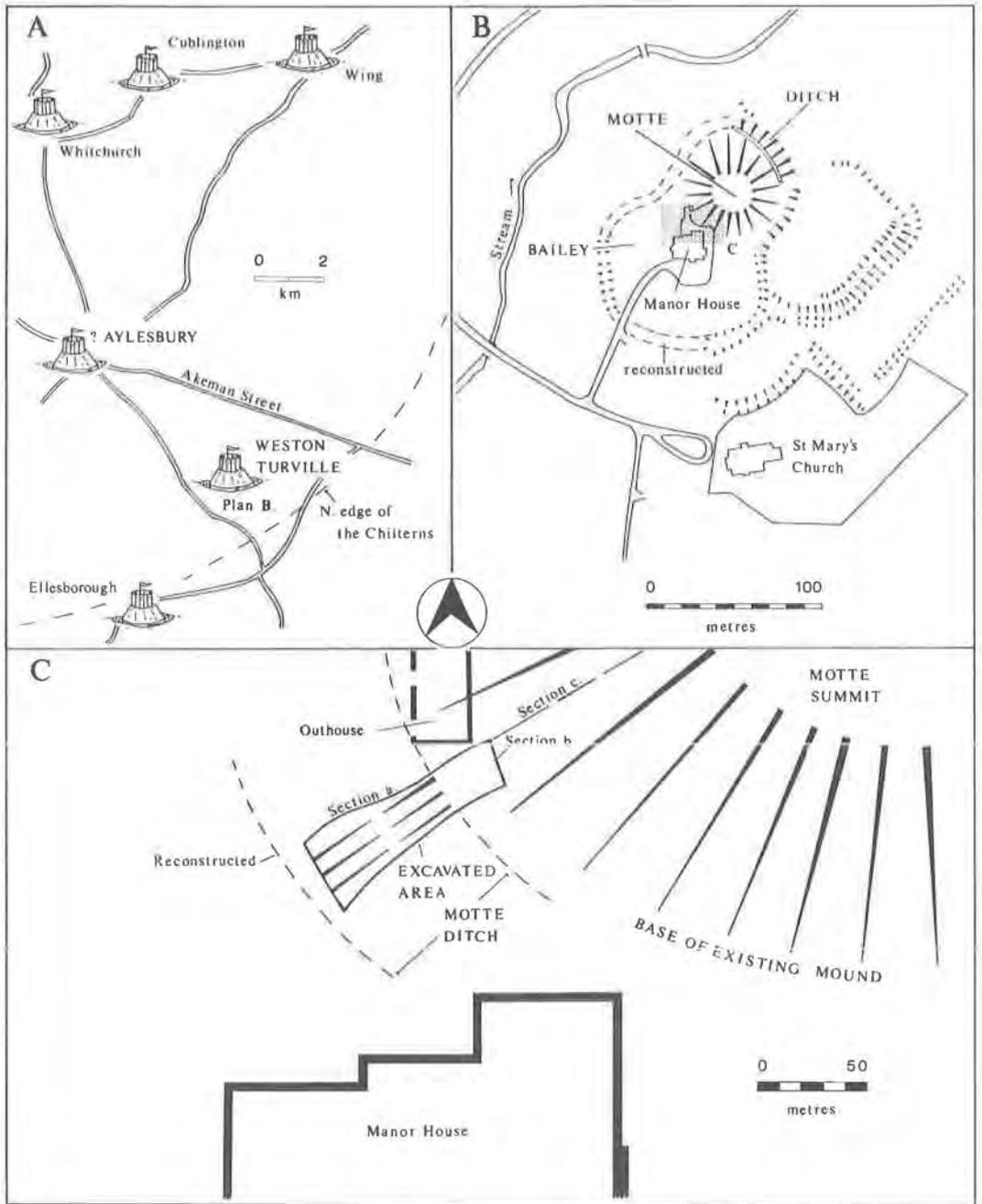


Fig. 1. Location of the motte at Weston Turville and of excavation.



Plate XV. Motte (bottom left, among trees), manor house, church and moats (left of photograph): aerial view, looking S. The excavation can be seen between the house and the bottom of the photograph.

in many places, suggests considerable slighting. Similarly the summit has probably lost over 1 m in height, surviving now only 5 m above modern ground level. The motte ditch survives well on the NE and E where it is 9 m wide \times 2.4 m deep, though originally deeper (Fig. 5).

The excavation was designed to provide information concerning the construction of the motte and ditch, the backfilling of the ditch and the slighting of the castle, along with dating evidence for these events. The historical background of the period is discussed in the article following, by Dr R. P. Hagerty. Excavation records are filed at Buckinghamshire County Museum ref. CAS 1056.

The Excavation

A trench 9 m long \times 3 m wide, aligned NE-SW, was opened by machine.

Pre-motte Features (Figs. 2-4)

Two parallel gullies/ditches had been truncated by the construction of the castle defences. Their alignment was at variance with the motte ditch which cut the outer gully (26). This gully, 0.08 m in width, was 2.70 m W of the inner cut (20), a much more substantial feature with a reconstructable width of at least 2 m. Silting was absent in both features, which were found to have been backfilled with mound dump material, indicating an origin in the period immediately preceding motte construction. It is therefore likely that they represent remains of a temporary enclosed encampment, destined to be the manorial *caput*.

