

# **Wigmore Castle, Herefordshire**



ENGLISH HERITAGE

# **An Earthwork Survey and Investigation of Wigmore Castle, Herefordshire**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background

An earthwork survey was undertaken in February 2001 and March 2002 of Wigmore Castle, Herefordshire, (SO 46 NW 7) by staff of the Field Investigation team of English Heritage (EH) based at Swindon. Wigmore Castle became a guardianship site in 1995 and since then consolidation work and limited archaeological investigation has been carried out to make the site more accessible to the public and also to encourage the diverse flora and fauna, but at the same time retain its ‘romantic ruin’ appearance (Hoppen 1995, 24; Coppack 1999). The purpose of the current survey, which was carried out in response to a request from the EH West Midlands Regional Office, is to provide a plan and analysis of the whole site, including the earthworks to the north-west and south-east of the castle.

Wigmore Castle (centred at SO 4080 6919) is a motte and bailey castle that was built soon after the Norman Conquest and was to become one of the principal English strongholds along the Welsh Marches during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was also the residence of one of the most powerful Marcher baronial families – the Mortimers - until Ludlow Castle became their principal seat. The motte itself is not wholly artificial, but formed by cutting and ‘shaping’ a natural outcrop. The earthworks also provide evidence of re-fortification during the English Civil War. To the east of the castle, and detached from it, lies the former market town of Wigmore that developed along a street leading towards the castle. The town is dominated by its church, which was built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and lies almost centrally in the ‘old’ part of the town.

In addition, the Mortimers founded an Augustinian monastery some 2km to the north of the castle on the northern edge of Wigmore Moor (fig 1). The Roman road linking Chester and Caerleon, known as Watling Street, traverses the moor in a north-west/south-east direction close to the monastery. The town, however, was not located in relation to the Roman road. The Mortimers controlled vast tracts of land in the region (and elsewhere in England, Wales and Ireland); they also enclosed land to create two deer parks, one of which encircled the castle while the second was at Gatley c3.5km to the south-east. To the north-east of the castle, within the park, two banks define an enclosed area that may have been the location for tournaments. It could also have been a deer pasture that was best viewed from the north-east tower. Although the castle is the principal focus of this report, the other major components, the town, the moor, abbey and deer parks, are briefly considered since they are integral to our understanding of the castle.

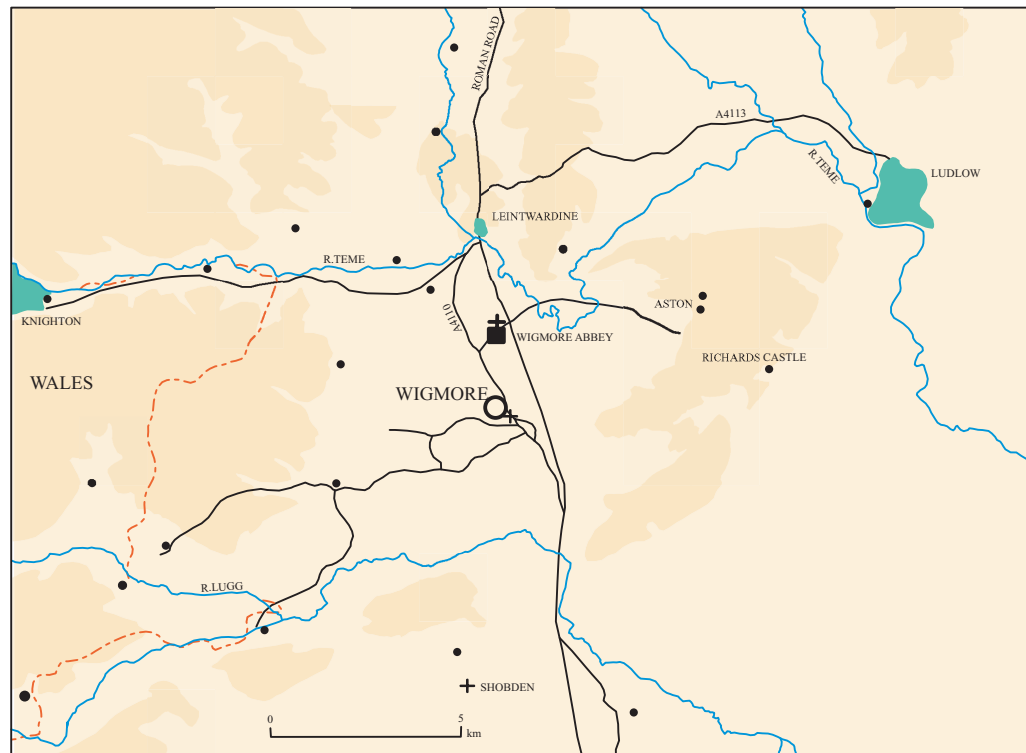
## Location and Topography

The earthworks and remains of the medieval castle at Wigmore are situated some 12km west-south-west of Ludlow, 14km north of Leominster, and 8.5km east of the Welsh border. It lies towards the south-eastern end of a long ridge that gradually descends from higher ground. This high ground is known as the Wigmore Rolls and Lawn Coppice. To the west of the castle a wide re-entrant separates the ridge from even higher ground. A small stream flows south-east along this re-entrant and formed the back of the property boundaries in the town.

The place-name, Wigmore, is of some interest. The second element is relatively common, occurring in approximately 100 names in England; it is derived from OE *mor*, which is

understood to mean low-lying marshy ground (Gelling 1984, 54). However, the first element (OE word *wicga*) is more noteworthy since, when combined with the second element, may indicate a specialised term for an unstable marsh in which ‘blister’ bogs appear and disappear (Gelling & Cole 2000, 59). Wigmore is therefore aptly named since to the east of the castle is Wigmore Moor, a remnant of a once more extensive glacial lake that covered much of the low-lying ground and where the geology is of alluvium (Cross 1968; Sale-Harding 1989). Small tributary streams issue from the moor, some of which have been canalised, and flow north to the river Teme. Aside from the streams, ditched field boundaries assist in drainage. However, despite the best efforts of agricultural improvers, the moor still floods after periods of heavy rain. The moor would therefore have presented an evocative picture with pockets of water appearing and disappearing as well as more extensive sheets of water, and would have been a striking image as the castle was approached, or indeed when viewed from the castle with the abbey on a promontory at the edge of the moor. The symbolism of the water is perhaps supported by the Mortimer’s ascertain of their Arthurian descent (Chigago ms 224; BL: Cotton Nero A.iv; Matthews & Stewart 1987, 139).

