

Fig. 1: the City of London during the Norman period.

The excavation of a Norman fortress on Ludgate Hill

Bruce Watson

ACCORDING TO the 12th century writer FitzStephen, London had "two castles strongly fortified"¹, in addition to the Tower of London in the south-east corner of the city (Fig. 1). It has been generally assumed from documentary sources that the two fortresses were separate but adjacent structures, known as Montfichet's Tower and Baynard's Castle². Since 1986 the site of Montfichet's Tower has been extensively excavated by the Department of Urban Archaeology of the Museum of London, in advance of the redevelopment of the area.

Site location

No trace of either Montfichet's Tower or Baynard's Castle remains above ground level, as in 1275 the sites of both castles were given to the Dominicans for the foundation of a new friary, known as Blackfriars³. Despite the obliteration of both fortresses during the 13th century, it has proved possible to postulate the location and extent of each site from documentary evidence.

The best available evidence for the location of Montfichet's Tower is a deed of 1278 regarding an

1. C. L. Kingsford (ed.) *John Stow, A Survey of London* (1971) 60-61, 220.

2. H. Johns Introduction to the maps in Lobell (ed.) *The British Atlas of Historic Towns* vol. 3 - *the City of London* (1989) 62.

3. *Ibid.*, 60.

agreement between the Bishop of London, the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's and the Dominicans about the proposed locations of the new friary church⁴. From this document it is clear that the tower was already a ruin and lay inside the line of the city wall, extending between Ludgate and the river, and close to the site of the planned church choir; that is, within the area of excavation described here. A recent study of the topography of medieval London also identified this area as the site of Montfichet's Tower, suggesting that the fortress lay within an area delimited by St Paul's Deanery to the east, the city wall to the west, Ludgate Hill to the north and Carter Lane to the south⁵.

The approximate position of Baynard's Castle can also be suggested. It was probably located due south of Montfichet's Tower inside the city walls. After the establishment of the Dominican friary, a second Baynard's Castle was built further east along the waterfront.

Documentary evidence

The construction of Montfichet's Tower is not documented, but it is probable that it was built during the late 11th century. The first mention of Montfichet's Tower by name occurs in c 1136, when its lord was involved in a plea concerning lordship over the water of the River Thames⁶. The last mention of it as a place of military significance is in Jordon Fantosme's contemporary poem about the rebellion of 1173–74, which describes how Gilbert de Munfichet had strengthened his castle in London and become allies with "Clarreus" – identified as his cousin Walter fitz Robert fitz Richard of Clare, lord of Baynard's Castle⁷.

The name Montfichet appears to be derived from the connection with the Montfichet family of Stansted Montfichet in Essex, who occupied the fortress during the 12th century.

The excavations – the southern ditches

Excavations along the north side of Carter Lane at Nos. 52–66 revealed two phases of ditch aligned east-west and dug into natural strata – brickearth overlying sand and gravel (see Figs. 2 and 3: section 2). The earlier of the two was only some 10m (33ft) long, with a terminal at each end. It was only 1.2m (4ft) deep (originally c 2m, 6ft, allowing for the truncation caused by the construction of Victo-

rian basements). After the accumulation of some 0.5m (20in) of erosion material and silts within the ditch, its southern edge was cut by the later ditch. All finds from this phase were Roman (the problem of finds residuality is discussed later).

The earlier ditch is interpreted as the first phase of the southern defences of Montfichet's Tower, as it lies within the postulated area of the fortress and has a similar alignment to the later ditch. The terminal at the west end probably marks the line of the rampart behind the city wall, while the terminal at the east end may mark the position of an entrance. The rest of the ditch was presumably destroyed by the creation of the later ditch.

The later southern ditch has now been traced over a distance of 41.0m (134ft). It was aligned east-west and extended beyond the limit of excavation. The west portion of the ditch was about 16m (52ft) wide, but further east it appeared to narrow slightly. Its northern edge was curved, but this curve does not mean the ditch turned southwards, as no sign of it was found under the east end of the friary church choir on the opposite side of Carter Lane⁸. The ditch had a broad V-shaped profile and was over 4m (13ft) deep in the centre (originally c 5m, 16ft, allowing for truncation).