The Motte Ditch and Mound Construction (Figs. 2-4)

The mound was constructed by heaping up material quarried from the ditch (Pl. XVI). The Gault Clay was ideal for this purpose and would have required little or no consolidation and reinforcement (Pl. XVII). Any available turf would have been stripped before the defences were built, and set aside for this purpose. Indeed, what appeared to be the remains of a turf 'cheek' was recorded (Fig. 3, layer 10).

The motte ditch (12) was cut, with a stepped base, to a depth of almost 2 m. The W side had

a slope of 45° over a horizontal length of 2.40 m. It had a dished base also 2.40 m wide which sloped from N to S, and a much broader, shallower E slope, the top of which was outside the excavated area. The reconstructed width is approximately 9 m.

A narrow berm, 1.6 m in width, was provided between the inner edge of the ditch and the original line of the mound base, which was probably marked by the W edge of the larger pre-motte gully (20) and the turf cheek (10).

This part of the mound had been built by laying or tipping layers of clay quarried from the ditch. These sloped down from S to N.

Two post holes (15 and 22) were found at the edge of the mound base, 1 m W of the ditch edge. These were both c.0.60 m in diameter and 0.30 m in depth, and probably formed part of a basal revetment or palisade, no other remains of which have survived. An alternative interpretation is that they represent the remains of a bridge abutment.

The Backfilled Ditch (Fig. 3)

The water-table was found to be 0.60 m above the bottom of the ditch, and the resultant waterlogging of these primary deposits (24) promoted the preservation of much organic material, particularly wood fragments which included some shaped timber pieces (see below). These deepest deposits were naturally-formed, washed-in laminated clay sediments, in the form of very thin layers which alternated between chocolate-brown and green-grey in colour. The shallow water-table would have ensured that the ditches were wet for most of the year. An unexpected discovery was two blocks of dressed masonry from a twelfth-century building (see below). These were found 1 m apart in the bottom of the ditch, along with other undressed clunch blocks. Roof tile, also derived from the demolition of one or more buildings, was found in the backfill (see below).

Above this level, three much thicker dumps of clay were found, one on top of another, the nature of which suggests more than one phase of purposeful backfilling. These layers produced

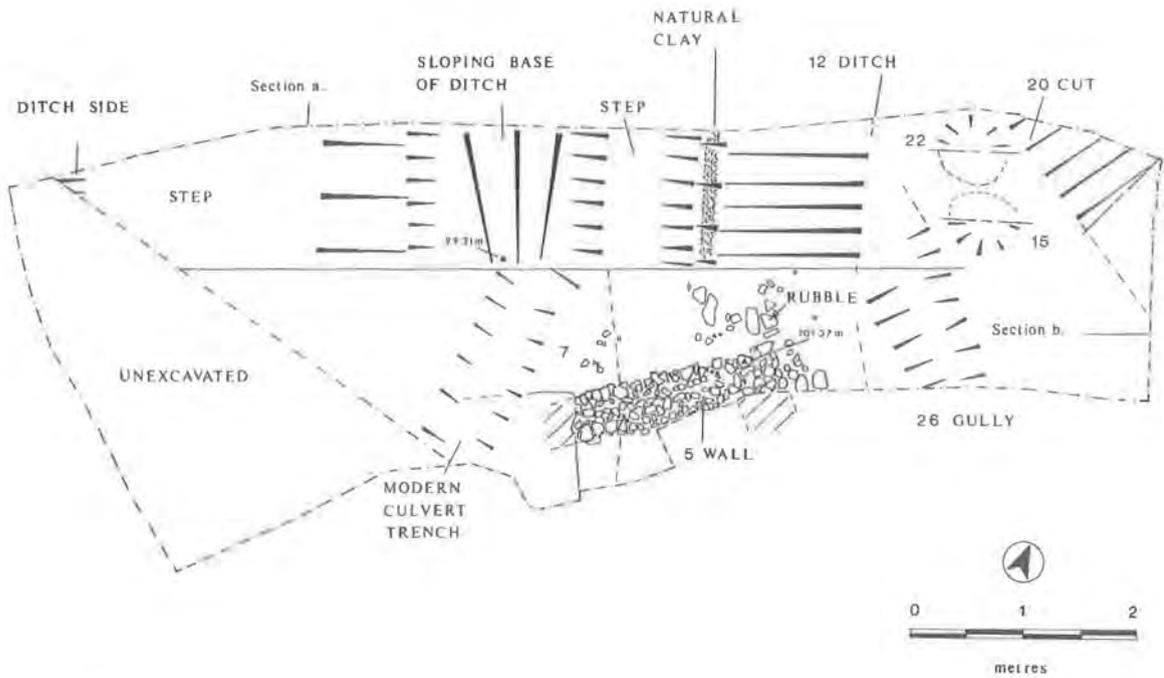


Fig. 2. Plan of excavated area.

