



**Herefordshire  
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HEREFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY

## **Longtown Castles Project A Community Archaeology Project**



**Archaeological investigation and recording during  
2016: An interim report.**

HAR 364



Longtown Castles Project  
A Community Archaeology Project  
Archaeological investigation and recording during 2016:  
An interim report.

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**Herefordshire Archaeology** is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic sites and landscapes, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects.

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## Summary:

Longtown & District Historical Society successfully applied for a Heritage Lottery Grant in order to run a community project, researching the historic and archaeological development of Longtown and Ponthendre Castles over three years. Herefordshire Archaeology was contracted to undertake and manage all aspects of the archaeological works which include field survey and two seasons of excavation, with the involvement of the local community, schools and other interested groups.

Both castles were subjected to Structure from Motion 3D scanning by Remotely Piloted Aircraft in this case a Drone. Ponthendre was subjected to additional earthwork survey in order to record profiles of rampart and ditch.

Two trenches were excavated within the eastern bailey at Longtown Castle. Trench 1 was excavated across the northern terminal of a post-medieval gap in the rampart. This provided a stepped section through the rampart showing that the base and core of the rampart was constructed of turf stacked directly onto natural bedrock. No artefactual evidence was forthcoming from this turf suggesting that the rampart was constructed prior to any settlement in the environs. The geomorphology and the presence of small quantities of pottery present within the upper rampart deposits suggests that the rampart was added to and heightened during the late 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century. The second trench provided evidence of a series of working surfaces associated with the construction of at least two phases of building ranging from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century through to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is suggested that this represents the “builder’s yard” during the construction of the inner bailey wall and gatehouse.

Three trenches were excavated at Ponthendre Castle; a quadrant of the top of the motte, an area inside the bailey and a trench across the rampart. No medieval pottery or any other artefactual evidence or features associated with occupation relating to the medieval period was recovered from any of the trenches. The trench across the rampart showed that the bailey rampart was made of marl and clay which directly overlay a buried turf surface. This overlay a cultivated soil suggesting a period of arable land use which, in turn, overlay a thick “forest soil”.

Interim evidence at Longtown suggests that the square rampart was the first development of the site but whether this was pre conquest is at present unclear. Trench two has shown two distinct phases of use, one in the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and an earlier one which will be investigated during the 2017 season.

Interim evidence at Ponthendre suggests that an earthwork castle was commissioned and constructed but at best only lightly / very occasionally used and may not have been used at all.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. National Grid References are accurate to approximately 5m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50 and 0.02m at 1:20m

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## **1. Introduction to the project**

Longtown & District Historical Society consulted with archaeological professionals, staff of Historic England and local historians, before successfully obtaining a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for a community project to conduct historical research, surveys and archaeological excavations at the sites of both Longtown Castle and Ponthendre Castle. This was to be run over three years and was to include two seasons of fieldwork.

Longtown & District Historical Society produced a brief for the investigative works (A specification for archaeological investigation into the two Norman period castles at Longtown, Herefordshire, produced on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2015). In response to this brief a project design was produced, this set out a detailed methodology which addressed the research questions raised within the brief and made every effort to achieve value for money and as much community involvement as is possible throughout the life of the project. The project design and costings for the project were accepted by an independent panel comprising representatives from Longtown & District Historical Society, Historic England, an independent archaeological consultant and the National Lottery in December 2015. Herefordshire Archaeology was therefore contracted to undertake and manage all archaeological elements of the project during 2016 and 2017 and to produce an interim report describing the 2016 fieldwork and initial results followed by a full, final report and complete site archive after the completion of the 2017 fieldwork.

This document is the interim report describing the fieldwork and initial results and observations from the 2016 season of works. As such, the conclusions and interpretations contained within it may be subject to alteration as the project progresses and further information and evidence is recovered during the 2017 season. The earthwork survey was conducted on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> May, the excavation ran from the 4<sup>th</sup> July to 23<sup>rd</sup> July

This project could not have come about without the vision and determination of the Longtown & District Historical Society, the support from the Heritage Lottery fund, support from a wide range of specialists and Herefordshire Archaeology's excavation team. However, the real success of this seasons work is in large part due to the commitment of large number of volunteers who worked so hard (often under very hot conditions) and contributed so much to the project.

## 2. Historical Background to the sites

The two castles lie approximately 1km apart with Longtown Castle located on the crest of a ridge and Ponthendre Castle on the end of a small spur overlooking the Olchon Brook to its north and the River Monnow to its east.

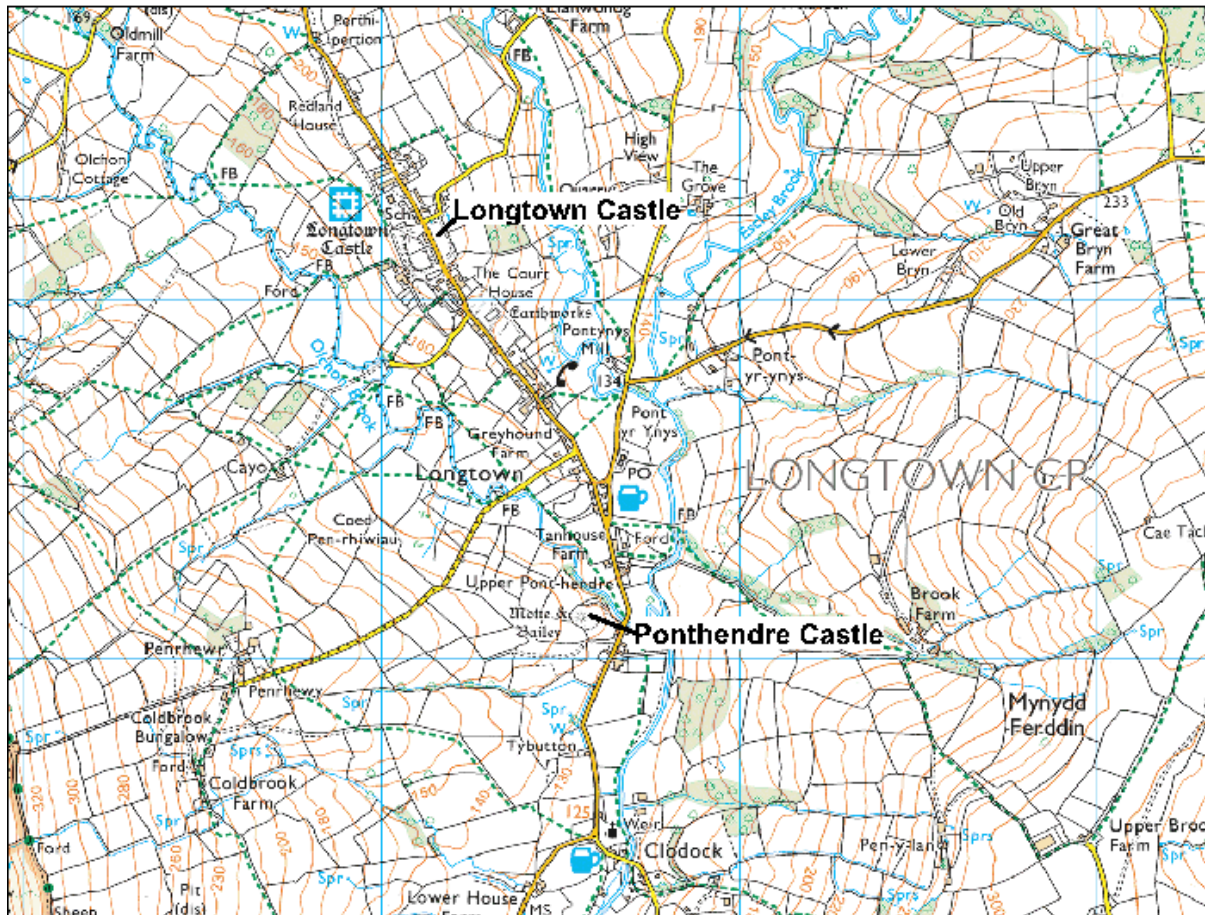


Figure 1: Location of Longtown and Ponthendre Castles.

### Longtown Castle

Longtown Castle stands on the south end of a ridge overlooking the river valleys of the Monnow and the Olchon. The rivers flow past either side of the castle meeting about three quarters of a mile further south by Ponthendre motte and bailey.

The fortifications consisted of a rectangular enclosure of about three acres with a motte at the north-west angle on which stands a circular keep. The western half of the enclosure is divided into two parts of which the northern formed the inner bailey and the southern the outer bailey. The inner bailey was bounded by a curtain wall on the north-east, east and south sides, with an entrance gateway in the south wall. There appears to be no wall on the

west side where possibly the steepness of the scarp made any formidable masonry unnecessary. The keep is thought to have been constructed in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the remains of the curtain-walls to the inner bailey, together with the remains of the southern gateway are believed to be of late 12th or early 13th-century date.