Fig. 1 Location of Wigmore Castle



Militarily, the castle’s strategic importance may not be readily apparent; however, since it lies almost centrally between the rivers Teme and Lugg, c4km to the north and south respectively, it would have commanded the wide area between the two.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There was a small settlement at Wigmore before 1066. Immediately after the Norman Conquest William fitzOsbern (Earl of Hereford) built a castle on the wasteland known as *Merestun* (Thorn & Thorn 1983, 9:1). It was one of a number of castles he built along the Welsh Marches in the years immediately following the Conquest including Ewyas Harold, Clifford, Hereford and Chepstow (Shoesmith 2000, 11).

By the time of the Domesday Survey, Ralf de Mortimer held Wigmore Castle, as well as the town itself, which was assessed as a borough and valued at £7. However, there is no indication of the population at this time (Thorn & Thorn 1983, 9:1). Wigmore became the centre of a compact block of land in the Welsh Marches that was owned by the Mortimers and included sixteen vills held in demesne, four of which were also castle sites (Remfry 1995, 5). During the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, Hugh de Mortimer, son of Ralph, supported Stephen and it appears that during this period he was dispossessed of his lands until Stephen succeeded to the throne in 1135. In 1155, an army laid siege to several castles in the Welsh Marches, including Wigmore.

Hugh de Mortimer founded Wigmore Abbey in the neighbouring parish of Leintwardine in 1179 (Brakspear 1934, 28). The abbey, an Augustinian house of Victorine canons, was initially established at Shobdon, but moved to Aymestry and then Wigmore, then Byton, back to Shobdon before finally settling at Adforton on the northern edge of Wigmore Moor (Knowles & Hadcock 1953, 159). The construction of the abbey was aided by other grants from local landowners including Brian de Brampton, who granted materials for the work from his woods and quarries. The monastic church, like the church at Wigmore, was dedicated to St James and, as principal patrons to the abbey, the Mortimers were invariably buried here.

The Welsh were a continual threat to the Marches during the 13<sup>th</sup> century; however, most of their incursions into the central Marches appear to have been limited. On one occasion, in 1221, they attacked Wigmore Abbey and destroyed most of the conventual buildings (Brakspear 1934, 28). The abbey, however, was re-built and in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century the church was also re-built (ibid, 29).

It was not until the defeat of the Welsh that stability was achieved in the region; this defeat also increased the influence of the Marcher lords with their acquisition of some Welsh territory. Mortimer, for example, gained control of most of Radnor, Montgomery, and part of Pembroke (Sale-Harding 1989, 45).

In 1264 Wigmore Castle and the lordship of Radnor was attacked by rebel barons and the Welsh, and Roger Mortimer's enemies 'levelled all his castles, pillaged his lands, and burnt his manors and vills' (Hopkinson 1991, 36). What effect this and other conflicts with the Welsh had on Wigmore Castle is not entirely clear. There was certainly re-building at this time; indeed most of the castle's surviving masonry dates from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and 14<sup>th</sup> century (RCHME 1934, 205; Curnow 1981, 23). This process may have begun in 1223, two years after the destruction of Wigmore Abbey, when a grant of 20 marks was made from the Crown to help towards the cost of the castle's re-fortification (Remfry 2000, 7). Further evidence of the castle and the land held by the Mortimers appears in 1304, following the

death of Edmund Mortimer, when an inquisition listing his estate describes the castle as having ditches. There was a garden, a courtyard and barns as well as a dovecot and two fishponds. He also held 160a of arable land, a water mill and a fulling mill (PRO: C 133/114 (8)). In 1322, during the incarceration of Roger Mortimer in the Tower of London, two ditches are mentioned 'below the castle' as well as a fishpond 'below the town' (PRO: E 142/27). The ditches are probably the detached ditches at the north-west and south-east ends of the castle. Today these ditches are dry, but the south-east ditch may well have contained water during the medieval period since Leland mentions one with water when he visited (in Robinson 1869, 142). In 1324 the castle appears to have been in a neglected state when 'the walls of Wigmore Castle are greatly damaged and weakened ... the outbuildings there outside the castle, such as the barns, cowsheds, sheep-folds, and other necessary outbuildings were damaged ...' (PRO: E 163/4/48). In 1335 there appears to have been little change when '... towers, turrets, walls, bridges, houses, and other buildings of the same castle and manors ... for want of care of the same, and much waste and destruction are being done in the same castle and manors ...' (PRO: C 145/124 (18)).

The Mortimers were extremely ambitious and their importance and influence increased even more in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century when Roger Mortimer acquired the Ludlow lordship through marriage and in 1328 he was created an Earl taking the title Earl of March (Hopkinson 1994, 320; Shoesmith 1996, 231). Ludlow replaced Wigmore as the principal seat of the Mortimers during the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Hopkinson 1994, 320). During the later 14<sup>th</sup> century, Edmund Mortimer (d. 1381) married the daughter of the Duke of Clarence (second son of Edward III) and took the additional title of Earl of Ulster (Shoesmith 1996, 232). Edmund was succeeded by his son, Roger, who in turn was succeeded by his son, Edmund (d. 1425). On the death of Edmund, the Wigmore estates passed to Richard, Duke of York, who had married a Mortimer heiress. In 1461, Richard was succeeded by his son Edward, and following the battle of Mortimer's Cross he was crowned King Edward IV. This meant that the Lordship of the Marches, as well as all the other titles and lands held by the Mortimers, passed to the Crown. Edward established a council to administer the royal interest in the Marches and since he held such a large amount of land, the influence of the other Marcher lords slowly declined.

Wigmore Castle's later history appears a little obscure. Its regional importance had long diminished and it may have been used simply as a residence or hunting lodge for the adjacent park. Maintaining the castle was clearly an expensive undertaking but nevertheless, in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, Bishop Lee who was President of the Marches, repaired it after finding it 'utterly decayed in lodging'. It was again repaired by Sir Henry Sidney (1559-86) when it was used as a prison (Shoesmith 1996, 233). A survey of the castle in 1584 found that:

'twoe bridges there leadinge from the Towne of Wigmore into the Parke and Castle being very much decayed noe carriage can passe with any burden on them into the Castle or Parke. The first bridge, as well as the foundacon as in the tymber above wholly to be puld downe ... the other bridge partley decayed in the one end as well as in the foundacons as above ... the houses, buildings, walls, and other edifices in the said Castle beinge very ruinous and decayed will not without greate charges be reprised' (Robinson 1869, 141 quoting BL: Lansdowne ms ii, 82).





