PILSBURY: A FORGOTTEN CASTLE

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INTRODUCTION

Pilsbury Castle (SK 114638) is a Scheduled Ancient Monument lying within the parish of Hartington Town Quarter in the Derbyshire Peak District. The Peak District National Park Authority recently purchased the site to protect it from possible damage.

The castle site is set within a parish of obscure outline and unusual size. Pilsbury Castle is in Hartington Town Quarter which, with its neighbours Hartington Nether Quarter, Hartington Middle Quarter and Hartington Upper Quarter, constitutes a long, thin parcel of territory stretching from below Hartington village up to the hills just north and west of Buxton — a ribbon-shaped swathe of land approximately 30km long and about 5km wide. The southern lower length of this ribbon has been sandwiched between the River Dove, which forms the county boundary, and the line of the Roman road that ran from Buxton to Derby, much of which is now the A515 trunk road.

Although numerous attempts have been made in the past to explain the castle earthworks, there has been no detailed topographical survey or geophysical examination and documentary searches have previously proved to be of limited value in unravelling its history.

In an attempt to establish and preserve whatever information exists, and to separate fact from fiction, members of ARTEAMUS (Archaeological Research TEAM, University of Sheffield) conducted detailed topographical and geophysical surveys of the earthworks, obtained a report on the geology of the site and undertook an exhaustive documentary search.

The study was incorporated into a broader Local Heritage Initiative project, entitled 'Pathways to Pilsbury', which was supported by grants from the Countryside Agency, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Nationwide Building Society.

THE NEW SURVEY

A contour survey of the site was carried out using a total station EDM. As there is no single point from which the whole site can be seen, a grid of nine control points was marked and integrated. About 2,000 points were then surveyed and recorded, and the readings used to construct a hachure plan of the site. The exact position of the site in

the landscape was determined by surveying the positions of two of the control points from the nearest undisturbed benchmark.

In conjunction with this, we also undertook a geophysical survey of the interiors of both baileys and the summit of the motte, using both resistivity and magnetometry. Approximately 4,000 readings were obtained for each method. We did not attempt to survey the minor earthworks on the flood plain by geophysical methods because soil conditions were unsuitable.

Aerial photographs were taken from a model aircraft carrying a remotely controlled camera.

Geology

The geology of the site is complex. Therefore, a geological report was sought from Dr Robert Toynton of the University of Sheffield, which is now deposited with the site archive.

The castle site is adjacent to the boundary between the Lower Carboniferous Visean limestones and the shales and sandstones of the Namurian stage of the Upper Carboniferous. The boundary is unconformable, with the strata to either side dipping at different angles. To the east of the castle, on the lower part of the hillside, the bedded limestones are replaced by apron reef facies which, though lacking clear bedding, is often more resistant to weathering.

The sharply defined outlying limestone knoll to the immediate north-east of the castle site is composed of apron reef facies limestone. Fossil alignment shows that this is the core of a tight fold within the reef limestone. The hill on which the castle is situated appears to be undisturbed Carboniferous shale at a similar level to a terrace cut into the shale on the opposite bank a little way upstream. This may be upstanding as a chance remnant or due to a greater resistance to weathering produced by folding. There is no evidence of landslip at the site.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Pilsbury Castle earthworks lie about 0.5km north of the shrunken medieval village of Pilsbury which, in turn, lies about 2km north of Hartington (Fig. 1). The River Dove winds approximately from north to south beside the castle site, also forming the boundary between Derbyshire and Staffordshire at this point. The steep-sided river valley runs along the boundary between the millstone grit, shales and mudstones of the Sheen ridge to the west and the limestone of the White Peak plateau to the east.

The main earthworks of the castle itself have been fashioned out of a knoll composed largely of shale, protected on the east by a small, steep-sided limestone reef. Further, slighter earthworks lie on the floodplain between the knoll and the river, but some of these may not be contemporary.

As they exist today, the earthworks take the form of a Norman motte with two separated baileys, one to the east and one to the south (Fig. 2; Plate 1). The natural knoll has been modified; separating the motte from the promontory by a substantial ditch and piling spoil on the top to give it more prominence. The two baileys have banks and external ditches, while the whole castle appears more substantial on the northern side because here it falls naturally and sharply to the flood plain (Plate 2). The eastern bailey