The earthworks consist of a rectangular enclosure with rounded angles enclosed by a rampart and ditch, the latter is now filled in on the north-west and the south sides. On the west side the rampart runs into the motte while on the north side there is a gap between the motte and the rampart. Near the middle of the south rampart there is an inner ditch or sunken entrance running from it and at right angles to the outer ditch, dividing the enclosure roughly into two halves. Only the southern part of this ditch remains, but it probably originally continued northwards across the enclosure and formed an outlet through the existing gap in the north rampart by the east side of the motte.

The origins of Ewyas Lacy Castle, as it was once known, are unclear and theories abound concerning the development of this unusual site. It may have been built on an already well-defended site. Its prominent location, on a spur of high ground between two river valleys, and the evidence of its outer earthworks, suggest to some that an Iron Age camp may have been established here. The square nature of the massive ramparts has convinced others that its origins come from a re-used Roman Marching camp. An alternative suggestion is that the origins of the site lie in the late Saxon period, in the 10th century. In 1086 Domesday Book recorded the land here as belonging to the De Lacy family, who exacted payments in honey and pigs from their tenants.

The first castle on this site was a timber structure, perched on top of the man-made motte, or mound. In the 12th century, the De Lacys spent what was then a considerable sum of £37 improving this castle, and the present stone keep dates from about this time.

In 1241, the Lacy lordship ended; the castle then passed through a number of owners but retained its importance. In 1233, Henry III visited, ordering the garrison to be enlarged.

In 1403, Henry IV, finding the castle somewhat decayed, commanded it to be refortified for defence against attacks led by the Welsh chieftain Owain Glyn Dwr.

By the 1450s, however, it seems to have fallen out of use. Longtown, from which the castle now takes its name, was a planned medieval market town outside the castle ramparts. The

town was not a success, perhaps as a result of the Black Death in the mid-14th century: it gradually shrank in size and importance to the small village seen today.

### **Ponthendre Castle**

Ponthendre Castle sits on the end of a spur which juts out into the valley at the point where the River Monnow and the Olchon Brook meet and gives commanding views both to the north and south. It is therefore strategically a very suitable location for a castle. The name "Ponthendre" from the Welsh meaning "bridge at the old settlement" or "bridge by the winter farm". The earthwork appears to comprise the remains of a Motte and Bailey presumed to be Medieval in date. The tree covered motte is 10.5 metres in height and 44 metres in diameter. The enclosing ditch is 6 metres to 12 metres in width and 0.5 to 3 metres in depth, south-east to north-west. The scarp around the bailey is 3 metres to 4 metres in height and the rampart, 12 metres wide, 3 metres high on the south east side, 11 metres wide and 1 metre high on the north west side. It has been suggested that the castle was built by Walter de Lacy who died in 1085, and that the castle was replaced by Longtown Castle to the north in the twelfth century. (Pastscape)

Bruce Coplestone-Crow suggests that the administrative centre of the commote of Ewyas, (not under the commote of Ewyas Harold), in 1086 "was the motte and bailey castle at Walterstone....this was then within the castlery of Ewyas Harold. By 1100, probably the caput had been moved closer to the old , Welsh centre of the commote at Cloddock, to the motte and bailey castle at Pont Hendre.....and by 1200 to the castle at Longtown." (Coplestone-Crow,1989.)



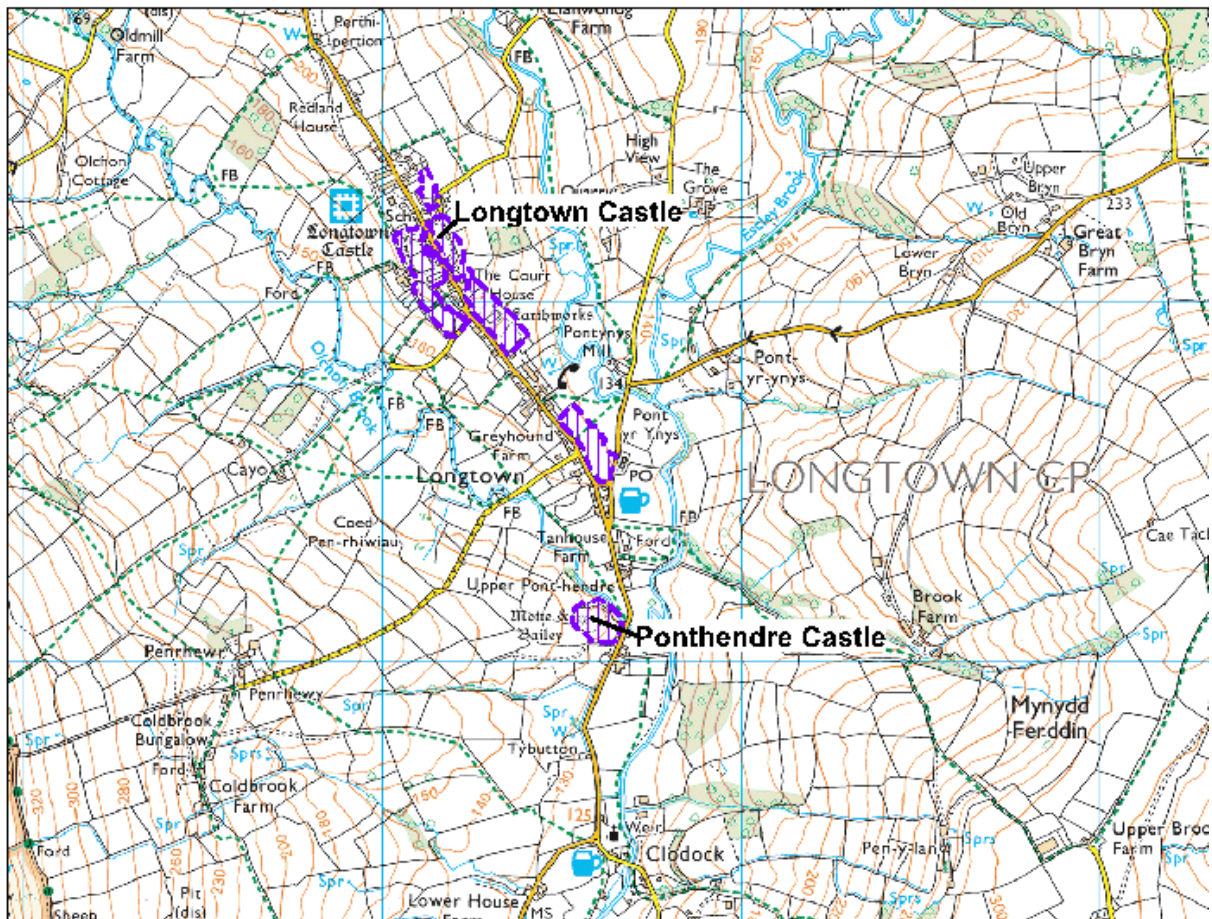


Figure 2: Castle locations and designation map of the extent of Scheduled Ancient Monuments (highlighted in purple).

### **3. Scope of the works.**

The archaeological fieldwork, as outlined in the brief produced by Longtown & District Historical Society comprised:

1. The earthwork survey of Ponthendre Castle.
2. Excavation of Ponthendre and Longtown castle in accordance with Scheduled Monument Consent.
3. Location of trenches in order to address a series of research questions
4. The protocols and methodology for reinstatement of excavated areas.
5. The protocols and systems in place for the training and supervision of volunteers and for the engagement of the local community and visitors from further afield.

Research Questions at Ponthendre Castle:

- a) Over what period(s) was the motte and bailey occupied?
- b) Was it completed and was it a single or multiple phase construction?
- c) What form did any keep structures take and what materials were used?
- d) What were the form and materials of the bailey defences?
- e) What activities took place within the bailey?
- f) Are there any structural remains still in place?
- g) Were any of the structures subsequently robbed or slighted?
- h) Is there any evidence of earlier occupation of the site?

Research Questions at Longtown Castle:

- a) When was the square embankment constructed?
- b) Was the embankment a single phase or multiple phase construction?
- c) What materials were used to build it?
- d) Is there an internal structure to the embankment?
- e) Was it faced with either timber or stone?
- f) Was it topped by a wall or palisade?
- g) Was there an internal ditch as suggested by the geophysics?

- h) Is there evidence for buildings within the embanked enclosure?
- i) What activities took place within the embanked enclosure?
- j) Over what period(s) was the enclosure occupied?
- k) Is there evidence for earlier occupation of the site?

#### **4. Ponthendre Castle Earthwork Survey.**

An earthwork survey hachure plan was produced during 1952's by a retired engineer and amateur archaeologist called Richard Kay. Mr. Kay appears to have surveyed a significant number of earthworks across the county, his original survey drawings are held in the National Monuments Record, Wales, but copies of the Herefordshire sites exist within the Historic Environment Record. The survey of Ponthendre castle undertaken in 2016 was designed to compliment the Kay survey, check its accuracy and reliability and, using modern techniques, add detail.

