

*FLINT CASTLE
archaeological evaluation of sites
to the west of the castle in 1988*



Archaeological evaluation of an area to the west of Flint Castle, Delyn, was carried out over a period of 4 weeks in late November and early December 1988 in response to proposals for future development of the area. The work was sponsored by Delyn Borough Council, and was carried out by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in conjunction with Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments.

INTRODUCTION

Trial excavations were carried out within the area of a carpark and waste ground between the castle and the access road to an industrial estate on the south-west, and immediately next to the known limits of the outer ward of the castle.

location on figures 1-2

Flint lies on the south side of the Dee estuary, 11 miles to the north-west of Chester. The Castle is sited on a sandstone outcrop to the north-east of the town. Although it now lies several hundred metres inland, it lay on or near the shoreline in the medieval period.

BACKGROUND

Flint Castle was one of the first to be built by Edward I in Wales. Work on the construction of the castle and the new town associated with it began in the campaign of 1277 and continued until the mid 1280s. Richard II was at Flint Castle when he surrendered to Henry Bolingbroke in 1399. The castle changed hands several times during the Civil war in the 17th century; it was finally surrendered to Parliament in 1646, and was subsequently partly dismantled.

The Flintshire County Gaol was built in the outer ward of the castle in the 18th century, and the prison remained here until the early 20th century when it was demolished. The area to the west of the castle saw intense industrial activity in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Today, the castle consists of an inner ward, with a curtain wall (much of which was rebuilt in the 19th century) and towers at the north-east, north-west and south-west corners. At the south-east corner is a separate great tower or donjon surrounded by a moat. To the south is an outer ward, which is separated from the inner ward by a moat.

The moat continues around the eastern and southern sides of the outer ward, which is raised to a level above the town to the south-west. The inner edge of the moat is revetted by a sandstone wall, breached by a gate giving access to the medieval town near the middle of the south side of the outer ward.

