

FURTHER WORK AT CONISBROUGH CASTLE, YORKSHIRE (PL. XXXIII, A-B)

The excavation of the bailey at Conisbrough Castle to expose the remains to public view began in August 1967. The single-aisled hall discovered then has been briefly described in this Journal (xii (1968), 153) and was visited by members of the Royal Archaeological Institute during their summer excursion in 1968 (*Archaeol. J.*, cxxv (1968), 327-8). Work has gone on intermittently since 1967, but was renewed in an intensive campaign of three weeks in August 1969, the rewarding results of which are briefly recorded in this note.

1. The whole N. side of the bailey is occupied by the single-aisled hall (PL. XXXIII, A) with its attendant service-buildings extending eastwards to terminate in the kitchen near the keep. At the W. end of the hall, but separated from it by a small bank (?steps above), a two-storied range runs south along the curtain, containing a great room 45 ft. long internally on the first floor, the hood of the fireplace of which survives in the curtain. This was the arrangement in the 14th century, although it is clear from the surviving stone bases of two kinds on the ground floor that it has undergone at least one major alteration. It will require further study. Following the curtain the range then changed direction with a room c. 20 ft. square on the first floor.

2. There was then a marked change of ground level, the bank outside being held back by a retaining wall. This bank of clay and stones was c. 6 ft. high and yielded sherds of cooking-pot of c. 1200 where it had been cut back at the front to accommodate the great foundation of dry stone for the curtain, and one base sherd earlier than 1100 on the old ground surface below it.⁴⁷ Behind this was a roughly square masonry opening. According to an eye-witness (the son of the then custodian) miners had dug out this shaft during the pre-war Depression and found a 'Norman' arch at its base. Much evidence in the form of miners' picks was found to corroborate this. The E. side was of fine ashlar below the depth of 18 ft. reached. The other sides had been built of rubble down to the solid rock, the N. side terminating in a moulded pointed arch (14th-century) springing from the rock. Behind this was a masonry slot, perhaps best interpreted as a latrine chute from the first floor of the vanished range. The feature will require further exploration when it has been shored up.

3. The natural subsoil of the hill on which the castle stands is sandstone and clay. Where the clay has dissolved the rock becomes very unstable, as the huge fissures in the latrine chute showed, and as can be seen even better in the vast disused quarry of the Ashfield Fire Clay Works south of and visible from the castle. (The face looks as though it has undergone marine erosion and huge masses of rock have spewed out into the quarry.) It is this instability that has caused the collapse of a large section of the curtain-wall on the S. side of the castle. There is an apparent gap of 130 ft. between the E. side of the gatehouse and a point beyond the second turret eastward. The excavation showed that the base of this second turret still exists *in situ* but just west of it there has been a major landslide which brought down the next turret, the E. turret of the gatehouse and part of the barbican. It is not a matter of the wall falling; the hillside itself has subsided. A remarkable discovery was that the E. turret of the gatehouse with the springing of its gate arch and a section of barbican wall in front of it lies c. 15 ft. below its original position. The erection of a bridge in the position of the original entry will allow the public to inspect the gatehouse remains below.

4. The surviving fragment of wall on the E. side of the gate passage was shown to have a transverse straight joint with a little of its rear plinth, indicating that the original gatehouse had been a tower 25 ft. square, excluding the projecting turrets. It had been extended backwards and eastwards to form a building c. 20 ft. wide against the curtain, which could be entered at first-floor level from a room behind the gate. The N. wall of this building was 6 ft. thick and its E. end (footings still barely revealed) indicate that

⁴⁷ I am greatly indebted to Mr. J. G. Hurst for dating the pottery.

it was *c.* 40 ft. long. According to our previous informant an altar slab, now in the church, was found by the miners near the gatehouse.^{47a} It is possible, therefore, that this building may have been a chapel.

5. The W. half of the segment between the two S. buttresses of the keep was excavated. The cylinder of the keep has a steep batter at its base terminating in a fine plinth course which was clearly the intended ground level (although now covered by soil). Below this is an offset of about 8 in. and then the face drops vertically 6 ft. 10 in. (PL. XXXIII, B). The offset course itself is rough, but of the seven courses below the top three are finely dressed and the bottom four rough. The basal course rests on the original ground surface and the artificial mound cast up against the masonry consists of hard beaten clay with horizontal streaks of soil in it. Except for sherds of 14th-century pottery in its upper part the mound was sterile. It is clearly analogous to the small mound or motte found by Professor E. M. Jope at Ascot Doilly.

6. The rise of ground level at the W. end (i.e. the upper end) of the hall, as well as the peculiar rising courses in the curtain at this point, indicate that an earthen bank preceded the curtain-wall in stone. Traces of it on the W. side have already been mentioned. A section was made behind the collapsed curtain on the S. side where, below the mortar floor level of the later buildings and above the old ground surface, there was a bed of clay 4 ft. deep. There was pottery in profusion in it and as the sherds cannot be earlier than about 1275, it seems clear that this make-up is later than the curtain-wall. (My guide-book dating is *c.* 1200.) The inference seems to be that when the later building was erected the area between the little motte and such bank as may have survived before the fall of the curtain was made level by making up the ground with clay. There is, then, a little evidence for an earlier earthen castle on this site, but we may suspect the royal burh (Conisbrough, Cuningesburg, in Domesday Book) probably enclosed the larger hill-top on which stands the parish church with its traces of pre-conquest work.

The major works of readjusting the levels (all to be done by hand) and the engineering operations at the gatehouse, to be carried out while 20,000 visitors annually want access to the keep, are tasks that are likely to tax the ingenuity and resources of the Ministry's charge-hand, Mr. R. Beardesley, and his team for some time to come.

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FURTHER WORK AT BOLINGBROKE CASTLE, LINCOLNSHIRE (PL. XXXIII, C-D)

In volume x (1966) of this Journal (pp. 152-8) the initial stages of the reclamation of Bolingbroke Castle by the Ministry of Public Building and Works were described; the work continues and is indeed not likely to be concluded for a few years. The main results as set out in the previous note still stand, but there are two or three points that have now to be amplified or modified.

The great talus of sand and fallen material that lay against the outer face of the curtain has now been cleared mechanically. The very soft sandstone of which the castle is constructed has proved a grave problem and the two main objectives in proceeding with this quickly were to allow the sodden stone to dry out and to prevent children scrambling over it and so breaking the hard crust on the stone. The most significant discovery was the exposure of the base of the octagonal SW. tower (tower C: fig. 62 in vol. x) which was found to be round like all the rest; above the lower courses of the original round tower its exterior had been reconstructed as an octagon with the same radius (PL. XXXIII, C). Inside, the tower retains its original horseshoe shape with a

^{47a} The Rev. G. F. Braithwaite has confirmed that the rectangular slab with chamfered edge and bearing five consecration crosses, now in use as the altar in the N. aisle of Conisbrough Church, was found before the war in the bailey of the castle.