CASTLE HILL, BAKEWELL

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Castle Hill is an oval knoll which rises to about 500 feet O.D. at Nat. Grid. Ref. SK 221688, some 100 feet above the River Wye, commanding the bridge and the township of Bakewell on the opposite bank. The name 'Castle Hill' was in use at least as early as 1439. From the later sixteenth century, field-names such as 'Warden Close', 'Court Yard' or 'Stocking Court' were applied to different parts of the hill, although these seem based on antiquarian surmise inappropriate to the true character of the site (Cameron 1959, i, 32 and 36–7).

The earthwork which surmounts Castle Hill has been familiar to antiquaries at least from the time of Stukeley (1725, 26), although by the middle years of the eighteenth century John Lowe, for one, dismissed the notion that this might represent the site of a fortress as 'nothing more than a vain suggestion of some fertile imagination' (Lowe 1765, 235). Speculation continued to surround the site, however, and by 1783 William Bray had introduced a new suggestion (Bray 1783, 156):

> On the right hand of the bridle road from [Bakewell] to Chatsworth, is a square plot in a pasture, with a tumulus in it, which is hollow at the top, a few thorns growing on it. This was part of the castle built by Edward the Elder, in 924, which was of great extent as appears by foundations occasionally discovered; but there is not now a stone of it to be seen.

This proposal seems to have been received almost without question during the subsequent century. And the authors of the Victoria County History considered 'the presumptive evidence [for identifying this with] Edward's *burh* exceedingly strong . . . . . an example of a tenth-century work, which may have been subsequently converted into a post-Conquest fortress' (Cox 1905, 358, 376). Mrs. Armitage (1912, 47) remained sceptical, insisting that any *burh* should have been a much larger work, enclosing the church. But because the Anglo-Saxon chronicler described the *burh* being not 'at' but simply 'near to' (*þær on neaweste*) Bakewell (Earle and Plummer 1892, i, 104; cf. phraseology of entries s.a. 896 and 1094), this identification is still commonly asserted (e.g. Cameron 1959, i, 32).

With the exception of topographic names, documentary information is lacking. But the general history of the site should no doubt be related to that of Bakewell itself. The site of an Anglo-Saxon religious foundation of some importance, Bakewell had belonged in turn to Edward the Confessor and William I. On the death of the Conqueror, Bakewell passed into the hands of his illegitimate offspring William Peverel, forming part of the extensive Peverel estates until in 1153 these were forfeit to the Crown after William Peverel IV's involvement in the death of Rannulf Gernon, Earl of Chester. The Bakewell vill remained in royal hands until the last years of the twelfth century when, at some undetermined date in the reign of Richard I, it was given to Ralf Gernon (Maxwell Lyte 1920–31, 288, 997; cf. Yeatman, 1886–1907). Although the manor was thenceforward a decidedly less significant unit, the important church together with its appurtenances having been given to Lichfield cathedral at about the same time or shortly after, Bakewell subsequently represented the administrative centre of the Gernon (Vernon) estates. It was again repossessed by the Crown, at least temporarily, soon after and perhaps as a result of the defeat of the Barons at Evesham in 1265.

By the late 1960s housing development had already spread over the greatest part of Castle Hill and plans were in preparation to build over the entire summit. In June 1969, with the consent of the then owners, The Uphill Land Development Company Ltd., a preliminary investigation was undertaken to determine the character and date of the earthwork. The time available was strictly limited, but sufficient evidence was forthcoming to persuade the writer of the value of the site and the usefulness of its preservation.

Submissions were subsequently placed before a Public Enquiry held at Bakewell on 13th November 1969. Permission to develop the site was refused. It did not prove possible to return to the site the following year. Subsequently, however, the site came into the possession of the Bakewell Urban District Council and it was possible to extend the excavation for a further week in June 1971 in an attempt to elucidate some of the problems raised by the initial investigation.