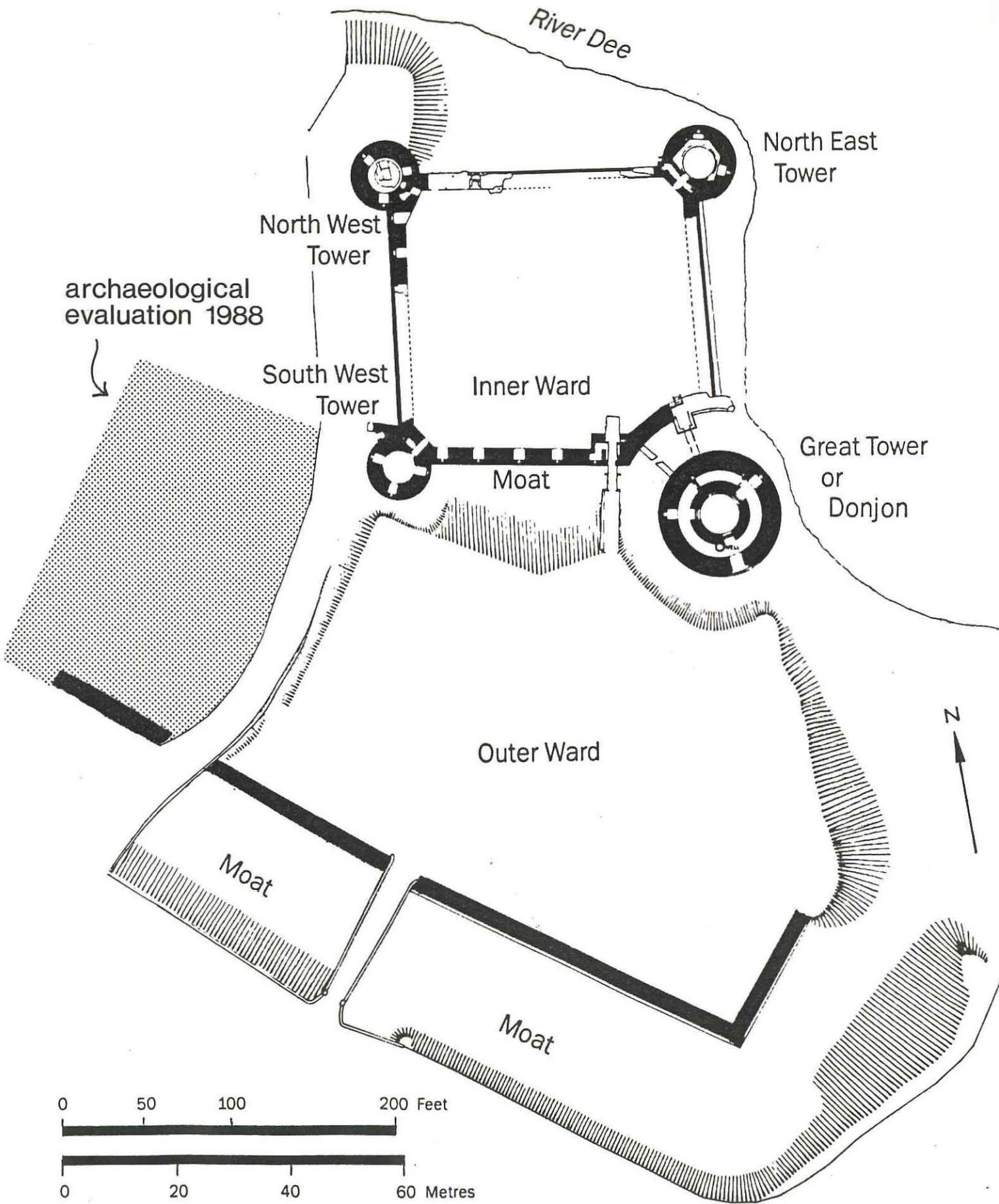


FIGURE 1: Flint Castle, Delyn (plan after Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments)

It is thought that in the medieval period the moat around the donjon and at least part of the moat around the outer ward to the south-east were flooded and joined to the waters of the Dee estuary.

The original plan is less clear the area of derelict land beyond the path skirting the west side of the castle. An anomalous and isolated stretch of the revetment wall around the outer moat continued for a distance of over 20 metres beyond the known extent of the outer moat, before finally petering out. Documentary evidence suggests that this wall had extended for at least a further 4 metres to the west until about the mid 20th century, and that it was truncated when the site was cleared at about that time. The present ground level to the north-east of this stretch of wall lies several metres below that within the existing outer ward to the south-east.

see figures 1 and 3

The excavations were designed to assess the nature and degree of preservation of any archaeological deposits in the derelict area to the west of the castle in advance of proposed future development.

EXCAVATIONS IN 1988

A key question was whether the outer ward had once extended into the area west of the castle, as suggested by the isolated stretch of wall mentioned above, by the stub of a wall on the south-west corner turret of inner ward, and also by property boundaries on several 18th and 19th century maps of the area.

see figure 3

This hand-dug trench was opened just to the north-west of the south-west corner turret of the inner ward in an attempt to see whether the wall stub which forms part of the turret could be found continuing to the west, and if so what relationship it had to the outer ward. However, although the trench was within about 4 metres of the castle tower, and was dug to a maximum safe depth of 2 metres, only modern dumped rubble and late 19th century or early 20th century features were found.

Trench 1

These five machine-cut trenches were opened up across the carpark and derelict area to the west of the castle. Trench 2 was sited just beyond the end of the isolated stretch of walling on the south-west of the outer ward and was designed to show whether the wall continued to the west, and whether it was accompanied by the moat at this point. Trenches 3, 5 and 6 were cut from east to west across the site and were intended to locate