The lowest recorded fills consisted of some 2.0 to 2.5m (6 to 8ft) of waterlain silts, peats and silts/clays, mixed with domestic rubbish (see Fig. 3: section 1). These fills are dated to 1050–1200, though there was residual Roman material throughout the sequence. Above this was about 1.0m (3ft) of secondary fills – a mixture of silts, erosion material, hearth rakeout and latterly dumps of redeposited natural deposits, domestic rubbish and garden soil, probably representing systematic infilling. These fills have a date range of 1150–1350. Dug into the secondary fills of the ditch were the graves of the Dominican friary cemetery.

This ditch is interpreted as part of the southern defences of Montfichet's Tower and presumably the open ditch flanking Carter Lane mentioned in an early 13th century deed⁹; it apparently represents a second phase of the defences. The later ditch, being about twice the width and depth of the earlier one, appears to represent a strengthening of the defences. The vast amount of material that the excavation of this ditch would have produced

4. Document copied into the *Liber Pilosus* of St Paul's, Guildhall Library MS 25, 501, f107.

5. *Op. cit.* fn. 2, 59.

6. F. M. Stenton *Norman London: an Essay* Historical Association Leaflet no 93 (1934) 8.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Excavations at 10 Friar Street and 69 Carter Lane. See 'Excavation Round-up 1989; City of London' *London Archaeol* 6 no. 6 (1990) 162.

9. *Op. cit.* fn. 2, 59.