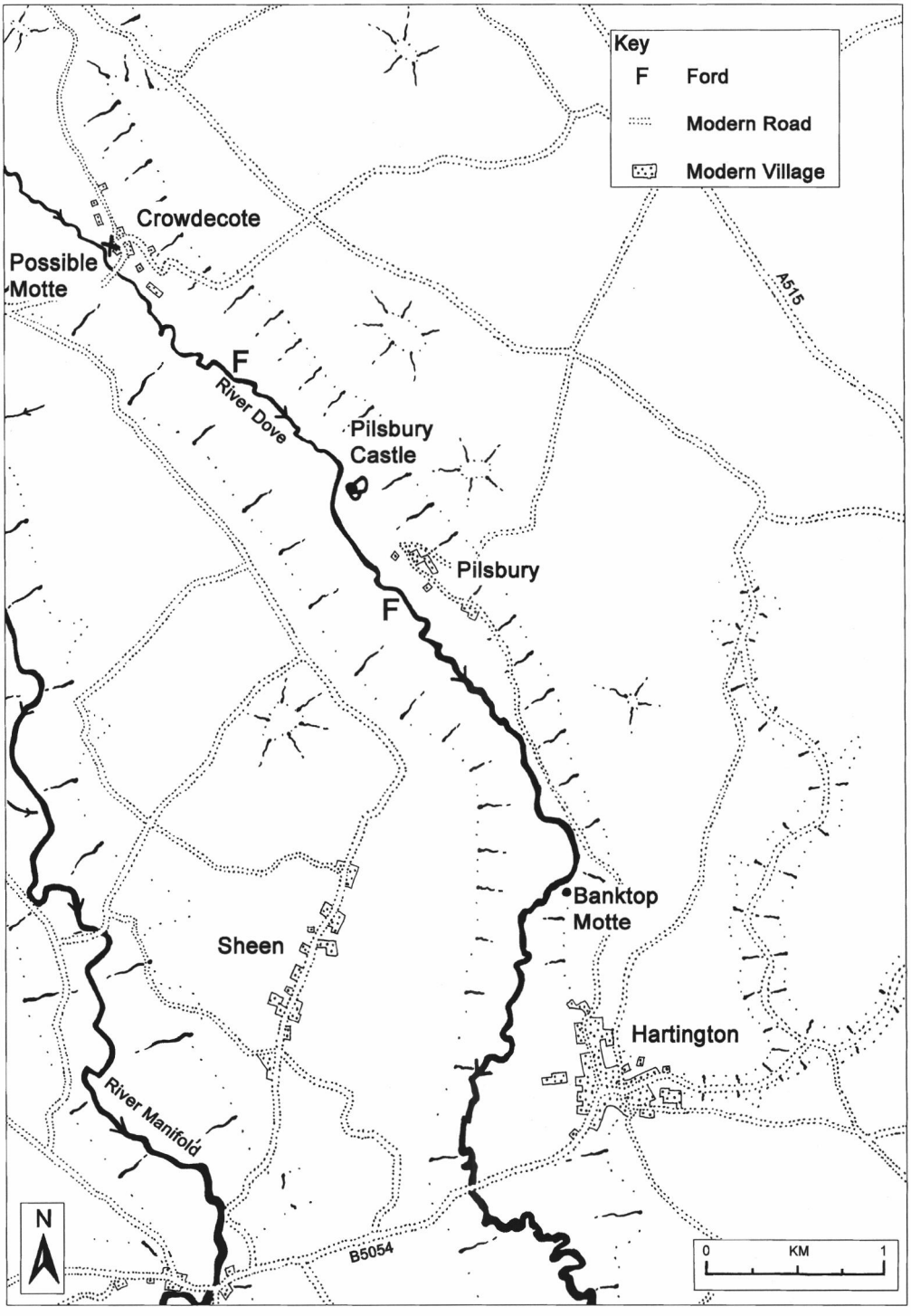

Fig. 1: Pilsbury Castle: location plan of earthworks.

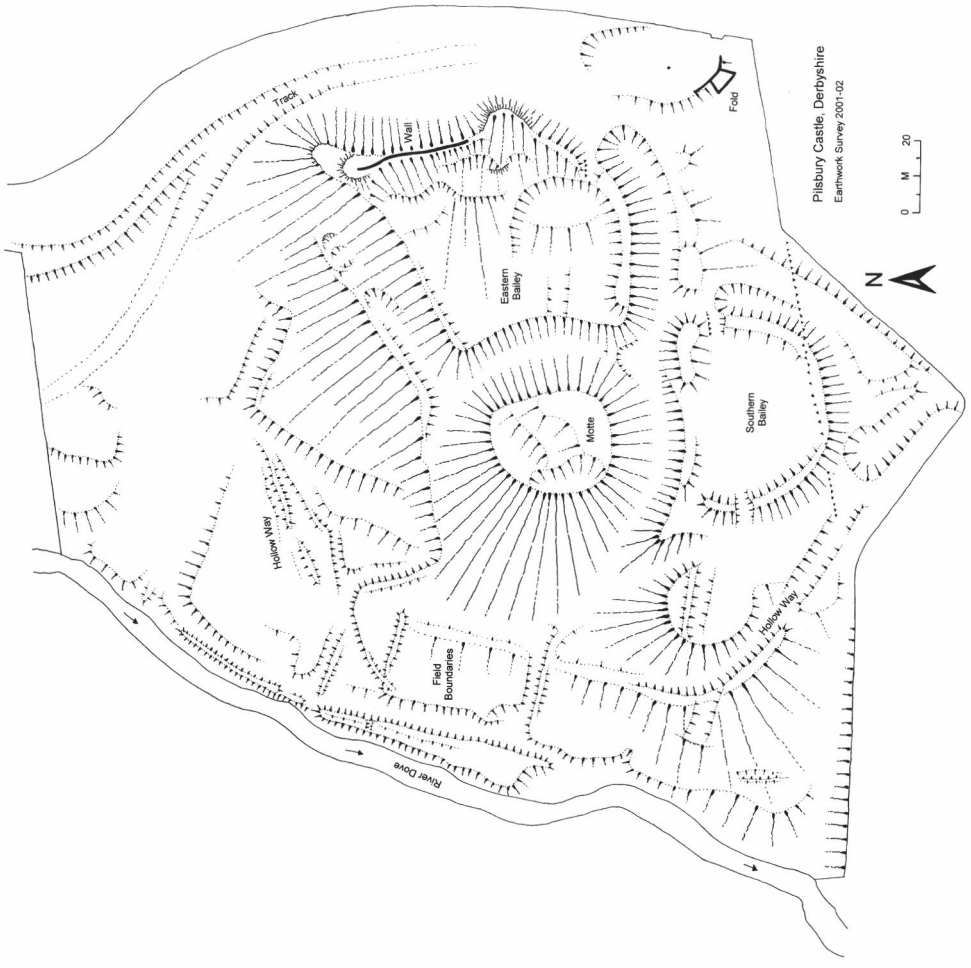

Fig. 2: Pilsbury Castle: hachure plan of earthworks.

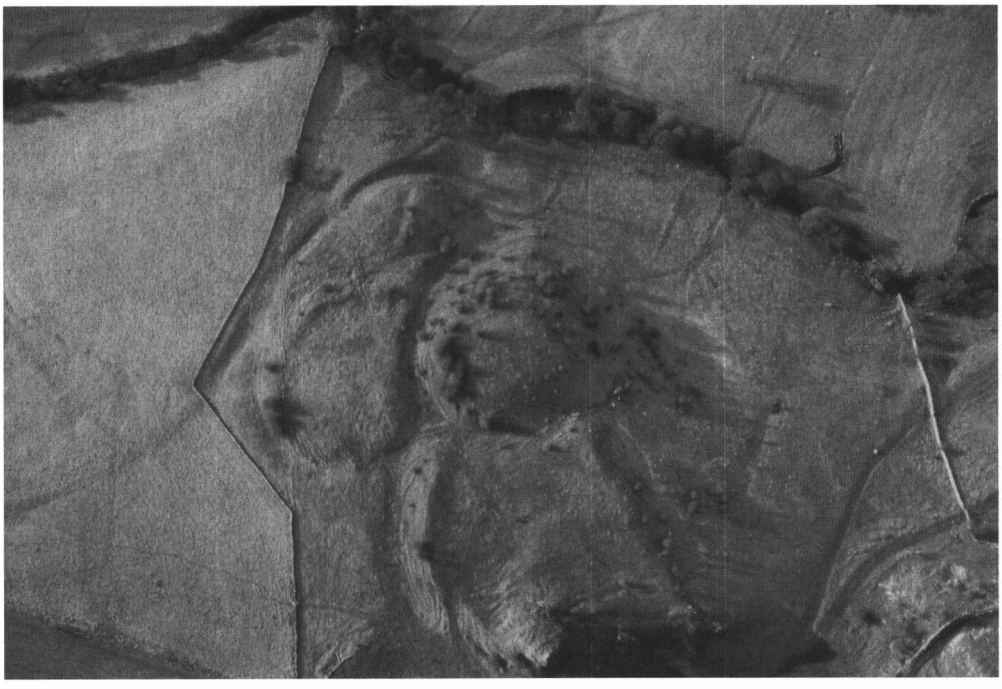

Plate 1: Pilsbury Castle from the air.

is bounded to the east by the limestone reef, which also provides a substantial natural barrier.