The monument and its immediate environment were overflown by a drone using specialist remote imaging software. This comprised photogrammetry (by remotely controlled drone), also known as Structure from Motion (SfM). The results, like laser scanning, provided a very accurate three dimensional representation of the subject which is proportionally correct and can be scaled and/or georeferenced. The drone was also used to capture landscape / topographic photographs in order to show the monument's setting within the wider landscape.

A Leica 509 Total station was used in order to locate points from which the aerial survey and the Kay survey could be tied together. A series of profiles were produced over the rampart and across the bailey. The Kay survey was found to be accurate (although the break of slope and other minor details are always a little subjective and differ by degrees from surveyor to surveyor). The principal measurements of the motte, rampart and other principal earthworks matched well with the Total Station data and the overall plan fits accurately to the vertical aerial survey.

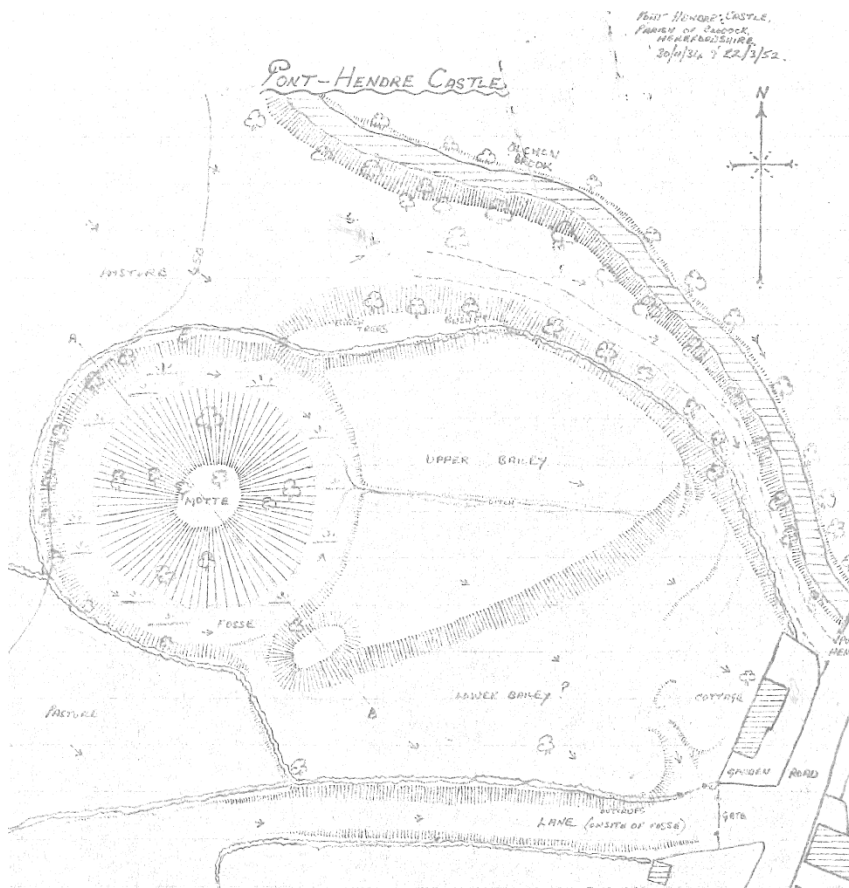


Figure 3: Reproduction of the Kay survey of 1952.

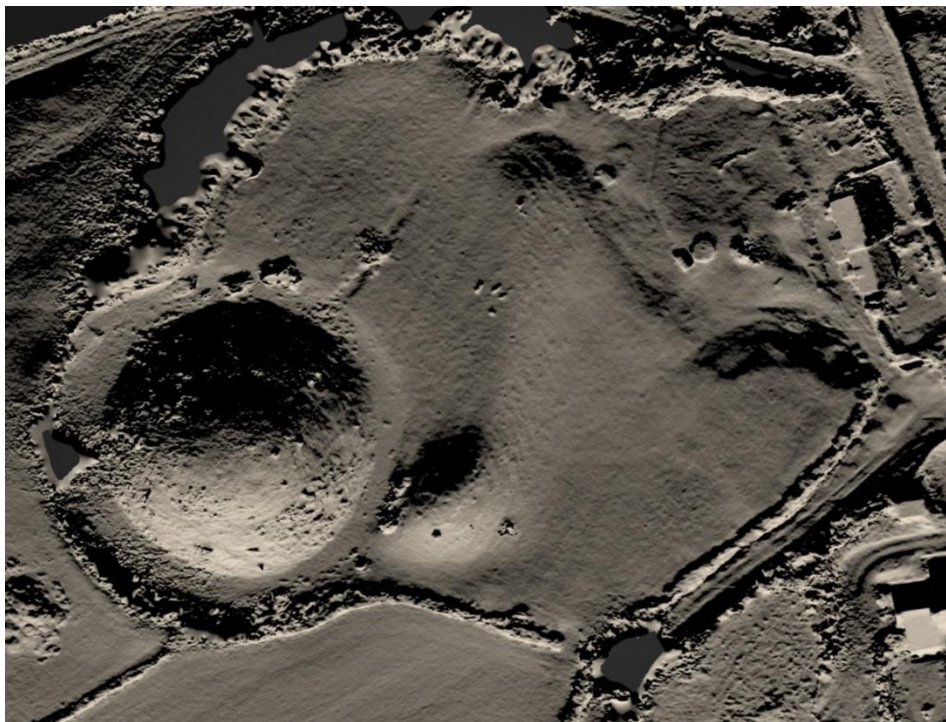


Figure 4: Structure from Motion 3D model of Ponthendre Castle, (Vertical)

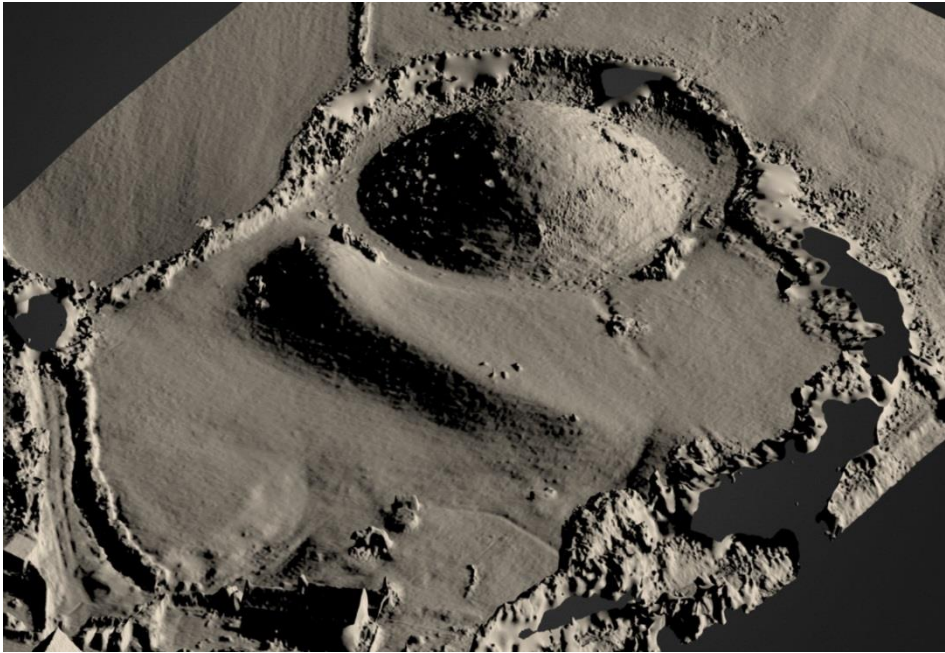


Figure 5: Structure from Motion 3D model of Ponthendre Castle, (Oblique looking north).

The structure from motion survey brought out detail that Kay's survey and the aerial photographic survey did not. The ability to digitally remove the trees and most of the dense vegetation shows the motte and bailey earthworks very clearly and it also shows the bailey being covered by parallel ridges suggesting post medieval cultivation and drainage.

Due to the spectacular results of the Ponthendre Drone survey it was agreed that Longtown Castle should be surveyed in the same manner. (Longtown Castle was the subject of a detailed earthwork survey by English Heritage in 2003). This was undertaken the day after the Ponthendre survey.



Figure 6: Structure from Motion 3D model of Longtown Castle, (Vertical)



Figure 7: Structure from Motion 3D model of Longtown Castle, (Oblique looking west)

The results were as good as those from Ponthendre and not only provided the team with a 3 dimensional model that could be looked at from any angle but also a full digital photographic archive.



Plate 1: Adam Stanford (AerialCam) undertaking the Drone survey.

## 5. Excavations at Longtown Castle

Two trenches were excavated within the outer bailey of Longtown Castle. These were located and excavated in accordance with the method statement and the Scheduled Monument Consent which was granted for the works.

In addition to the two trenches, consent was approved for the augering of two transects across the external ditch. This was not undertaken during the 2016 season due to the landowner failing to respond to our request for permission to undertake the works on their land. It is anticipated that this work will be undertaken during the 2017 season.