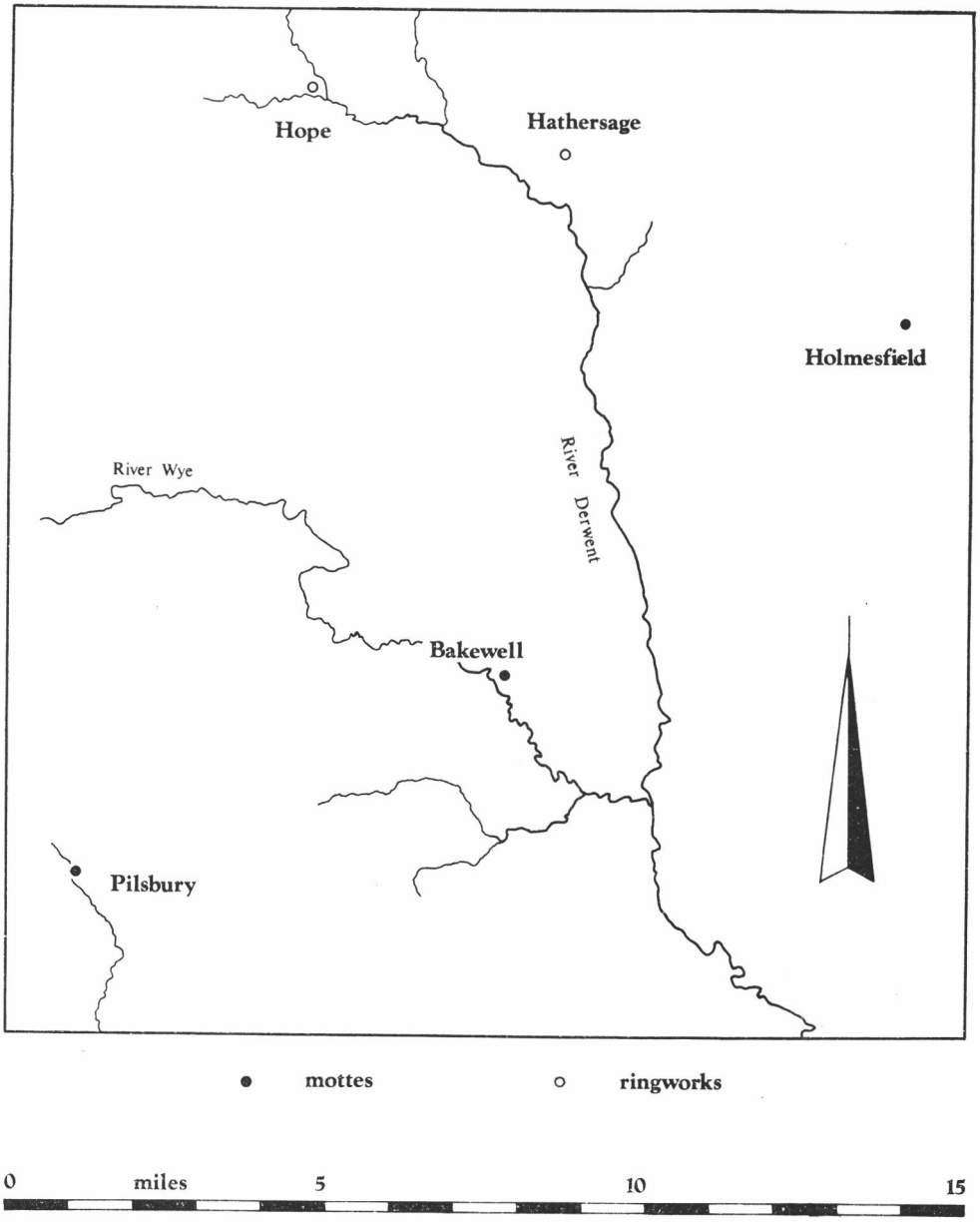

Fig. 1 Mottes and ringworks in north–east Derbyshire.

THE SITE (Figs. 1–3)

In the neighbourhood of Bakewell the River Wye flows more or less south east towards its confluence with the Derwent some three miles down-stream, meandering along the flat bottom of a glaciated valley. The south–western edge of this valley is formed by the slope of the limestone massif of High Peak while the north–eastern edge is represented by the steeper scarp of the Millstone Grit series. Castle Hill itself forms an oval spur projecting from the north–eastern escarpment but, like that on which Haddon Hall lies less than two miles farther down the valley, it seems to be based on a bench of limestone extending from beneath the series of Shale and Kinderscout Grits which form the steep Manners Wood escarpment behind. The spur is capped by remnants of mixed glacial or periglacial detritus, of which more extensive remains are familiar at about the same height along the opposite side of the valley: boulder clay and the heterogenous 'head' deposits which vary from grey clays to rubbly sand (cf. Straw and Lewis 1962–65, 72–80; Straw 1968, 275–80 and refs.).

The earthwork itself is situated at the southern end of this spur, dominating the shallow fording of the Wye and facing the present township of Bakewell. The position is naturally defensible; and with the hill falling away steeply on three sides, it commands extensive views both across and along the line of the valley. Farther east, the Manners Wood escarpment rises another four or five hundred feet to the site of the Ball Cross Iron Age hill-fort (Stanley 1954, 85–99). Superficially, the Castle Hill earthwork resembles many other early medieval sites of the smaller 'motte-and-bailey' type. The motte itself, a low truncated cone 11 ft. high and 35 ft. across at the summit, lies at the farthest end of the spur, its height enhanced on three sides by the slope and scar of the hillside. On these three sides the natural declivity makes further defence in the form of a ditch both undesirable and impractical. But towards the north the motte seems to have been separated from the flatter interior by a broad ditch, now completely filled but clearly visible as an arc of darker herbage growing in the damper, richer silt. The limited extent of the ditch may account partly for the relatively small size of the motte—the substance of which probably derived entirely from this source. A neat conical sinkage 5 ft. deep at the centre of the summit might perhaps represent an early treasure-hunting exploit. But, already present at least by 1725 (Stukeley 1725, 26), it might equally represent natural sinkage connected with some internal feature. Round three parts of the exterior of the motte a narrow terrace spirals upwards in an anti-clockwise direction, which, similar to the spiral foot-paths sometimes found on larger mottes, should probably be regarded as relatively recent.