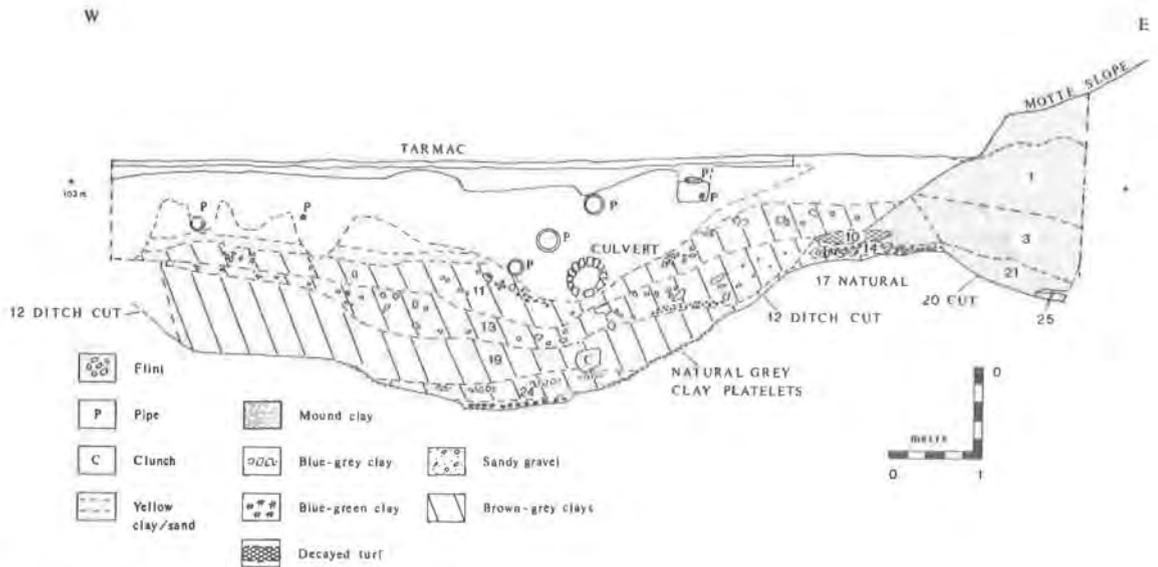


Fig. 3. Section of motte ditch and mound.

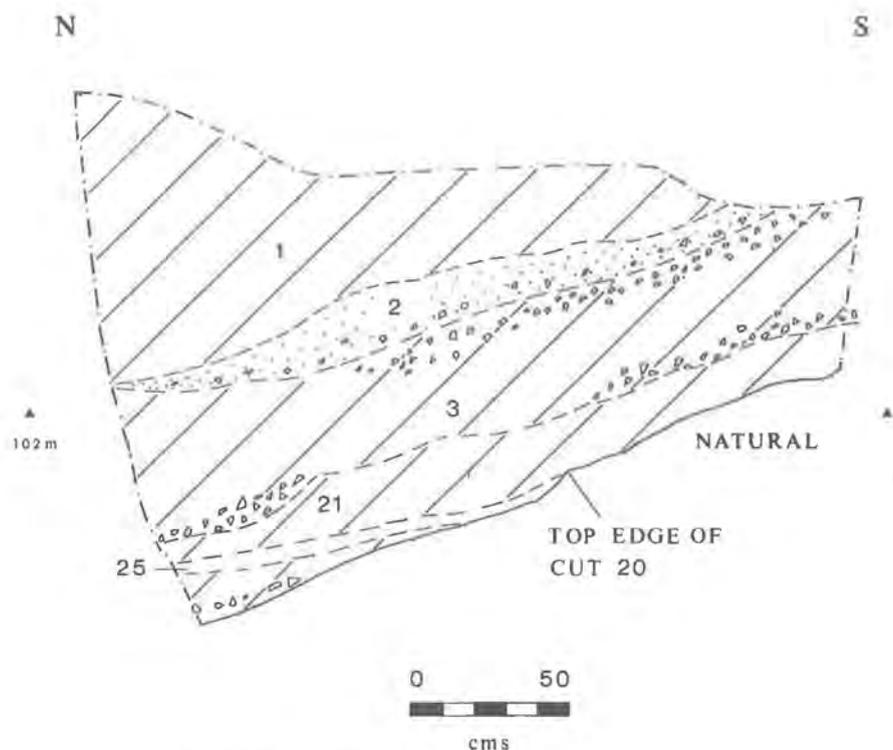


Fig. 4. Section at base of motte (location Fig. 1).

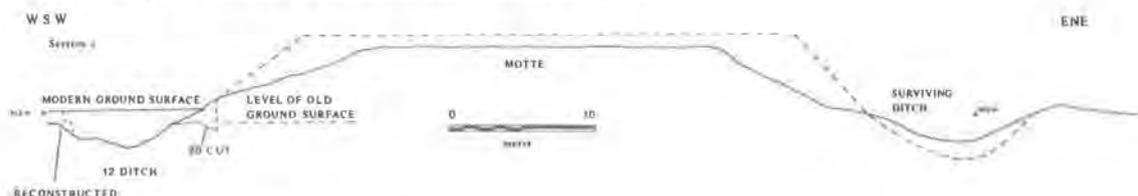


Fig. 5. Section across motte and ditch.

a good ceramic assemblage. The lowest of these (19) can be dated to the twelfth century (see Pottery below). On ceramic grounds the subsequent infilling can be dated to the thirteenth/fourteenth centuries.