On top of this reef lie the fragmentary remains of a narrow, flimsy rubble wall, held together with lime mortar that has been tempered with chopped straw (Plate 3). It is not possible to determine whether the wall is contemporary with the castle earthworks, but the composition of the mortar is consistent with a medieval origin and there seems to be no other explanation for the wall's existence. Its position, lying as it does on top of a barrier that is already naturally impressive, makes it most likely that its function was to level the top of the reef to stabilise a beam to which a palisade could have been attached. The alternative would have been to cut a beam slot in the solid limestone and there is no trace of this.

The only other visible trace of possible use of stone lies at the south-western corner of the eastern bailey, where it is possible that the entrance to it lay and where the ground might have been revetted to prevent slippage into the ditch round the motte.

Faint, level areas are visible within the eastern bailey, perhaps the remains of building platforms, but only faint irregular humps can be seen in the southern bailey, of which both bank and ditch are generally less substantial.

The topography of the site, with banks, ditches and mound, has made most of the area unattractive for more recent ploughing. Only the southern end of the south bailey (separated from the remainder by a field boundary until recently) seems to have been subjected to plough damage. However, with the reduction of sheep grazing on the earthworks in the last few years there was a marked development of hawthorn scrub engulfing the motte (now controlled), along with increased rabbit burrowings. The

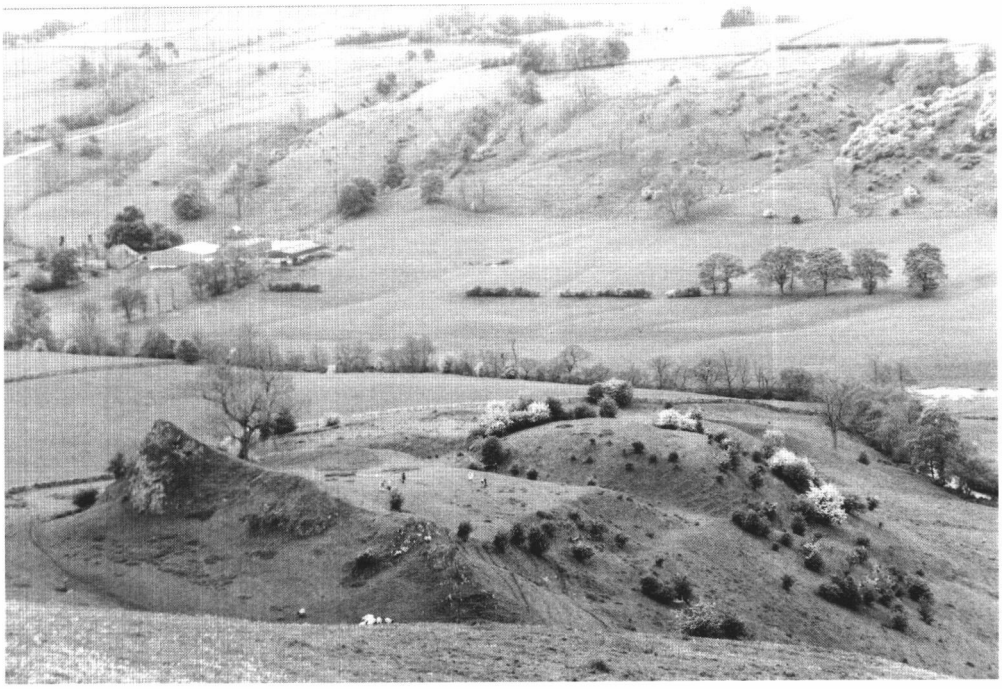

Plate 2: Pilsbury Castle from the north, showing impressive defences. The River Dove is centre, motte right centre, eastern bailey and limestone reef to left.

remaining earthworks appear to be well preserved, despite the soft shales of which they were constructed.

The Eastern Bailey

The remains of the defences surrounding this bailey, which lies between the motte and the steep side of the limestone plateau above, are by far the more impressive. To the north, where the natural contours of the knoll are already steep, there is a bank and an external ditch. Together they would have proved a formidable obstacle to close-quarters attack when topped with a palisade. To the east, the limestone reef protects the bailey, possibly with a palisade above, and to the south there is again a bank and external ditch. To the west, a ditch separates the bailey from the motte.

There is a breach in the bank surrounding the bailey at the southern limit of the reef. This has previously been interpreted as the entrance to the castle complex (Barnatt and Smith 1997, 82–3) but in fact it seems entirely recent, probably cut to facilitate vehicular access to the bailey, and this was later recognised by Barnatt and Smith (2004, 88–90).

Within this eastern bailey, the traces of two, or possibly three, flattened areas lie in the lea of the limestone reef and provide the only visible evidence for possible timber buildings anywhere within the castle earthworks. One is about 8 metres long and 4 metres wide, while the others are smaller and less distinct. Geophysics failed to confirm their presence, but soil conditions were not favourable. There is also the very faint trace of a possible track, leading west from the largest of the building platforms towards the motte. Most other contours within this bailey seem to be natural, although some deliberate flattening may have taken place.

Plate 3: Pilsbury Castle: fragments of mortared rubble walling on top of limestone reef.

The Southern Bailey

The earthworks of the bailey lying south of the motte appear visually less substantial. They comprise low banks with an external ditch surrounding a gently undulating area containing no visible traces of buildings. A geophysical examination also failed to locate any architectural structures. The southern extremity of the bailey earthworks has been subject to recent plough damage and is, therefore, less prominent. There are also two points, to the east and west of the enclosure, where the perimeter bank has recently been breached and to the east the ditch has been filled to facilitate the passage of farm vehicles. A low mound lies at the point nearest to the eastern bailey, but this has been subject to extensive rabbit damage making interpretation difficult.

It has been suggested that the southern bailey might be the primary earthwork on the site, later incorporated in the more elaborate plan when the motte and eastern bailey were constructed (Hart *pers. comm.*), but only excavation might establish this.

The Motte

The motte rises steeply from the flood plain and is separated from the two baileys by a substantial ditch. The spoil from ditch construction was probably used to raise the natural height of the motte. The sketch plan of the castle prepared by Clive Hart (1981, 146) shows traces of a building or watchtower on the summit, but there are no visible surface signs today. If they had existed, the extensive rodent activity would probably

have obliterated them. Hart's interpretation (*pers. comm.*) was based on an aerial photograph taken in the late 1970s by Derrick Riley which has been seen by the authors and certainly shows what can be interpreted as parch marks. Frustratingly, however, a geophysical survey in 2002 did not produce firm corroboration of any building on this part of the motte; although possible faint traces could be discerned at another point (see below — geophysics survey).

The entrance

It was suggested previously that the original entrance lay at the southern extremity of the limestone reef, but this breach in the bank is recent. The actual site of the original entrance is not easy to determine, but it was possibly located at the north-western corner of the southern bailey, next to the ditch separating it from the motte. This would have given access to the southern bailey. At the north-eastern corner of this lies a low mound that might have been the site of a timber gatehouse, from which a bridge could have led to the south-western corner of the eastern bailey. It is apparent that the bank of the eastern bailey at this point stops short of the ditch surrounding the motte, and there are hints of a stone revetment on this corner, lending support to this interpretation.

