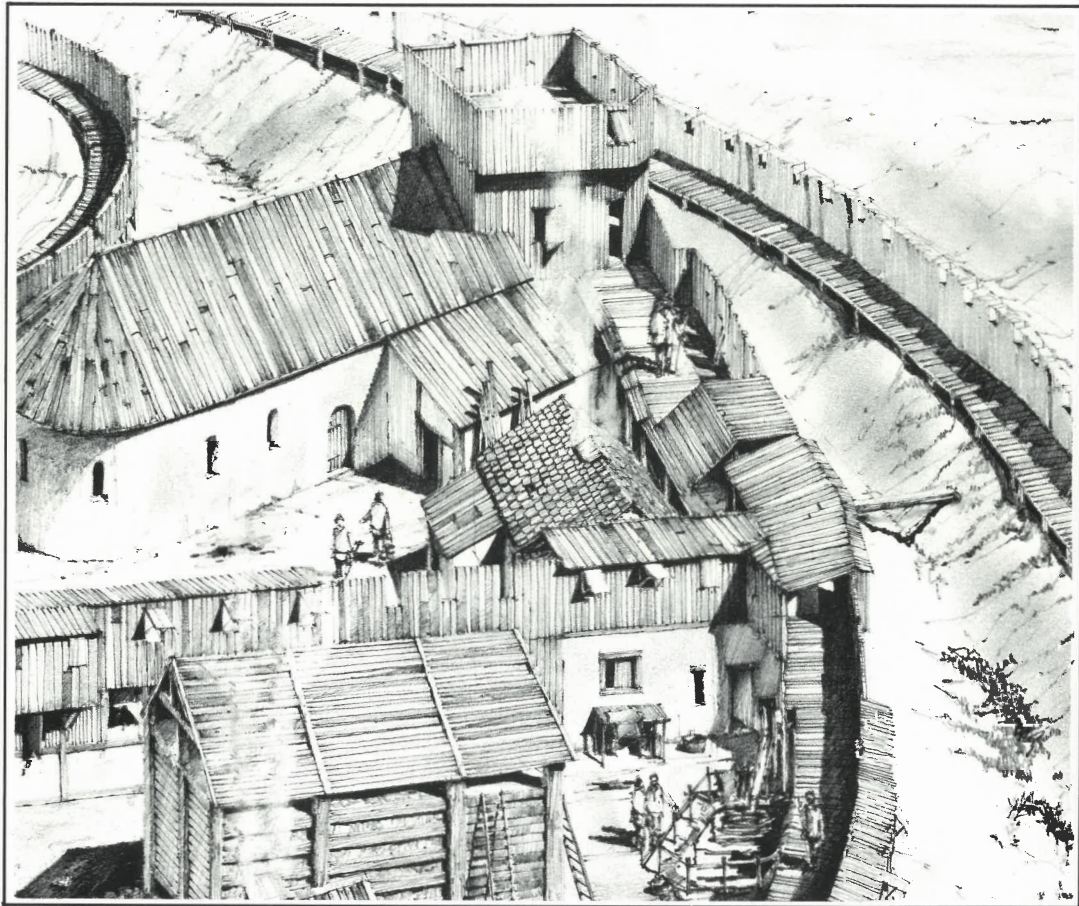


**HEN DOMEN · MONTGOMERY**

# A Timber Castle on the English- Welsh Border

CLWYD-POWYS  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

EXCAVATIONS 1960-1988 · A SUMMARY REPORT



**PHILIP BARKER  
AND  
ROBERT HIGHAM**

THE HEN DOMEN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

1988

The evidence for much of what follows will be found in the first volume of the definitive report, HEN DOMEN, MONTGOMERY: A TIMBER CASTLE ON THE ENGLISH-WELSH BORDER (Philip Barker and Robert Higham, Royal Archaeological Institute, 1982), available from the authors at £8.00 post free.

#### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many people who have contributed over many years and in many ways to this excavation, but who are too numerous to name here individually. We are grateful to the site owners, Mr. and Mrs. John Wainwright, for their continuing encouragement, to the staff of CADW for their support and to the Montgomery Civic Society for much assistance. Mr. Ivor Tanner of Montgomery has given his time generously to helping with many practical problems. Funds and other resources have come from many bodies, notably in recent years the universities of Birmingham and Exeter, Messrs. Barker and Carson (Droitwich), Tiltridge Ltd. (Upton-on-Severn), the British Academy and the Robert Kiln Trust. Jennifer Warren word-processed the text of this report. Mike Rouillard designed its layout and prepared the plan of the earliest castle. The reconstruction of phase X was drawn by Peter Scholefield.

*with best wishes  
Peter Scholefield*

THE SITE IS ON PRIVATE LAND, AND IS NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AS AN ANCIENT MONUMENT. AN EXHIBITION ABOUT HEN DOMEN IS TO BE FOUND IN "THE BELL", ARTHUR STREET, MONTGOMERY, THE EXHIBITION CENTRE OF THE MONTGOMERY CIVIC SOCIETY.

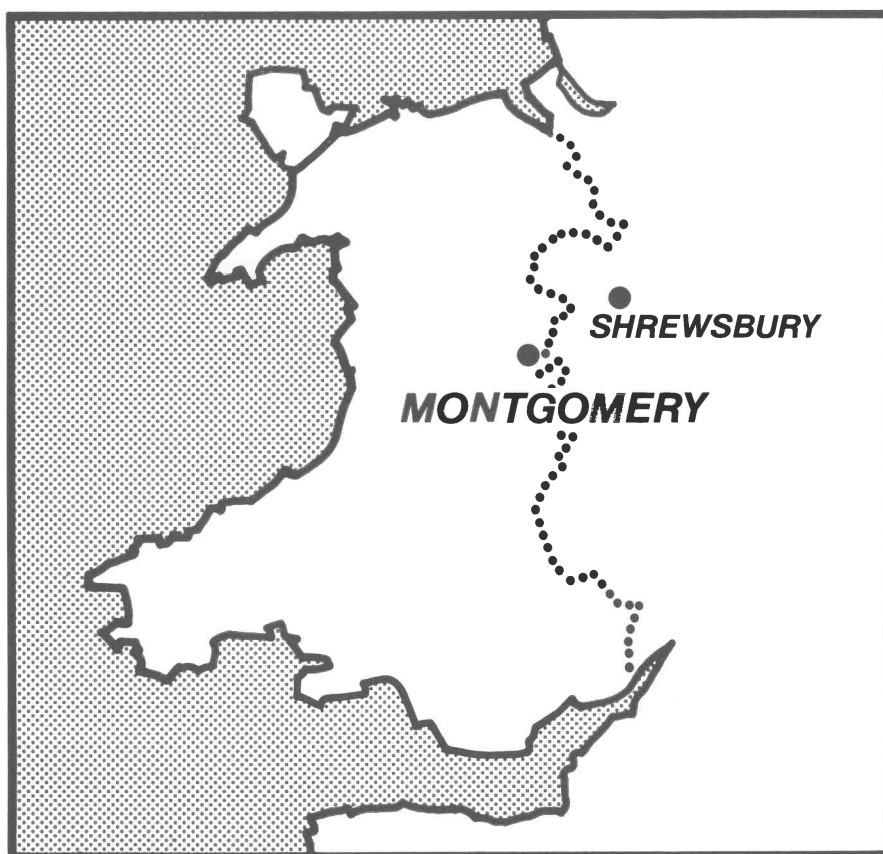
**HEN DOMEN · MONTGOMERY**

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# A Timber Castle on the English- Welsh Border

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EXCAVATIONS 1960-1988 · A SUMMARY REPORT