A Post-Motte Structure (Fig. 2)

After the final infilling of the ditch, a building with mortared stone rubble walls was constructed in the later medieval moated enclosure. One of the wall footings survived in the excavated area in a 2 m length, three courses high, aligned NE-SW with a corner at its east end. The west length was destroyed by

modern intrusions. This wall contained no brick and probably dates from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, perhaps being built to support a timber-framed superstructure. This was probably an outbuilding to the later manor house, which lies beneath the modern mansion.

Conclusions

The motte ditch was found to be shallower than the existing ditch on the E and NE of the mound. The latter, an external defence, was probably just over 3 m in depth when cut; this greater depth is hardly surprising as the portion of ditch excavated was an internal defence,

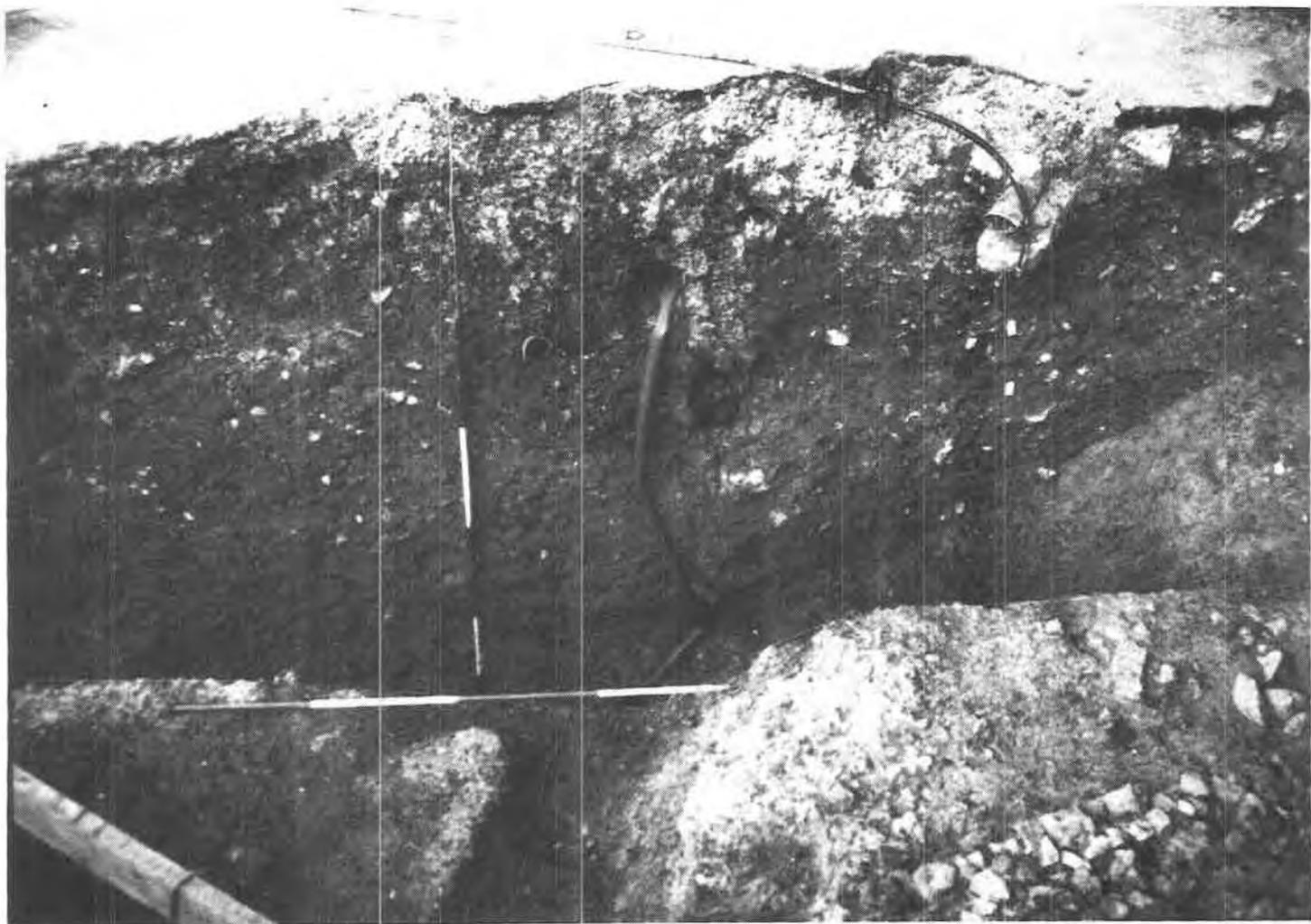


Plate XVI. Section of motte ditch, looking N.