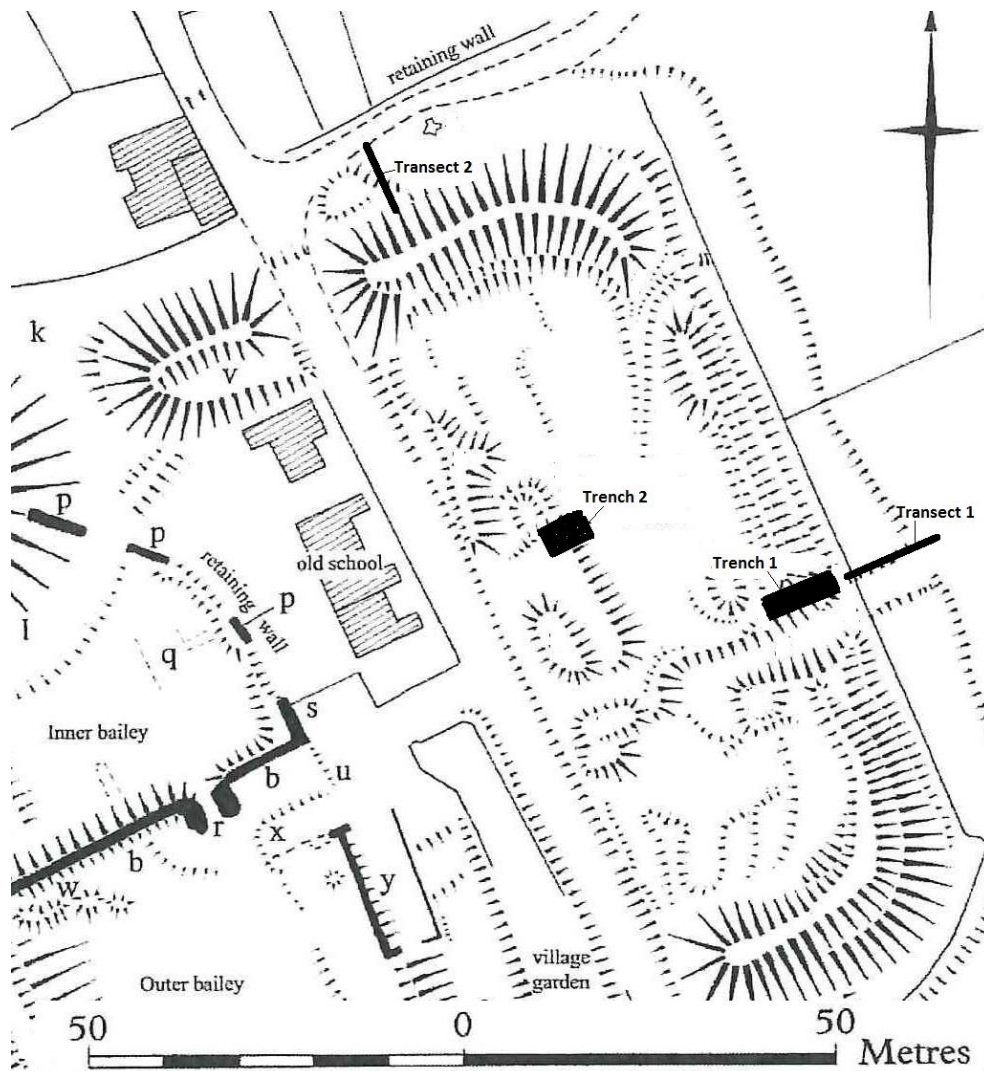


Figure 8: Trench and auger transect location Plan for Longtown.





Plate 2: Aerial Photograph showing the two trenches in relation to the castle.

### **Trench 1**

Trench 1 was designed to give a cross-section through the eastern rampart of the outer bailey of Longtown Castle while minimising disturbance to the earthwork, which stands approximately three metres high above the bailey interior. Advantage was therefore taken of an existing cutting through it: a post-medieval trackway dug through the rampart (at a date not later than the early 18<sup>th</sup> century from cartographic evidence) to give access to the field outside. Excavation of trench 1 commenced with a JCB on the northern slope of the post-medieval trackway, at first cutting steps into the slope to allow for safe excavation of the full height of the rampart, followed by the removal of turf and topsoil from the whole of the slope to reveal the truncated rampart stratigraphy behind. In the course of this operation, the distinctive green-grey-tinged turf horizon forming the earliest rampart strata was noted right across the base of the trackway cutting, demonstrating that the trackway had indeed cut through the rampart and had not (for example) been installed on the line of any earlier, medieval, access through it. It soon became apparent that to excavate a complete profile from the front of the rampart to beyond its tail in the interior, even based on a pre-existing cutting, was not going to be achievable within a three-week season, and resources were

therefore concentrated on the main body of the rampart, and its tail and the interior were therefore left unexcavated below a post-medieval horizon.



Plate 3: Rampart section showing bedrock and tip lines of the turf core.

The external defensive ditch was not excavated. It is clearly evident as a water and mud-filled depression outside the eastern rampart, filled-in locally where the post-medieval trackway gives access to the pasture outside. It is hoped that a profile of the ditch can be established by augering at a future date.

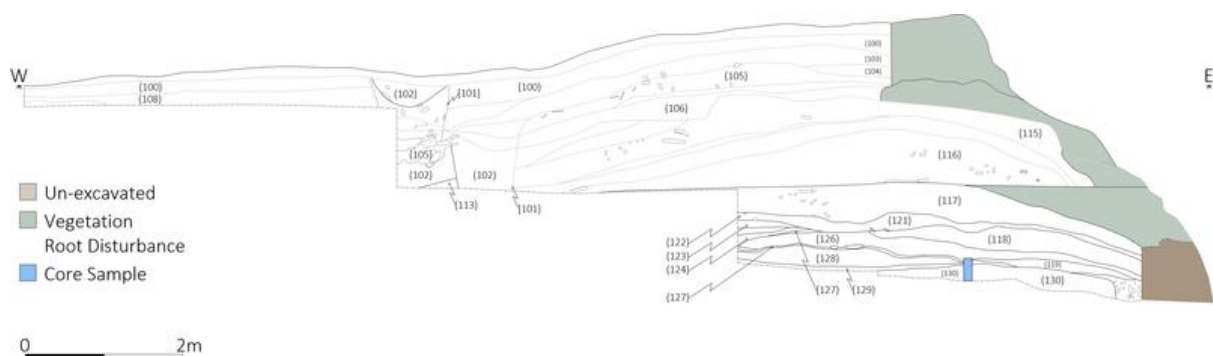


Figure 9: Section drawing of the excavated rampart section.

The earliest deposits encountered were of natural origin. Natural sandstone bedrock (context 133) was found at the eastern end of the trench just behind the front of the rampart. It was of

variable character with solid peaks of rock alternating with smaller slabby sandstone pieces increasing in size and frequency with depth. The interstices were all filled with sterile grey silt (context 130) which continued westwards (unexcavated) under the main body of the rampart and was identified as a buried soil. There was no evidence of any features (such as post-holes) cutting down into the natural surface from or through the overlying rampart, and no evidence was found for any retaining structure or revetment at the front of the rampart.

The earliest rampart material consisted of alternating thin layers of brown and grey silty clay, to a height of 0.55m above the natural surface, clearly recognisable as individual layers of stacked, decayed turf. These were excavated over a width of five metres westwards from the front of the rampart, but continued (unexcavated) further to the rear.



Plate 4: Detail of rampart base showing the differing colour of silts, clays and turf remnants.

The main body of the rampart above consisted of substantial (up to 0.7m thick) tips of brown, red- or orange- or grey-brown silty clays; these could be seen to form dumps, sloping down towards the front and rear of the rampart but also side to side (north and south) longitudinally along the rampart, and were interpreted as the upcast from the excavation of the ditch around the castle perimeter. One of the uppermost of these layers (context 105) was a distinctive layer of redeposited rock, what appeared to be rotted mudstone or siltstone with fine laminations down to 1mm thick. Similar material can be seen at the top of the natural

bedrock in the side of a holloway outside the castle on the west side of the Longtown ridge. Overlying this were further layers of dumped soil, one of which had the characteristics of a buried soil, suggesting that the rampart was raised in height by approximately 0.3m, later in its life.

The summit of the rampart was examined, but only in a quite small area within the main trench and in a 1.5m-square extension to the north designed specifically to examine the surface of the uppermost rampart material. No trace was seen of any features that might have suggested a rampart-top defensive structure such as a palisade.



Plate 5: The excavation at the top of the rampart in relation to the section through it.