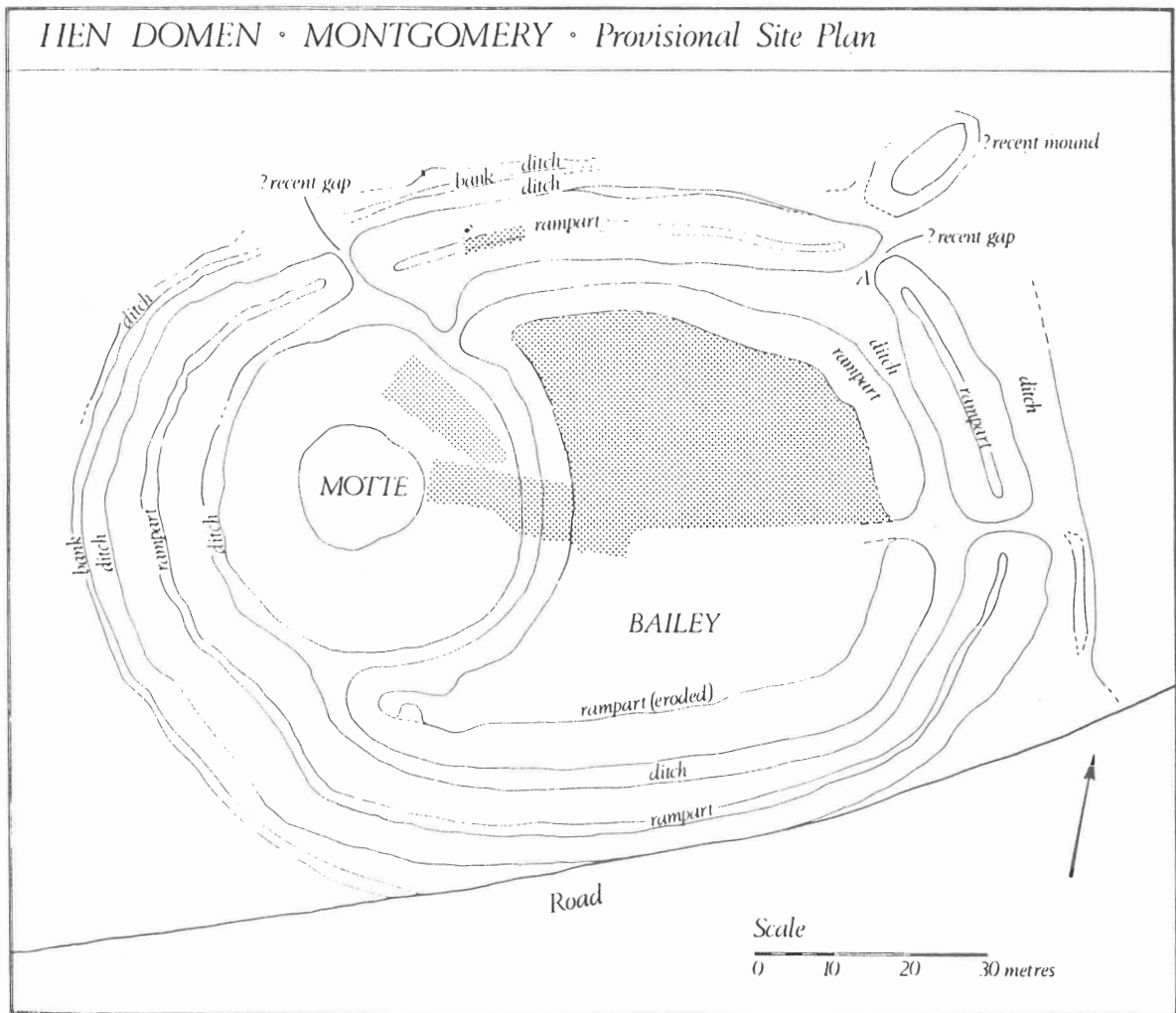
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INTRODUCTION (fig. 1)

Hen Domen, Montgomery, Powys (NGR S0214981) is the site of a medieval timber castle built by the Normans in the 1070s and occupied for approximately two centuries. It has been the subject of an extensive excavation spread over nearly thirty years and still continuing. Much of this has been carried out for short periods, and the total length of the various seasons' work is less than two years. Nevertheless it is the most fully explored site of its type in the British Isles, perhaps in Europe, and provides clear evidence of how structurally complex timber castles might be. The earthworks which are now the only surface remains of such sites conceal a history of development which only excavation can illuminate.



**Fig.1**

The shaded area contains structural evidence discussed (see figs. 4,5,6,7,8).

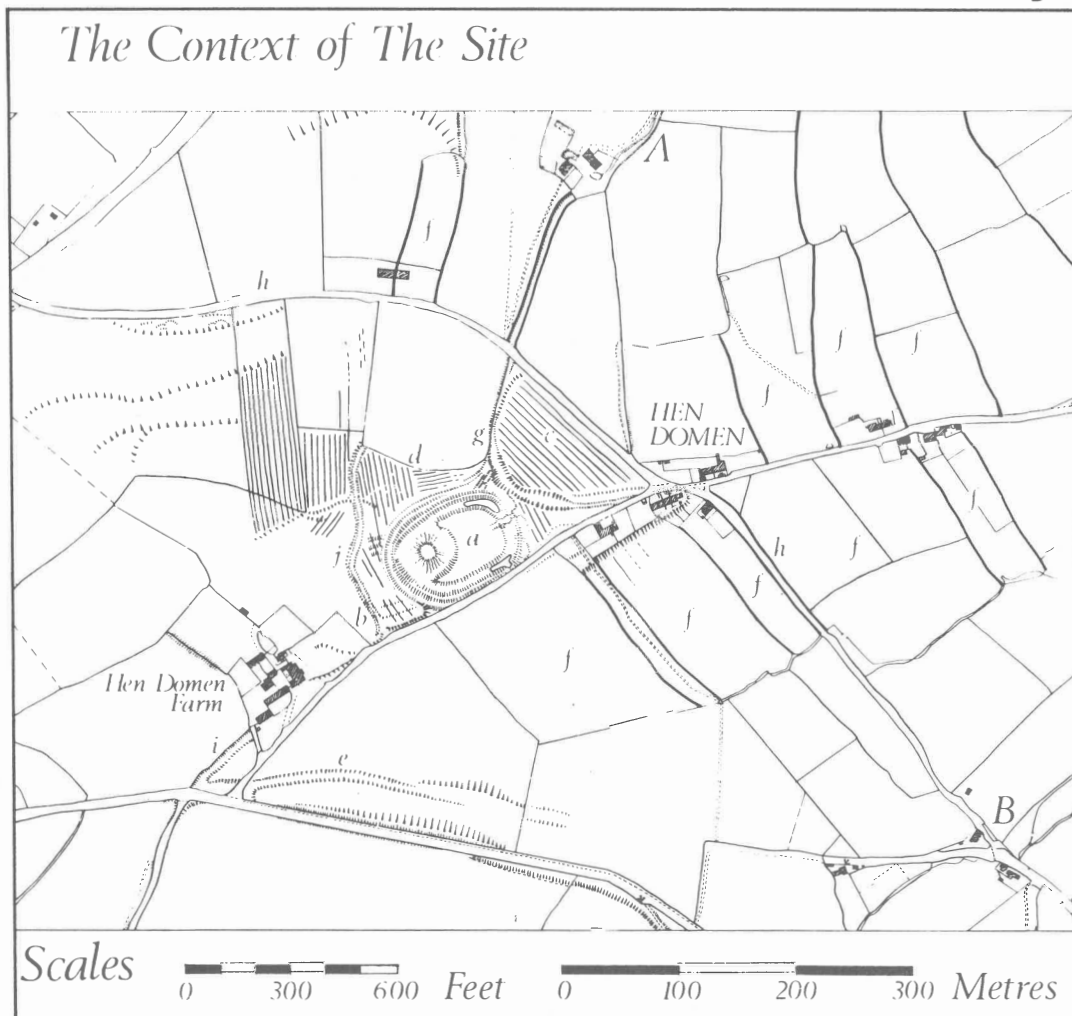
Hen Domen (whose Welsh name means "the old mound") is an example of a motte and bailey, a common type of medieval castle. A motte was a man-made mound (though sometimes created out of a natural feature) of earth, turf or broken rock, and carried a defended residence, often in the form of a tower. Mottes vary enormously in shape and size, that at Hen Domen being 8.0m high, and 40.m in diameter at its base and 6.5m in diameter at its summit. A bailey was a defended courtyard containing domestic buildings

and other structures. At Hen Domen the bailey is quite small, covering a third of an acre, but it is heavily defended with double ramparts and ditches. Excavation of the junction of the motte and the bailey rampart showed that at Hen Domen the motte was a primary feature of the site's design. The castle was built on a ridge of boulder clay overlying shale. This clay was an excellent material for the building of the motte, digging of the ditches and piling up of ramparts, as well as being used for the wall-cladding of some of the timber structures. There is no evidence that any part of Hen Domen was rebuilt in stone during its two hundred year life.

THE SETTING (figs. 2,3)

All archaeological sites are part of a man-made landscape, and at Hen Domen there survives unique evidence of the landscape in which the castle was built. Beneath and around the site survive clear traces of a field system of pre-Norman date. These fields were ploughed in ridges and are among the earliest surviving examples in the British Isles of this type. The evidence of Domesday Book (see below) and of pollens preserved in an excavated part of this field show that the area had already been abandoned before the Norman Conquest and was being used as a hunting chase. Two hollow ways, or sunken roads, as well as house platforms of unknown date lie among these fields. Other fields near Hen Domen have the curving boundaries suggestive of later fields contemporary with the castle itself. The present-day hamlet of Hen Domen may overlie the site of a small borough which the lords of the castle apparently tried to foster in the late twelfth century.

Fig.2





The location of the castle was influenced by the nearby crossing of the River Severn at Rhydwhyman. This was a large ford, whose probable Anglo-Saxon name, *Horseforde*, implies its military value. It lay at the end of valley routes which gave access to central England, and had been important for over a thousand years previously. Within a short distance are situated an iron age hillfort (Ffridd Faldwyn), a Roman fort (Forden Gaer), the Welsh-Mercian frontier of Offa's Dyke and a new castle and town established in 1223 by Henry III at present-day Montgomery to replace the first Montgomery castle. Two road systems can be seen on the map, one reflecting the importance of Forden Gaer and the first castle, the later one radiating from Montgomery.