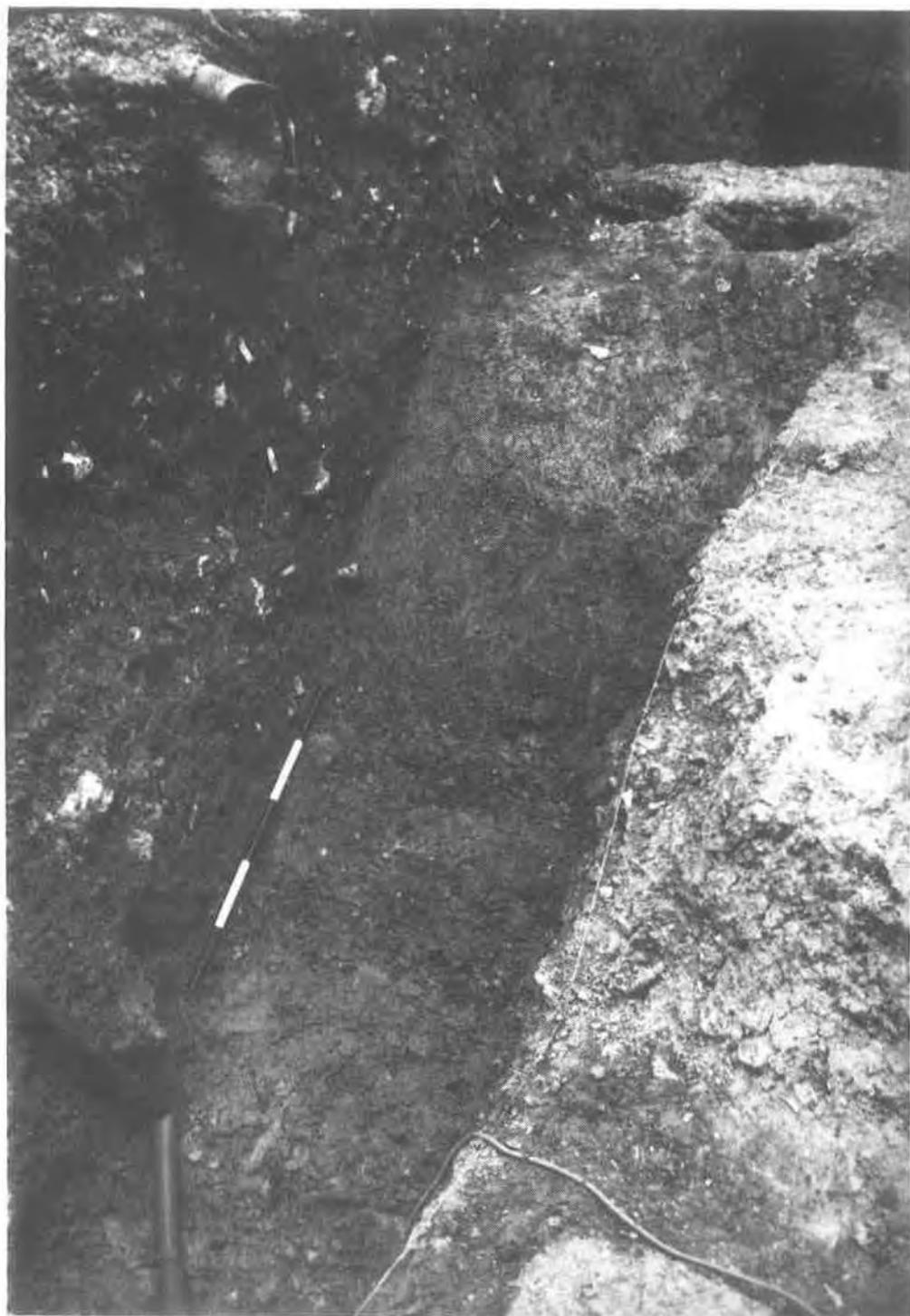


Plate XVII. Detail of ditch cut through gault clay with post pits 15 and 22, looking N.



Plate XVIII. Section ditch and mound material, looking E.

dividing the motte of the castle from the bailey.

It is likely that the motte sides and top have been considerably denuded, the summit having been 1–2 m higher than at present (Fig. 5). The motte would originally have been over 6 m high, which compares favourably, when the dimensions are considered in proportion, to the excavated Bedford Castle motte (Baker *et al.* 1979, 15). The latter was 50% greater in height and diameter than our lesser example, but surprisingly with a ditch, on the bailey side, of the same dimensions as Weston. No other mottes have been excavated in Buckinghamshire, so direct local comparisons are not possible.

The Finds

The Pottery by Barbara Hurman

There were 297 sherds of pottery examined from the ditch fill: context (11) 34 sherds, (13) 224 sherds, (19) 35 sherds, and (24) 4 sherds.