The remains of what is probably the line of a bailey defence encloses an area of about one acre to the north of the motte. No embankment is visible, but a simple terracing or escarpment of the natural hill-slope exists, doubled facing the river valley to the west, and obscured or confused by a sunken field-wall to the north. The relationship of this terracing to the motte is unclear. Cox suggested in 1905 (358, 376) that there may have been a second enclosure farther to the north beyond the field-wall, and perhaps further defensive works 'on the hillside across the railway'; but he added that, although 'more apparent within memory', these were not at that time significantly preserved. Only a simple single bailey was recognised in a sketch-plan published by Pryce in the following year (Pryce 1906, following 264; not described in text). The first (1878) edition of the 25 inch Ordnance Survey map had marked only the motte itself on the summit of the hill, although allowing garden terraces in the grounds of nearby Castle Hill House. The area in question north of the field-wall has now been largely levelled for building.

THE EXCAVATION

i. The bailey defences (fig. 3, x–y–z)

Three-foot sections cut from west to east through the lines of the presumed bailey defence revealed no structural features of any kind. Any slight embankment might have eroded away completely, but there was no evidence for ditching nor any kind of revetment.

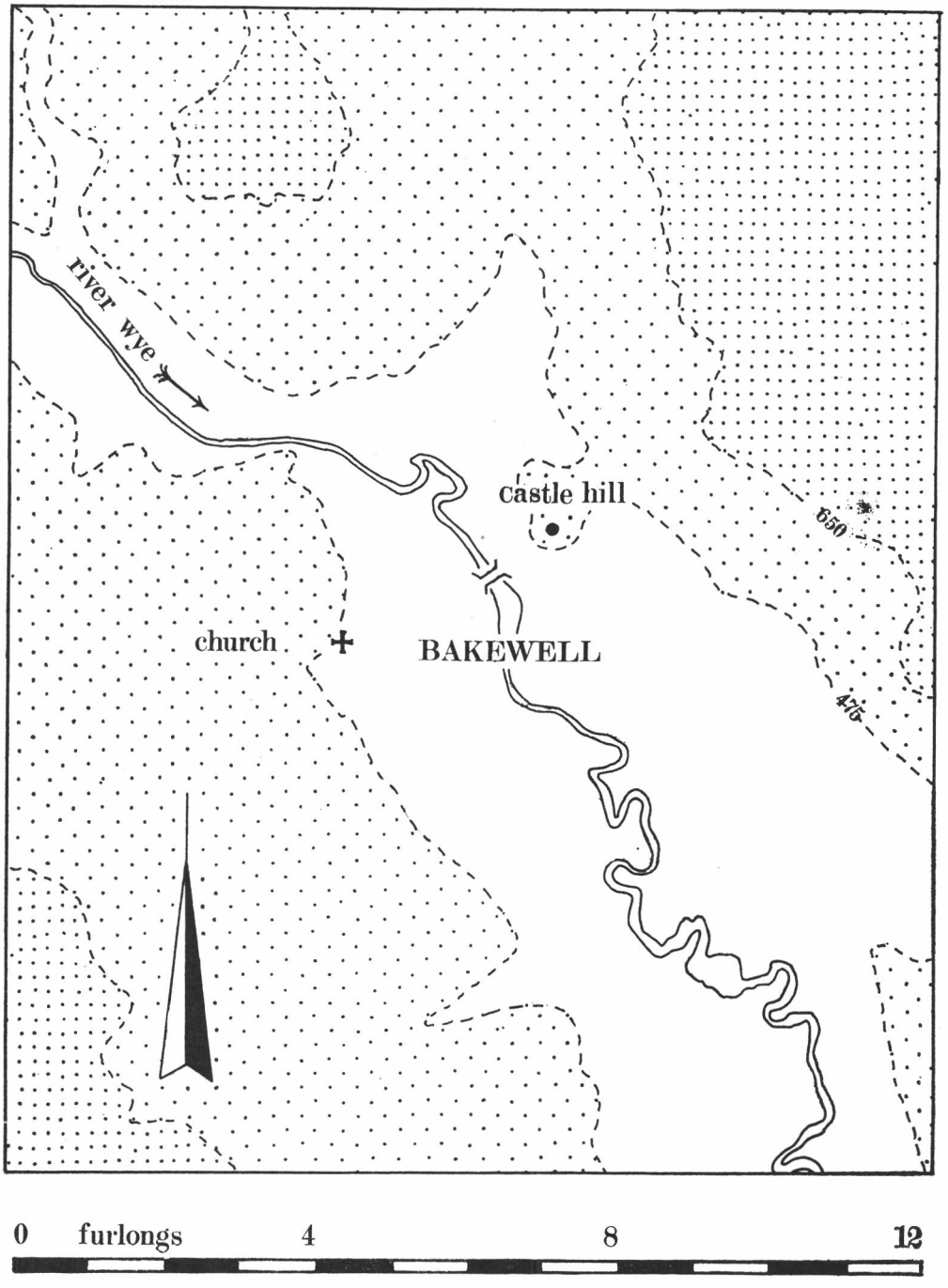

Fig. 2 The position of Castle Hill, Bakewell.

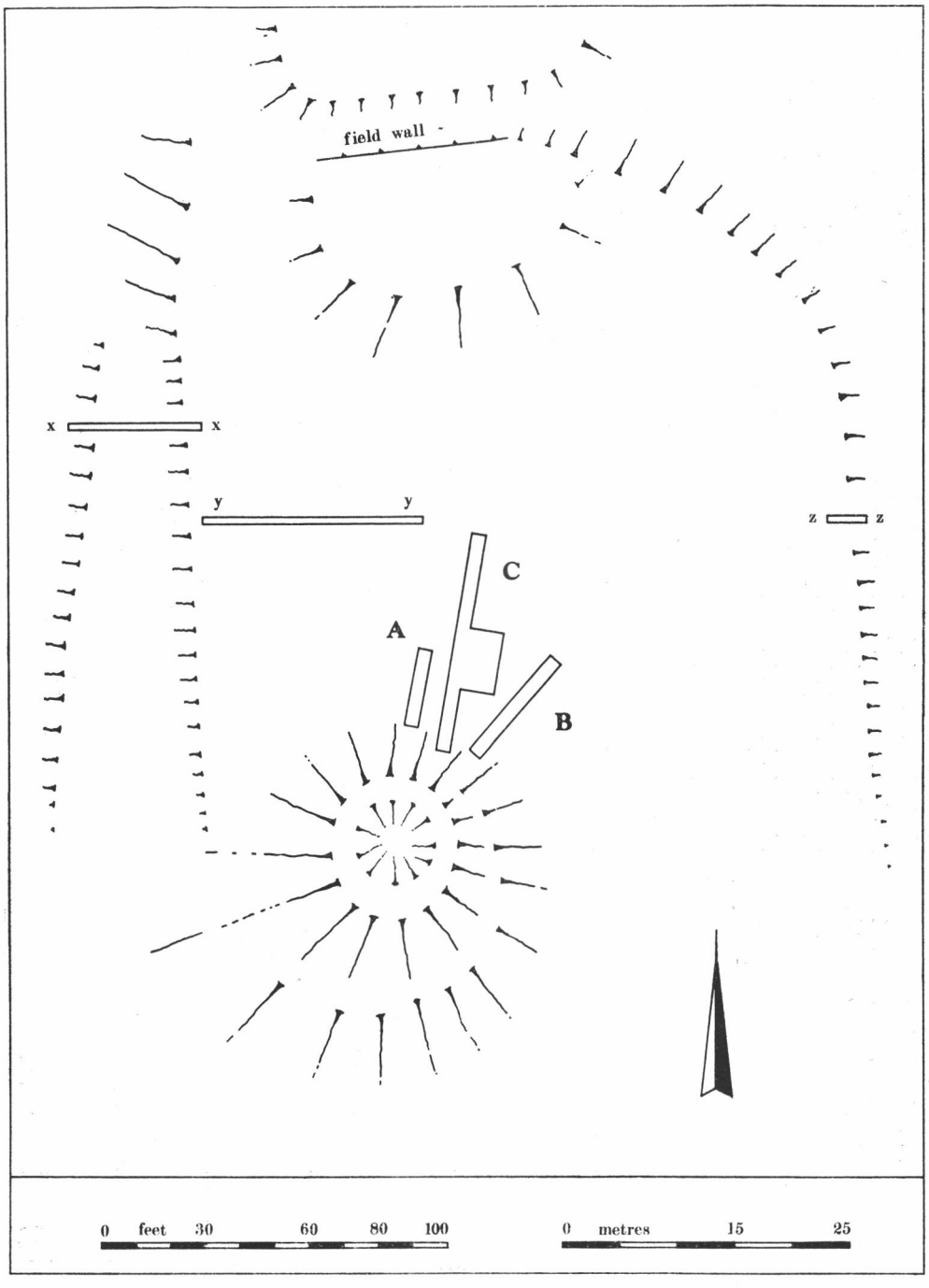

Fig. 3 The Castle Hill earthworks, showing position of the cuttings.