Excavation beneath the castle ramparts has revealed part of a settlement earlier than the Anglo-Saxon fields. This is not illustrated here, but was probably of dark age or perhaps prehistoric date. Excavation of the castle's outer defences also revealed part of a stone field boundary beneath the Anglo-Saxon fields. The first Montgomery castle (Hen Domen) was therefore one element in a landscape which evolved from very early times to the present day.

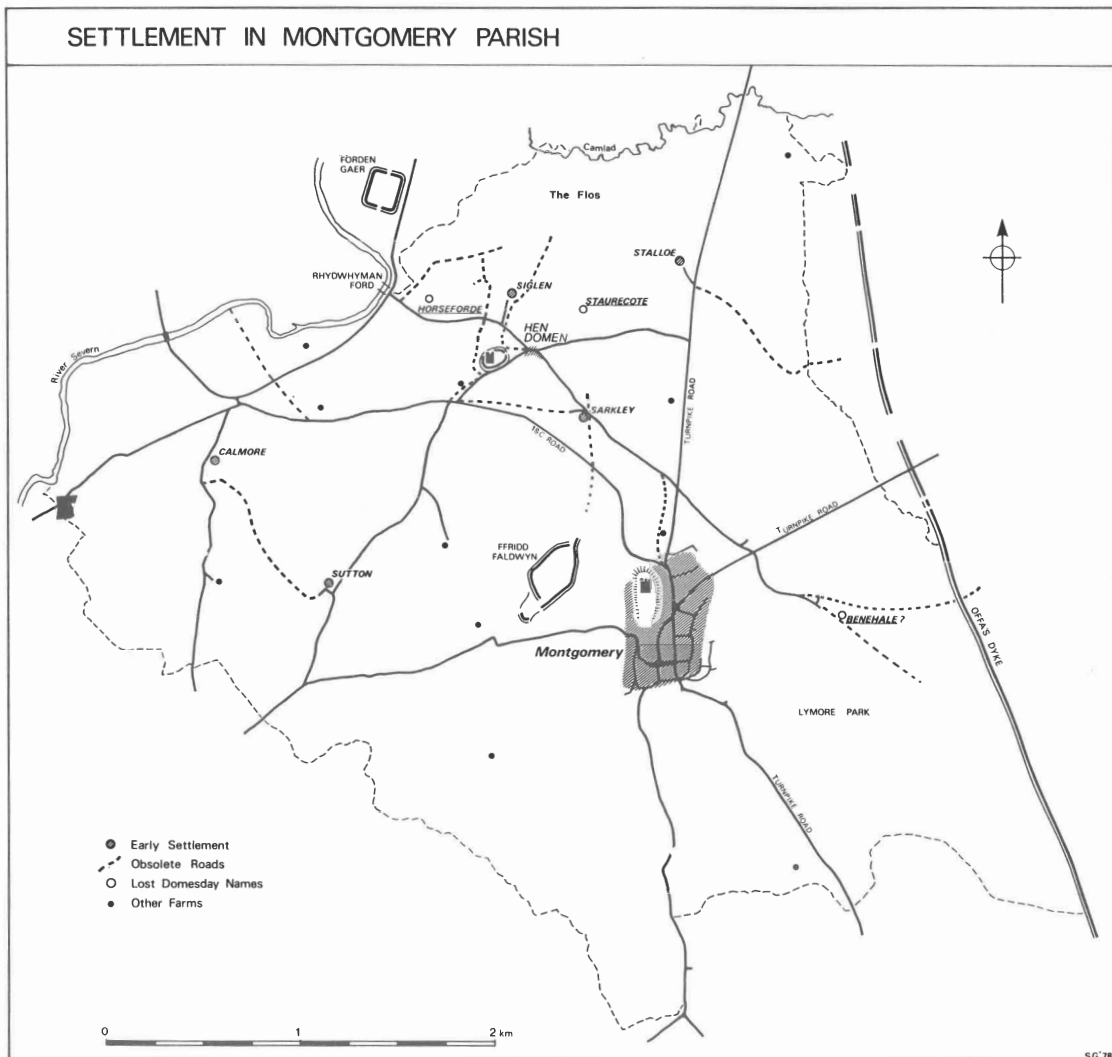


Fig. 3

## THE HISTORY

As is the case with many medieval castles, there are few direct documentary references to Hen Domen which are contemporary with its occupation. Domesday Book (1086) provides the first clear statement of the castle's existence: Roger, earl of Shrewsbury since 1070, had built a castle and called it Montgomery after his home in Normandy. Whether he did this out of nostalgia, or as an aggressive act of defiance against the Welsh, is not clear. Perhaps he intended to establish a town and priory, classic features of Norman colonization in Britain, though he never did so. The castle (which should be referred to as Old Montgomery) certainly became a base for conquest in central Wales: by 1086 considerable tracts of Powys were under Roger's control. Though since he was an important figure in the Anglo-Norman world he probably played little personal part in these developments. Many other small castles sprang up in the Vale of Montgomery and along the Severn valley as a result of increasing Norman influence, but in 1095, the garrison of Hugh, Roger's son, was massacred in a Welsh attack, so the Norman conquest of the area did not go unchecked. This first phase of the castle's history came to an end with the fall of Robert of Bellême, Hugh's brother, in 1102. In rebellion against King Henry I, Robert was expelled from England and his lands on the Welsh border, in Sussex and Yorkshire, confiscated. The earldom of Shrewsbury became a royal shire, the conquests in Wales were lost, and Old Montgomery and the lands immediately around it became a new marcher lordship. In this first phase, the structural evidence, simple and massive, is a good reflection of the strongly military character of the occupation.

The family of de Boulers (Baldwin I, Stephen, Robert and Baldwin II) held Old Montgomery until 1207. They were far less rich and powerful than the earls of Shrewsbury had been, and this was their only castle, its lordship the limit of their powers, though they acquired lands elsewhere through marriage into a Yorkshire family. In this second phase of its existence, however, the castle had important domestic and administrative functions as well as military ones. Sometimes the de Boulers were at war with the Welsh, but not always: one of them married a princess of Powys; their local tenants provided a garrison and hunting attendants, as well as provisions for the castle. The lord of Hodnet, an outlying manor in Shropshire, was their steward, periodically bringing his family to Old Montgomery and being provided with suitable lodging to carry out his business. The de Boulers never rose to the highest ranks of marcher society, but they were undisputed lords of their own territory, much of which would be visible from whatever structure they built on top of the motte at Hen Domen. It is from this phase that the fullest archaeological picture of the castle has been recovered. Its defences and crowded courtyard of domestic buildings well reflect the mixture of military and domestic life that characterized the longest single period in the site's history.

By 1207 the family had died out and their lands passed to the king. The sheriffs of Shropshire maintained the castle, but in 1215 the area passed into Welsh control, and the archaeological evidence (see below) suggests the castle was abandoned. In 1223, in renewed war against the Welsh, Henry III planned its refortification, but a new site nearby was chosen for a much larger stone castle. All later references to Montgomery castle are to the new castle, and Hen Domen disappears from history. The archaeological evidence, however, suggests that the site was re-occupied, and the explanation for this probably lies in the local topography. The crossing of the Severn at Rhydwhyman, not visible from New Montgomery, continued to

be an important meeting place of Welsh and English down to the 1270s, when Edward I's conquests in North Wales reduced the political importance of Montgomery. As a forward control point for the river crossing, the first castle probably had a final lease of life of fifty years' duration. In this period, however, it was a purely military outpost and had none of the social attributes of the twelfth century. The contraction of the occupied area in the latest structural phase reflects this change of character very well.

#### THE STRUCTURAL EVIDENCE AND ITS INTERPRETATION (figs. 4,5,7,8)

The buildings which are described below in simplified terms were represented in the ground by complex evidence which varied greatly in character. This may usefully be summarized here, since in a brief report it will not be possible to describe the complexities of every building. In addition, the problems of reconstructing and dating the site's structural development may be considered.