The pottery from the base of the ditch (24) contained nothing diagnostic in terms of dating; the pottery in the initial backfill (19) formed a group dating from the late eleventh century to the early twelfth century (Nos. 1–3). Some residual sherds of eleventh–twelfth-century date occur in context (13) (Nos. 4–6). The final infilling, (11) and (13), included joining jug sherds from the later thirteenth to the later fourteenth century (Nos. 7–15). Forms and fabrics of this pottery can be paralleled with known stratified material from the area (Farley 1976).

Cooking Pots: the majority of the sherds were unglazed coarse wares and presumed to be from cooking pots.

Jugs: two unglazed coarse-ware jugs were represented, one illustrated (No. 7), the other a shattered, stabbed strap handle. There were 47 glazed jug sherds, and apart from three (two brown-green glaze, context (11), one orange-green, context (13)) all came from the same jug; two reconstructed pieces of this are illustrated (Nos. 13, 14). Although the fabric

identification for this jug fits a recognizable Brill/Boarstall type, its decoration is unfamiliar in the area. The same can also be said for the form of jug sherd showing a handle stump (No. 15).

Decoration: this consisted of thumbing on rims, applied thumb strips, and combing, wavy and irregular; one base piece (from (19), not illustrated) had combing underneath the base, and glazed jug sherds had applied overlapping pads and horizontal indents on strip decoration.

Fabrics: the illustrated material was examined under a binocular microscope $\times 20$; the majority of sherds were hand-made and fired under reducing conditions unless otherwise stated in the pottery catalogue below.

- Fab. 1 Sand, quartz, flint, occasional inclusions (grains of calcareous grog, small black pebbles).
- Fab. 2 Sand, quartz, flint, sparse iron ore and calcareous inclusions.
- Fab. 3 Sand, quartz, flint, occasional organic inclusions and very small black pebbles.
- Fab. 4 Brill/Boarstall type, sand abundant, quartz sparse, iron ore and calcareous inclusions.

The common factors were the sand and quartz grains; the variation came within grain size and frequency of flint/?chert, and the occasional organic, iron ore, calcareous, and grog inclusions.

Some grey, black or buff, angular or round occasional inclusions especially in the late eleventh/twelfth-century pottery (Nos. 3, 4) were difficult to identify without thin sectioning, although similar to grog.

Catalogue of Illustrated Pottery (Fig. 6)

The context number(s) are given at the end of each entry.

- 1. Dark grey, fab. 1. (19)
- 2. Oxidized ext., grey int., random combing, fab. 1, abundant quartz. (19)
- 3. Black, pink-mauve margins, diam. 36 cm, fab. 1. See

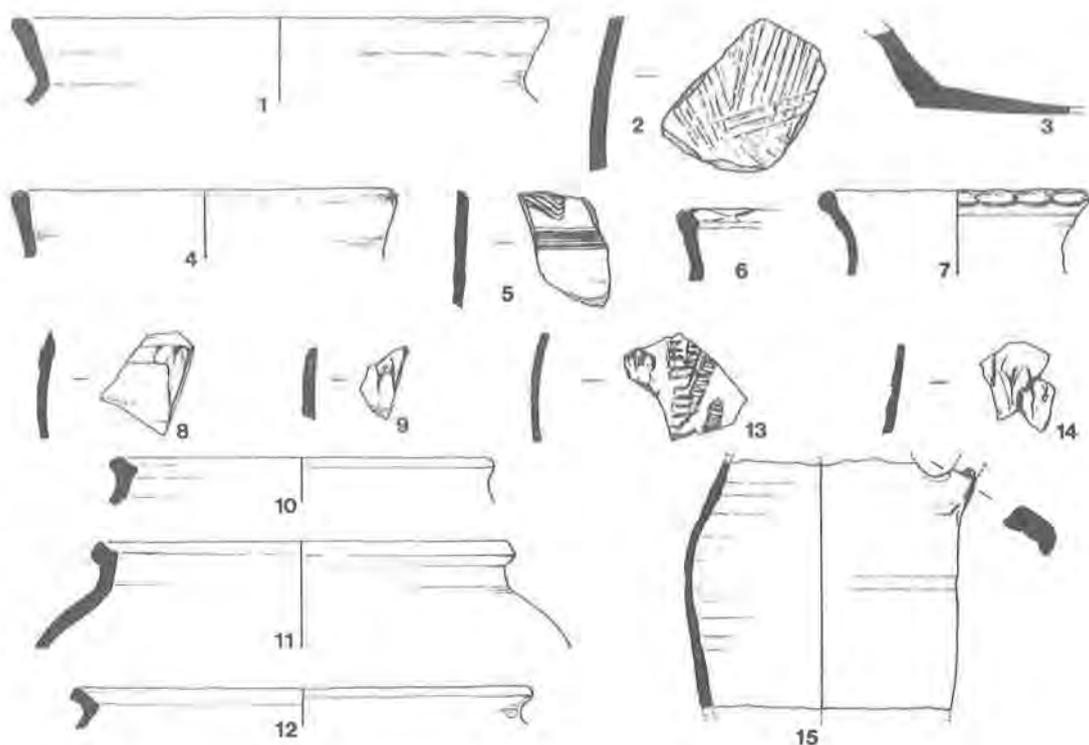


Fig. 6. The pottery, 1-0 layer, 0-0 layer (1:4).