Beyond the castle and town were two deer parks. The earliest reference to a deer park at Wigmore is in 1301 (Cantor 1983, 36) and in 1304 two parks are mentioned, one named *Wygemore* and the other *Gatelith* (Cal IPM, Ed 1, 235), which can be identified with Gatley Park. The park at Wigmore was bordered by a hedge 746 perches long (c3800m), which enclosed an area of c83ha (an area of 200a (83ha) was given in 1324 and 300a (125ha) in 1325). It held 100 deer in 1324 and lay ‘by the castle’ (PRO: SC12/8/18; SC6/1145/23). Field names, such as Great Lawns, Little Lawns and The Lawns, which are recorded on a 19<sup>th</sup>- century map, indicate that the park included the lower ground to the east of the castle and extended as far as the modern road between Wigmore and Adforton, and north to the parish boundary (HRO: IR30/14/227; fig 16). The remainder of the park lay to the north and north-west of the Castle on Wigmore Rolls and Lawns Coppice and probably bordered the stream on the western side of the castle.

The second park was at Gatley, on the high ground to the north-east of Leinthall Earls. It was similar in size to Wigmore Park, covering an area of 250a (104ha) (although the area was 350a in 1325 (146ha)) and held 100 deer (PRO: SC12/8/18).

The arable land at Wigmore lay in four ‘town-fields’ (BL: Harl 1240. f.41.v.). The amount of land in demesne appears to have fluctuated, but in 1322 it amounted to 310a (129ha) (PRO: SC 6/86/29). The burgesses also held meadow on the edge of Wigmore Lake (Sale-Harding 1989, 46). Although these strips were the burgage allocations at the time of Enclosure in the late-18<sup>th</sup> century (Tonkin 1973, 285), they may have formalised an already existing situation since fields on the moor include names such as Moor Burgage and Burgage Meadow.

## **PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

Previous archaeological investigation at Wigmore Castle includes earthwork survey, geophysical survey, aerial survey and excavation.

At least three earthwork surveys have been undertaken at Wigmore. Edward Downman carried out the first survey sometime between 1895 and 1906. The plan, which is held in the British Library (BL: Add 37650 f.44), was reproduced in the Herefordshire Victoria County History (Chalkly Gould 1908, 247). It shows the circuit of the curtain wall and shell keep as well as walling within the inner bailey. It also shows two linear banks on the lower ground to the north-east of the castle. These banks are now ploughed-out in the arable field and are only evident as crop marks, although a fragment of the northern bank survives in a pasture field below the castle. The northern bank had a ditch on the north side, while the southern bank’s ditch was to the south.

Another survey was undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England in 1934 (1934, 206) and has been re-produced on succeeding OS maps. The plan shows the partial curtain wall and shell keep, as well as the hachured detail of the motte and bailey. In addition, it shows the possible outer bailey to the south-east of the castle, which may continue on the southern side of the farm as far as a scarp. The two linear banks on the north-eastern side of the castle are also shown continuing further up the castle slope than on Downman’s plan. Interestingly the southern bank extends on the northern side of the road and appears to curve slightly and lies against a track.

In 1998 a contour and hachured survey of the motte and inner bailey was commissioned by EH (Barratt 1998). The plan shows the outline of the castle as a series of contours and hachures with a brief interpretation as well as the masonry before consolidation.

Two geophysical surveys have been undertaken at Wigmore Castle, both in the area of the possible outer bailey. The first was in 1990 (Readhead 1990) when a number of anomalies were found. The most significant were areas of high resistance that were interpreted as buildings. The first lay *c*100m west of the southern rampart and measured *c*15m x 7m; the second building was much larger and was positioned against the outer ditch of the inner bailey; it measured *c*34m x 11m. Apart from these two possible buildings, another area of high anomaly was found at the base of the south-east side of the rampart and its the north-eastern end. These were interpreted as a wall and tower respectively.

The second geophysical survey was undertaken in 1998 (EH unpublished plan). Apart from a few anomalies of both high and low resistance, perhaps the most significant feature was a linear feature that was interpreted as ditches defining the northern edge of the outer bailey. These ditches are on the lip of the northern scarp-edge. Other areas of high and moderately high resistance appear to be in the same area as the previous geophysical survey.

There appears to be no published account of excavation at Wigmore Castle. However, during the conservation stage in 1995, it was decided that limited excavation was required in order to inform the engineers about the stability and safety of the monument. Two trenches were dug within the inner bailey. The first was along the south curtain wall where 9m of buried deposits were found (Coppack 1999, 65). The section revealed a timber kitchen dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and masonry ‘of exceptional quality’ (ibid). A second trench was dug near the east tower, but it is not known what was recovered here.