Trenches 2-5

figures 4-6

figure 8

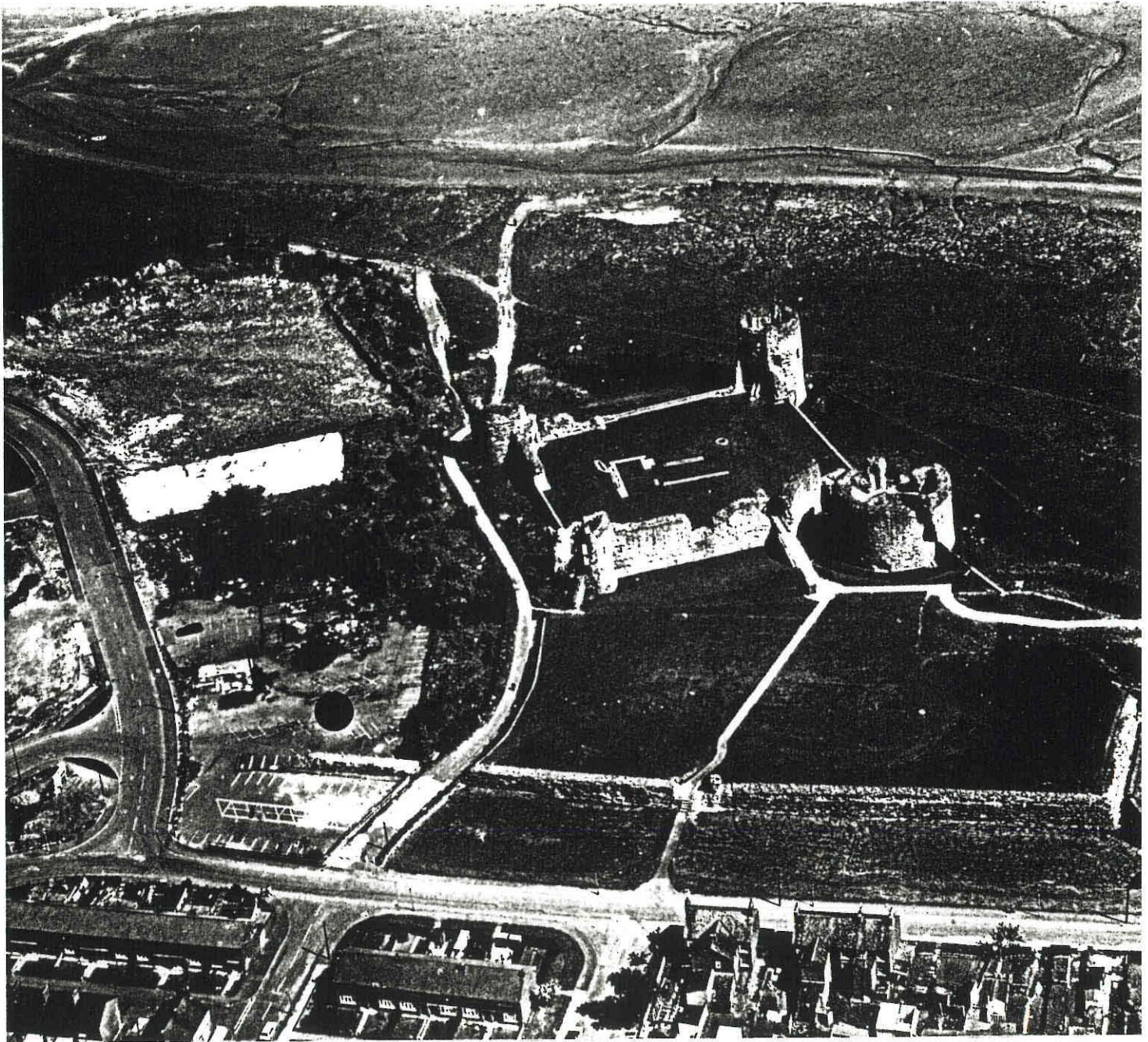


FIGURE 2: aerial photograph of Flint Castle from the south-west, with approximate site of 1988 archaeological excavations marked by black circle in lower left-hand corner (photo: C R Musson, CPAT 87MB559)