The faint signs of a track in this enclosure leading towards the motte might have led, in turn, to another bridge spanning the ditch and giving access to the motte's summit. However, the point of access remains uncertain.

Thus, the southern bailey might have been an outwork to create a defence of the entrance in depth. It might also have been used to house workshops, or to keep stock or horses.

Access to the Castle

A substantial hollow-way leads between the main defences and the River Dove (Fig. 2). To the south, it can be traced as a spur from the main track leading to the hamlet of Pilsbury but to the north it does not seem to continue straight along the flood plain. There are, however, indications that it may well have continued round the northern side of the promontory to join another track existing between the castle and the rising ground to the east, which is still visible as a slight hollow-way. If this were the main access route to the castle, those approaching would have been forced to make a circuit of a substantial part of the defences, making the castle appear more imposing.

The track passing east of the castle (Fig. 2) is shown as active on early Ordnance Survey maps, leading past a ford known as Stepping Stones, 700m upstream of the castle and visible from it (SK107645). Today, the track running north from Pilsbury past the castle stays on the dryer ground and continues to Crowdecote, Glutton Bridge, Stannery and Dowel Dale.

There are no signs of tracks indicating a ford across the River Dove at the castle site, so it may have primarily guarded north-south traffic. However, in this general locality the major post-medieval routes, some of which probably had medieval origins, crossed the river rather than running beside it (Fig. 1). To the south there were river crossings at Hartington and at the now-shrunken settlement of Pilsbury, neither of which is directly visible from the castle, although the ford at Pilsbury might have been visible from a watchtower on the motte. To the north, there was a possible river crossing at Stepping Stones, while another existed at Crowdecote.

Other earthworks

On the flood plain between the earthworks of the motte and baileys and the river lies a series of other, mostly slight, earthworks (Fig. 2). The most distinctive of these is a broad, low bank with a ditch to the east side running beside the river for about 70m, but a number of linear banks and ditches also run from the base of the motte towards the river. Most of the latter lie at right angles to the river but one is 'Y'-shaped at its eastern end and west from here what appears to be a further bank runs diagonally and may overlie one of the east/west banks.

It has been suggested that the bank parallel to the river might have formed an embankment for a fishpond, used to provide food for the garrison, but this seems unlikely. Alternative (but equally unlikely) explanations have been either that the bank formed a simple protection against flooding or that it was part of a defensive outwork of the castle itself. However, the bank does not seem adequate to meet either of these needs. If it is a built structure, its purpose remains enigmatic. Between the castle site and Hartington there are historically recent examples where the river has changed course (in one case nearby leaving a small area of Staffordshire on the eastern bank of the present river). The broad linear 'ditch' next to the bank might represent the remnants of a palaeochannel and, thus, is a natural feature. This has led to the land between it and the present river appearing bank-like, but this may be an illusion as it is no higher than other parts of the river bank. This appearance is enhanced by what appears to be a low field bank associated with those that meet it at right angles.

The other, slighter, banks and ditches also defy firm explanation. Their most likely purpose might have been as field banks marking lines on which hedges were planted. They tend to run at right angles to the river and might represent small stock enclosures. Some may predate the track leading past the castle onto the flood plain, while others certainly overlie it and must, therefore, be later, and there are no definite temporal connections with the castle itself, given that the hollow-way may not be contemporary with the castle.

Geophysics survey at Pilsbury Castle

Magnetometry and resistivity surveys were carried out at Pilsbury Castle in early June 2000. The areas covered were approximately 40m squares over the eastern and southern bailey plus an extended 20m square on top of the motte. Plate 4 shows the locations surveyed. The southern bailey had a high soil moisture level.

Resistivity survey

The resistivity survey was carried out using a Geoscan RM4 meter. Archaeological features and deposits can be detected if the level of moisture they contain is significantly different from the natural deposits that surround them. The fill of a ditch or pit which is richer in organic deposits than the subsoil will hold moisture very well and give low resistance values, but compacted surfaces or brick or stone constructions drain more easily and give high resistance values. The results show high resistance values as the dark areas and lower values in the light areas (Plates 5 to 7).

Each area surveyed appeared to show some possible results. The southern bailey showed a linear high-resistance feature running approximately north/south, heading for

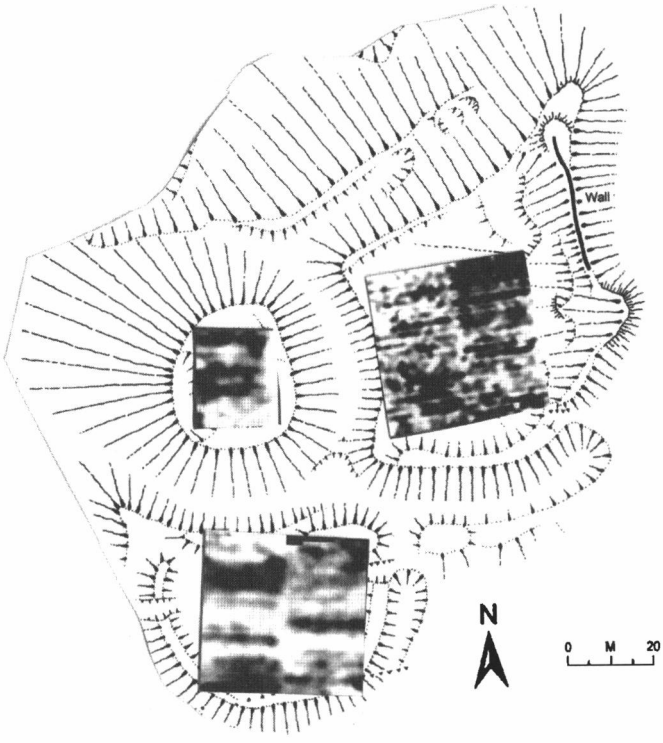

Plate 4: Pilsbury Castle: location plan of geophysics grids.

the bailey bank where it has been damaged by a recent drystone wall. This may be a track or compacted layer leading to an entrance into the bailey.

The feature of high resistivity on the north of the motte may indicate buried and collapsed stonework, but the area has extensive rabbit damage which would improve drainage and thus cause higher resistance readings.

The results from the eastern bailey appear to show a linear feature of high readings coinciding with a slight depression leading towards the motte. This may possibly be evidence of a trackway leading to a bridge over the ditch at this point.

The very shallow soils at Pilsbury are generally unsuitable for the production of resistivity data: the results might tend to show the depth of the bedrock and the surface water drainage rather than archaeological features and should be treated with caution.

Magnetometer survey

This survey was carried out using a Geoscan Fm36 Fluxgate magnetometer. Plates 8 to 10 show the results. Past human activity may permanently alter the magnetic properties of a deposit. These include burning, the importation of magnetically different material, the creation of enriched organic features and the altering of depths of topsoil. The magnetometer survey used a fluxgate magnetometer which detects any variations of the magnetic field from the normal background reading which will have been caused by the magnetically altered subsoil.