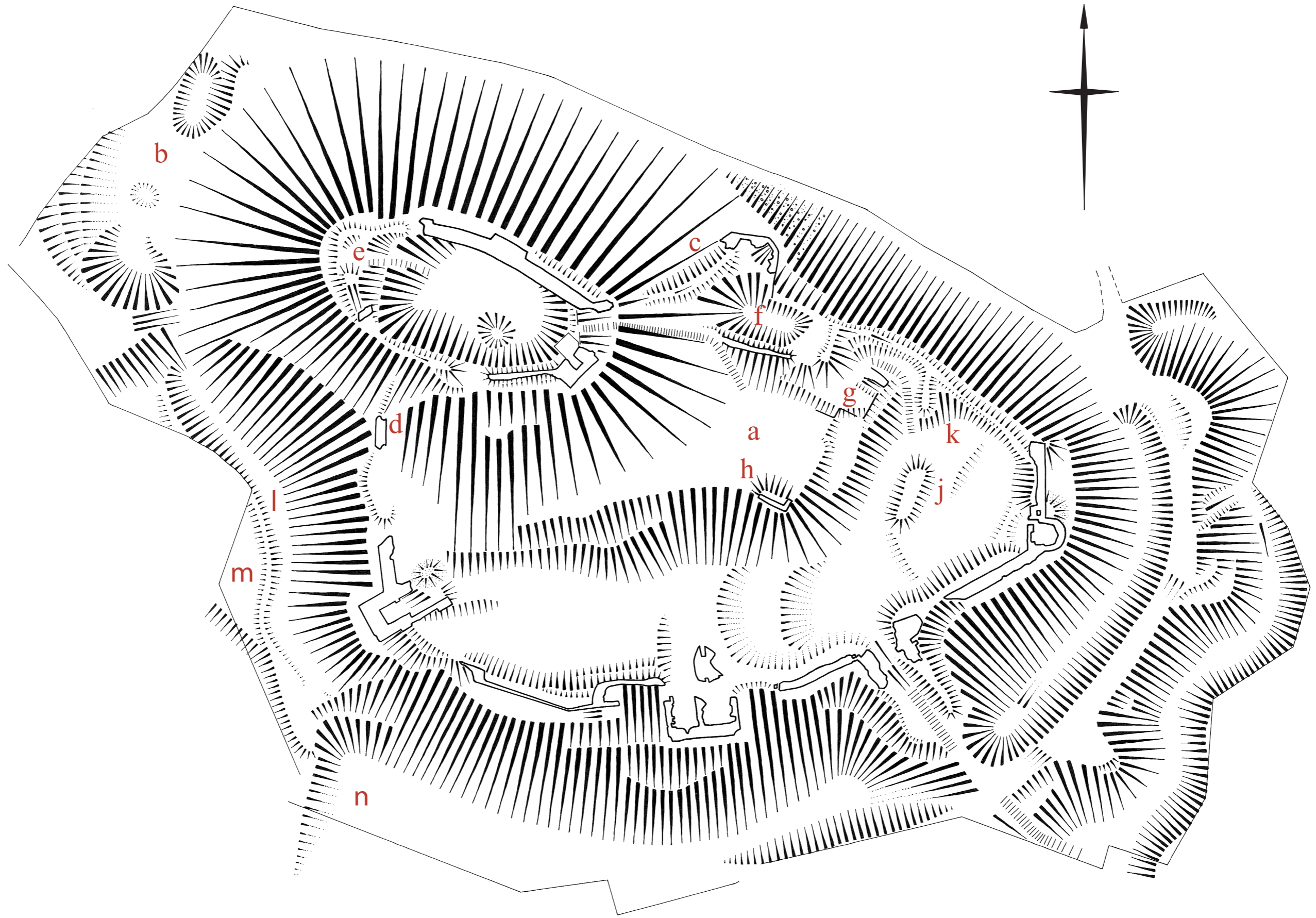
Aside from the archaeological investigations, analysis of the castle has been undertaken by Curnow (1981) and Remfry (1995; 2000).

## **EARTHWORK SURVEY AND INTERPRETATION**

The core of Wigmore Castle comprises a substantial motte, much of it natural, and an inner bailey. To the south-east the inner bailey is bordered by a ditch, counterscarp bank, and outer ditch. Beyond the outer ditch the relatively flat ridge is bounded in the east by a bank, which defines the outer enclosure or court.

The plan of the earthworks is grouped under three main headings: the motte and inner bailey, the outer enclosure, and surrounding earthworks. Fallen masonry and the substantial amount of buried rubble have tended to make an interpretation within the inner bailey somewhat limited. In addition, dense vegetation and rubble covers the base of the motte in the south, which may mask more features. Elsewhere, trees blanket the sides of the motte and the ridge with a consequent thick matting of leaf-mould.

The letters in the text refer to letters on the plans.



50 0 50 Metres

Fig 3

## The Motte and Inner Bailey (fig 3).

### *The Motte*

The motte, which is oval, lies on the north-west side of the castle and measures 94m x 79m at the base, tapering to 50m x 25m at the top. It stands some 16m above a platform (a) within the inner bailey and 18m above a quarried area (b) on the western side. On the north side it is c23m above a break in the natural scarp, which is used as a track beside the fence-line. On the north-east side of the motte is a bank (c), which is part of the curtain wall and measures 16m x 4m. It descends from the walling on the top of the motte towards the north tower. Similarly, on the south side of the motte a slight scarp (d) links the summit to a fragment of the curtain wall on the slope. Further south it becomes a spread bank close to the south-west tower where it is no more than 0.1m high. Interestingly the top of the motte is only 2m higher than the top of the ridge to the north-west and it is therefore the digging of the cutting, and the steepening of the other sides, that formed the motte.

*Fig 4 Interior of shell keep showing a fragment of the buttressed walling*



On the summit of the motte are the remains of an oval shell keep. On the northern side there is a substantial fragment of the buttressed curtain walling. It measures 30m in length and stands at least 4m in height and up to 2.5m thick (fig 4). On the south-eastern side is a fragmentary tower, which is again at least 4m high. Extending 25m west from this tower is an earthen bank that is covering a stone wall. A break in the walling may be the result of more recent damage, or more likely location of another tower (Buck's engraving shows a postern gate somewhere along this side (fig 2)) (see also Barratt 1998). In the south-west is a further wall fragment of a stair tower, at least three-storeys high. A mound (e) at the western side of the shell keep is c4m higher than the eastern side, with a bulbous projection to the west. This feature was described in some detail in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, and has subsequently been interpreted as an octagonal tower, which was at least 14m in diameter and consisted of three storeys and a basement (Shoemith 1996, 239). It has also been proposed

that it may represent a small motte, possibly the original 11<sup>th</sup> century castle, with the bailey occupying the area of the present shell keep (ibid, 240).

The interior of the shell keep is *c*3.5 lower than the keep curtain wall. It is devoid of earthworks apart from a circular depression, *c*0.1m deep, cut into the south side. The entrance to the shell keep is not entirely clear but probably lay to the east, between the tower and surviving part of the northern curtain wall, in the same place as the present entrance.

### ***The Inner Bailey***

The inner bailey consists of a relatively flat platform (a), with sections of walling defining the probable position of buildings, and a lower court to the south and east separated by a substantial scarp (fig 5). Surrounding the bailey are the remains of a curtain wall (in places defined by a bank), four towers and a gatehouse.