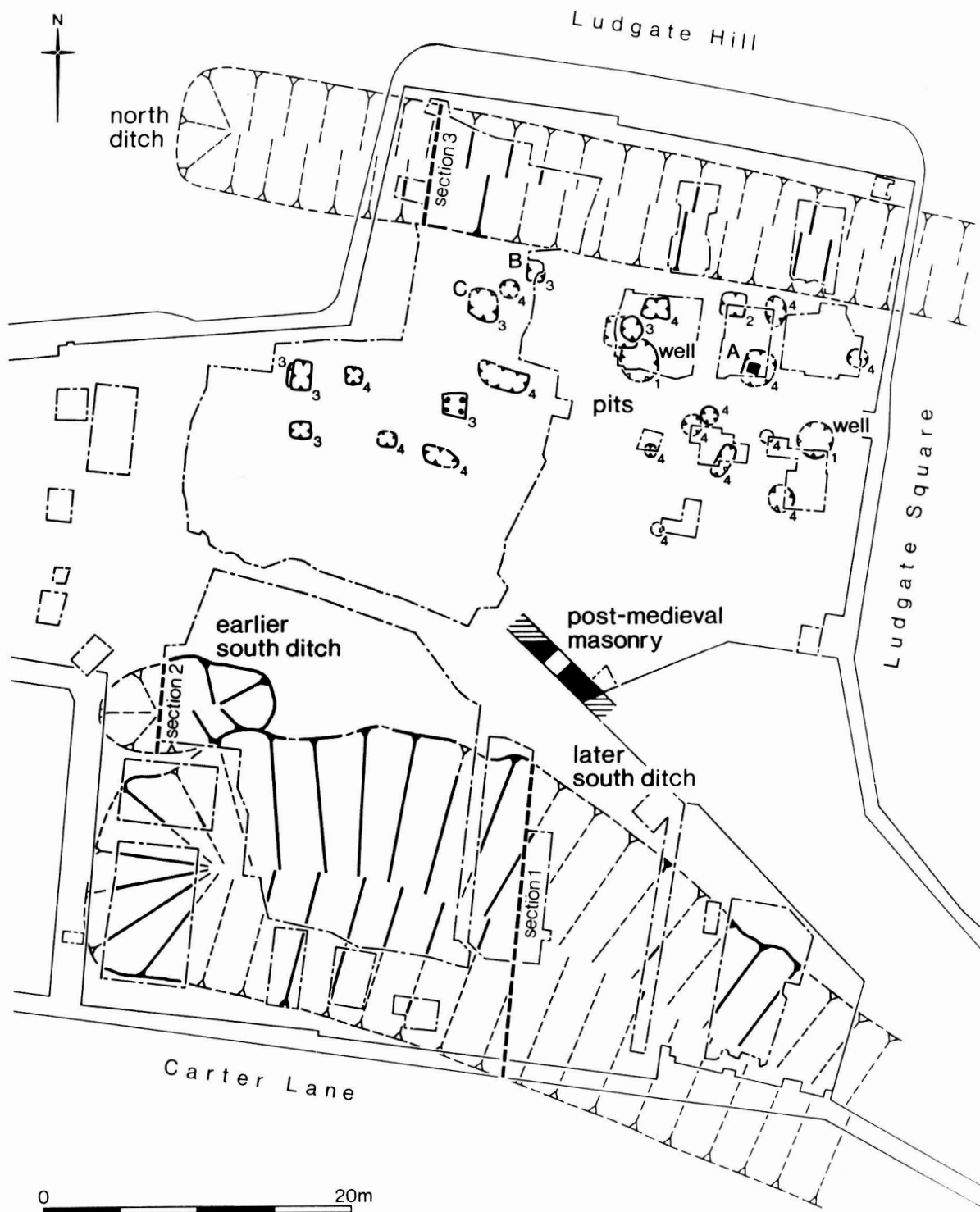


Fig. 2: site outline, showing the area of excavations and features described in the text. The dates of the numbered features are: (1) Roman, (2) late Saxon, (3) Norman, (4) uncertain, either Roman or medieval.

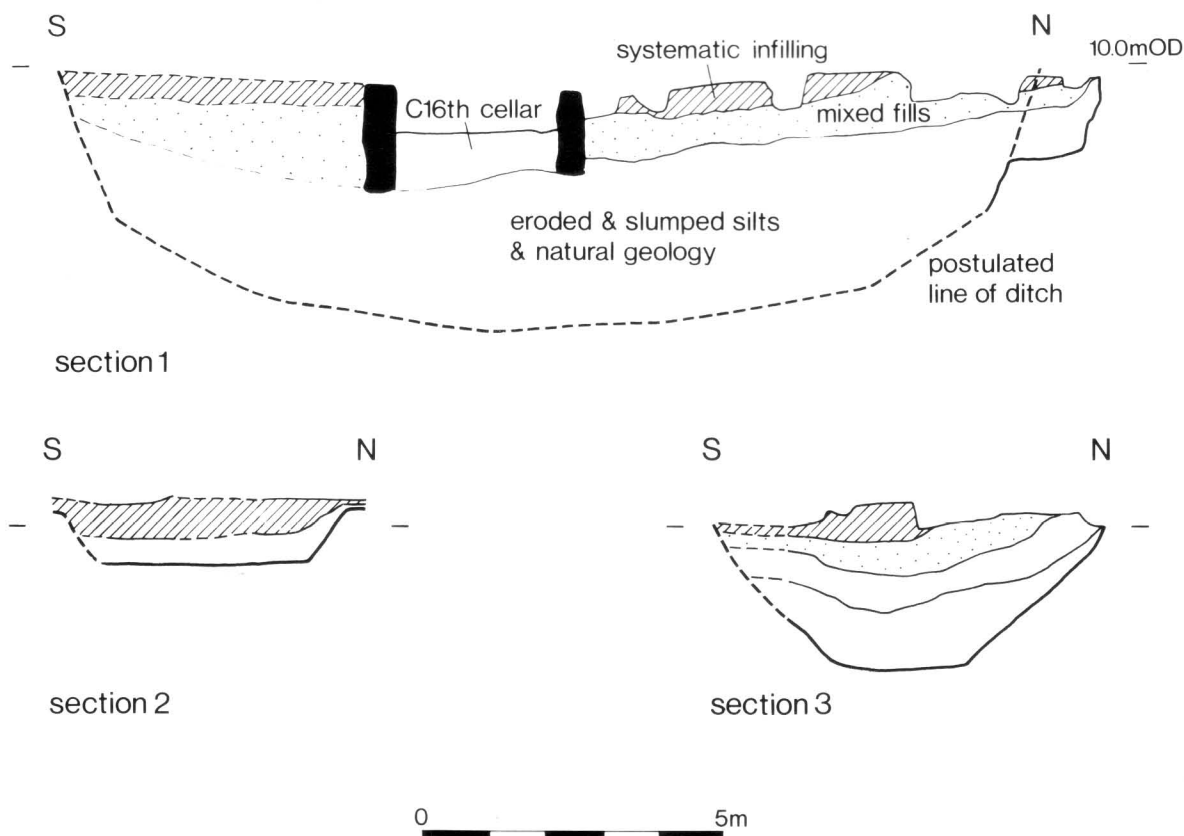


Fig. 3: ditch sections; for location see Fig. 2. Section 1: later south ditch; Section 2: earlier south ditch; Section 3: north ditch.

would have been enough to build a sizable motte, though work to date has produced no evidence of such a feature. Possibly the motte lay within the unexcavated eastern portion of the site.