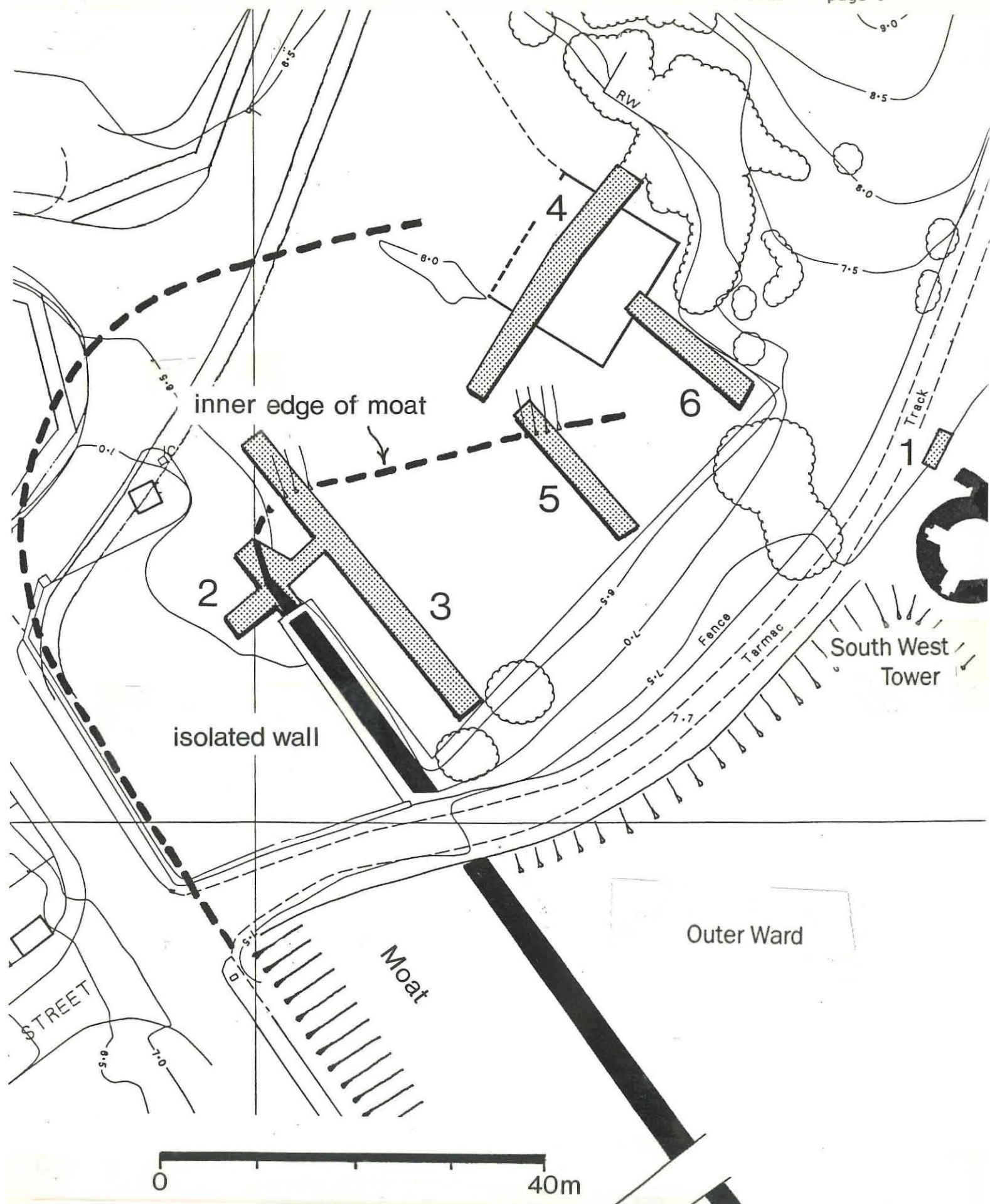


FIGURE 3: Location of Trenches 1-6 excavated in 1988

the western and northern edges of the outer ward, and to assess the nature and quality of any archaeological deposits in this area. Trench 4, running north to south was similarly designed to investigate the nature of deposits along the western edge of the site.