*Fig 5 View of inner bailey looking towards the shell keep*



At the base of the motte and 8m above the platform (a) is a rectangular depression, probably a building platform (f) with an entrance at the south-east corner. It measures *c*20m x 10m and *c*1.5m deep. The eastern and southern walls are clearly defined, although only along the southern wall are traces of stonework evident within the thick vegetation. The northern side probably formed part of the curtain wall. Sections of walling (g) lie to the east and 4m above (a). The eastern wall measures 6.5m in length and stands *c*1.5m high. At its southern end it doglegs to the west and continues a further 6m where it merges with the base of a scarp.

The platform (a) lies between the base of the motte and a prominent scarp in the east. It is up to 6m above the remainder of the bailey but gradually diminishes in height before merging with the base of the motte and bailey near the south-west tower. A section of walling (h) lies in the south-east corner, it measures 5m x 2m and 1m thick and stands 3m high on the south

side and 0.2m high on the north. Since this fragment of walling is parallel to the walling at (g), it is possibly part of the same building. Although not identified in the current survey Baratt (1998), recorded a possible excavation trench to the north of this walling.

The remainder of the inner bailey slopes gradually towards the gatehouse, from the north-east and the west. In the north is a sub-rectangular mound (j), which is possibly a spoil heap from an unrecorded old excavation.

Enclosing the inner bailey is the curtain wall, with four towers and the gatehouse positioned along its length. The fragmentary northern tower lies near (f) and projects beyond the line of the curtain wall. It has four faces on the northern side and is linked to the bank that extends south-west up the side of the motte. On the east side of the tower, a fragment of walling extends south for c5m, linking to the building platform (f). Traces of a buried arch in the tower would suggest that a substantial part of it is buried beneath debris. From the north tower, the curtain wall continues as a scarp and bank for 28m to another bank (k) that projects into the inner bailey. This projection may reflect the course of a wall. The curtain wall, represented by a bank c1.5m above the interior of the bailey, continues south-east for a further 20m to a section of walling where its course changes and leads to the east tower (fig 6). This tower is semi-circular, with a drain in the northern corner. From the east tower, the curtain wall extends 15m, beyond which it continues as a bank for a further 6m to the gatehouse.

*Fig 6 East tower  
from bailey interior*



The remains of the gatehouse lie on the south-east side of the bailey (fig 7). Two storeys are still above the present ground level; however, the gate arch is only c1.7m high above present ground level, which indicates that a considerable amount of stonework lies buried. Externally, two projecting banks leading down the ditch indicate lines of walling. This barbican is shown on Buck's engraving (fig 3) and contained two chambers for operating two portcullises (Shoesmith 1996, 237).

The curtain wall continues south-west for 12m from the gatehouse. Beyond this point it continues as a scarp to the southern tower. A considerable amount of stone debris marks the remains of collapsed walling. The two-storey southern tower has an internal central wall dividing it into two compartments. Immediately in front of the eastern portion are the remains of a basement, which is now the home to a colony of bats (Coppack 1999, 68). Access to the basement was not possible; however, it was described in detail in 1870 (Shoemith 1996). The curtain wall between the east tower and south tower is the longest stretch of straight walling along the castle's perimeter, with the gatehouse placed almost centrally between the two.

*Fig. 7 View of the gatehouse from the counterscarp bank.*



From the south tower the fragmentary curtain wall continues to the south-west tower. Near the south tower, the curtain wall is fragmentary, and stone rubble here indicates its collapse. Further west, the wall stands at least 6m high externally but only c0.3m internally. It also varies considerably in width. Further collapsed walling, marked by the scarp by the south-west tower, marks the course of the curtain wall, which is c0.5m above the inner bailey level.

The rectangular south-western tower is similar to the south tower, but with only one compartment. Projecting from the southern wall is a narrower section of walling extending a further 8m within the inner bailey and bounded in the north by a scarp. A mound to the north of the scarp, measuring 0.6m high, contains a large quantity of stonework. The curtain wall extends for 7.5m from the south-west tower up the motte slope. Its course can be traced beyond this point as a spread bank to another wall fragment. Beyond the masonry the slight scarp (d) extends to the shell keep.

#### ***The ditches and counterscarp bank (fig 8 and 10)***

To the east of the inner bailey is a ditch, counterscarp bank, and an outer ditch. The inner ditch is up to 2m wide at the base, increasing to 18m at the top. It is up to 7.75m below the







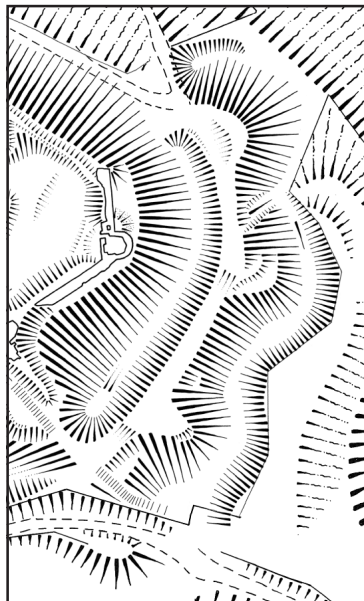
base of the curtain wall and 3.25m below the counterscarp bank. The ditch is c57m long and terminates at its northern end at the junction of two tracks. At the southern end the ditch terminates at the causeway that links the counterscarp bank with the inner bailey gatehouse. On the south-western side of the causeway the inner ditch survives for c25m but may formerly have continued to the dry stream below (p). The levels of the base of the ditch on either side of the causeway only differ marginally by approximately 0.7m.

On the northern side of the farm track, near the stream and enclosed by a fence, is a mound with stones on the eastern side. This feature was probably created during stone clearance.

The ditch (l) is evident again in the south-west where it ascends the hill to a prominent scarp to the south of the quarried area (b).

The flat counterscarp bank extends from the farm track to the northern escarpment where it merges with a track junction (fig 9). In the south it is cut by the farm track. There are no indications of stonework along its course. Along the eastern façade, north of the farm track, there are three bulbous projections, and a fourth, which has been cut by the farm track. The northern platform is semi-circular, measuring 10m diameter, with a slight internal bank. It

*Fig 9.  
Counterscarp bank  
showing location of  
Civil War battery*



faces north-east across the low-lying ground and overlooks the Adforton road. The central projection has a cutting on the northern side. The southern projection is more V-shaped than the other two, with the two arms each measuring 8m in length. The fourth projection is cut by the deeply incised farm track, but nevertheless the line of the eastern side of the bank bottom is similar to that on the northern side of the track. In form, these projections are analogous to Civil War gun platforms elsewhere in the country and appear to be placed to protect the gatehouse (see for example Thackray 2000; Thompson 1977; RCHME 1964).