The northern ditch

Fronting onto Ludgate Hill was another linear ditch (some 30m, 100ft, north of the later southern ditch) also aligned east-west. It has now been traced for 26m (85ft) and it extends both east and west beyond the present limits of excavation (Fig. 2). The full extent of this ditch is uncertain, but it appears to terminate east of 37 Ludgate Hill, as salvage recording here in 1969 on the projected line of the ditch revealed no such feature dug into natural deposits¹⁰. The ditch was 6.8m (22ft) wide and 2.6m (8.5ft) deep (originally over 3.0m, 10ft, allowing for truncation).

The primary fills consisted of 1.0 to 1.3m (3 to 4ft) of slumped and eroded natural deposits, above which was some 0.5m (20in) of waterlain silts and peats (Fig. 3: section 3). Above these deposits was a

further 0.70m (2ft) of silts and peats mixed with erosion material, dumps of hearth rake-out, rubbish and iron slag -- thrown in from the northern side of the ditch. Within these deposits were two semi-articulated horse skeletons and numerous other animal bones, suggesting the systematic disposal of butchery waste, perhaps from the Shambles in Newgate Street. Large quantities of animal bones were also recovered from the backfill of the nearby 12/13th century city ditch terminal north of Ludgate¹¹. All the later fills appear to be systematic infilling.

The dating of the north ditch is problematic, as all material recovered so far from its fills has been Roman. However, it seems unlikely that the ditch is of Roman date for several reasons. Firstly, this area on the south side of the main Roman street would normally have been densely built up, perhaps explaining the presence of two wells here (discussed later) and the vast amounts of Roman finds. Secondly, the Roman finds in the ditch do not have a clear chronological progression, corre-

10. P. Marsden 'Archaeological finds in the City of London 1966-69' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 22 part 3 (1970) 1-9.

11. P. Rowsome 'Excavations at 1-6 Old Bailey and 42-46 Ludgate Hill (LUD82)'. Archive report, DUA, Museum of London.

sponding to their stratigraphic sequence, as might be expected if the feature was Roman. The date range for the ditch fills is AD 40-400. Thirdly, the excavation of the two southern ditches similarly produced a vast amount of residual Roman finds, confirming that there was a high degree of residuality on site. Within the City of London intense re-use of the sites over the centuries has resulted in the contamination of the archaeological deposits, particularly by intrusive features like pits or ditches.

In conclusion, while the northern ditch cannot be dated with absolute certainty to the Norman period, it is believed to represent part of the Norman fortress, and the Roman pottery within its backfill is considered to be residual.

The interior

The area between the two sets of ditches has been extensively examined. Work here revealed various oval and sub-rectangular shaped pits dug into natural deposits (see Fig. 2). A number of pits dating from c 1000-1150 are likely to be contemporary with the fortress, and are interpreted as fea-