Four main construction techniques were used, and the builders seem to have chosen whatever method seemed most appropriate to the materials available and the function of the particular building. In the earliest castle, the massive foundation trench of Building LIa, nearly a metre wide and deep, reflects horizontally laid timbers with uprights morticed into them, either at intervals with other infilling, or perhaps continuously as in stave-built churches. The massive character of such a timber is revealed by the survival at the foot of the motte ditch of the base plate of the adjoining bridge, which was some 0.3m square and 4.5m long. Secondly, there were buildings with individual posts set in large post-pits. A twelve-post building (XXXVIII) of the earliest castle which survived for many years, took this form (figs.4,5). Preserved fragments in the bottom of some of the post-pits of this structure showed the uprights to have been some 0.2m in diameter. Thirdly, some buildings were represented by lines of much smaller posts which alone could not have provided support for the walls. Wattle and daub may sometimes have been employed, but in some places the remains of substantial clay-walling survived at foundation level, particularly for building XXII in the middle period (fig.5). Here the walls were some 0.75m. thick and the timbers provided only a skeleton around which the clay was built up. Fourthly, some post-sockets were so shallow that they can only represent the settling of timbers belonging to buildings which were self-supporting, with framed timbers throughout their superstructures. Buildings of this type were found in the earliest phase (e.g. XXVI and XXVII) and almost exclusively in the latest phase of the site (figs.4,8). Although in most periods there was a mixture of building techniques, there was apparently no use of ground sills or fully framed buildings in the middle period when the de Boulers were in occupation. This could indicate that their supplies of good timber were more restricted than those of the Montgomery family before them and the royal custodians who followed them.

It is hoped eventually to publish a reconstruction drawing for each phase of the site. The first of these is included here (fig.6) and represents the middle period, for which the fullest plan is available. It is discussed below in detail, but may be introduced here briefly since it arises directly from consideration of the structural techniques outlined above. As with all archaeological reconstructions of timber buildings, it is reliable in ground plan and basic building technique for each structure,



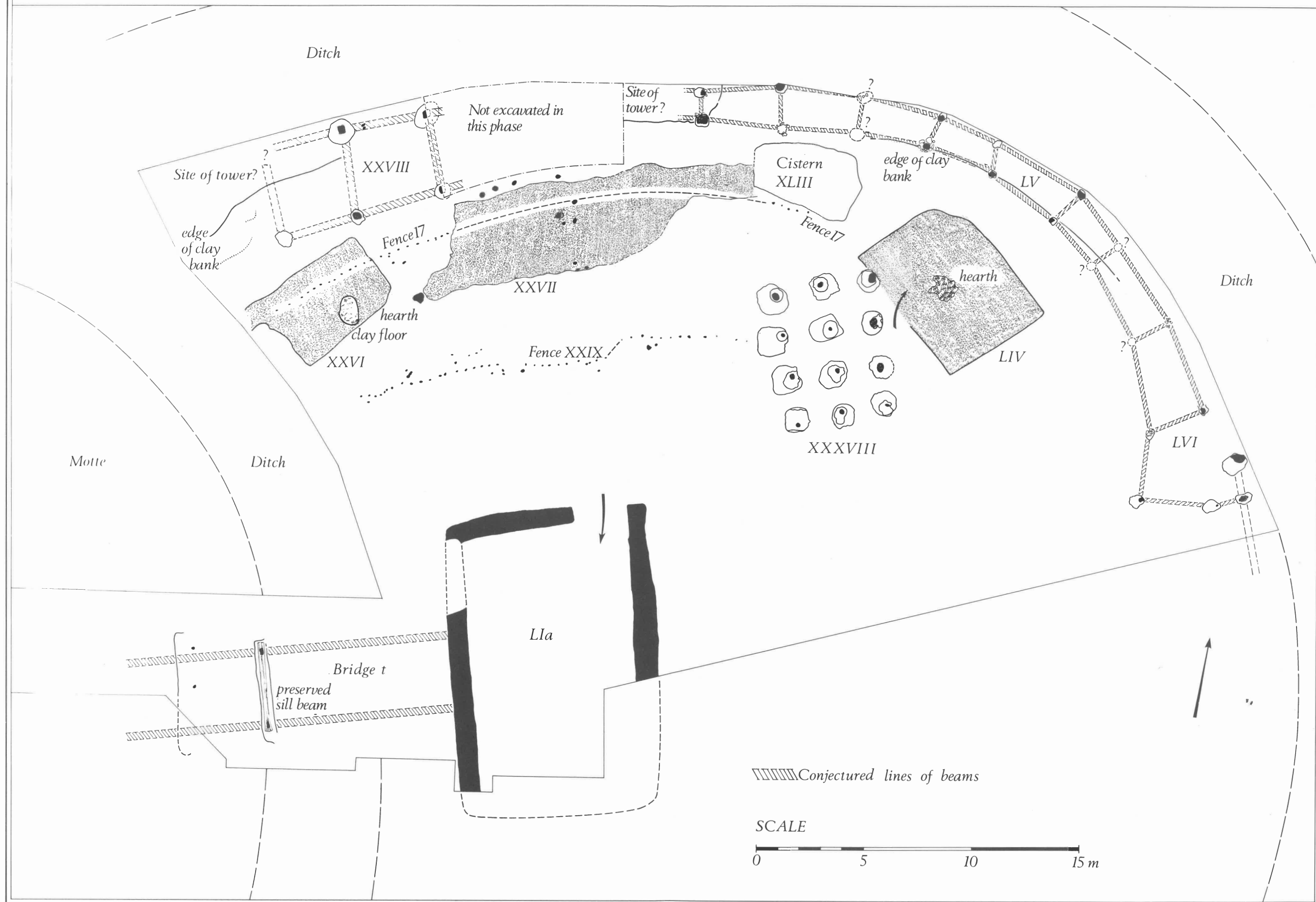
but choices of wall cladding, roofing materials, details of doorways, windows and many other aspects are more speculative. Sometimes the plan of a building reveals something of its superstructure. Building XLVIII, in the middle period, has opposing walls with different numbers of posts, so that its roof must have rested on wall plates: it cannot have been a building composed of bays. Very often, however, decisions about superstructure rest upon a general knowledge of medieval buildings and common sense considerations. Since there have been no finds of roof slates, and since thatch would present a fire hazard in a crowded site for which attack was always a threat, planking and shingles seem the logical choice of roofing material. Shingles are also well attested in the documentary history of castles generally. For the most part decisions about reconstructional detail depend upon using the repertoire of techniques for which there is some evidence somewhere on the site. The use of clay walling, for example, has been liberally suggested.

Finally, the difficulties of dating the structural development of the site should be emphasised. The overall dating rests heavily upon the documentary framework outlined above. It is assumed that the earliest castle dates from between 1070 and 1086, and that the latest castle dates from after 1223. There is also some archaeological evidence which corresponds with the two ends of the overall date range: Stamford ware (eleventh century pottery from eastern England) was associated with the earliest castle, and late thirteenth century pottery with its decline. But between these two major horizons lay a multitude of structural events, both major and minor, whose dating is not assisted by the documentary, or any other evidence. It is tempting to relate the middle period plan (phase X) to the acquisition of the castle by the de Boulers in 1102. But the rebuilding may not have been embarked upon immediately. In any case, the north-western part of the bailey had a structural phase (not illustrated) between the earliest castle and phase X. The latter has therefore been cautiously labelled "circa 1150", but this can be no more than an approximation. Equally it is impossible to decide whether phase Y, succeeding X, was within the de Boulers' occupation, or whether it reflects the period of royal custody from 1207-1215. If the former, then some major social change in the use of the site is indicated, as well as a significant change of building technique. Between phases Y and Z, a deep silt layer accumulated in the lowest part of the bailey, suggesting an abandonment. It is quite probable that this coincides with the period of Welsh control of the area from 1215 to 1223. On the whole, however, historical correlations are difficult, and the artefactual material is not sufficiently diagnostic to help date the structural phases. In any case, with the exception of the first and last phases, the phases as presented here are greatly oversimplified. The buildings here separated out into individual plans were probably the product of a more continuous process of repair and replacement. It cannot be proved that all the structures presented in one plan were erected at the same time, nor that they were demolished at the same time, but simply that at some stage in their use they were contemporary with each other.

#### THE EARLIEST CASTLE (fig.4)

The earliest structure of Roger of Montgomery's castle was a low bank of clay and turf piled up along the course of the rampart which was soon to be built over it. This bank, some 1.5m wide, levelled up the downward slope at the point where the front timbers of the palisade were to be erected.

HEN DOMEN · MONTGOMERY · Northern half of Bailey · The Earliest Castle c.1086



It has not been traced throughout the northern defences of the castle, and it is curious that it did not appear at precisely the points where some of the palisade timber positions were also elusive. Perhaps there were details in the design of the defences which are now impossible to detect. At the extreme north-west corner the bank was higher and broader, although it was badly mutilated here by rabbit burrows. Perhaps this was the site of a tower, and a similar mound some 20 metres further east may have carried an interval tower. These putative towers must have been heavily framed structures, since they left no ground evidence. At the bailey entrance, however, a curving row of posts was sunk in the ground. It is not clear whether these represent a tower (tentatively called building LVI) or simply a revetment holding back the rampart material in a vertical wall flanking the entrance passage. Another large post-pit here may represent a support for a fighting platform which bridged the entrance. The palisade defending the northern half of the bailey was not uniform throughout its length. In the north-west corner the rear posts supporting the fighting platform were some 3.5m behind the front posts (building XXVIII). Further east they lay only 1.5m behind (building LV). This difference between the upper and lower halves of the bailey became more marked in later phases of the castle's development and subsequent palisades were of the narrower design. Despite this difference the evidence for all the posts was similar in that none stood in excavated post-holes. They stood directly on the laying-out bank (or the pre-castle field surface immediately behind), or in shallow depressions (perhaps the result of settling) or on pads of clay. The raising of the bank created a horizontal base for the front and rear posts, possibly indicating that the timbers were cut to pre-set lengths. Perhaps the entire structure was pre-fabricated. There was no evidence on the ground of horizontal beams linking the front and rear posts; if they existed they were jointed in slightly higher up. If there were no such beams the uprights must have been supported in position while the rampart was piled around them. The rampart itself, dug from the surrounding ditch, was a largely undifferentiated dump of boulder clay and stones. Tip lines were visible, but no major periods of construction were apparent. Fence 17, located at the time of writing in the extreme north-west and partially further east, may have been a revetment to control the tail of the rampart as it was dumped. From the rampart the palisade timbers must have risen at least 4.0m, to provide a breastwork tall enough to protect a man on the fighting platform and to allow access beneath.