- also No. 5 from the same pot but no join. (19)
4. Dark grey-brown, fab. 1. (13)
 5. Black pink-mauve margins, horizontal and wavy combing, fab. 1. (13)
 6. Black-purple, pinched thumbing top line of rim, diam. uncertain, fab. 4, sparse calcareous inclusions. (13)
 7. Light grey ext., int. darkened, thumbing outer edge of rim, fab. 2. (13)
 8. Light grey-buff, applied vertical, and joining horizontal thumbed strip, fab. 3. (13)
 9. Dark grey, applied, vertical thumbed strip, fab. 3. (13)
 10. Black-grey, fab. 3. (13)
 11. Buff-grey, fab. 3, very sandy, sparse flint. (13)
 12. Buff, smooth surfaces, orange-red core, fab. 4, very sandy, a large void with some organic remains. (13)
 13. Mottled green glaze ext., orange-buff core and int., wheel thrown, applied overlapping thumbed pads and indented strip decoration, fab. 4. Joins No. 14. (11)
 14. Neck sherd, as No. 13, with thumbed pads but no strip decoration, fab. 4. Joins No. 13. (11)
 15. Jug sherd with base of slashed strap handle, unfinished interior plug to handle, where a large piece of calcareous inclusion was lodged. Green-yellowish overall glaze ext. with good gloss showing some iron staining from iron grains within fabric. Buff-grey core, orange-buff int., wheel thrown, fab. 4. (13)

Residue on a Sherd from Base of Ditch Fill
by Dr J. Evans

The residue had the appearance of a black powder. Microscopic examination showed no vegetable matter or other structural debris to be present. A sample of the order of 200 mg was removed for analysis.

Preliminary investigation of the residue using infra-red spectroscopy indicated the presence of a complex mixture of organic materials. The sample was thus extracted with a range of solvents and the extracts separated by various chromatographic techniques. The only compounds identified were long chain fatty acids.

The major fatty acid detected was palmitic but relatively substantial amounts of oleic were also detected. Lower levels of linoleic, linolenic and stearic were also found. This group of acids

strongly suggests that at least part of the residue was produced by burning a vegetable oil. Context (24).

The Tile

No tile was present in the primary silting (24) or the initial backfilling (19). In the subsequent infilling, (11) and (13), 3.18 kg of ceramic roof-tile was present, principally unglazed peg-hole tile. One piece of ridge tile and one green-glazed ridge(?) fragment was present. The tile fabric was sandy with occasional inclusions of flint.

The Waterlogged Wood by Rod McCullough

The assemblage consisted of nearly 100 specimens from context (24). As presented they were well preserved within a clay medium. This medium also contained snail shells, one vertebra (possibly of sheep) and one possible worked flint flake.

The specimens were washed in tap water and sorted. The sample contained both worked wood and unworked round wood (i.e. wood removed from the tree but without any further working). Some of the specimens had been scorched. Having split the assemblage on the basis of carpentry marks the two fractions were subsampled: 60% of the worked wood and 30% of the unworked wood were thin sectioned and identified to species.

With an assemblage such as this it is often informative to note the morphology of the tool marks and of the item itself; from such observations it may be possible to discuss the range of the tool kit and the intended use or re-use for the wood. From this some assessment of the context may be possible. However, with such a small assemblage taken from a single context any detailed discussion is likely to be specious.

Worked Wood

This fraction contained a range of artefacts from fragments of rods through to offcuts of quite advanced carpentry ('advanced' here means in the progress of a piece of wood towards the finished artefact and away from its natural state). Thin sectioning showed that the majority of the specimens were beech (*Fagus*

sylvatica) (65%) with oak (*Quercus* sp.) (30%); a small component consisted of ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*), both present as single specimens. Both the beech and the oak were represented by flakes, carpentry offcuts, pins and slightly worked round wood. The pieces of ash and hazel were just slightly worked round wood.

Unworked Wood

The unworked wood consisted of hazel (50%), beech (40%) and a single specimen of elder (*Sambucus nigra*).

Discussion

Thus beech was arriving on site in its unworked state (though these are small branches) and may well have undergone the conversion process to finished artefacts on or near to the site. The carpentry offcuts include broken pieces of planks or battens and deliberately cut end pieces of the same. Some pieces bore clear tool marks with one in particular having numerous small grooves which are probably saw marks. It is not possible to ascribe function or form to the artefacts. However, it is likely that the context received the waste products of wood working and that there was probably a carpenter or joiner on site at some stage.

The unworked wood contains, as well as beech, two species of the woodland edge, both of which would have been of some use, though neither as carpentry timber.

None of the species present are alien to the region. The relative economic importance of each species cannot be assessed from a single context but it is not unreasonable to assume that beech was the major component of the neighbouring woodland and the main source of timber.

Animal Bone

A total of 211 fragments, weight 2.33 kg, were recovered from the medieval infilling of the ditch. At least one fragment showed signs of butchery, and an initial examination suggested a ratio of 65% sheep/goat:35% cattle, mainly small pieces of long bones. Also two cock spurs.