Beyond the gun platforms is an outer ditch, which is more sinuous than the inner one, reflecting the gun platforms on the bank. The ditch is 2m wide at the base, increasing to 15m at the top. It is 5.8m below the counterscarp bank and 2.8m below the outer bank. This ditch is only

complete between the farm track and the natural scarp edge in the north. The outer bank of this ditch is very spread and lower than the counterscarp bank, thus providing an unrestricted field of fire for the guns.

The counterscarp bank (m) in the west is much narrower, being only 3m wide overall before merging with the natural scarp in the south. Its profile suggests that it is later, and is possibly a field boundary or associated with a phase of re-fortification. At (n) a scarp extends south with a slight bank on the western side, and gradually diminishes by the stream. Whether the topography of this area is partly the result of the fallen masonry from the tower and curtain wall is unclear. This area is particularly dense in vegetation. The stream probably provided water to the ditch and the bank in the west effectively formed a dam. The ditch outlet is overlain by the modern farm track.

### **The Outer Court (fig 8 and 10)**

The outer enclosure, which was probably an outer court, covers an area of c1.2ha and occupies the ridge top to the east of the counterscarp ditch as far as a prominent bank (o) in the east. In the south its course is unclear, but it probably extended along the top of the ditch (p). This ditch, which appears to have been a former watercourse, extends from the farm track towards a field boundary in the south where it turns south to meet the present stream. A sunken farm track cuts through the outer enclosure along the plateau. This track, which leads from the town, was probably the main route to the castle.

The bank (o) extends south from near the northern scarp-edge and is cut, first by a footpath from the church, and then the farm track and farmhouse. Its course probably continued to the south of the farmhouse where a low bank, no more than 0.5m high on the west side, merges with the natural scarp. Garden landscaping and a fence boundary to the south of the farmhouse have tended to obscure this feature. This bank effectively 'screened' the court from the direction of the town. Access to the outer court was possibly through a gatehouse, which may be in the vicinity of the farmhouse. A gatehouse here would probably also have served as a courthouse. Interestingly the northern side of the outer court was known as Courthouse Close in 1841 (HRO: IR30/14/227).

Despite the lack of earthwork evidence, the course of the outer court perimeter in the north may have been the ditches identified by geophysical survey (see above). The ditches, however, appear to be rather narrow when compared to the counterscarp ditches, and may therefore not be associated with the perimeter.

The outer court, apart from a hollowing on the northern side, is devoid of earthworks. However, geophysical survey identified a number of high resistance anomalies that were interpreted as two possible buildings, walling at the base of (o), and a possible structure at its northern end (see above).

## Surrounding Earthworks (fig 8 and 10)

### *East of the Outer Court*

Beyond the outer court are three further mounds along the northern side of the footpath that leads towards the church. The western mound (q) has a square platform on top. The central mound (r) is elongated, measuring 15m in length, and stands c7m above the footpath on its southern side. The eastern mound (s) is D-shaped and measures 10m x 6m. This latter mound is linked to (r) by a small, relatively flat platform, which has a slight ditch on its southern side and a bank almost in the centre. The northern side of these three mounds is marked by another narrow track and fence-line, beyond which the ground falls away precipitously. This northern side is also densely covered in bushes and vegetation. A fence to the east of the mounds marks the western extent of the town.

The function of the two mounds (r and s), is not entirely clear. Sited beyond the outer court, they provide a good field of view towards the town and it is possible that they are castle outworks. It has been suggested that they may have been a motte and bailey that have been later re-used as a siege castle (Remfry; 1995, 26; Shoemith 1996, 241), but this seems unlikely since there is no bank to provide protection on the exposed western side.

### *West of the castle*

Wigmore Castle's motte is separated from the ridge to the west by a deep cutting (b). The bottom of this cutting has a number of shallow scoops with further, larger excavations, on the western and southern sides of the scarp-edge. These features are probably the remains of quarrying, possibly dating to the post-medieval period (*above*). Further west, beyond the fence-line, the ground rises steeply to the summit of the hill. Amorphous earthworks on the north-western side are probably the result of soil erosion and tree-falls.

On the ridge summit are two linear cross-ridge ditches (t). The western ditch is c3m deep, but progressively decreases in depth as it descends the escarpment on the southern side. On the northern side it extends as far as the steep escarpment. The ditch, therefore, effectively cuts the ridge. The eastern ditch is appreciably shallower, measuring c1.5m in depth; it is also not parallel to the western ditch and may therefore not be contemporary.

There are a number of possible interpretations for this feature. In a prehistoric context it may be defining the edge of a much larger enclosure (*below*). It has also been suggested that it may be a siegework (Remfry 1995, 26); however, since the ditch is on the western side this seems unlikely. The mound formed by the deeper ditch, and east as far as the motte ditch, is D-shaped and measures 20m east/west and 15m north/south. There is no evidence of stonework on the mound. From the mound, which is only 2m higher than the top of the motte, there is a good field of view across the flatter, but nevertheless undulating land to the west. It is therefore probably a castle outwork (which may be re-using an existing feature) and dating

to the Civil War. As such, it provides a platform for forward protection on this exposed flank.

### ***Linear banks***

On the northern scarp near the motte are two linear banks with external ditches. The north-western bank (u) has a much sharper profile at its northern end and is surmounted by a hedge. Further south it continues up the slope as a broad bank as far as the track, beyond which, within the woodland, it is defined by a bank c0.2m high with a ditch on the northern side.