The deposits encountered during excavation can be broadly divided into three categories: the natural geology of the site, medieval features and deposits relating to the outer ward, and finally 19th and 20 century deposits largely resulting from industrial activity.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

Due to landscaping operations in the mid-20th century, natural deposits lie fairly close to the present ground surface over much of the southern and eastern parts of the site (about 0.5 metres below the tarmac at the south-west corner).

geology

The natural deposits vary considerably across the site. Over the southern part of the site, in the area crossed by Trenches 2 and 3, the uppermost natural deposit is a layer of blocky reddish brown clay. This layer thins out towards the north and is absent in the area crossed by Trench 5. In Trench 2 and the west end of Trench 3, the layer overlies a thin layer of dark bluish grey clay which in turn overlies a layer of bluish grey shale.

In the eastern half of Trench 3 the reddish brown clay overlies a flaky, buff-coloured sandstone bedrock which almost certainly forms part of the outcrop on which the castle stands. This sandstone is also present along the entire length of Trench 5, where it was of a more greenish colour.

To the north and west of the site, in the area crossed by Trenches 4 and 6, the top of the natural deposits is much deeper, at between 1.5 and 2 metres below the present tarmac. The deposits here are of a different nature to elsewhere, and most probably represent estuarine layers deposited on the southern edge of the Dee estuary. In Trench 4 these consists of a bluish grey waterlain clay silt, and in Trench 6 they consist of horizontally banded waterlain layers of gravel, sand and clay silt.

None of the trenches provided evidence of surviving stratified deposits above the natural surface belonging to a date earlier than the 19th century.

Medieval occupation

The southern extension to Trench 2 showed that the moat of the outer bailey had almost certainly continued into this area. The isolated stretch of wall was found to survive just below a layer of hardcore make-up of the carpark, and had retained the inner edge of the moat. This continued the line of the upstanding wall further east for a distance of 4 metres, but then turned abruptly through an angle of 45 degrees to the north-west and continued in that direction for at least a further 4 metres.

the revetment wall

see figure 4

The inner face of the wall had been terraced into the reddish brown natural clay, whilst the exposed southern face was evenly coursed and built of dressed stone. The outer face of the wall was exposed to a depth of about 2 metres from the surviving upper courses, and auguring suggested that it continues for up to a further 0.7 metres. The thickness of the wall decreases from 1.6 metres at the eastern end of Trench 2 to only 0.9 metres at the western end, which clearly suggests that the wall also decreased in height in that direction.

see figure 6

The lowest layer directly butting the wall-face in the southern extension to Trench 2 consisted of a waterlogged dark bluish grey silty clay, probably of medieval date, which contained flecks of charcoal and preserved fragments of wood. The upper layers were all of post-medieval date, and suggest that the moat would still have been visible in this area until fairly recent times.

the moat

Evidence from Trenches 3 and 5 suggest that from a point slightly to the north of Trench 2 the outer ward had originally curved back around towards the castle on the east. The inner edge of a deep cutting was identified in the western ends of both trenches. In the case of Trench 3 this extended to a depth of over 2.1 metres. The lower filling of the moat at this point was similar to that in Trench 2, and produced some sherds of medieval pottery. Again, like Trench 2 the upper filling was all of post-medieval date. The cutting in Trench 5 extended to a depth of at least 1.5 metres below the top of the sandstone bedrock. The upper post-medieval layers in this instance overlay greyish waterlogged clayey silts probably of medieval date.

see figure 8

On the basis of evidence from Trenches 3 and 5 it seems unlikely that the outer ward had been accompanied by a stone wall in this area.



FIGURE 4: elevation of sandstone revetment wall revealed in Trench 2 (scale 2m)



FIGURE 5: upper courses of sandstone revetment wall revealed in Trench 2



FIGURE 7: surface of carpark being removed by machine adjacent to the isolated stretch of sandstone wall to the southwest of the castle



FIGURE 8: Trench 3 viewed from northwest with probable inner edge of moat in foreground

Intensive industrial activity took place in the area west of the castle in the 19th and 20th centuries. The area under evaluation was occupied until the mid 20th century by a chemical works, parts of which were found during excavation.

modern activity

At the north end of Trench 4 were the remains of a flue or inspection pit dug to a depth of at least 2 metres below the present ground level. To the south of this, between the hardcore make-up of the carpark and the natural was a layer about 1 metre thick of cinders and lime.