Excavation on the rearmost part of the rampart was, as noted above, discontinued before medieval strata were reached. The rear slope of the rampart, and the slope down to the trackway, were covered by soil layers with large quantities of flat, slabby, sandstone rubble, one of these layers (context 108) contained pottery of 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>-century date. Immediately below the topsoil, the whole area was covered by a subsoil (context 103), from which came sherds of 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>-century and mid-13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>-century date. The latest feature identified by the excavation was a ditch or field drain sealed only by the topsoil. This was seen at the top of the section and, as the excavation progressed, was found to be very deeply cut on a south-easterly alignment down the slope of the post-medieval trackway to its very bottom,

therefore cutting through even the turf layers at the base of the rampart sequence. Artefacts from its fill were indicative of a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century or early 20<sup>th</sup>-century date (including a brick with a stamped frog). It was presumably cut to drain the bailey interior, though the labour involved in its construction seemed disproportionate given that there is no known evidence of a waterlogging problem in modern times within the bailey interior.



Plate 6: Detail of Post medieval stone lined drain cutting the rampart.

In conclusion, the excavation successfully provided a cross-section of the bulk of the eastern rampart and was able to demonstrate that a primary turf bank on the old ground surface was followed by the raising of a massive dump rampart. It will not be possible to demonstrate whether all the material for this was derived from the digging of the extramural ditch alone until a profile of the latter can be reconstructed. The dump rampart was later raised in height by a marginal amount. The front of the rampart was probably not retained in any way, but it is less certain how the rampart top (only a very small part of which was sampled) was defended, and it is possible that some material has been lost from its top through erosion or through more deliberate activity. It is however highly unlikely that the eastern rampart ever had masonry components, whether a front revetment or a curtain wall on top, and it appears to have lain outside the scope of the early 13<sup>th</sup>-century works represented by the motte

tower, inner-bailey curtain and gatehouse, unless the final raising of the eastern rampart was the consequence of earth-moving activities elsewhere in the castle. No artefacts were found in any of the rampart layers, suggesting, as expected, that it was raised when the Longtown ridge was devoid of occupation. Dating of the rampart will, therefore, depend entirely on the possibility of extracting carbon-14 dates from sampled material from its basal layers.



Plate 7: The completed rampart section

## Trench 2



Plate 8: Aerial Photograph showing the two trenches in relation to the castle.

Trench 2 was located on the Green adjacent to the road, north of the castle, on ground sloping down towards the north-east. It was located over the corner of a rectangular earthwork with the intention of ascertaining whether the earthwork was modern spoil associated with the construction of the school during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or whether it related to earlier activity on the site. The trench measured 6m (east-west) by 4m (north-south).

The trench was excavated by hand with the turf cut into manageable blocks, and stacked as a revetment for the spoil heap. The topsoil immediately overlay a densely packed stone layer. This comprised mostly small to medium, angular and flat stone in a clay / loam matrix. Finds included three early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century coins, a number slate pencils as well as Victorian and later pottery and other finds such as clay pipe stems and bottle glass.

Mixed within this material were two iron arrowheads (possibly post medieval), deteriorated iron objects and three pieces of abraded pottery from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It would appear that this deposit can be directly related to the construction and use of the school but that it was placed on top of an earthwork which existed already.

Immediately beneath this deposit, there lay an extensive spread of flat angular sandstone fragments (201) that included pieces of stone roof tile, identified by the picked peg holes. It could be seen on the ground that this mound of stone stretched along the roadside for almost the entire length of the green. The deposit within the trench sloped down toward the north and east, where it noticeably thinned, partly exposing a linear feature, close to the eastern trench edge, that the stone was slumping or tipping into.



Plate 9: Trench 2 looking west showing the flat sandstone deposit (201)



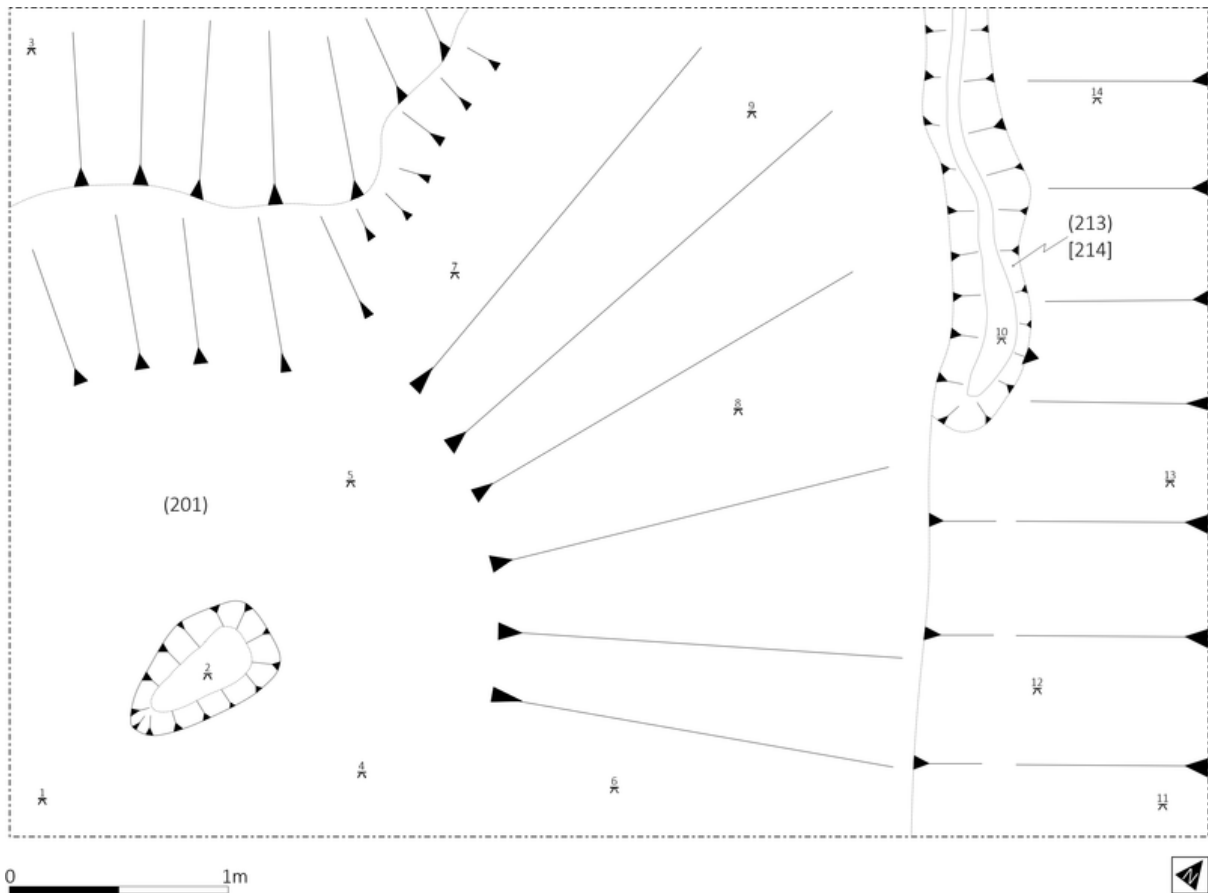


Figure 10: Plan of stone deposit (201) and the top of the linear feature (213).

Finds from within the stone deposit included a range of pottery from between the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century and the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, clay pipe stems, metal objects including nails and a possible horse shoe.



Plate	10:
Trench	2
looking south	
showing the	
flat	

Below the stone deposit there was a layer of re-deposited clay/marl (204) that also sloped towards the eastern end of the trench.

A cut [203] and fill (202) containing 3 sherds of 13<sup>th</sup> century cooking pot lay partly under the east section. The exposed part of the feature formed an irregular circular bowl shape in plan with a possible short channel leading off towards the north. It is unclear what this feature represents, however the fact that only 13<sup>th</sup> century material was recovered from it suggests that this represents the top of in-situ early medieval archaeology.

Beneath this later were a series of stoney deposits, (204), (205) and (206). These appear to be dumps of stone waste and marl. No artefactual material was forthcoming from these deposits.