In glacial regions especially, mottes were sometimes made by simply trimming an already existing natural knoll, and there is no reason why in this case the bailey defence should not have taken advantage of the natural declivity of the land, merely scarping the sloping surface. Similar terracing lower down the western slope is clearly associated with the grounds of the eighteenth-century Castle Hill House. This might have extended farther up the hill on this side, although the boundary between Castle Hill House and Courtyard Field, in which the earthwork lies, is an old-established one, and the single line of terracing on the eastern slope lies over the brow of the hill well out of sight of the house.

The narrow cuttings may have missed palisade post-holes along the brow of the terrace. Alternatively, perhaps this *enceinte* was originally surmounted by a specially-planted hedge-work (*haga*) of which no ordinarily recognisable indications would remain.

ii. The motte ditch (Figs. 3–5)

An arc of darker grass extending for some 45 degrees round the base of the motte on its northern side indicated the line of a ditch, the silting of which might be expected to contain evidence of the motte's construction date and its subsequent occupation, and also perhaps of the relationship between the two elements of the earthwork.

Trench A. An exploratory cutting 22 by 4 ft. was made from the foot of the motte across the supposed width of the motte-ditch. The position of this cutting was determined both by local information as to the area of previous, un-recorded, treasure-hunting, and the need to reserve significant areas for future investigation.

The southern end of Trench A cut about 4 ft. into the original motte-slope (Fig. 4), showing that the mound had been built up in a series of layers of loose material: sand, rubble, clay and loam, not strictly horizontal, but tipped at or near the centre and falling outwards towards the perimeter of the mound without any discernible revetment. No doubt part at least of this material was taken from the ditch itself, cut irregularly to about 4 ft. below the original ground level, but emphasized by a rubble counter-scarp so as to form a gap between motte-edge and scarp-top of some 12 ft. at this point. This counter-scarp was relatively well-made, with a rough facing of small rubble lining the ditch and a thin capping of red clay on the sloping bailey side. The bank had apparently been further heightened by another capping of red clay at a later stage.

Against the inner motte-side of the ditch lay a line of round water-worn limestone boulders, quite unlike anything else on the site and no doubt brought from the river bed at the bottom of the valley for this purpose. The stones were not laid in any way but simply piled loosely on top of each other with either gaps or dark silt between. This feature relates to the construction of the motte. The ditch was clearly dug first and the boulders placed in it afterwards, but whether as part of one constructional phase or another, later reconstruction is difficult to ascertain. The light brown primary ditch-silt appeared to lie unevenly beneath the boulders, but so thinly that, unless the ditch had been frequently cleaned, no very long period could have lain between the original ditch cutting and the insertion of the boulders. If the insertion of these boulders was associated with the second clay capping of the counter-scarp, some re-cutting would almost certainly have been necessary. But no sign of re-cutting was apparent, although the nature of the subsoil at this point is so irregular that it may possibly have taken place. This line of boulders seems clearly intended to prevent the loose and otherwise unrevetted mound material from falling into the ditch. And indeed, the ditch is filled up to the line of these boulders with motte material at this point. It was this fact that led to the working hypothesis that the motte had originated subsequent to the counterscarp embankment—which might represent an artificial link between the 'natural' bailey scarps on either side (Wilson and Hurst 1970, 175). Perhaps this line of boulders extended right round the mound, although apparently the ditch lay only on its northern side. In any case, this would seem to imply a badly-conceived structure. More likely there was some special need for reinforcement at this point in