In Trench 6 were similar deposits of industrial waste, and two brick wall foundations running at right-angles to the trench. Three pipe trenches, two of them carrying ceramic drains and one a cast-iron gas or water pipe, also crossed the trench.

At the east end of Trench 5 were three walls, two of brick and one of sandstone, and several gulleys cut into the sandstone bedrock.

A brick pier was exposed in the west side of Trench 1. This extended from about 0.3 metres from the present ground surface to a depth of over 1.7 metres, and was associated with two concrete floors which were found at the base of the trench.

The side walls of two probable dry-stone culverts were found at the southern and north-west corners of Trench 2.

Substantial earthmoving took place in about the mid 20th century, probably to remove the remains and residues of the chemical works. These operations have removed practically all upstanding features and earlier deposits down to at least the surface of the underlying natural.

The concrete raft foundations of a dutch barn subsequently erected on the northern part of the site were identified, and there are traces of a further building which may have been a garage to the west of Trench 5.

A tarmac surface with a concrete kerb was laid over the rest of the site to form the present carpark; more recently a layer of about 1 metre of topsoil was dumped on its eastern half.

The excavations suggest that the outer bailey of the castle originally extended for a distance of up to about 40 metres to the north-west of the

INTERPRETATION

lane on the west of the castle, turning sharply back towards the estuary at a point just short of the road leading to the industrial estate, and probably turning back again towards the south-west tower of the inner ward.

Recent disturbance had removed all trace of a continuation of the stub of wall attached to the south-west tower of the inner ward, and this feature remains unexplained.

The outer ward at the extreme western end was probably accompanied by a moat dug into the underlying layers of clay and shale, and revetted by a sandstone wall. The arrangements on the northern side of the outer ward is less certain: the excavations failed to identify the outer edge to a moat, and the nature of the deposits revealed in trenches in this area suggest that the outer ward at this point is likely to have been defined by artificially scarping the natural stone outcrop to form an edge which which was open to the estuary on the north.

The decrease in thickness of the revetment wall identified at the south-west corner of the outer ward suggests that this originally terminated close to this point, but the defences may originally have been continued around the seaward side as an earthen bank. In this context it is interesting to note that there is historical evidence that the castle ditch was initially revetted with turves as a temporary measure (see A. Taylor, The Welsh Castles of Edward I p. 19).

The outer ward to the west of the castle now lies several metres below its level further east, but the evidence of later activity in this area together with the character of the inner face of the isolated stretch of revetment wall in this area, both suggest that this was probably levelled in the 19th or 20th centuries.

Despite the modern disturbance to this area it is essential that further archaeological work should be undertaken in advance of any future development or landscaping. There are still questions to be answered about the precise extent of the outer ward of the castle and the nature of the relationship between the moat and estuarine deposits to the north and west. Full attention should be given to the examination of early waterlogged deposits in these areas since they provide conditions in which artefacts and valuable environmental evidence may be well preserved.