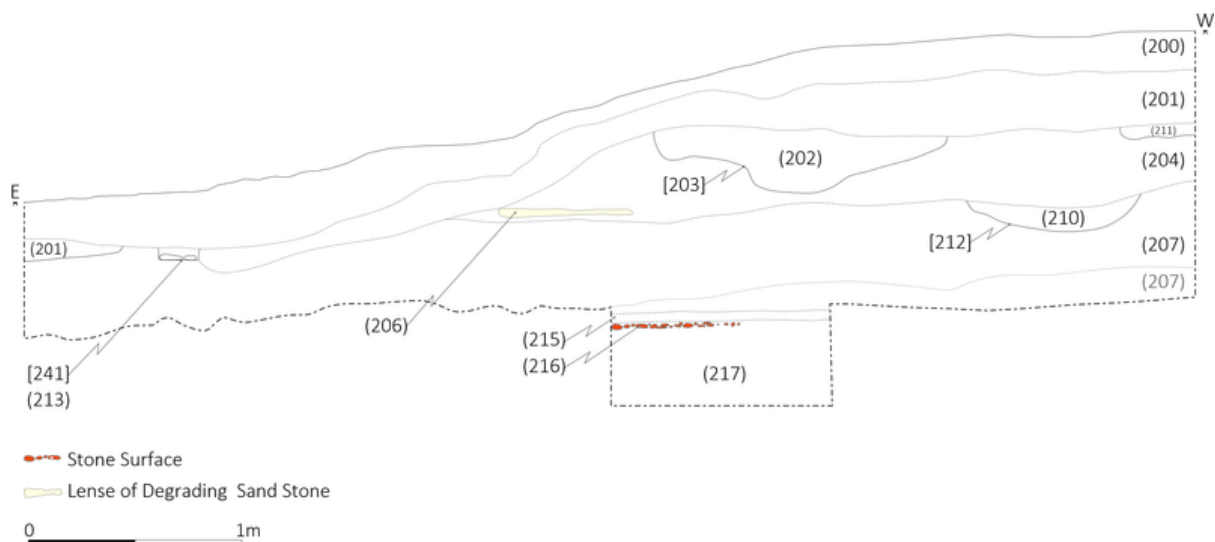


Figure 11: Southern section of Trench 2

The two deposits, (201) and (204), formed the bulk of the earthwork which appears to run along the southern side of the road and onto which later deposits connected with Victorian and later building work have been added making some of the earthworks higher. These overlay a compacted deposit (207) of red / brown marl approximately 0.4m thick. This contained ten sherds of mid to late 13<sup>th</sup> century pottery and appears to represent a dump of material placed across the entire trench in order to level up the ground surface. Other artefacts recovered from this deposit included animal bone (not present in any overlying deposits) iron nails and part of (possibly) a horse shoe. There was also a small amount of iron slag, though no evidence of metal working was otherwise present.

Two features had been cut into 207 including a post hole (208)/[209] and the linear feature (213)/[214] along the eastern edge of the trench. The post hole was located towards the north-west corner of the trench. Within its fill were flat stones set vertically to pack the post that had originally filled the hole. No corresponding post holes were present within the excavated area. The linear feature (213)/[214] was either the stone filled base for a timber beam slot or possibly a small drain.

Layer 207 came down onto a compacted pebble/stone surface (216) that had a layer of trampled grey soil (215) overlying it. The trampled deposit contained many small pieces of black medieval cooking pot, (spot dated to the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century), an iron nail and some crushed animal bone (some burned) suggesting the presence of domestic activity nearby.

Within or perhaps showing through, surface (216) are several large, horizontally deposited angular stones (see Plate 11), located towards the south east corner of the trench and continuing under the southern section. Their grouping suggests a purposeful placement in some instances and these were left in-situ in order to be properly excavated during the 2017 season.



Plate 11: The gravel surface (216) and the flat larger stones within or showing through (217).

A small sondage was cut through the surface (216) approximately half way along the trench and hard against the southern section, in order to provide a sample of this material and to assess its depth and nature. The sondage was cut approximately 0.50m deep through (216) into a layer of greyish gritty gravel and clay below (217). This deposit was not bottomed and appears to comprise a soft clayey material containing charcoal and burned bone.



Plate 12: Trench 2 looking west showing the top of deposit (217) in the southern half of the trench and deposit (207) overlying it in the northern portion of the trench.

Finds from deposit 217 included burnt animal bone, an iron nail and small fragments of crumbly, burned daub. The material was sampled and run through flotation equipment in order to retrieve artefacts and environmental data. This deposit appears to represent a fill of a cess pit or other feature containing small fragments (perhaps the sweepings) of kitchen rubbish. Burned bone and carbonised cereal grains were recovered as well as small fragments of un-abraded cooking pot.

The 2016 excavation of trench 2 was terminated at this point but much of the trench will be re-opened during the 2017 season in order to excavate and record the basal deposits reached in this season.

## 6. Excavations at Ponthendre Castle

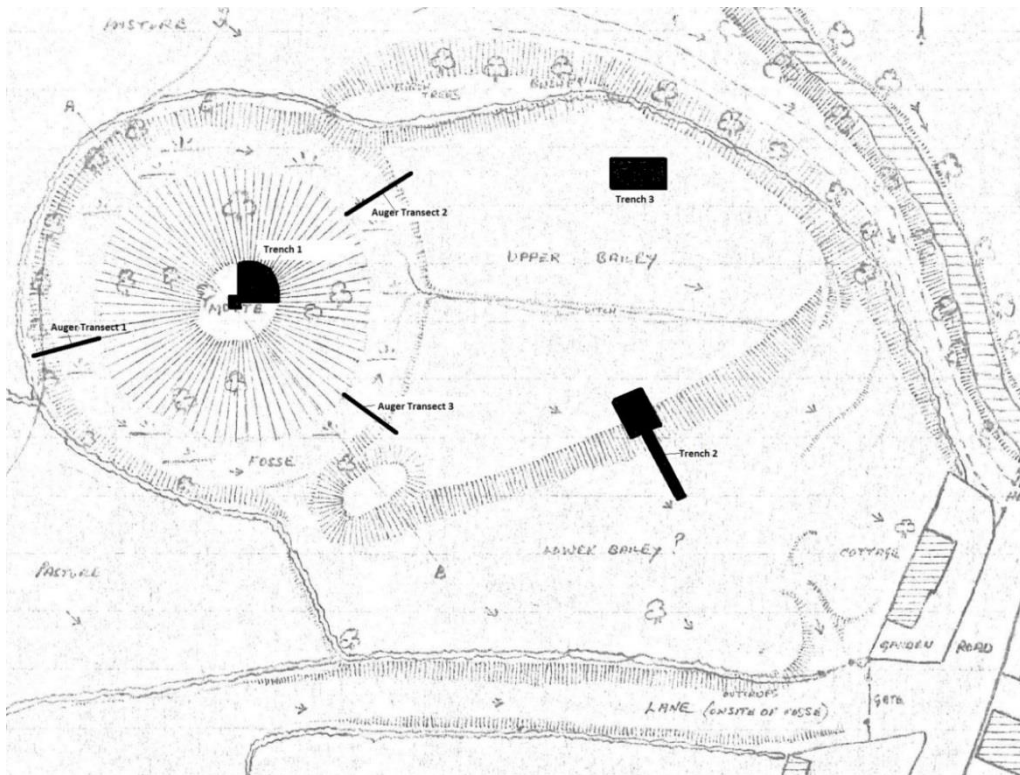


Figure 12: Trench and auger transect location plan for Ponthendre (not to scale)



Plate 13: Aerial photograph showing trenches 2 and 3 in relation to the earthworks. Trench 1 is in the trees on top of the motte.

## Trench 1

Trench 1 was located on the summit of the motte. It was positioned to examine the north-eastern quadrant of the summit and to take in an anomaly roughly in the centre of the motte identified during a geophysical survey undertaken prior to this project taking place. The southern and eastern sides of the trench each measured 6.00m. Its purpose was to reveal and record any structural features associated with a timber or masonry tower that might be expected to have existed here.



Plate 14: Trench 1 on top of the motte.

Prior to excavation the surface of the summit supported a rough grass/moss cover with young birch regeneration, field roses and mature oak trees. Removal of the reasonably shallow (0.10 – 0.16m) humic, sandy clay loam topsoil (1001) revealed a purple red hard packed clay marl (1002), a redeposited natural that is presumed to form the bulk of the body of the mound. The clay contained occasional small to medium green sandstone fragments.

Two slots (0.70m x 5.00m) were excavated along the southern and western trench edges to a maximum depth of 0.40m. No features were identified within these or within the trench as a whole and although conditions were not ideal for identifying subtle features it was anticipated that any features associated with a tower would be fairly substantial. The clay body of the mound was however extremely dry, the summit is sheltered by the closed tree canopy and the weather during the excavation was for the most part warm and dry. It is intended to reopen the trench in 2017 and to remove a reasonable depth of the clay deposit to ensure that features have not been masked by surface disturbance. There were no finds from trench 1.



Plate 15: Detail of trench one as left at the end of the 2016 season prior to backfilling.

## **Trench 2**

Trench two was located across the eastern line of the bank defining the bailey. An area opened initially across the visible earthwork bank measured 4.00m north-east south-west by 6.00m north-west south-east. An extension 1.00m by 13.60m was excavated south-eastwards down the slope to try to identify any external ditches or other defensive features creating a south-west facing section 19.60m long.



Plate 16: Vertical photograph of Trench 2.

The rampart consists of a series of dump deposits surviving to a maximum depth of 0.70m above a 0.97m deep buried soil with a clear relic turf line (see figure 13) The buried soil represents either an undisturbed brown-earth forest soil or a truncated forest soil with an upper horizon representing a cultivation soil. A column soil sample was taken of the buried soil to carry out micro morphological examination to establish which of these is the case and to enable pollen sampling to reconstruct the early environmental history of the site and area. A single struck flint was recovered from the junction of the buried soil and the rampart material. Two further flakes of flint debitage were recovered from within the buried soil.