The second bank (v) lies to the south-east and is very spread with a slight ditch on the south-east side. Both these banks continued into the arable field to the north-east, but are now ploughed out and only visible as crop marks as far as the main road between Wigmore and Adforton. However, this bank formerly extended a short distance across the road (*above*).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Castle**

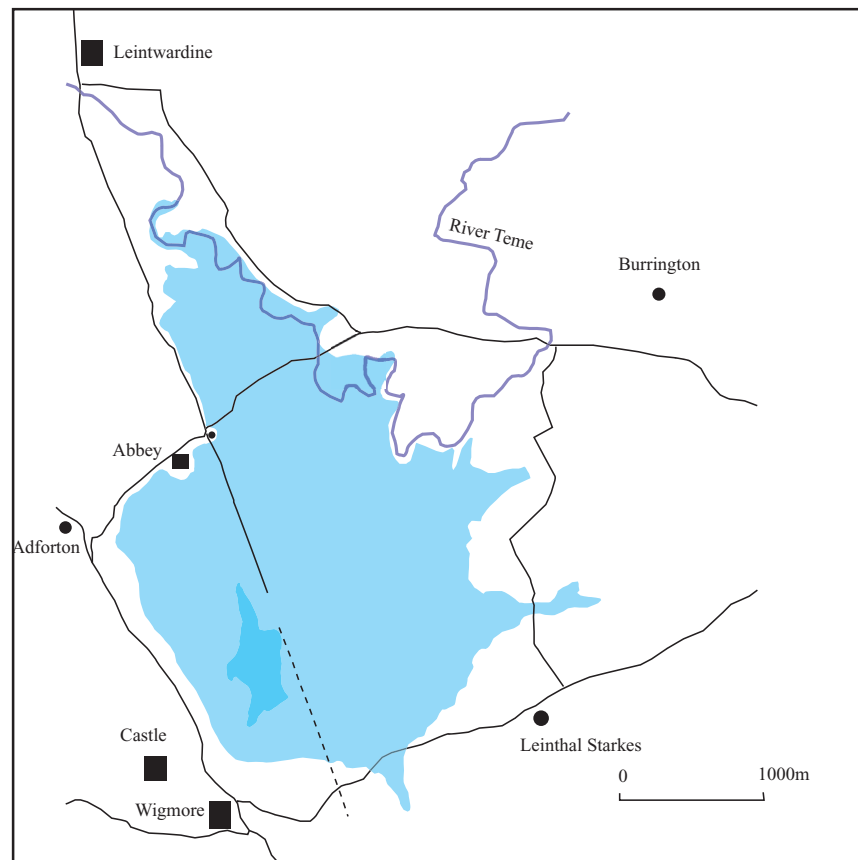
Castles were essential in the control of the Welsh Marches following the Norman Conquest; they provided a place of refuge as well as a stronghold from where the surrounding area could be dominated. A castle, particularly a baronial castle such as Wigmore, was also a lord's domestic residence with his hall and other attendant buildings. It was also the centre of his estate where business was transacted. Beyond the walls of the castle there may have been features expected at such prestigious sites such as deer parks, gardens, and fishponds. Wigmore Castle displays all these characteristics, but despite its earlier importance, it only fulfilled a military function for a relatively short period of time.

A number of issues emerge as a result of the earthwork survey and investigations at Wigmore Castle that need to be explored. The first concerns the location of the castle - at a significant, or special place - and its relationship to the moor and abbey. Despite the lack of archaeological evidence, it is likely that the higher ground surrounding the moor was utilised in some way throughout the prehistoric period as a place from where the boggy moor could easily be exploited. It is unclear what the area of this moor was at any particular time, but it is reasonable to assume that at its maximum it extended as far as the bottom of the escarpment of the surrounding hills and that the lower ground to the east of the castle was a lake (fig 11).

The castle is not sited on the highest point in the locality; indeed it is overlooked across the broad valley to the west. The motte itself is at a similar height to the ridge in the west and at a point where there is a dramatic fall. It is therefore probably formed from a natural outcrop or knoll. Such an adorned natural feature would have been distinctive and defined in some way during the prehistoric period as a place of special significance which, by the Romano-British period at least, had been supplanted by nearby Leintwardine. The topographical significance of the place, however, would have been retained. The castle, therefore, is sited in a distinctively natural position and there are indications in the earthworks that suggest it as

having been marked out and ornamented in some way (see Bradley 1993; Bradley 1998, for a discussion of the symbolism of monuments and natural places in the prehistoric landscape).

*Fig 11. Plan of possible extent of Wigmore Moor. The darker area represents the lowest lying ground.*



The latest phase of the development of the castle that can be identified from the earthworks is a phase of re-fortification in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. This can be seen on the counterscarp bank when four gun platforms were constructed in front of the gatehouse utilising part of the castle ditch. In addition, an outwork on the north-western side of the castle may have been constructed, possibly utilising a pre-existing ditch, to protect this vulnerable flank.

The medieval castle is the next stage that is apparent in the earthworks. Here a substantial mound was ‘shaped’ from the natural outcrop with a relatively flat platform at its base within the bailey. The steepness of the eastern side precludes the need for a continuous ditch around the curtain wall, but instead it is confined to the more vulnerable sides. The castle walls and towers appear rather unusual and were perhaps designed more for display, as well as being a potent symbol in the landscape. There are four extant towers punctuating the curtain wall. The two to the south are rectangular and project from the wall, while on the north-eastern side the northern tower has four external faces and the eastern one is circular. The northern and southern towers are nearly equidistantly placed, while on the more vulnerable south-eastern side the towers and gatehouse are closer together. This variety of tower design and rather elaborate masonry illustrates the dual function of the castle; on the one hand it is a military ‘machine’, but on the other it is a statement of the lord’s importance and prestige.

The earliest stage of development was possibly the process of defining this special place by enclosing the outcrop. This phase is not entirely clear from the earthworks; however, it is entirely plausible that this was achieved by the construction of the cross-ridge ditch in the west, thus making a physical separation of the natural outcrop and lower platform from the ridge.

*Fig 12. Wigmore Castle viewed from the probable eastern boundary of the deer park.*



In the north, the abbey is situated on a small promontory projecting into the moor and close to the former Roman road and, like the castle is in a topographically special natural place. This imposition of a Christian symbol has the effect of ‘Christianising’ the northern moorland landscape in a similar way to the secular domination of the ridge at Wigmore. The Roman road, which also forms part of the precinct boundary, survives as a track for part of its

*Fig 13. View across Wigmore Moor from the castle. The abbey can be seen at (A), while the deer park boundary is defined by the road (B). Notice the low-lying area (C) in flood. This is the lowest lying ground in the moor.*