FUTURE WORK

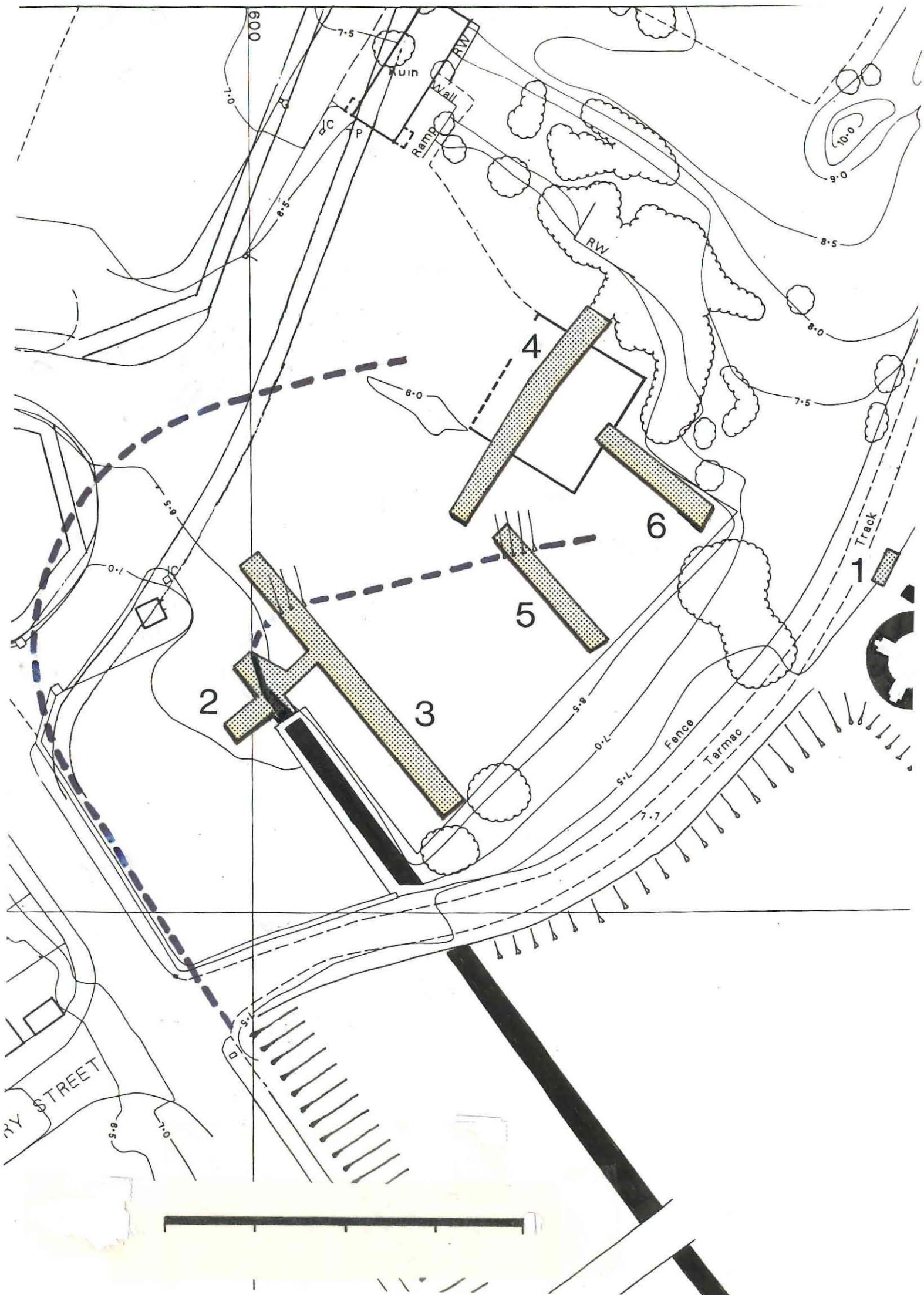
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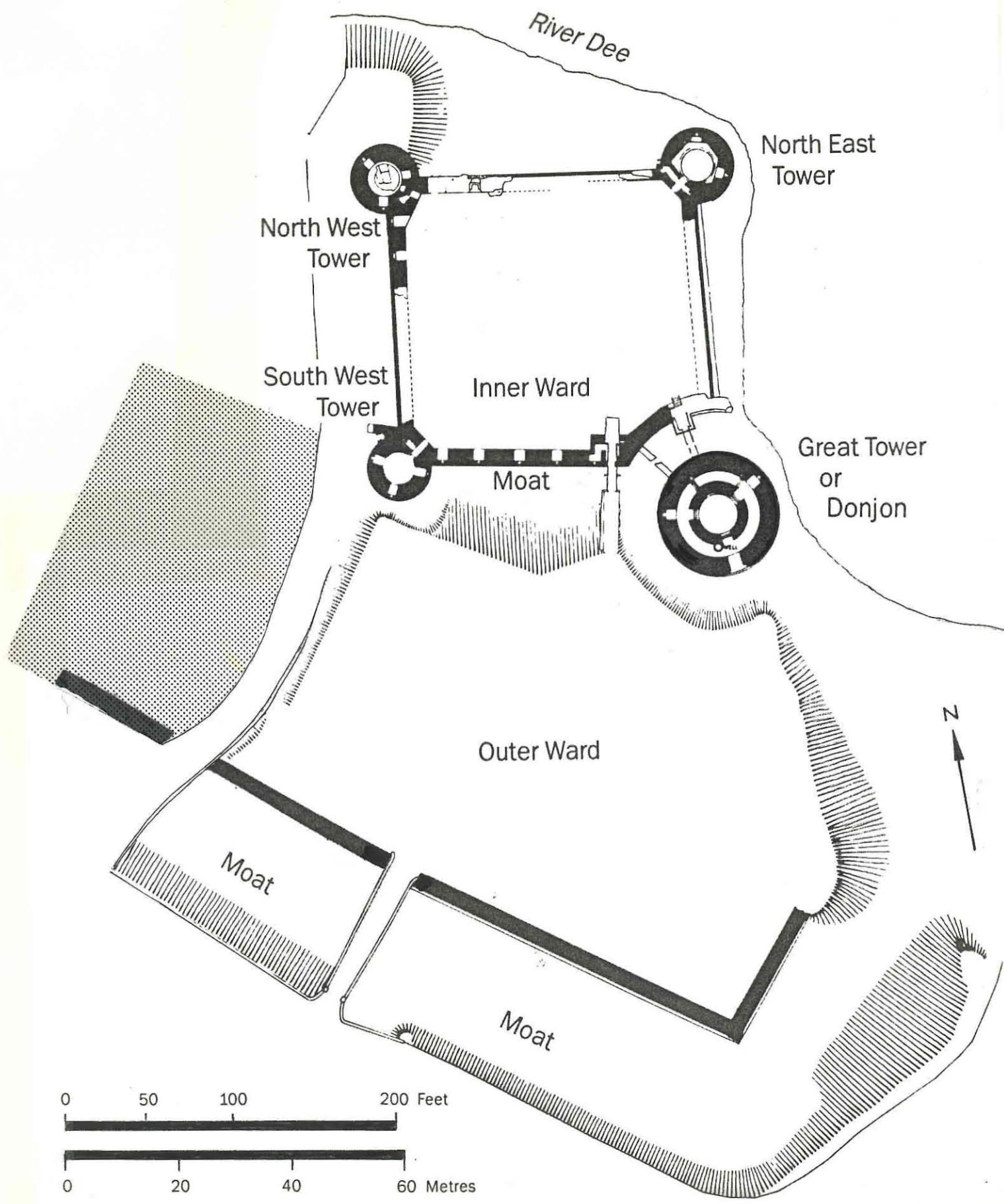
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H R Hannaford

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust
7a Church Street, WELSHPOOL, Powys SY21 7DL
tel Welshpool (0938) 3670

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Present day mean high water mark

R I V E R D E E

Access by water?

The castle was built on a sandstone outcrop

Access by water?

Well
Inner bailey

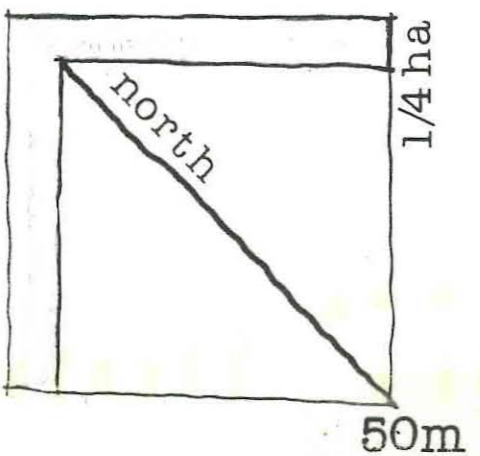
Possible line of outer bailey

Outer bailey

Gatehouse

Bridge/causeway

To town centre along Castle Street



Conjectural Reconstruction