The most convincing indications from the survey are on the motte in the same area as indicated by the resistivity survey. This possibly indicates collapsed stonework or

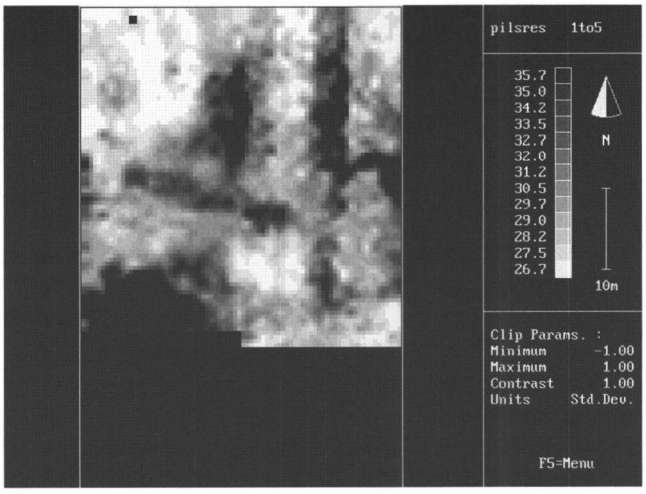

Plate 5: Pilsbury Castle: resistivity survey results, eastern bailey.

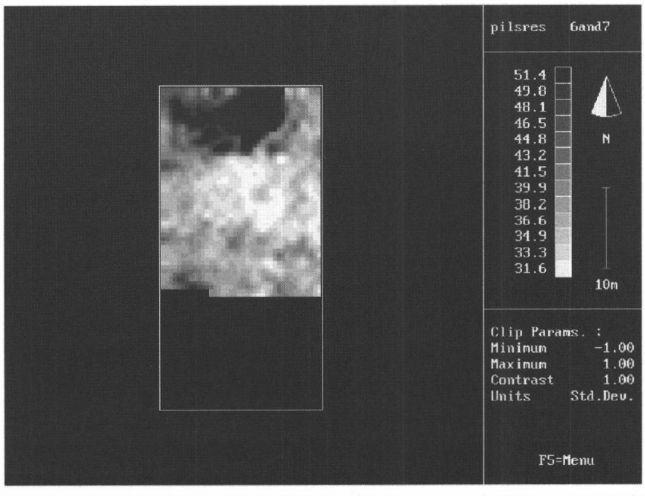

Plate 6: Pilsbury Castle: resistivity survey results, motte.

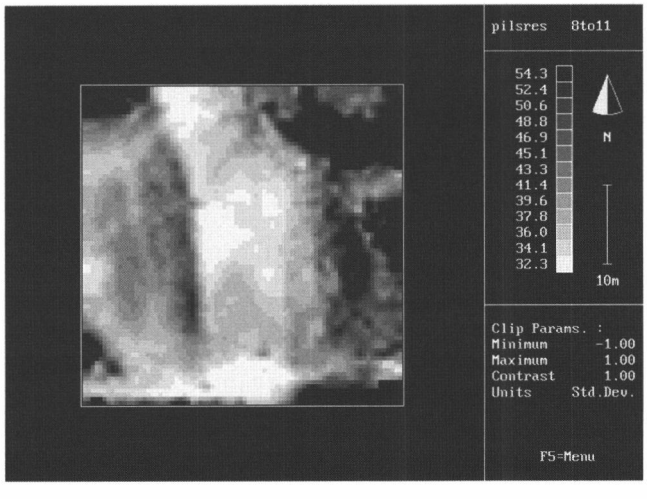

Plate 7: Pilsbury Castle: resistivity survey results, southern bailey.

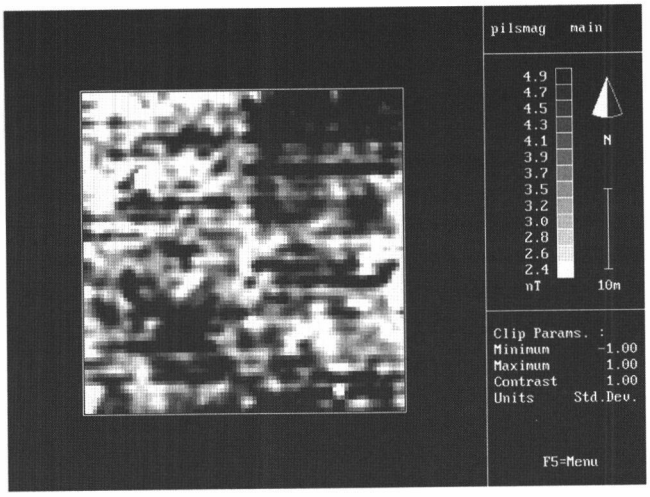

Plate 8: Pilsbury Castle: magnetometry survey results, eastern bailey.

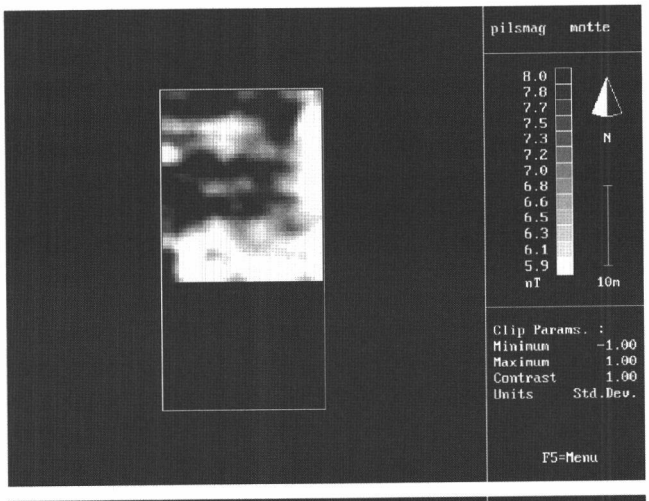

Plate 9: Pilsbury Castle: magnetometry survey results, motte.

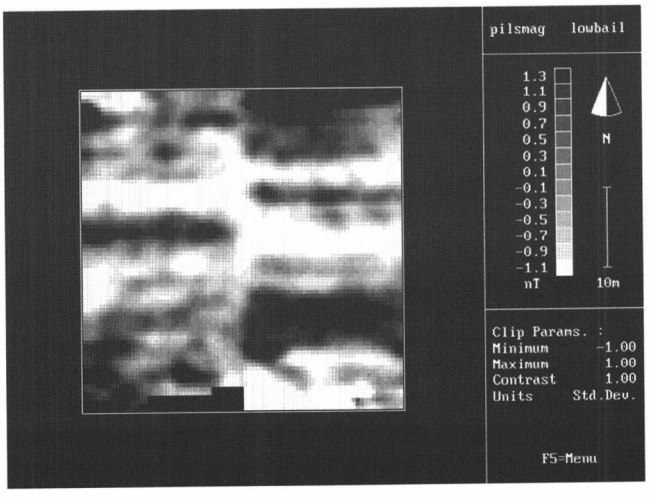

Plate 10: Pilsbury Castle: magnetometry survey results, southern bailey.

foundations giving different responses to the shales that form the bulk of the motte. However, an alternative explanation in the form of a bonfire cannot be ruled out.

RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION

Earlier research

Comparatively little research had been undertaken on the castle site prior to the Arteamus investigations. The first record that has previously been accepted as referring to Pilsbury Castle appeared in a book cataloguing the collections of Micah Salt (Turner 1899, 139). This refers to a list of items received in 1896 from 'the site of an ancient mansion, Castle Field, Crowdycote [*sic*]'. Following the list of relics, he states that "a passage like a cave had been made under the foundations". Turner later referred to this excavation again (Turner 1903, 162);

'At Crowdicote [*sic*], near Hartington, there are remains of foundations of an old castle. A passage like a cave had been made under them. In it were found, about twenty years ago, a number of relics... The cottages near the spot are partly built of sandstone, evidently from the ruins.'

These relics were said to include silver coins (one of Henry III), an iron arrow point, bronze key, buckle and a bronze spur rowel, among other objects. They now seem to be lost.

It seems unlikely that this refers to Pilsbury Castle for the following reasons:

- There are no physical signs of any excavation at Pilsbury Castle.
- There is no reason why Turner would not have named the site correctly.
- There are no cottages nearby fitting this description.
- The descriptions of the find site are inconsistent, first calling it a mansion and later the foundations of a castle.
- If the artefacts were found within the fabric of the motte, they provide a *terminus post quem* for its completion. Henry III was not crowned until 1216, which seems improbably late for the earthworks.

Although there appears to be no record of a Castle Field at Crowdecote, a much more likely candidate would seem to be the putative artificial hillock at Dove Mount in Crowdecote (Hurford and Sheppard 2005, 79–81). This is discussed further below.

Only three other examinations of the site appear to have been undertaken, the first being that recorded in the North Derbyshire Archaeological Survey (Hart 1981, 146), which includes the first largely accurate sketch plan of the site; the second the archaeological survey of Pilsbury Farm (Barnatt 1991, 1–3) and the third in the excellent work on the landscape history of Hartington (Weston 2000, 91). None of these included a very detailed description or discussion of the castle.

Documentation of the Castle

The literature search proved a disappointment. We now believe strongly that no pre-Norman records of the area remain, while the only written record from the 11th century is the well-known entry in the Domesday Book, which names Pilsbury but not the castle. This is hardly surprising, however, as only 50 castles known to have existed in 1086 are recorded in Domesday — less than 20 per cent of the total. If those mentioned in other sources before 1100 are included, the total is still only about 90 (Renn 1973).

After all, castles were sources of expenditure rather than income, which was recorded in Domesday.

The Domesday entry reads in translation (Williams and Martin 1992, 745):

'In Pilsbury and Ludwell Alsige had 2 carucates of land to the geld. [There is] land for 2 ploughs. It is waste. There are 12 acres of meadow. In the time of King Edward it was worth 10s'.

It is also true that many sites of timber castles are more or less undocumented (Higham and Barker 1992, 41).

The next written mention of Pilsbury that has been traced (but, again, not of the castle) occurred in 1262 (Jeayes 1906, 181). This is a charter, or grant of land, by Robert 3rd de Ferrers, Earl of Derby, to Henry of Shelford of 100 acres in Hulland Ward, for the rent of a sparrow hawk or 6d. It was dated 25th January and witnessed at Pilsbury. This date is only four years before the King confiscated the lands of the Earl of Derby following a rebellion.

DISCUSSION

When was the castle built?

Some authors have suggested that the earthworks of Pilsbury Castle developed over time (Hart 1981, 146) and that its origins may lie with the Anglo-Saxons or even in the Iron Age (Barnatt 1991, 2; Cox 1905, 385; Hinde 2002, 65–70; Millward and Robinson 1975, 115). There are numerous examples where motte-and-bailey castles occupy earlier defensive sites. However, only excavation might provide a definitive answer in this case and all the visible earthworks are morphologically post-Conquest fortifications (Hodges 1980, 25–34).

The only pointer to an earlier origin lies in the name Pilsbury, which is Anglo-Saxon (=Pil's fortified place) (Cameron 1959, 370). This place name could date to anywhere between the first Anglian settlement of the Peak (6th–7th centuries) and the 11th century, but this need not necessarily imply that a fortified site existed on the knoll. Later authorities have extended the meaning of 'burh', or 'bury', so that it may now be taken to imply no more than the presence of an estate, manor or any enclosed place (Higham and Barker 1992, 41; Parsons and Styles 2000, 75–81). This could have referred to an Anglo-Saxon hall at or near the site where the hamlet of Pilsbury lies today, so that Pilsbury Castle could well have taken the name of the nearest settlement.

Hart (1981, 146) and Barnatt (1991, 2) have suggested that the two baileys might be of different dates, although the latter has since changed his view (Barnatt and Smith 2004, 88–90). The banks and ditches of the southern bailey are certainly less impressive today than those of the eastern bailey. However, without excavation it is not possible to establish whether this reflects different dates of construction or different purposes.

Assuming that the earthworks visible today are typical of a Norman timber castle, we can narrow down the date of construction, but alternatives still remain. The widespread insurrection in Mercia led King William to order what is known as the Harrying of the North in 1069–70. Desperate poverty and starvation followed the programme of laying waste to farms, killing livestock, burning homes and farm buildings and driving the people from their source of livelihood. Outlawry may have followed as the harried sought sanctuary in the hills and woods. In response, many Norman landlords built

castles to control their lands and protect them from outlaws. Thus, Pilsbury castle might have been one of the many castles built between 1070 and 1080 in order to curb the threat — especially of banditry, brigandage, poaching and other nuisances (Weston 2000, 91).

However, some have disputed this explanation, for the meaning of 'waste' in Domesday is uncertain (Brian Rich *pers. comm.*). If the King's men had ravaged the area where the lords of nearly all local manors on the Derbyshire side of the river were now the favoured de Ferrers family, it would seem extremely improbable that single manors would be left untouched — but that is what seemed to happen. Nearby Tissington, for example, was recorded in Domesday as still productive:

'Eadric, Gamal, Wulfgeat, Wihtric, Leofric [and] Godfwine had 4 carucates of land to the geld. [There is] land for 4 ploughs. There are now 3 ploughs in demesne, and 12 villans and 8 bordars having 4 ploughs... and 30 acres of meadow' (Williams and Martin 1992, 745).

It is possible that at least some of the manors in which arable land was recorded as waste were uncultivated because the lord had conscripted the peasants to work elsewhere, leaving only pasture as productive land.

However, this might just be a matter of manor structure and selective depopulation which spared Tissington. The lord might have wanted to create a large forest area reserved for grazing and hunting which included Pilsbury.