The rampart material was found to have been quarried from a wide shallow external ditch and is essentially the reverse stratigraphy of the material as it was quarried. The lowest horizons (2013 and 2003) may have been an initial turf strip and foundation bank. The former (2013) was dark reddish brown silty loam, almost stone-free, identified as redeposited turf, above that 2003 was dark reddish brown silt clay, with medium sized weathered stones. Overlying the back of this material are two deposits of degrading green sandstone in a



matrix of red and red brown clay loam. Green sandstone bedrock was recorded in the ditch section to the east (see below) and this material is almost certainly derived from there. Two further deposits served as a capping to the stone deposits. Red purple clay loam (2005) forming the rear of the bank and a stony deposit (2004) forming a hard packed surface to the crest of the rampart. The latter was cut by a post-hole (Plate 17 & Figure 14) 1.00m maximum diameter and 0.80m deep with a post pipe between 0.50m and 0.55m diameter. It is possible that this represents a palisade fence along the top of the rampart.

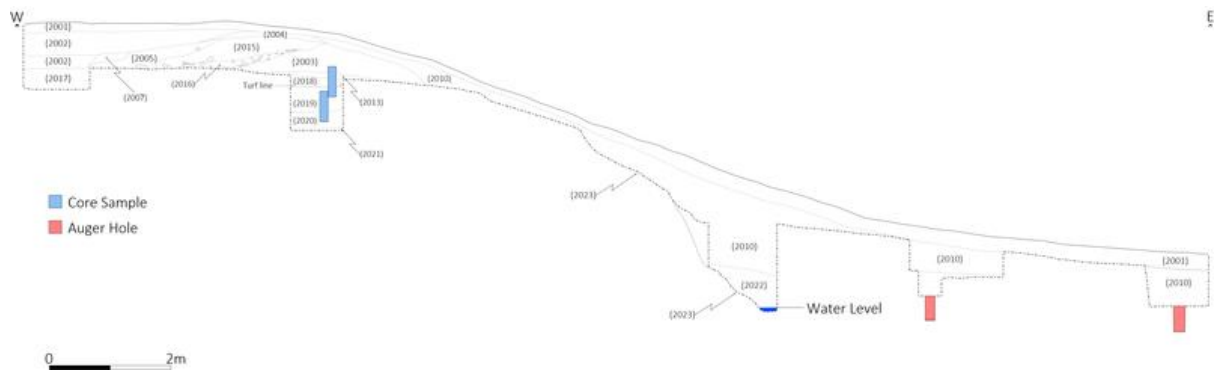


Figure 13: Eastern section of Trench 2.



Plate 17: Post hole in top of the Rampart

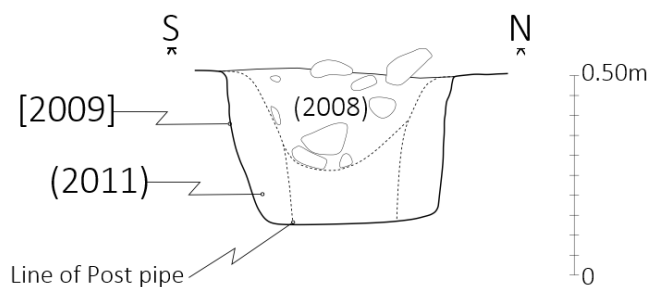


Figure 14: Section through the post hole.



Plate 18: the outer face of the rampart cut into natural marl and green sandstone.

The defensive quality of the site had been enhanced by steepening the natural hillslope between the rampart and the ditch. The scarped slope essentially formed the elongated internal side of the ditch. The ditch itself was examined in one area. The western side was defined by distinctive green sandstone bedrock interspersed with red clay mixed with degrading green sandstone. Excavation was limited to 2.1m below current ground level (1.4m below the general trench level) so the depth of the ditch could not be established, however natural clay marl was recorded by auger at approximately the same absolute depth only 2.60m to the east suggesting that the base of the ditch might be up to, but probably not more than, 1.00m deeper. The ditch fills were fairly homogenous. The lowest (2022) was red brown clay with small flecks of silica and degrading yellow sandstone up to 3mm. The depth exposed in section was just over 0.60m. Above this and below the modern turf and topsoil was a 1.26m thick deposit of colluvial material, red brown clay loam with green flecks of degrading sandstone.



Plate 19: The buried turf or old ground surface (immediately above the scale bar), onto which the rampart was constructed.

Although the height of the surviving rampart is only some 0.70m and the minimum depth of the ditch to the east is 2.10m the difference in height between the top of the rampart and the recorded base of the ditch is actually 4.60m (potentially 5.60m). Add to this a timber palisade on the rampart and the earthworks would have formed, and appeared as, a substantial defensive arrangement.

### Trench 3



Plate 20: Trench 3 looking west.

Trench three was located within the bailey enclosure to the east of the motte and measured 6.00m east west by 4.00m north south. Modern turf, topsoil and subsoil (3001 and 3002) were removed to reveal a leached clay deposit over the entire area of the trench. The only features recorded within this were a number of holes and burrows. Most were clearly created by moles but it is possible that some may have been stake-holes.



Plate 21: Trench 3 looking south showing some of the deeper mole activity and the natural banding.

Again the warm dry weather was not ideal for feature recognition but weathering and differential drying over a number of days revealed a series of wide bands running roughly north to south across the width of the trench (3003, 3004, 3007). Further examination of these showed them to be banding within the natural clay. A sondage cut in the south-west corner of the trench recorded degraded sandstone within distinct yellow/green clay at a depth of 0.60m below present ground level.

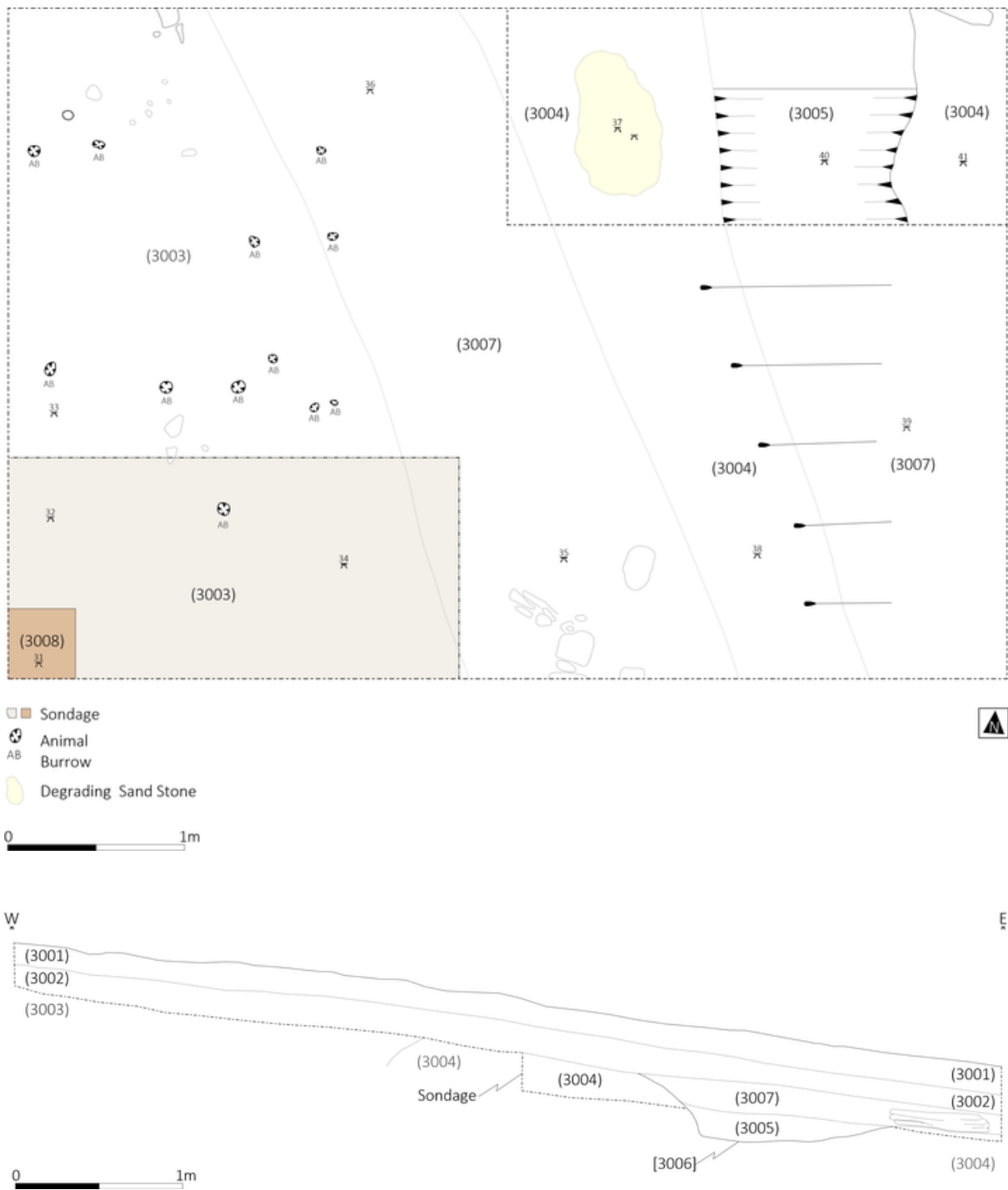


Figure 15: Plan and northern section of trench 3.