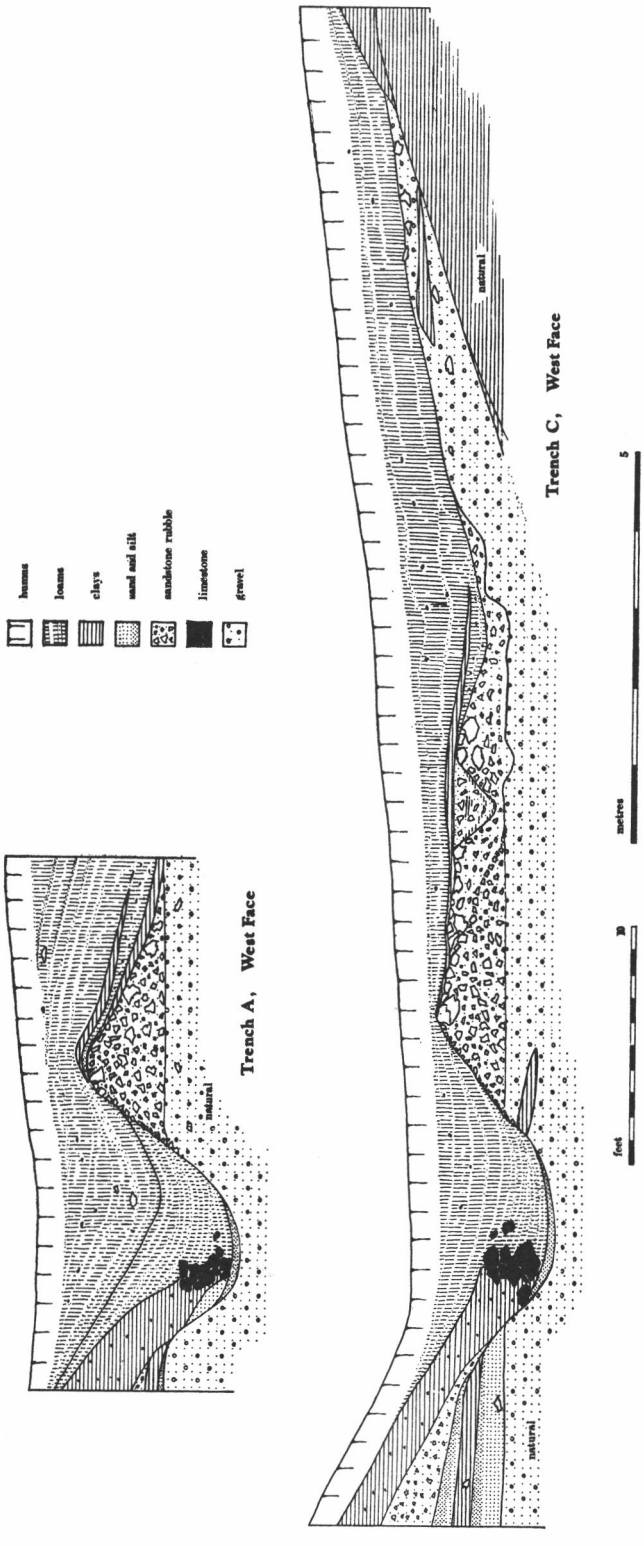

Fig. 4 Castle Hill, Bakewell. Trenches A and C; Sections.

order to bear an additional burden, such as a bridge. If part of the original design, this feature might have been set into the skirt of the motte. Probably we have here a later revetment, after the weight of an original bridge had caused unconsolidated material in the skirt of the mound to slump into the edge of the ditch.

Scattered between the boulders were found two or three body-sherds, tentatively ascribable to the late twelfth or thirteenth centuries, from a pot in a sandy, orange ware, bearing the remains of a patchy, clear lead glaze, and a variety of food-bones, including those of a small type of ox, horse, roe-deer, and possibly sheep:

Bos taurus, left tibia, distal end; left tibia, mid-shaft; left radius, immature; ?rib fragment; *Equus caballus,* left tibia, distal end; left patella; thoracic vertebra; ?rib fragment; *Capreolus capreolus,* right humerus, distal end; *Capreolus* or *Ovis aries,* right scapula, proximal end; half vertebra.

In every other respect, the filling of the ditch at this point proved exceptionally clean. No more significant material was found save for a probably fourteenth-century rim-sherd and fragments of horse-dung in the upper filling. This would be hardly surprising if this part of the ditch lay beneath the shelter of a wide bridge. The ditch-fill was a loose and relatively homogenous sandy loam, its stratification indicated by texture rather than colour-variation (making photographic record unsatisfactory) and probably implying a relatively rapid infill. In an attempt to distinguish different phases of this infill by some alternative means, extensive tests for pollen-analysis were made by Dr. John Tallis, but the conditions of the site proved too alkaline for the preservation of pollen.

Trenches B and C. Two additional cuttings were made across the ditch: Trench B, 36 by 4 ft., a further 30 degrees to the east, and Trench C, 63 by 4 ft., between the two. Trench B proved to lie within the area of previous disturbance, and a large limestone boulder lying within the lower skirt of the motte was the only pristine feature; its size and position would be appropriate to the last of the line of reinforcement. Trench C, however, confirmed and extended the evidence of Trench A, although the ditch-fill was here quite barren of occupation debris. The cutting was extended for 30 ft. beyond the counter-scarp and into the bailey area. Here the slope of the bank and associated cuttings into the natural surface had been made up with an additional dump of sandstone rubble to form a gentle feature-less slope. Seven or eight feet to the rear of the counter-scarp, however, a broad bowl-like sinkage, 18 in. deep, lay at the edge of the trench, perhaps representing one part of the seating for a bridge-pier, but filled with sand and red clay of the second capping. Trench C was extended laterally to the east and carefully examined in plan, but no further traces of either possible bridge-supports or any kind of embankment fencing were observed. However, it was clear that the counter-scarp did not extend uniformly around the edge of the ditch, but fell away to form an elongated rubble platform, which was no doubt the base of a broad bridge of the kind familiar elsewhere in structures of this kind.