The tail of the rampart did not long remain in this form. In the north-west corner, two small buildings (XXVI and XXVII) of which only the floor areas survived, were inserted. As illustrated, XXVII is represented by charred timbers, clay and charcoal from its destruction rather than a floor, but XXVI had a laid clay floor. The lack of wall foundations suggests that these were built of framed timbers. Further east lay building LIV, erected on a platform of clay and with walls represented by small postholes whose timbers were perhaps clad in clay. Probably also belonging to this phase of additions was the digging of the first water cistern (XLI) at the lowest point of the bailey. This was to remain, with alterations, throughout much of the castle's life.

Adjacent to building LIV was a massive structure with twelve deeply founded posts in four rows of three set at close intervals. The post-pits of this building (XXXVIII) were dug so that their bottoms were level to within 0.1m, again suggesting some prefabrication of the timbers. Carbon fourteen assay from the preserved bases of two posts produced results of  $1054 \pm 70$  and  $971 \pm 70$  (corrected dates) which may also indicate the re-use of timbers from an earlier structure elsewhere. The close spacing of these

timbers suggests this building was not a domestic dwelling but a structure designed to resist the thrust of stored material, and a granary is the most likely interpretation. In addition, its proximity to the probable western entrance of building LIV suggests strongly that in this phase the twelve posts carried their superstructure high enough off the ground to allow access beneath it. This building had a long life, continuing through major reconstructions of the castle (see below).

Of similarly massive character was the building (LIa) occupying a central position in front of the motte ditch. This is represented by a foundation trench up to 1.0m wide in places and cut deeper on the west (up slope) side so that its bottom was more or less level. This trench would have comfortably held horizontal timbers similar to a preserved example which lay in a trench at the bottom of the adjacent motte ditch. This sill beam, the foundation of the first bridge, was 4.5m long and 0.3m square. It had mortices near its ends to carry uprights for a bridge nearly 4.0m wide. A timber slot and two postholes on the motte side represented further elements of this bridge. A socket in the underside of the preserved bridge timber (and therefore redundant) is a further indication of the re-use of old timbers and pre-fabrication in the earliest castle's design, of which other evidence was quoted above. The proximity of the bridge to building LIa, as well as the compatible sizes of the preserved timber and its foundation trench suggest strongly that access to the bridge was via the building. The massiveness of foundations also suggests that this building was of two storeys, perhaps a first floor hall, the major residence within the bailey of the earliest castle. Fence XXIX, between this building and those behind the rampart, may represent an internal division of the bailey screening the main residence from lesser structures. Building LIa itself became the site of a further structure in the next phase and was of long-lasting influence in the site's development.

Restricted access to the motte bridge via building LIa would add another dimension to the defensibility of the motte, especially since the ground floor entrance was in the northern wall of the building rather than facing the bailey entrance. If the motte tower to which the bridge led was constructed along similarly massive lines as the rest of the earliest castle then, together with the bridge and building LIa it would have made a formidable sight in a local landscape whose buildings were of a much slighter character.

#### THE TWELFTH CENTURY CASTLE (figs.5,6)

The earliest castle underwent various (unillustrated) modifications, with evidence of a new palisade and other structures dug into the top of the rampart in the north-west corner. The date of these changes is not known, nor is the date by which the bailey was transformed into the new lay-out for which we have the fullest plan (phase X) so far available. It is referred to here as mid-twelfth century and represents the de Boulders' castle. Fig.6 is an attempt to show what the bailey looked like in this period, and is based as closely as possible on the excavated evidence. Some elements in the plan survived from the earliest castle, notably the granary Building XXXVIII and the site of the cistern XLIII, but in many other respects the plan was different in detail, as well as being generally more built up. Phase X was principally composed of post-hole structures and there was evidence for extensive use of clay as solid walls (Buildings XII, XXII) or as cladding to thicken a skeleton of posts and wattles (the

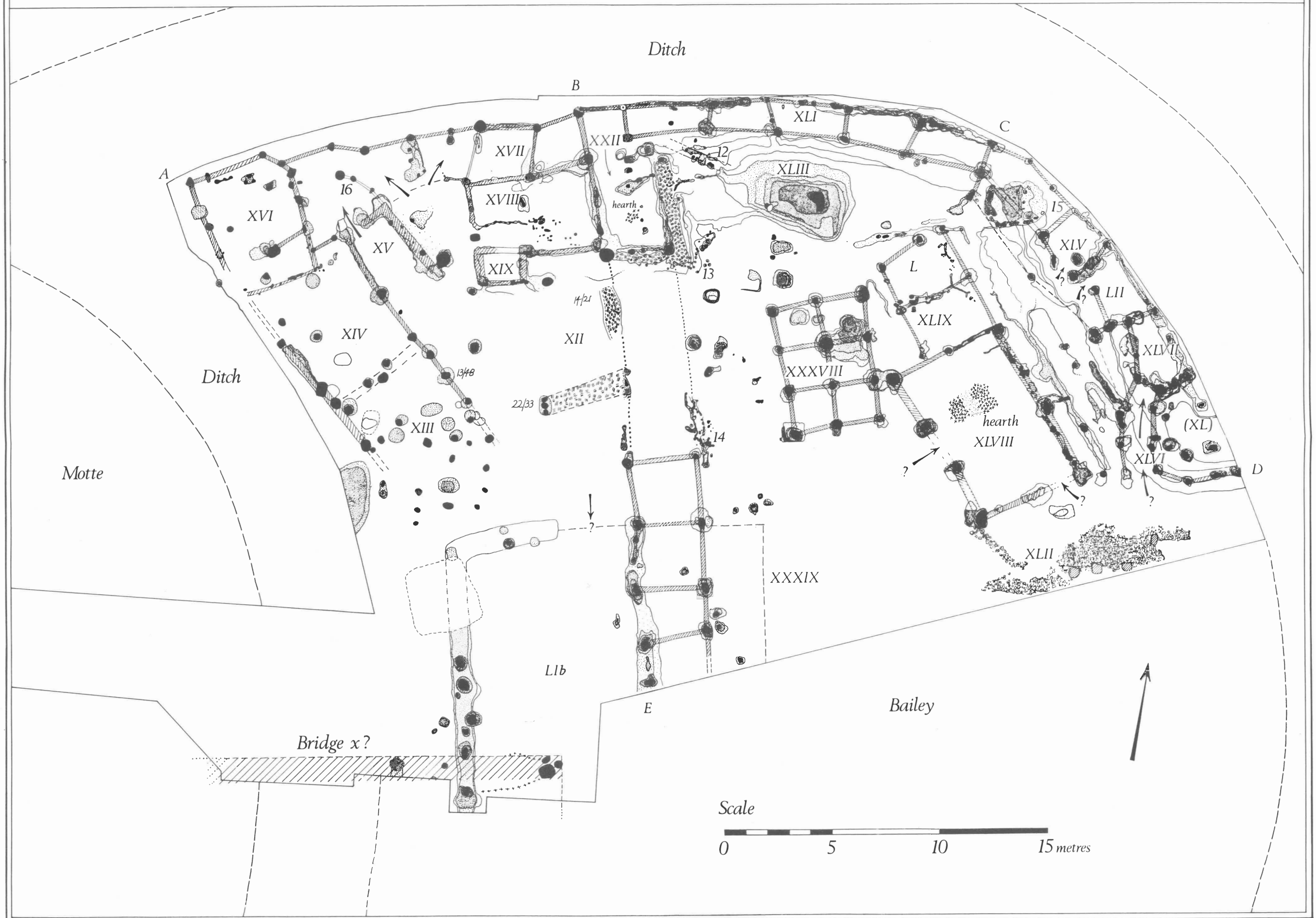
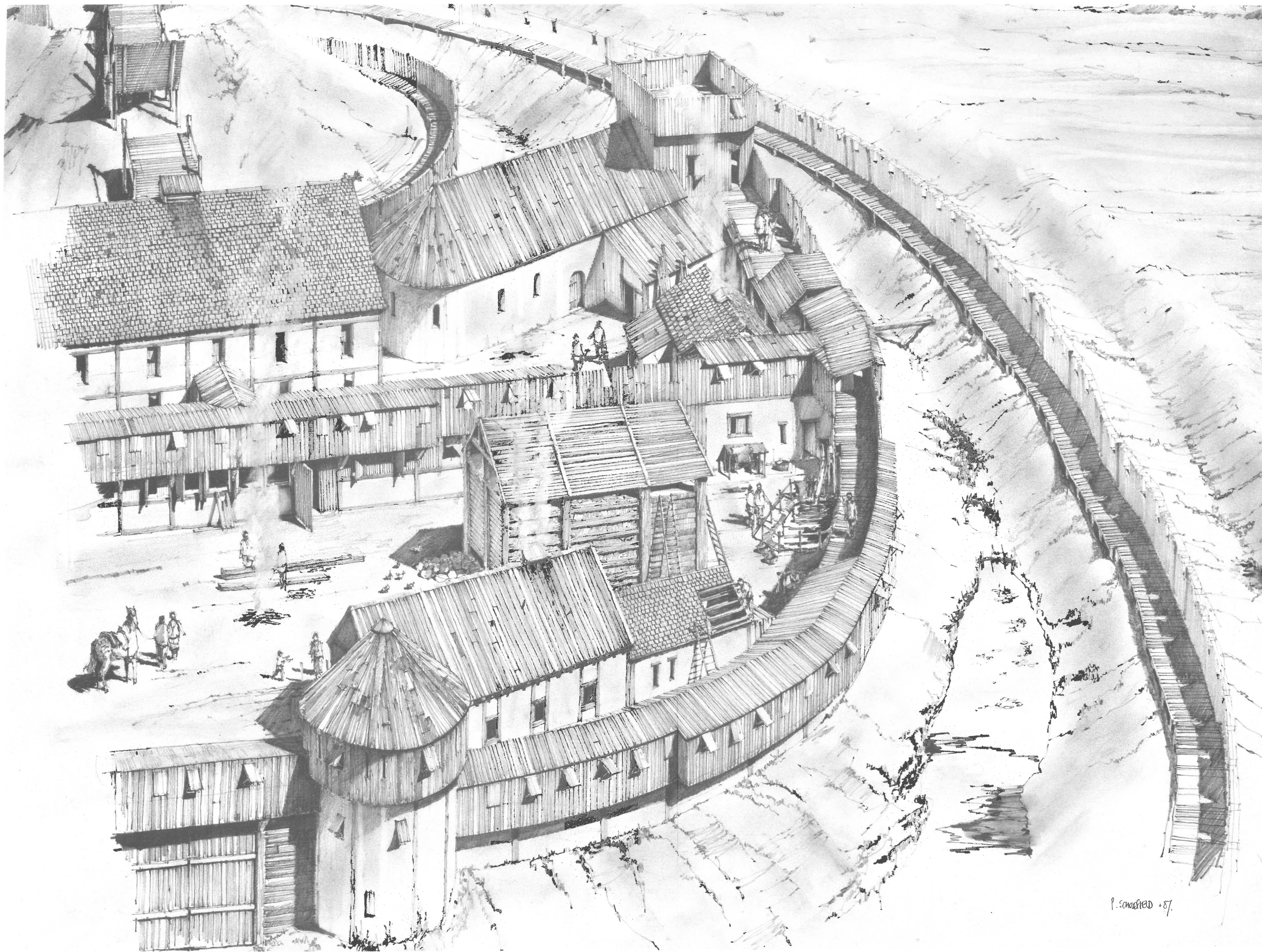