The few finds recovered included modern ceramics and two pot sherds of the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century from the topsoil and one sherd of 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century pot from the subsoil. The earlier finds probably came onto the site with manure from nearby farmhouses.

The lack of any evidence for a structure on the motte and the lack of features in an albeit small area of the bailey, if a true representation, is a significant finding. Added to this is the

lack of any artefacts, ceramic or otherwise, from the suggested period of construction and/or occupation. If taken at face value, the evidence to date would appear to suggest that the motte and bailey was constructed but never occupied. Further work is needed on the summit of the motte to confirm the lack of any structure and there will be an opportunity to examine another area of the bailey interior.

### **Motte Ditch Auger Transects**

Two of a planned series of three auger transects across the motte ditch were carried out in the 2016 season. These showed that the ditch to the north-west and south-west of the motte, although in reality cut from some meters above current ground level, contained very little fill material. The maximum depth of fill recorded was 0.85m. The profiles were fairly consistent with disturbed organic material and clay in the first 0.25m above stiff clay deposits with some organic material gradually becoming cleaner with depth. Lower deposits were clays with stone and sand before natural stony marl.



Plate 22: line of auger holes across the south-west portion of the moat.

It is possible that the ditch may be substantially deeper on the downslope, eastern side of the motte and this will be tested in 2017.

## 7. Discussion

The 2016 season of works has recovered a considerable amount of data regarding the development and construction of both Longtown Castle and Ponthendre Castle. The survey work, (both measured and via drone) has enabled a better understanding of the complexity of both sites and has provided digital data which can be used to see both castles from new angles and aspects. The data from the excavations has enabled the process of understanding two very different castles to begin and will help shape the research during the 2017 season.

The trench through the rampart at Longtown castle has provided much information regarding its construction, development and subsequent decline. When the masonry remains of Longtown are looked at it is easy to conclude that all of the major earthworks apparent at the castle would have originally contained at least some element of stone, however it would appear that the square rampart or “outer bailey” was constructed of turf laid directly on rough bedrock. The geomorphology suggests that the rampart was constructed at a time when there was little activity on or even close to the site and the fact that so much turf was used indicates that the immediate environs was open pasture. The pottery recovered from the rampart was only present within four contexts all close to the top and suggest a period of heightening during the mid 13<sup>th</sup> or early 14<sup>th</sup> century. The geomorphology appears to agree with the pottery in that a horizon of rebuild was identified above which all the pottery came from and below which none was forthcoming. It would also appear that the tail of the rampart was added to or dumped on in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and / or 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and that the field drain and the gap in the rampart are of 17<sup>th</sup> century or later date.

As to the origins of the square rampart / outer bailey; this remains unclear at present. It is fair to say that the idea of it being a Roman marching camp is no longer valid in that no Roman pottery was recovered from either trench, pottery usually being very common on Roman sites. The suggestion that it was some form of Iron Age or prehistoric enclosure is also very doubtful due to its shape and the lack of any finds relating to the prehistoric period. The fact that the Norman tower keep was built onto the north-western corner of the rampart and that this was believed to have been done during the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, suggests that the rampart was in existence well before then. It is therefore currently thought that this earthwork represents a pre-conquest fortification, constructed on the orders of Harold in order to subdue the Welsh. A small amount of charcoal has been recovered from some of the turf material at the base of the rampart section. It will be sent for assessment in order to see if there is sufficient for a C14 date to be produced. Any forthcoming date will, of course, not



necessarily date the construction of the rampart but rather the formation of the turf but it will provide a *Terminus Post Quem*, before which the rampart could not have been constructed.

The trench within the Green at Longtown Castle (Trench 2), has provided much information regarding the use of the “outer bailey” from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century through to the present day. It is clear that the earthworks which run along the eastern edge of the present road are not all related to “modern” development and the dumping of spoil from the other side of the road but have their origins in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It would appear that this area was being used as a series of builder’s yards with very little (if any) domestic activity taking place. The discovery of what appears to be waste stone tips which formed the base of the earthwork through which Trench 2 was cut together with the post hole and very little, but very abraded, pottery suggests that light structures perhaps roofed for shelter but not walled necessarily were being used and that masons or some other specialists were using this area for the purpose of preparing material perhaps associated with the construction of the inner bailey wall and gatehouse. The timeframe suggested by the pottery would certainly fit in with this phase of development and corresponds with the suggested date for the heightening of the rampart from trench 1.

Trench 2 was not fully excavated during the 2016 season and the material in its base (context 217) appears to be completely different in character compared to anything else encountered above it. Therefore it is proposed that much of this trench is re-opened in 2017 and the excavation starts with the top of this deposit which must be of very early 13<sup>th</sup> century date or earlier and appears to continue for some considerable depth.

The results from the excavations at Ponthendre Castle were indeed surprising. To excavate three trenches within a medieval motte and bailey and not recover any early medieval artefacts must be regarded as unusual! This however raises more questions than it answers. The motte is clearly quite large and the excavation across the rampart show proper construction with a marl and rock back to it and a compacted top. The material was dug from a wide but shallow external ditch and the natural scarp was also cut back in order to make the rampart more imposing. Therefore from an earthwork point of view the castle appears complete. The presence of a post hole on the very top of the rampart would suggest that timber superstructure had been added to the completed earthwork. Yet the complete lack of any artefactual evidence dating from the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century would suggest that the castle was not used, or if it was used (i.e. garrisoned), it was used very infrequently and by very few individuals. It is, however entirely possible that the trenches excavated during the 2016 season at Ponthendre were simply in the wrong place for finding evidence of occupation. Of

the three trenches excavated, the only trench one could reasonably expect to produce artefactual evidence in any quantity, would be Trench 3 within the bailey. Could it be that the location of Trench 3 just happened to be in a location where occupation did not take place? Were it not for the subsequent use of the bailey as a garden, (as seen from the Drone survey and as evident from the deposits within Trench 3), one may be swayed by this argument. However the fact that the entire bailey appears to have been intensively cultivated and ploughed should mean that any early medieval deposits will have been truncated and disturbed and would therefore be more generally spread across the entire bailey.

This therefore means that a second trench within the bailey is needed during the 2017 season in order to establish a clearer idea of the degree of occupation at Ponthendre.

Equally, Trench 1 on the top of the motte will require further investigation. The nature of the material used in the construction of the motte, the dryness of the deposits and the sheer difficulty of excavation in that location meant that in 2016 less progress was made than was hoped. It is clear that this trench needs to be re-opened during 2017 and at least in part excavated to a greater depth in order to provide as good an opportunity as is possible for any structural features to be seen.

In conclusion, it is the author's and contributor's view that collectively we have learned much about both Castles. Some of the principal research questions have been answered, others partially and some have yet to be addressed:

#### Research Questions at Longtown Castle:

When was the square embankment constructed? **We have come some way on this.**

Was the embankment a single phase or multiple phase construction? **Two Phase.**

What Materials were used to build it? **Turf and earth.**

Is there an internal structure to the embankment? **Not apparent but more to do.**

Was it faced with either timber or stone? **Apparently not.**

Was it topped by a wall or palisade? **Probably not**

Was there an internal ditch as suggested by the geophysics? **Not tested this year.**

Is there evidence for buildings within the embanked enclosure? **Yes.**

What activities took place within the embanked enclosure? **Building yards and more.**

Over What period(s) was the enclosure occupied? **From at least the very early 13<sup>th</sup> century.**

Is there evidence for earlier occupation of the site? **Not yet but next year will answer this.**

## Research Questions at Ponthendre Castle:

Over what period(s) was the motte and bailey occupied? **Unclear.**

Was it completed and was it a single or multiple phase construction? **Single.**

What form did any keep structures take and what materials were used? **Ongoing.**

What were the form and materials of the bailey defences? **Rampart and timber palisade.**

What activities took place within the bailey? **Very few...at present.**

Are there any structural remains still in place? **Not so far**

Were any of the structures subsequently robbed or slighted? **No**

Is there any evidence of earlier occupation of the site? **Yes 3 prehistoric flints were discovered beneath the rampart.**

Clearly there are some key questions left to answer. Not least determining (if possible), the origins of the square enclosure at Longtown, the date and nature of the earliest occupation at Longtown and the recovery of any physical evidence concerning Ponthendre during the early medieval period.

The contents of this report will be used to form the basis for determining target areas for excavation in 2017 in order to extract as much information from the study of these two very different, but equally fascinating, castles.

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## 9. Acknowledgements

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