DISCUSSION

Only extensive further excavation is likely to resolve the structural and chronological problems that remain. But the initial object of the investigation was achieved, and the essential character of the earthwork is now a little clearer. No evidence was forthcoming for any pre-Conquest occupation of Castle Hill, and the site of the Edwardian *burh* probably must be sought elsewhere. The defences seem to have been much less impressive than earlier antiquaries supposed. The earthworks represent a small motte-and-bailey characteristic of earlier medieval Britain from the eleventh century onwards.

The origin and true character of these structures remain matters of dispute. For the current state of debate see the papers associated with the current research project of The Royal Archaeological Institute: The Origins of the Castle in Britain (Davison 1967; Allen Brown 1969), and the continuing series of Chateau Gaillard Conference papers. Few general conclusions may as yet be drawn. An extraordinary diversity of structural implications lies behind the simple and uniform present-day external appearance of these earthworks. There seems to have been no one manner of construction or any

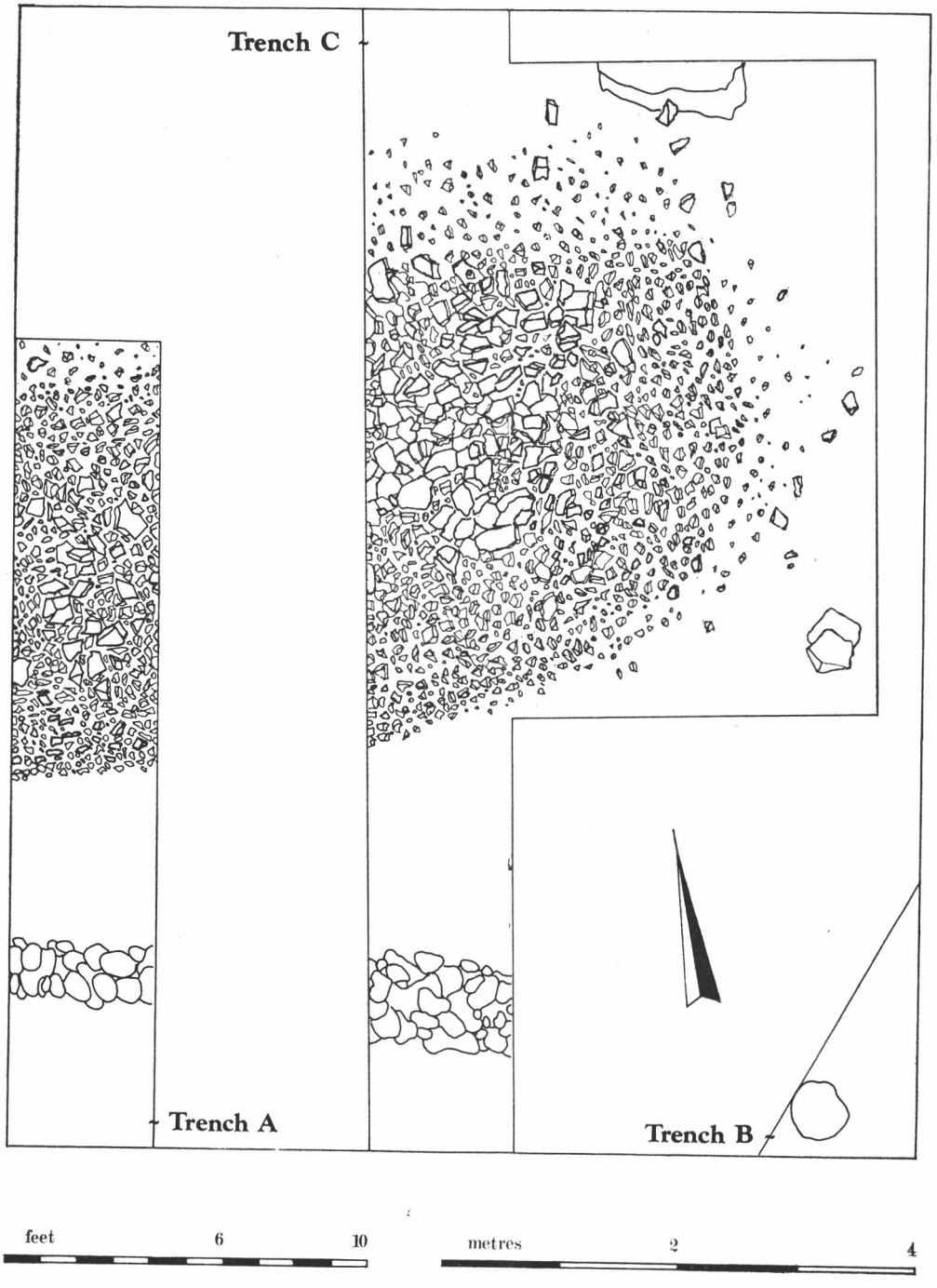

Fig. 5 Castle Hill, Bakewell. Trenches A, B and C; Plan.

general model, the character of each monument perhaps being determined largely by the individual facilities available to meet particular local needs.