Fig.5





This reconstruction drawing, based on the excavated evidence of phase X (fig. 5), shows what the bailey may have looked like in the middle of the 12th century AD.



outer and inner palisades and the rooms beneath the inner fighting platform).

The reconstruction and plan are here discussed progressively from the motte down to the bailey entrance.

There was virtually no evidence for the form of Bridge x, but the massive supports for the following Bridge y suggest that that bridge could be raised in some fashion as an early form of drawbridge. Accordingly, a leaf of the bridge in the reconstruction has been shown raised. Similarly, there is little evidence for the palisade and fighting platform, shown encircling the base of the motte, except that when a chord was cut across the motte there were a number of large post-holes which seemed to have no other function, though they made no coherent pattern. It seems highly probable that there was some form of defence here since, if there were not, the motte would be defended only by the outer, more flimsy, palisade and whatever structures there were at its top, which would make it unacceptably weaker than the bailey.

In the earliest castle there was unequivocal evidence of a very large building at the foot of the motte, probably a hall which was, with little doubt, of two storeys (see above). Building LIb seems to have been a post-hole building of the same dimensions and is here reconstructed as such. This building, has been shown here clad in clay with a shingle roof.

Building XIV/XIII is here reconstructed as an apsidal chapel, on the grounds that it directly underlay the more convincing chapel of Phase Y and because from post-hole l3/48 came the remains of a limestone stoup for holy water.

At the north-western end of the chapel is tower XVI on the thickened end of the bailey rampart. It is reconstructed as being of three storeys with a flat roof (as, for example, the southern tower at Stokesay Castle, Shropshire) since, though it may have had a gabled roof, it is an awkward shape and a flat roof seems more probable.

The palisade which encircled the bailey is presumed to have been of clay, reinforced with a post and wattle skeleton, since the post-holes which make up its evidence are of many sizes, some quite small and dug in a wandering line along the rampart crest. The palisade itself is presumed to be some 4+ metres (14 feet) high, as it was in the earliest castle. In the reconstruction the lower part of the palisade is shown clay-clad, while the upper part is of vertical planking, jettied out over the ditch, with hoardings and, in places, various forms of roofing, chiefly to demonstrate the possibilities rather than be definitive, since there is no evidence for these elaborations. However, the jettied upper storey of the north tower at Stokesay has now been shown to be contemporary with the tower of about 1295-1305 and while the beginnings of jettying are unknown, it is interesting to see, for instance, an 11th century capital from the Abbaye aux Dames at Caen which depicts an elephant and castle in which the castle (which is nothing like a howdah) has a tower with a semi-circular headed door or window and a jettied crenellated upper storey.

The roofing of the fighting platform is again purely conjectural, but there is, for example, clear evidence that the fighting platform at Goodrich Castle, though a good deal later, was roofed at the back with a pentice. In a small castle such as Hen Domen, there would be a real possibility of

being hit in the back by an arrow shot from the other side of the castle, so that a roof would be a sensible precaution.

An unexpected finding was that the bailey itself had been divided into two halves by a continuous series of buildings running south from Building XXII (ironically almost exactly along the line of the balk between the two stages of the excavation). The reconstruction of this line of buildings posed considerable problems but, as it seems intended for defence, rather than to be, for example, simply a social division (which it may also have been), we have incorporated a fighting platform across the whole complex. This fighting platform is suggested not only by the continuous barrier of buildings but also by a change in design from the first hall, to Building LIb on the same plan, with its extra row of outer posts on its eastern side. Building XXII and the other structures to its west formed a group partly domestic, partly industrial in character. XXII, with its clay walls and central hearth, must have been a well insulated lodging and the remains of a similar structure may be represented by XII. The floor of XV was littered with scrap iron, perhaps debris from a workshop and smithy.

To the east of the central division there are two prominent buildings - a granary, XXXVIII, retained from the earliest castle and a lesser hall, XLVIII.

The granary is reconstructed here as a sort of Dutch barn, with open or semi-open sides. The smaller hall had a hearth and two small attached rooms, L and XLIX, at its northern end. Behind the granary was a cistern or static water tank, XLIII, set in the lowest part of the bailey, and fed from a gutter, 12.

The tower by the main gate, XLVI, is D-shaped on the plan, but was presumably round, since the evidence for its eastern side is lost in the trees on the front of the rampart. It is reconstructed with a clay-clad lower storey, a jettied upper floor and a conical planked roof, though other variants are of course possible.

There is little evidence for the form of the gate. The reconstruction shows a simple gate with a fighting platform forming a bridge above. It is worth noting that the existing earthworks on the other side of the gate passage do not suggest that there was a second, matching tower there. The situation is reminiscent of the modifications at Ludlow, Richmond and Exeter, where the entrance is altered so that the gate lies to one side of a single tower, though the parallel is perhaps more apparent than real. The entrance passage contained a cobbled area with some post-settings. It is not clear whether these represent simply a metalled surface or a building. None is shown on the reconstruction.

The evidence for the outer defences comes from the excavation of a short stretch of the outer rampart which showed clearly that there had been a palisade of small post-holes which presumably strengthened a clay wall, backed by a fighting platform lying on the ground surface, rather than raised above it. The outer ditch, which has been sectioned, showed no evidence of an outer bank, or a palisade on its counter-scarp.