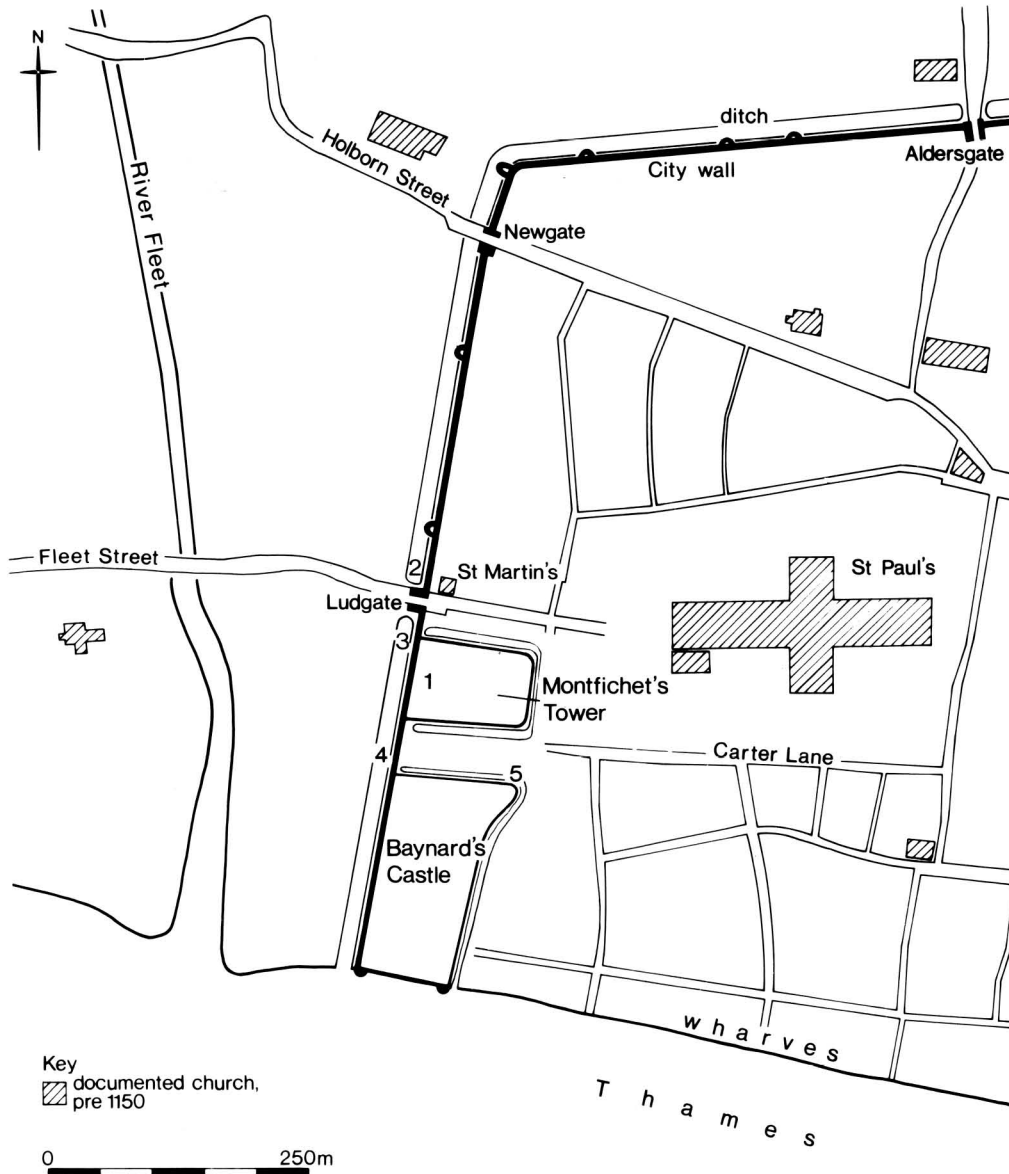


Fig. 4: the western part of the City of London during the Norman period, showing the location of sites mentioned in the text:

- (1) 52-66 Carter Lane/1-3 Pilgrim Street/25-33 Ludgate Hill (PIC87 archive report, Museum of London),
 (2) 1-6 Old Bailey/42-6 Ludgate Hill (fn 11), (3) 12-13 Ludgate Broadway (fn 14),
 (4) 7 Ludgate Broadway (fn 13), (5) 69 Carter Lane/10 Friar Street.

tures within the bailey. The proportion of residual Roman finds in the pits was very high, and some of the pits produced no dating evidence. A number of features therefore can only be described as of uncertain date. Some features such as the two wells appear to be of Roman date, and are presumably associated with the occupation along the Ludgate Hill street frontage. The street of Ludgate was widened in 1864 and 1897, so originally there would have been more space between the line of the ditch and the Roman street. One pit was of late Saxon date. The creation of the fortress appears to have destroyed most traces of earlier activity on the site.

The Norman pits were up to 2m (6ft) deep (originally *c*2.8m, 9ft, allowing for truncation) and were used for the disposal of cess and organic rubbish. There is no obvious pattern to the distribution of

the pits, except that none occurred close to the southern ditch – this area consisted of undisturbed natural deposits.