Despite all the problems involved in the extreme conventionality of its depictions, the Bayeux Tapestry remains the major contemporary point of reference in the study of this kind of monument (Allen Brown 1965, 81–3). Mottes are shown several times in Normandy and Brittany, complete and in use. Their contemporary appearance took the form of mounds surmounted by a palisade and tower, the whole surrounded by a ditch and counterscarp, and entered by means of an elaborate flying bridge defended at one end or other by means of a gate-house. The fact that bailey defences are never depicted might be due simply to artistic exigencies. Once, at Hastings, such a motte is shown under construction. The mound is thrown up in layers, perhaps using material taken for the most part from a surrounding ditch—a mode of construction apparently confirmed by investigations at York, Norwich and elsewhere (Armitage 1912, 122; Renn 1964, 131; Addyman 1968, 307–8). At Bakewell it seems reasonable to suppose that a similar layering may have been used: loose material piled at the centre and tipping outwards at the periphery, although a deeper cutting into the motte would be needed to confirm this. At Hastings itself the mound seems to have been homogenous rather than layered as it is depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry, although, despite its great size, without strapping or other discernible reinforcement (Barker & Barton 1968, 303–5). Few mottes reveal evidence for external revetment, but at South Mimms (Hertfordshire) the sides of the motte seem to have been entirely concealed with timber, and the summit mortared over (Davison 1967, 207; Potters Bar 1966, 30–3).

The Bakewell ditch must clearly have been crossed by means of some kind of bridge. The huge flying constructions depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry are paralleled by the well-known description by Walter of Térouane of a twelfth-century Flemish example: 'a bridge which springs from the outer edge of the ditch and, gradually rising, is supported by a double or even triple piers, trussed together at suitable intervals; and thus ascending as it crosses the ditch, it reaches the top of the mound on a level with the threshold of the gateway' (Bollandus 1643, ii, 799). Such unwieldy structures must always have represented a strategic liability, vulnerable to fire, and affording shelter to the attacker beneath its broad expanse. A bridge of this kind would imply a strongly defended bailey *enceinte*, and would perhaps be found only in larger and more elaborate mottes.

Where weak or non-existent bailey defences made such structures less desirable, or where the function of the motte did not warrant it, the flying bridge may sometimes have been replaced by an equally broad but more easily defensible form of horizontal bridge, perhaps resembling a ship's gangway. This would have been supported on a wooden arch, or, as at Abinger, a stone causeway reserved in the bottom of the ditch, and leading to a ladder or steps cut into the side of the motte (Hope-Taylor 1950, 15–43). The complex site at Hen Domen (Montgomeryshire) revealed a succession of no less than five bridge plans, all of the earlier ones between 10 and 12 ft. wide (Barker 1969, 25–7). There was some evidence here of a wattle fence designed to prevent the use of the underside of the bridge as cover. At Abinger, although no post-holes or other signs of the bridge were found, the block of reserved sand-rock which must certainly be the foundation of a bridge, was 13 ft. wide, and probably indicates an almost equally broad bridge. At Abinger the means of mounting the motte is uncertain, but at Baile Hill seems to have been by steps cut into the surface of the mound and apparently faced with wood (Addyman 1968, 307–8). At Bakewell the rubble built upon the north side of the counterscarp-bank could have been a similar bridge-foundation. As at Abinger, no certain sign of any timber or other support was found in the small area excavated, unless the sinkage remarked in the edge of Trench C represents this. Alternatively, the bridge was not permanently fixed, but was perhaps a simple gang-plank, raised or removed at need. Whatever the character of any bridge, something required the revetment of the motte skirt. The pressure at the motte-foot would have been considerable if a

gang-way or other kind of movable bridge was pivoted or levered against the side of the mound. Or perhaps the pressure on the foot of the ladder, or other means of scaling the motte, would have been sufficient to cause soil-slip.

The scarcity of pottery or other occupation debris was not confined to the area supposed to lie immediately beneath the bridge, which suggests that perhaps the motte was never 'occupied' in the normal sense of that term. Certainly some function like that of a simple watch-tower might well accord with its size and position. The Bakewell motte might have formed a convenient observation-post at the north–eastern edge of the Peverel estates; but the postulated date, based on the admittedly few scraps of pottery from the excavation, would hardly allow for the construction of the earthwork before the estates were broken up in 1153. And it seems unlikely to have been built under royal patronage at the end of the Anarchy when small defensive points of this kind were being generally dismantled. The motte's erection might perhaps best be dated to the final decade of the twelfth century, when the manor of Bakewell came into the hands of Ralph Gernon. Alternatively, the earlier part of the thirteenth century saw many occasions, such as the rising of the Northern Barons in 1215, when a land-owner might have erected a small defensible point. Although separated from the important church nearby, the Gernon estates now centred on Bakewell itself, and an observation-post commanding the main approaches and dominating the bridging-point on the Wye was clearly desirable.

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