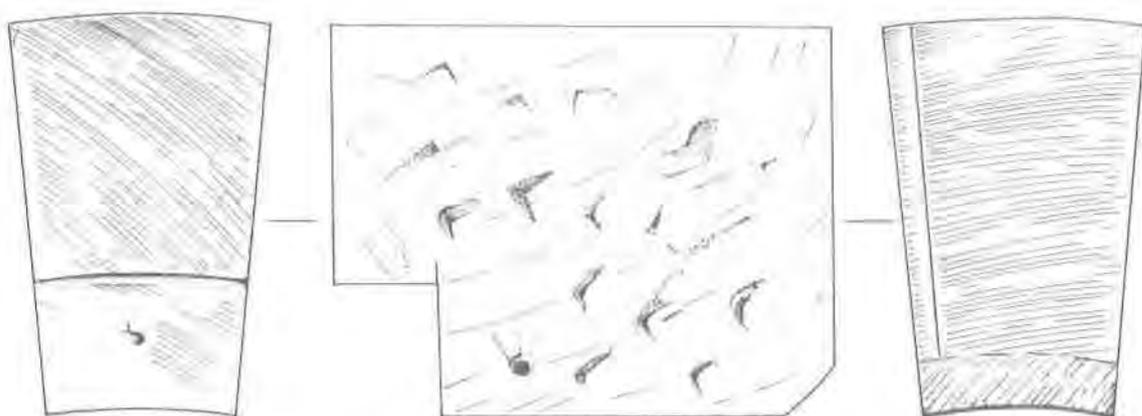


Fig. 7. Dressed stone from motte ditch (1:4).

Iron Objects

In all, ten unidentified small objects were retrieved from the medieval ditch fill. These were probably all fragments of nails. Not illustrated.

Copper Alloy Objects

Object no. 200. Tag end. Not illustrated. (19)

Object no. 201. Rivet head. Not illust. (19)

The Architectural Fragments (Fig. 7)

Two identical voussoir blocks in clunch from a door arch. The width of 0.31 m gives the full thickness of the inner order of the arch, with part of the door rebate on one side, and a simple chamfer at right angles to a laying-out line on the other. This simple design may have had a more elaborate outer order on top. Dated to the first half of the twelfth century. Examined by Richard Halsey, Inspector of Ancient Monuments. Context (24). Object nos. 203 (illustrated) and 204.

Discussion

There is no doubt that the sequence recorded above relates to the construction and eventual slighting of the de Turville motte and bailey castle at Weston Turville.

At the time of Domesday, Weston was held by one Roger who had been subinfeudated by Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (see following article). The motte may therefore have been a legally founded baronial castle built shortly after this

time in the later 1080s or in the 1090s. An alternative interpretation may be that Weston was an unlicensed 'adulterine' castle built during the early years of the Anarchy of the mid twelfth century. There is a clear reference to slighting in 1173/74 and it is highly probable that layer 19 represents the result of this action.

The waterlogged carpentry offcuts, recovered from the ditch bottom, appear to represent a construction phase when timber buildings were being erected or repaired atop the motte or in the bailey. Large structural members would have been formed from oak and beech, whereas small posts and wattles were derived from ash and hazel (see above, Waterlogged Wood report).

The voussoir blocks found deep down in the backfilled ditch are worthy of further note. They originated from a stone building within the *enceinte*, that is, from a hall or chapel either on top of the motte or within the bailey, which was demolished along with the castle. It is most likely that the stones came from a chapel which predated the existing parish church. The latter was built in the mid thirteenth century on a site 150 m from the motte, and it may be assumed that it succeeded the castle chapel both in date and function. The present church incorporates some twelfth-century details which could come from the earlier work (RCHM 1912, 313-16).

Following the slighting it is unlikely that the motte was re-used, and the bailey then appears to have been altered and enlarged to create a moated manor. Subsequent infilling of the ditch, (11) and (13), dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, is likely to be associated with this phase. A licence to crenellate this site was granted to John de Molyns in 1334 (RCHM 1913, 17), and the earthworks continued to be altered and enlarged into the post-medieval period.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the landowner for his assistance during the progress of the excavation. Dr R. P. Hagerty kindly provided an assessment of the documentary evidence (see following article). The production of this report would not have been possible without the help of the staff of the County Museum, particularly Michael Farley, Field Archaeologist.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, D., Baker, E., Hassall, J. 1979. 'Excavations in Bedford 1967-77', *Beds. Arch. J.* 13, 147-217.
- Brown, R. A. 1954. *English Medieval Castles*, 1st edn, London.
- CAS. County Antiquities Survey Record Cards at the Bucks County Museum, Aylesbury.
- Farley, M. 1976. 'Saxon and Medieval Walton', *Recs. Bucks* 20, 163-290.
- RCHM 1912, 1913. *Buckinghamshire*, vols. 1 and 2, Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (England).

The Society gratefully acknowledges a grant from English Heritage towards the cost of printing this paper.