Defenders trying to hold these outer defences would be in a desperate plight if the attackers managed to break through to the ditch, so we have tentatively suggested that plank bridges, capable of being quickly withdrawn, might have been provided and we have shown one of these.

HEN DOMEN • MONTGOMERY • Northern half of Bailey • Phase Y • Late 12th - early 13th century

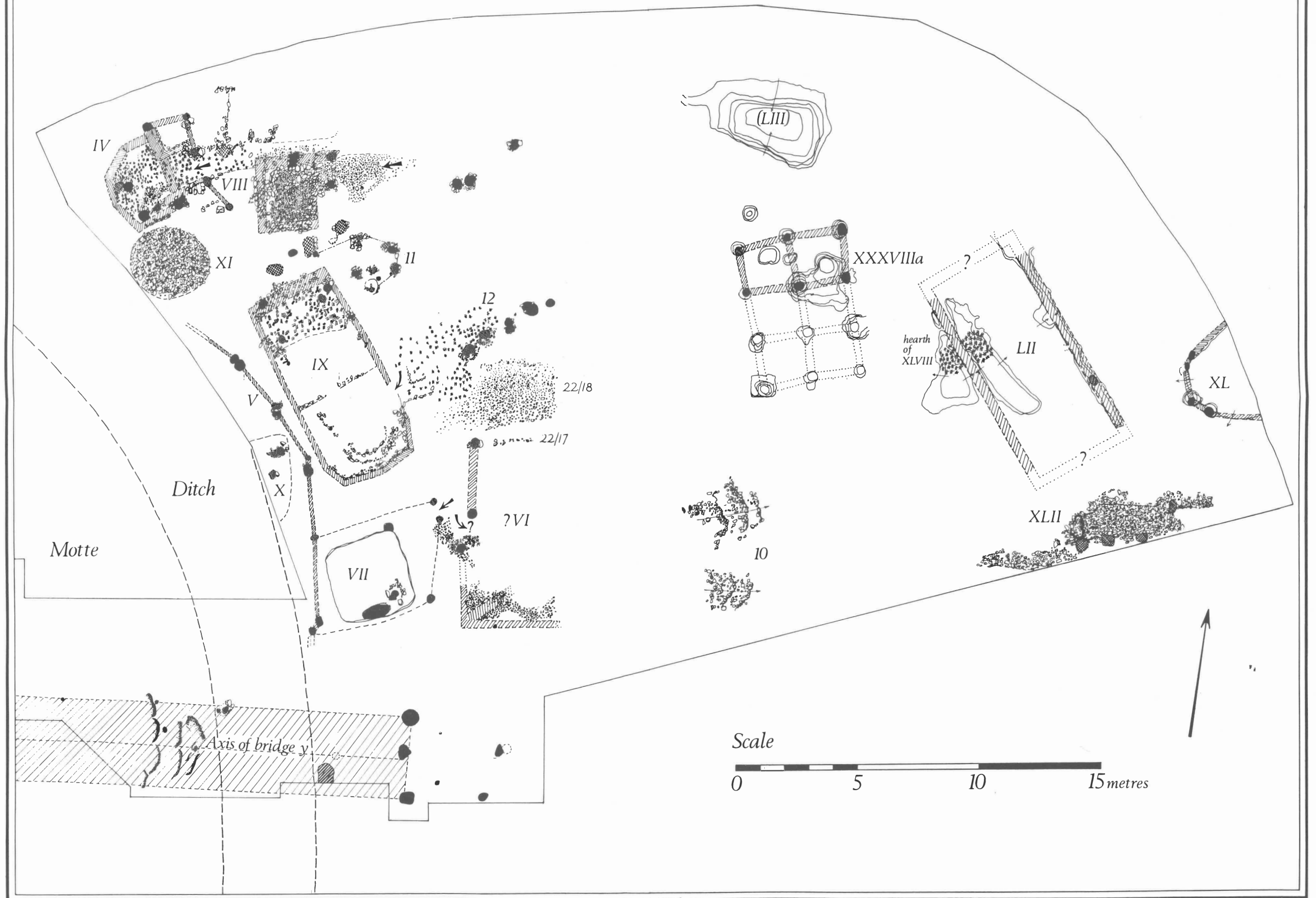


Fig. 7

Whatever the merits of the details of this reconstruction, it must echo the realities in a number of ways. The bailey was certainly crowded with buildings - the interior would be claustrophobic - there would be no view into the surrounding open country except from the fighting platform or the towers - in this respect the present earthworks are quite misleading. There was very little open space except immediately within the entrance; the buildings were large, of two or three storeys in some cases, and, most importantly, the castle was formidably defended. An attacker approaching from the fields to the north would be faced with concentric defences of quite massive proportions, reinforced by deep ditches, in places mud-, if not water-filled. We estimate that the distance from the bottom of the inner ditch to the top of the bailey palisade was some 10 metres.

A colleague has pointed out that once an attacker got into the bailey the battle would then become like street-fighting - in many ways the most difficult and fearful kind of fighting - in which each building has to be taken separately, with the attackers surrounded on all sides. Despite its defensibility the evidence of this phase also reveals clearly the domestic character of the castle, with its profusion of domestic buildings of all sizes and its provision of water supply and storage.

#### THE LATER CASTLE (fig.7)

Either late in the de Boulers' occupation, or after their demise in 1207, the bailey underwent radical changes, partly in the structural techniques employed and partly in the general lay-out of its buildings. The new structures of this period (phase Y) made little use of upright posts set in pits, the evidence of timbers in the ground comprising shallow sockets outlined in stones where uprights stood and shallow gullies in which sill beams rested. In either case the buildings were supported by their own framing. The most striking illustration of the change came from the rampart, where there was little direct evidence of defences. At the north-west corner a pattern of shallow post-sockets and an outline created by intense burning revealed a D-shaped tower (IV) overlying the tower of the preceding phase. Between the bailey and the motte ditch lay a palisade set in normal post-pits (V). Near the bailey entrance the incomplete plan of an oval tower was recovered (XL). Between them no structural evidence in the ground was apparent. But in the adjacent bailey ditch two timbers were recovered from a water-logged deposit, 1.2m in length with a slot 0.075m. cut in them, pegged at intervals of 0.38m. These were probably the base plates of a structure whose upright planks (0.38m. (15ins.) wide and 0.075m. (3ins.) thick) would have made a formidable wall. If this sort of technique was used in the defences it would account for the lack of evidence on the rampart.

The impression within the bailey is that the castle was less crowded domestically in this period. It must be remembered, however, that only half the bailey has been excavated, so that we cannot know what changes were also being made elsewhere. The contrasts between phases X and Y may be more apparent than real if in X the southern half was less crowded than the northern and if in Y vice-versa. Nevertheless, there were certainly reductions in both the number and size of buildings. There were hardly any structures behind the rampart in the north-west corner, building VIII being the only obvious feature. The granary was reduced in size by half, to become a 6-post building (XXXVIIIa). Most notably, the large hall in front of the motte ditch, which had stood in modified form from the castle's

foundation was removed and not replaced by any building of comparable size, at least not in the northern half of the bailey. Other features of this period were the counterparts of buildings in phase X. A second apsidal building (IX) stood on the site of the earlier putative chapel, with the foundation (XI) of a possible bell-tower to its north-west. The cistern continued in use in modified form (LIIII) and the massive foundations of a new bridge across the motte ditch lay slightly north of the earlier bridge axis. In the lower part of the bailey a new hall (LII), resting on ground sills in shallow gulleys, lay slightly east of its predecessor. At the bailey entrance the cobbled building (XLII) continued in use from phase X. There were three major additions, probably connected to each other. At the point where the bailey slope became more marked, a flight of crude steps (10) was constructed from pebbles and small boulders. This led to the site of a building (VI) of which only the western end was observed. But since this rested on sill beams it may have extended much further east. Immediately to its west lay a 3.0m square rectangular pit (VII) whose uneroded sides suggest permanent cover in a building formed by post-holes in the palisade along the motte ditch and others to their east. The environmental evidence from this pit will be described below and is of the greatest interest. Originally at least 6.0m in depth, its digging destroyed the west wall of the hall standing in front of the motte bridges. For much of its life it was probably a latrine pit, but it was eventually floored with clay 1.5m from its top, perhaps being used as a cellar to a structure above. In its probable latrine use it is not clear whether it served only the adjacent building (VI) or the whole bailey. Its proximity to the chapel is somewhat curious, and it is certainly among the more enigmatic features on the site.