Another option is also possible. The River Dove provided the boundary between the lands of the Earls of Derby and Chester at this point and relations between the two were at best delicate. The civil war between Stephen and Matilda, known as the Anarchy, ran from 1135 to 1153. During this, the de Ferrers family owned the land on which Pilsbury Castle stands, while the Staffordshire bank of the River Dove at that point was owned by Ranulf de Gernons, Earl of Chester. Many barons, including de Ferrers, supported King Stephen, while Ranulf supported Queen Matilda. During the Anarchy, hundreds of new castles were built across England, without the Royal assent legally required, and are known as 'adulterine castles'. They are ill recorded and after the civil war had ended, those not razed in the fighting were ordered to be slighted, although some were not.

Some historians believe that Pilsbury may date from that period, although adulterine castles tended to be less substantial and well designed than this site. It is, of course, also quite possible that Pilsbury Castle was built to guard the Earl of Derby's estates during another unrecorded episode of antagonism between the two families. This would render the date of construction even more difficult to determine.

A final option is that Pilsbury Castle was built in the 11th or 12th century as a focal point for this part of the Earl of Derby's estates, as an administrative centre and to 'control' the local population.

Who built the castle?

It is most likely that Henry de Ferrers or one of his descendants (Weston 2000, 91) built the castle. Henry fought with William at the battle of Hastings and was subsequently rewarded with 210 manors, 114 of them in Derbyshire. The seat of his chief barony was at Tutbury castle, Staffordshire, and the family also built another substantial castle at Duffield, north of Derby. Both of these were later rebuilt in stone. Henry de Ferrers' son, Robert, was granted the Earldoms of Derby and Nottingham sometime before

1138, but lost the latter following the civil war between Stephen and Matilda. Finally, in 1266, Robert 3rd de Ferrers, then Earl of Derby, backed the wrong side again — this time in the Barons' Revolt. He was imprisoned and almost all his lands confiscated, being awarded to the King's son, Edmund, who became the first Earl of Lancaster. By that time there was presumably no advantage in maintaining a castle at Pilsbury. If in use at this and later dates it might well have been refortified in stone but this appears not to have happened.

Why was the site selected?

The site of Pilsbury Castle lies in a central position in the Hartington estate, which would have made it a convenient focal point for administration and control.

Another reason for choosing to build Pilsbury Castle at this point is the natural advantage of the knoll projecting into the flood plain of the River Dove, much of it consisting of soft shale, which would have been easy to modify. The river is comparatively narrow and shallow in this part and there are numerous fords, both up- and down-stream. Of these, that towards Crowdecote would have been clearly visible from the castle while the approach from Staffordshire to another, downstream at the site of the settlement of Pilsbury (SK 116633), possibly could also be seen and therefore controlled. However, with so many river crossings nearby, it would have been easy to bypass the castle.

The fact that the castle site is overlooked from the limestone plateau is not of great importance. In the first place, the higher ground lay within the de Ferrers' estates, while the ridge on the opposite bank of the river, which did not belong to them, was several hundred metres away. Secondly, timber castles had been initially conceived for defence against mounted soldiers, who had to dismount to fight, and to resist violent, hand-fought attacks on gates and other parts of their perimeters. Only later did siege warfare, with massive siege engines, develop (Higham and Barker 1992, 41).

It is also noteworthy that the castle lay near the northern and western limits of the de Ferrers' family estates, where it would have provided a suitable base for ensuring that the boundaries were not violated.

There is another apparent motte without any visible bailey on a similar raised area of ground at Bank Top, between Pilsbury and Hartington (SK 126616) (Plate 11). This is much smaller, measuring only 20m in diameter but with a rock-cut ditch 2.5m deep. A further motte site has recently been suggested at Crowdecote (SK100653) (Hurford and Sheppard 2005, 79–81), also situated near the River Dove and now topped by a bungalow (Plate 12). It is tempting to speculate that these three sites might have been part of an intended series of defensive works on the boundaries of the de Ferrers' lands, one in each of the three Domesday manors of Hartington, Pilsbury and Ludwell, and the now lost site of Soham. An alternative explanation might be that Pilsbury Castle was built 1070–80, while the two smaller earthworks at Bank Top and Crowdecote were thrown up during the Anarchy.

Also it is, of course, quite possible that the position of the castle enabled it to fulfil more than one function.

What was the extent of occupation?

Few possible building platforms can be visibly distinguished within the eastern bailey, and none in the southern bailey. The geophysical data do not provide evidence for

Plate 11: Brand Top ringwork or motte, showing substantial rock-cut ditch.

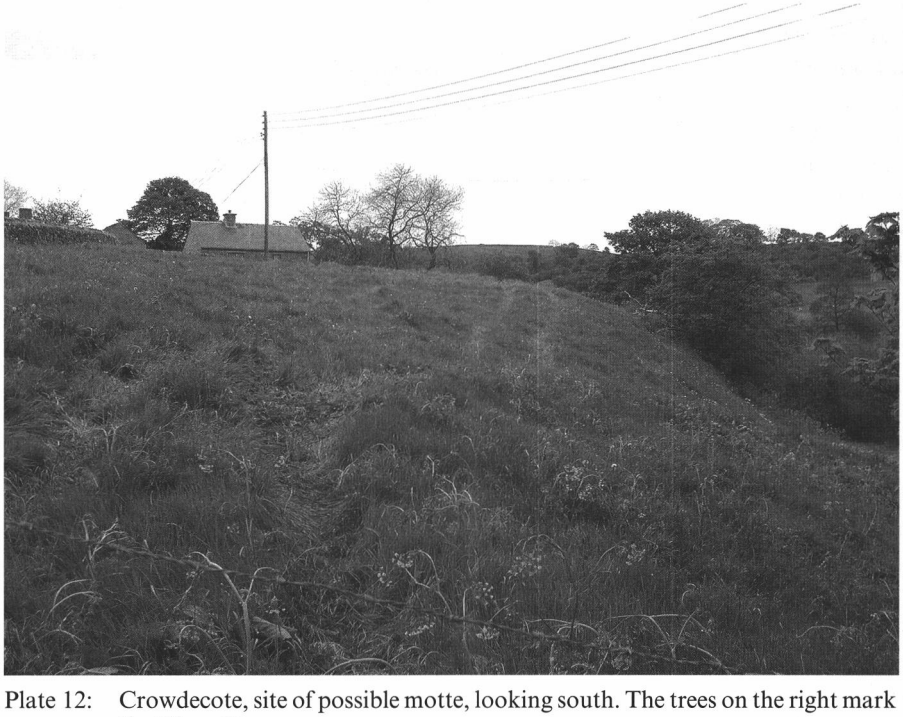

Plate 12: Crowdecote, site of possible motte, looking south. The trees on the right mark the River Dove.

further structures within either bailey. However, some structure may have crowned the top of the motte, as Hart (1981, 146) detected from air photographs taken in the 1970s, and there is possible slight supporting evidence from our geophysics results. It is clear that there were never enough substantial buildings to house and service such a prominent person as the Earl of Derby and his retinue. Moreover, despite extensive rodent damage to the summit of the motte, there seem to be signs of individual spoil dumps which would surely have been levelled had a watchtower been built there and the castle garrisoned. This might imply that construction was halted before completion and that the castle was never actually occupied.