To date, no firm evidence of associated ramparts or walls has been found. Possibly all traces of ramparts built of sand or gravel could have been removed by levelling during the late 13th century or been truncated by 19th century basements.

One feature close to the northern ditch that might be part of a rampart or wall was a large timber post of uncertain date (Fig. 2, A). Another feature on the edge of the ditch was a large rubbish pit of Norman date (Fig. 2, B). Any rampart along the northern ditch would have sealed this pit – unless it was dug through the supposed rampart. Another large Norman pit a few metres further south (Fig. 2, C) suggests that any internal

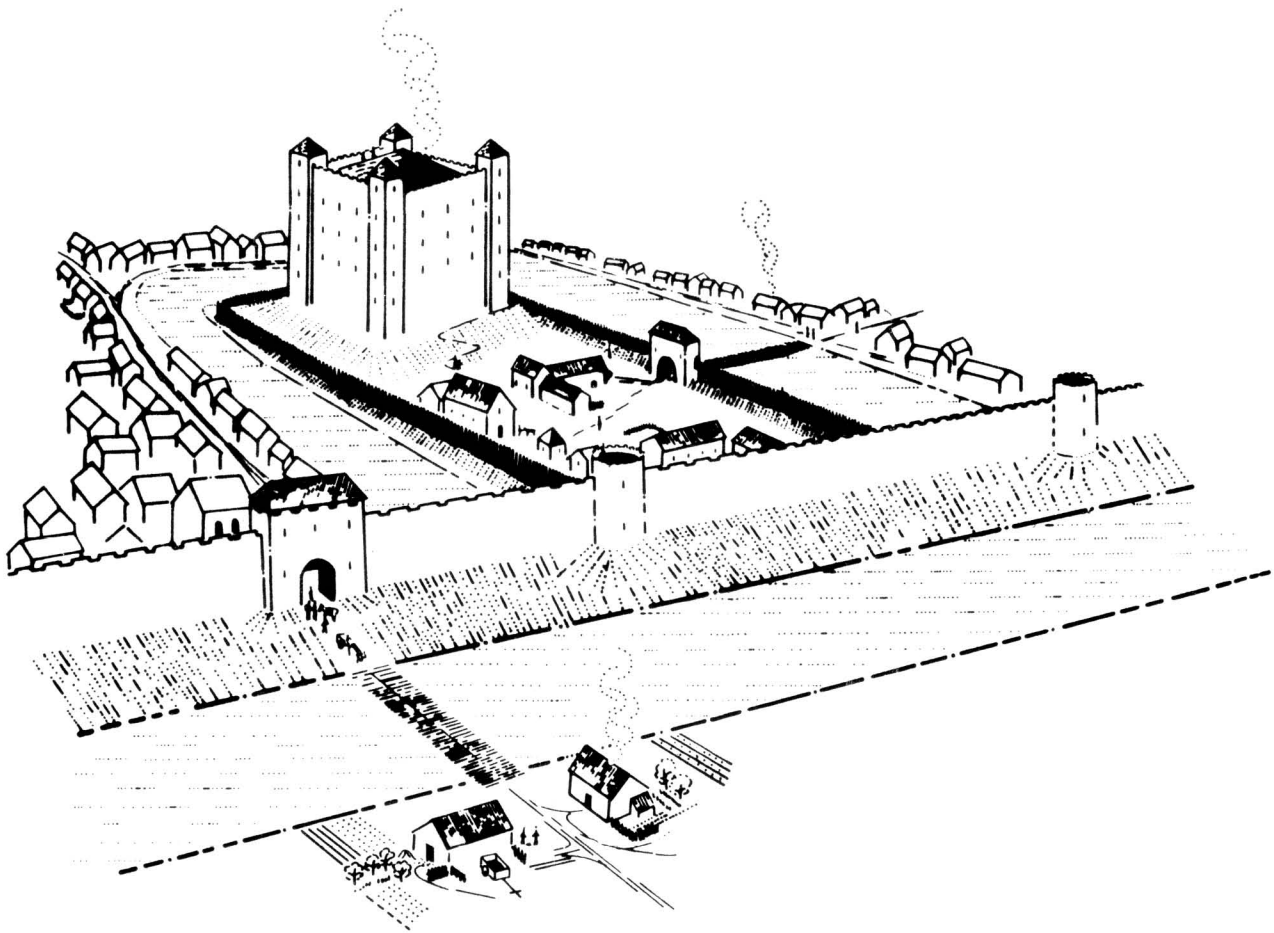


Fig. 5: reconstruction of the site, looking eastwards. The layout of the eastern part is conjectured.
(Drawn by Bruce Watson)

wall along the northern ditch was probably very narrow.