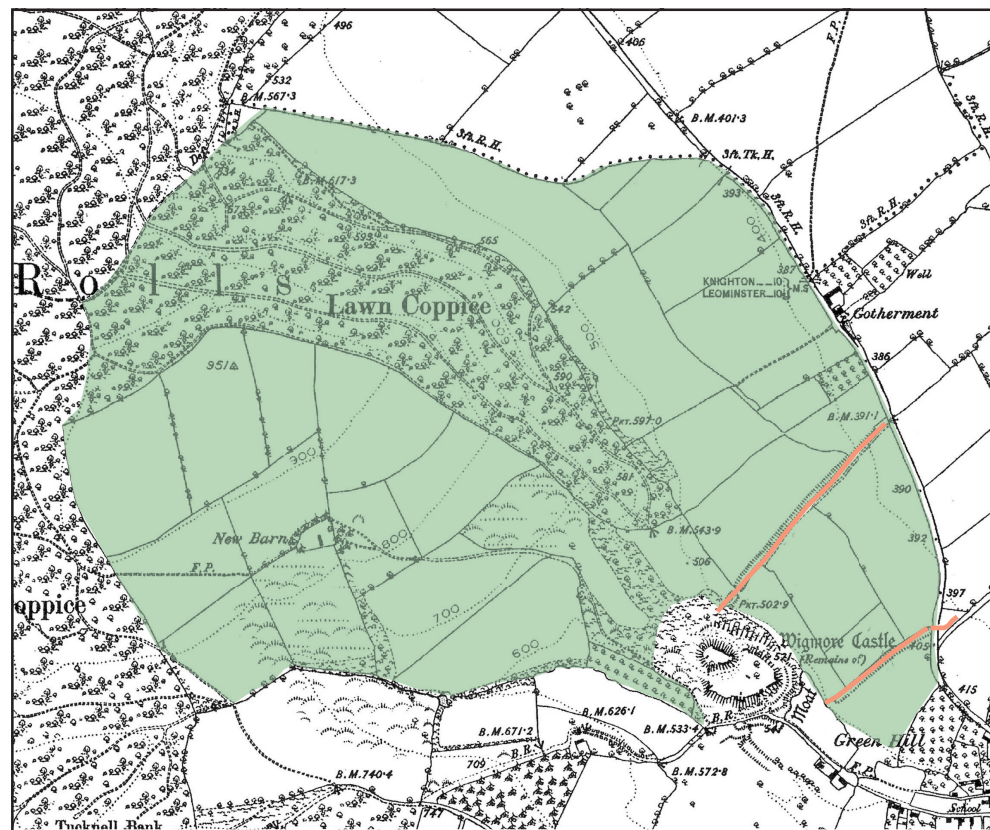


course across the moor but the remainder is merely postulated. This latter section had presumably been abandoned for some considerable time and may have been causewayed. Despite the lack of documentary evidence, the abbey may have controlled passage across the moor in a similar way to abbeys at river and causeway crossings elsewhere in the country (eg Stocker & Everson 2003).

The second issue as regards the castle is the perception that is gained as it is approached from the east (fig 12). The moor and lake effectively ‘dictates’ how the castle is approached. Further manipulation of the landscape may have been achieved by damming the river Teme in some way, perhaps at Burrington Bridge, to provide a larger area of water. The view across the moor would, nevertheless, have been spectacular, with first the moor with its shiny ‘blister’ bog, a sheet of water beyond, and then the castle dominating the skyline in the distance. Also in view would be the abbey, the ancestral burial place of the Mortimers, and the church at Wigmore. The remainder of the town would be shielded from view by the ridgeline. Within the circuit of the moor, therefore, is a landscape of considerable symbolism with the juxtaposition of bog, water, Christian and secular influence all within view (fig 13).

### The Deer Park

Fig 14. The shaded area represents the probable extent of the deer park at Wigmore. The deer enclosure can be seen to the right (north-eastern side) of the castle defined by the two brown lines. The southern bank formerly extended along a track for a short distance on the northern side of the road suggesting that the deer park in this area was perhaps a little further east.



The final issue concerns the deer park at Wigmore. The castle lay on the circumference of the park and it extended along the Adforton road and parish boundary before rising onto Wigmore Rolls. Although no fieldwork has been undertaken on the park, map evidence would suggest that the western boundary was probably formed by the stream that descends the ridge to the castle since the area closely corresponds to the area of the park in 1324 (see p6 above; fig 14). To the east of the castle, two banks extend from the road and up the slope towards the castle. The southern bank is cut by the Adforton road and curves for a short distance along the north side of a track. In the north, a field boundary reflects the course of the northern bank; however, whether this indicates that the bank formerly continued further north-east is unclear. The banks are not parallel, but are narrower near the castle. If the line of these banks is projected further up the slope, it is evident that the northern bank would intersect the castle at the north-west side of the keep, while the southern one encloses the inner bailey's outer ditch. From the north-east tower, these banks appear to 'define' the deer park. This was probably an area where deer were free to graze, but nevertheless confined. A panoramic view of this pasture with the lake and moor beyond gives a picture of harmony and tranquility.

The park may also have been used for the occasional tournament that was held at Wigmore (Barber & Barker 1989, 31). Initially these events were staged over large areas of the countryside and were more properly seen as feats of arms. However, the later tournaments were staged within smaller, enclosed areas known as lists, which may have been defined by a palisade, or banks and ditches (ibid, 193). The Mortimers were particularly devoted to the Round Table tournament at which pageantry and feasting were the principal elements and where knights took on the names and even characters of their Arthurian heroes. Given the Mortimer alleged Arthurian descent, the symbolism of the castle at one end of the list and the lake at the other would presumably not have been lost on those attending.

## **METHODOLOGY**

G Brown, M Bowden, and D Parker carried out the survey and field investigation. It was undertaken in two phases: first, the area of the castle was surveyed at a scale of 1:500. This involved a closed traverse of ten stations using an electronic distance-measuring theodolite tying in wherever possible to survey markers left from a previous topographical survey. From these stations a control network was established and the archaeological and topographical features were plotted. Taped offsets were used to survey the finer detail. The stonework detail was imported from the previous topographical survey.

The second stage was a survey of the area to the south-east and north-west of the castle. This was undertaken at a scale of 1:1000 using a GPS and total station theodolite to survey the archaeological and topographic detail and establish control framework. The archaeological detail was recorded in a similar manner to the 1:500 scale survey.

We are also extremely grateful to Mrs Barbara Wright, who is currently researching the Mortimer family and made available her transcriptions of documents held at the British Library and Public Record Office that pertain to the castle and abbey. She also drew our attention to other useful references, particularly those referring to the Arthurian legends.

The report was researched and written by G Brown. However, it has benefited by discussion and comment from M Bowden, P Everson and D Stocker. D Cunliffe drew the earthwork plans and G Brown and D Parker took the photographs.

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