However, small castles in the Norman period were very different from their later, stone-built counterparts. A castle like Pilsbury would probably only have a small hall and a few outbuildings to house a steward and some men-at-arms. The building platforms that can now be distinguished are large enough to accommodate these.

When was Pilsbury Castle abandoned?

With the apparent total lack of contemporary documentary evidence for the castle itself, this must also remain uncertain. By the middle of the 12th century, the age of the earthwork castle in England was over, with a few exceptions (Higham and Barker 1992, 41), to be superseded by the tower-keep. The building of stone castles had begun even before the end of the 11th century. On most important sites, stone had replaced timber and where no rebuilding had taken place the castles fell into decay (Rowley 1983, 49).

Timber castles had their disadvantages: they were vulnerable to fire and their defences needed regular repair or replacement. If Pilsbury Castle were still of importance during the mid to late 12th century, and standing as it does in an area where stone is readily available, it seems unlikely that it would not have been rebuilt in stone. The growing sophistication of siege techniques would have provided added pressure to replace rather flimsy timber defences, while the low-lying site would have diminished its value as methods of warfare changed.

Also, the Earls of Derby supported the development of the town of Hartington to the extent that it received a market and fair charter in 1203, the earliest such charter in Derbyshire (Coates 1965, 92–111). This confirms that Hartington, with its river crossing and market, was a thriving settlement by that time. Pilsbury Castle, however, lies about 2km to the north and the two sites are not intervisible, so that any importance its position had previously held would almost certainly have diminished as Hartington grew. It could well be that the castle had been abandoned well before 1200.

The charter of 1262 (Jeayes 1906, 181) complicates matters somewhat because it was signed at Pilsbury (although the castle is not mentioned). Among the witnesses was the Earl's brother, 'Will de Ferr[ariis] frater meus'. A document witnessed in person by such an important figure would necessarily have been signed in an important building. It has been suggested (Brian Rich *pers. comm.*) that this document provides evidence for the castle remaining in repair at the time, but this seems unlikely to the authors. There is no evidence of stone buildings at Pilsbury Castle and, if it had remained in use as a timber castle for perhaps 200 years, it would have needed substantial rebuilding and repair, probably more than once. It would not seem to have been sufficiently important for these expensive works to be undertaken. It would certainly never have been presented as

an edifice of prestige for the Earls of Derby, when their stone-built castle at Tutbury lay comparatively nearby.

An alternative explanation might be that a substantial dwelling existed in the village of Pilsbury itself: a Saxon hall perhaps stood there before the Conquest. Although the administrative centre might well have been transferred to the castle when it was built, a hall could easily have been rebuilt on the village site when the castle fell into disrepair and that, or its successor, might have remained to hold sufficient status in which to sign an important land transfer. Post-medieval buildings and other later works would almost certainly have obliterated any traces of such a building. There is a tradition that the manorial court was still held at Pilsbury rather than Hartington until the 19th century (John Leach *pers. comm.*), which would support the idea of a later, perhaps stone-built, hall.

CONCLUSIONS

In the absence of any contemporary documents mentioning Pilsbury Castle, and without excavation (which might itself raise further questions rather than provide answers), any conclusions are necessarily tentative and open to debate. In the opinion of the authors, the most likely interpretation of the site is given below.

Although earlier features may underlie the earthworks currently visible, speculation in the absence of evidence is pointless. Pilsbury Castle earthworks today are best considered as a Norman motte with twin baileys at right angles to each other, occupying a shale knoll bounded to the east by a small limestone reef.

The castle was almost certainly built by the de Ferrers family, later Earls of Derby, to whom the manor was granted by the King after the Norman Conquest. It lies near the northern and western boundaries of their lands, beside the River Dove. The date of construction was most likely between 1070 and 1080, but it was possibly built later, in the first half of the 12th century during the Anarchy. There is no evidence for stone buildings on the site, implying that it was built as, and remained, an earth and timber castle.

The castle's position beside the river bounding the lands of the de Ferrers also lay near their northern extremity to give a visible reminder of power and control to the local population on the estate, neighbours and enemies alike. The presence of another apparent ringwork at Bank Top, between Pilsbury and Hartington, and a third possibly man-made mound at Crowdecote perhaps implies that all might have been constructed as part of a planned line of defence along the river.

It is unlikely that the castle was ever intended to provide the buildings and services demanded by an Earl and, at best, a constable and a small number of soldiers would have provided a garrison. The local estate may have been administered from here in Norman times, but the buildings may have had the sole function of sheltering the workers constructing the defences for there is a possibility that the castle was never subsequently occupied.

Between Pilsbury Castle and the river lies a series of low banks and ditches, most of which resemble hedge lines. They are not all of the same date and may represent small field boundaries, none of which are certainly medieval. A broader 'bank' and 'ditch' beside the river is more enigmatic and is possibly the remnant of a palaeochannel.

The date when the castle was abandoned is also uncertain. Both Crowdecote and Hartington, neither of which is visible from Pilsbury Castle, were sited on river crossings while Pilsbury is restricted in its location. The development of Hartington, some 2km away, as a market town by the de Ferrers family would certainly have focused trade on the new market and diminished the importance of Pilsbury Castle, to the extent that the castle had probably been abandoned before about 1200. If it had been occupied any later (or even by that date), the castle would almost certainly have been rebuilt in stone, and no trace of this remains.

The next mention of Pilsbury (but not the castle) occurs in 1262 (Jeayes 1906, 181), and does not necessarily imply that the castle was still in repair, although it is possible that an internal hall remained in use even though the timber palisades had rotted away.

The project archive has been deposited with the Peak District National Park Authority.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Paul Ash led the geophysical survey, Nick Landon drafted the words, Andi Payne drafted the plan and Graham Phillips conducted the literature search. Alice Ullathorne and John Barnatt helped with the final drawings.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the project provided by the Peak Park's Sustainable Development Fund and the Local Heritage Initiative funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Countryside Commission, and the Nationwide Building Society.

We would like to thank the many members of Arteamus who assisted in the surveys, the Peak District National Park Authority and its staff for their support and the many people, too numerous to mention, who provided information to help in interpretation of the site. Robert Toynton provided a helpful geological report. Colin Merrony helped with the geophysics. Special thanks go to Steve Mills for his aerial photographs and our particular gratitude also goes to John Barnatt and Clive Hart for reading the draft and making many helpful suggestions. Brian Rich helped to crystallise our thoughts, too. Despite all this assistance, any errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the authors.

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The Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Peak Park Sustainable Development Fund, in publication of this paper.