#### THE LAST CASTLE (fig.8)

In the lower parts of the bailey the surfaces of this period (phase Z) lay above a deep layer of silt, whereas in the upper parts they lay immediately above the surfaces of phase Y. The accumulation of this silt represents at least a period of relative disuse, perhaps total abandonment and it has been suggested above (The History) that this relates to the Welsh control of the area from 1215 to 1223. In the subsequent rebuilding there was a major contraction of the built-up area, and most of the structures identified lay in the western half. To the east lay a horizontal building platform, with an internal partition, and a probable tower site by the entrance. Otherwise the evidence lay west of the north-south division of the bailey which was most obvious in phase X but had its beginnings in the earliest castle and was also apparent in phase Y. As in phase Y there was evidence of a north-western tower but no sign of a palisade. This may therefore have been of framed construction, as in Phase Y, though in the north west corner the shallow sockets of the fighting-platform supports were also located. The foundations of the motte bridge suggest a much narrower structure than any of its predecessors. Apart from their obvious western concentration the buildings of this period are difficult to describe. The evidence was wholly of very shallow post sockets and stone alignments along the edges of buildings. A building of some form stood in front of the motte bridge and incorporated the sunken floor in the top of pit VII described in phase Y. To its north a rectangular structure or structures is indicated as buildings I and II, with a pebble path (6) between them and a curiously shaped extension (7) at the north-east corner. The general impression is of a very different sort of bailey from that of the twelfth century, though the slightness of the foundations disguises a

HEN DOMEN • MONTGOMERY • Northern half of Bailey • Phase Z • c.1223 - 1300

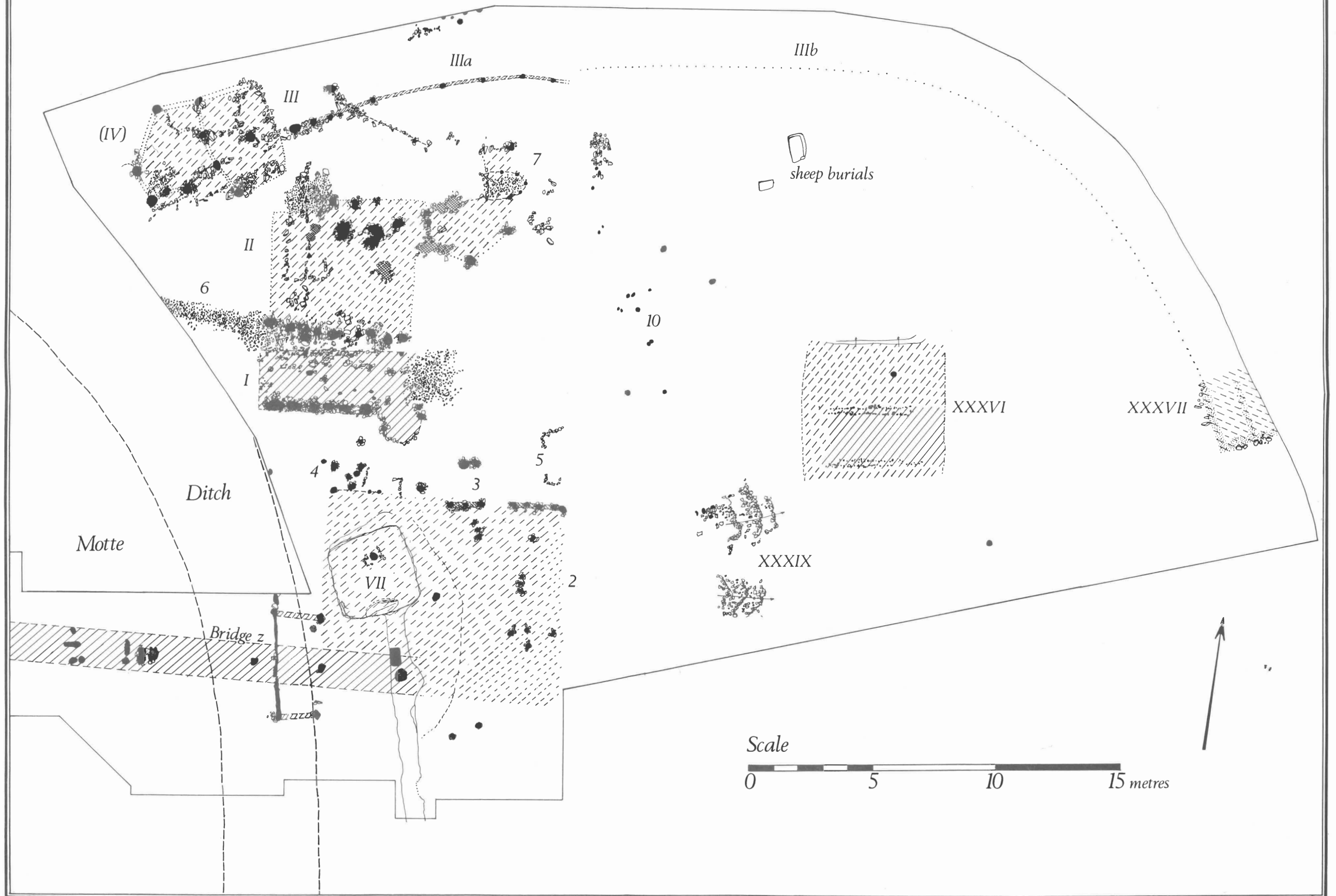


Fig.8



corresponding massiveness in the superstructure of the presumably framed buildings.

#### THE FINDS

The impression given by the small objects recovered is not that of a rich community. Indeed virtually nothing at all from before *circa* 1100 has been recovered. Like the rest of Wales and the Marches, the Montgomery area seems to have been without locally produced pottery from the Roman period until the twelfth century. From the foundation period of the castle came fragments of Stamford ware, glazed jugs from eastern England, and in the later twelfth century other products of this industry were also found. Since it is unlikely that this was the result of marketing, the material probably came in the baggage of travellers to and from Yorkshire and Lincolnshire: Robert de Boulers had married into a family from this area. The bulk of the pottery recovered is from coarse cooking pots and simple glazed jugs. Study by Pamela Irving and Alan Vince has shown that some of these were made locally, others being identical to material found more widely in Shropshire, Hereford and Worcester.

Metal objects are not numerous and are generally functional pieces such as fragments of tools, arrowheads, locks and horsehoe nails. The impression given is of a community whose wealth was not displayed in material form and which was economic in its recycling of metal waste. On the other hand, since no rubbish pits have been located we cannot be certain that the available finds are truly representative of the life-style of the inhabitants.

Numerous fragments of unworked wood were recovered from wet deposits in the ditches as well as the structural timbers described above. A well preserved stave-built tub of oak came from the bailey ditch near the castle entrance. Dendrochronological study by Ruth Morgan showed that the tree from which it was made was probably felled in the late eleventh century. This object may have had a very long life before it was dumped in the ditch. Alternatively, if it was discarded in the early twelfth century, it reveals that the inner ditch was never cleared out after that date, perhaps because the mud which collected at its bottom added to its defensibility.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

A rich sample of material was recovered from the deep latrine pit (VII) situated by the motte ditch. Analysis by James Grieg revealed a wide range of local flora which had been growing in a variety of habitats: arable land, meadows, marshes, stream sides and woodland. The species included weeds, cereal crops, hedgerow plants, sedges from damp places and birch, hazel, alder, oak and willow from the woodlands. Peas and beans, known to have been an important element in medieval diet, are poorly represented because they preserve badly. Most of the species represented are still found in the modern landscape of the area. In addition, the presence of the dung-feeding beetle and the stable fly suggest that some of the contents of the pit derived from stable sweepings, though interestingly, no building within the excavated area has been identified as a stable. The pit itself seems to have fulfilled mixed functions as latrine and waste disposal point. Since it was always protected by a building (see above),

the varied flora it contained must have been included in the rubbish: it cannot have blown in.

#### ANIMAL BONE EVIDENCE

This material has been studied by Sue Browne, and came mainly from the ditches, the cistern and especially the latrine pit. Cattle, red and roe deer were well represented in the food remains, but sheep were remarkably scarce and pig bones were very numerous indeed. Some dog and cat bones, as well as marks of carnivorous gnawing on many bones, suggest domestic animals were kept in the bailey. Plentiful butchery marks on bones of all species suggest that animals were brought to the site live for slaughter or as whole carcasses. Fowl, goose, pheasant and woodcock added variety to the inhabitants' diet, but there was virtually no evidence of fish consumption. Since, however, the material studied came from restricted areas and bone remains survived badly elsewhere on the site, great care must be applied in generalizing about two centuries of food supply, and the excavation of a kitchen site might change the overall picture. Most of the evidence came from the latrine pit, which was a fairly late addition to the castle's development. Individual items were also of great interest. Green stains on the bones of a goshawk may suggest it was a ringed hunting bird. The bones of eight new-born piglets from the latrine pit suggest their mother was kept within the bailey. A complete boar skeleton in the rampart must represent an animal which was for some reason considered unfit for consumption.

#### CONCLUSION

The evidence excavated at Hen Domen demonstrates that timber castles could be permanent, substantial fortifications with impressive accommodation. Timber castles were not, as they are so often made out to be, temporary, second-rate erections, easily overcome and replaced in stone as soon as possible. This castle dominated its landscape for two centuries and was rebuilt, always in timber (and clay) several times. The earthworks of this numerous class of monument are but a pale reflection of their true character.