The general absence of structural remains, such as post-holes, between the two sets of ditches is probably the result of 19th century truncation. Within one backfilled Norman pit were four post-holes grouped in a square pattern, their plan suggests that they were part of one structure of unknown function.

Archaeological survey of the party wall between 56 Carter Lane and 1-3 Ludgate Square revealed no sign of Norman masonry; the oldest fabric is probably of late 16th century date.

The associated city defences

The western side of the fortress was protected by the existing city defences, which according to the deed of 1278 ran from Ludgate south to the Thames. This part of the Roman city wall was demolished in c 1282 when the city wall was extended westwards at the request of the Dominicans¹². The exact position of this stretch of city wall is uncertain, but its approximate position can be inferred from several excavations. Firstly, excavations at 7 Ludgate Broadway in 1985 revealed the western edge of a large ditch aligned north-south, interpreted as part of the Roman defences¹³. Secondly, excavations at 12-13 Ludgate Broadway in 1983 revealed two intercutting ditches aligned north-south¹⁴,

the later of which was probably part of the Norman defences (see Fig. 3). Thirdly, excavations further east along Carter Lane have revealed no sign of the city wall, suggesting that it lies undiscovered between these various excavations.

Conclusions

The recent excavations bear out the existence of a Norman fortress near Ludgate, on the site indicated for Montfichet's Tower in the deed of 1278. The fortress was defended on the west side by the existing city defences and on the other sides by ditches, of which to date only those to the north and south have been located. The absence of walls, ramparts or internal structures is probably due to truncation of the site in the Victorian period. The western part of the interior appears to have been open space and was used for pit digging. This area is interpreted as the bailey and was probably occupied by timber buildings such as stables and store houses, as well as accommodation for the garrison. The eastern part of the site remains unexplored, but it may have been occupied by a motte and keep (see Fig. 5).

Acknowledgements

The work described here was generously sponsored by Eagle Star, London and Paris Properties and Waterglade International Holdings plc (52-54 Carter Lane only). Figs. 1 to 4 were drawn by Julie Carr.

12. *Op. cit.* fn. 1, 9.

13. J. Hill 'Excavations at 7 Ludgate Broadway (LBY85)'. Archive report, DUA, Museum of London.

14. P. Rowsome 'Excavations at 12/13 Ludgate Broadway (WAY83)'. Archive report, DUA, Museum of London.

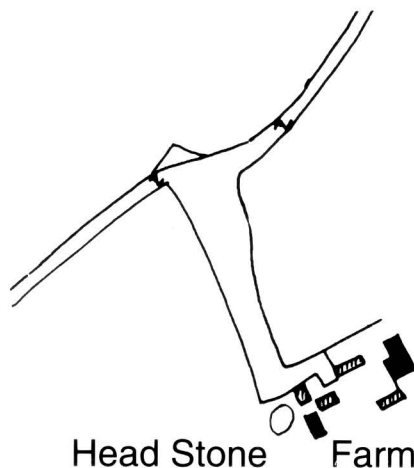
Letter

Headstone Manor

I NOTED THAT in the article on the Headstone Manor excavation (*LA* 6, no. 12, 328-332) the discussion referred to cartographic evidence dating from 1819 to 1914. I attach an extract from Isaac Messeder's plan of the Parish of Harrow, dated 1759 and prepared for Lord Northwick, then Lord of the Manor, which shows the estate in quite large detail. It confirms that at that date the area proposed for siting the new barn was open farmyard.

I should be interested to know something about the building to the right of the pond should they decide to build anything there.

Humphrey Ward
47 The Chase
Stanmore
Middlesex



Extract from Isaac Messeder's map of Parish of Harrow in 1759, in GLRO.