Castell Blaenllynfi, Brecknock: a Marcher castle and its landscape

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INTRODUCTION

By R. J. Silvester

Castell Blaenllynfi, just to the north of the Usk Valley and about 12 kilometres south-east of Brecon, is one of Brecknock's more important medieval castles (Fig. 1). Yet, despite its substantial earthworks, its standing masonry and its status as the *caput* of the medieval lordship of Blaenllynfi, the castle has received little more than passing interest.[4] The castle occupies the head of the valley of the river Llynfi, dominated by the towering ridge of Cefn Moel to the east and the lesser ridge of Allt yr Esgair on the west, at a height of around 180 metres above sea level. The siting is undramatic and offers little natural protection. The location, though, is a commanding one in that it looks down over Llangorse Lake and also controls access along an ancient route from Talgarth in the north to Llangynidr in the south across the watershed between the Wye and Usk valleys (Fig. 2).

The castle has attracted the attention of antiquaries and artists in the past, and they have bequeathed a valuable record of how the ruins appeared from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century. John Leland, the King's Antiquary, noted in 1536–39 that in a valley above Llangorse Lake 'is yet the shape of a veri fair castel now dekeiying, and by was a borow [borough] town now also in decay'.[5] Samuel and Nathaniel Buck published an engraving of the ruins from a drawing made in 1741 (Fig. 3).[6] This is particularly valuable in revealing the prospect from the castle down the valley of the Llynfi towards Llangorse Lake, a view now obscured by the woodland which envelopes the site, though their accompanying text provides little detail other than there were several fragments of wall 'of prodigious thickness'.[6] The English painter, John 'Warwick' Smith, produced a watercolour of the castle in 1790 (Fig. 4),[7] and though the antiquary, Sir Richard Colt Hoare, dismissed the ruins as 'trifling remains' in his journal for 30 May 1793, he nevertheless made a sketch of them in 1805.[8] At much the same time, the Brecknock historian, Theophilus Jones, whose text was enhanced by an engraving taken from Colt Hoare's drawing (Fig. 5), noted in passing 'the wretched remnants of baronial spendour' and mused that 'what could induce any person to erect a castle in so low a situation, surrounded by heights on all sides save one, can neither be conceived or ascertained' for 'this is a castle in a small dell upon the borders of a swamp without even the remains of a foss'.[9]

In the late 1960s the site was acquired by Mr J. Anstie Blackham who quickly developed an interest in the history of his new property. After much discussion with the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, he embarked upon a programme of survey, excavation and repair at the castle. Initially designed to uncover the curtain wall and internal buildings to facilitate survey, his work subsequently became more ambitious as he followed wall lines, cleared internal structures and excavated trenches to locate footings that were not visible on the surface. His mason, after training from the ministry, undertook limited repair of the more accessible stonework. After Mr Blackham's death in 1981 his work was continued by Mr R. Smith and Mr P. Mumford, this phase of work concluding in 1986.[10] Subsequently, vegetation recolonised the excavated areas obscuring exposed masonry, most of which remained unconsolidated, while the sides of the open excavation trenches eroded.
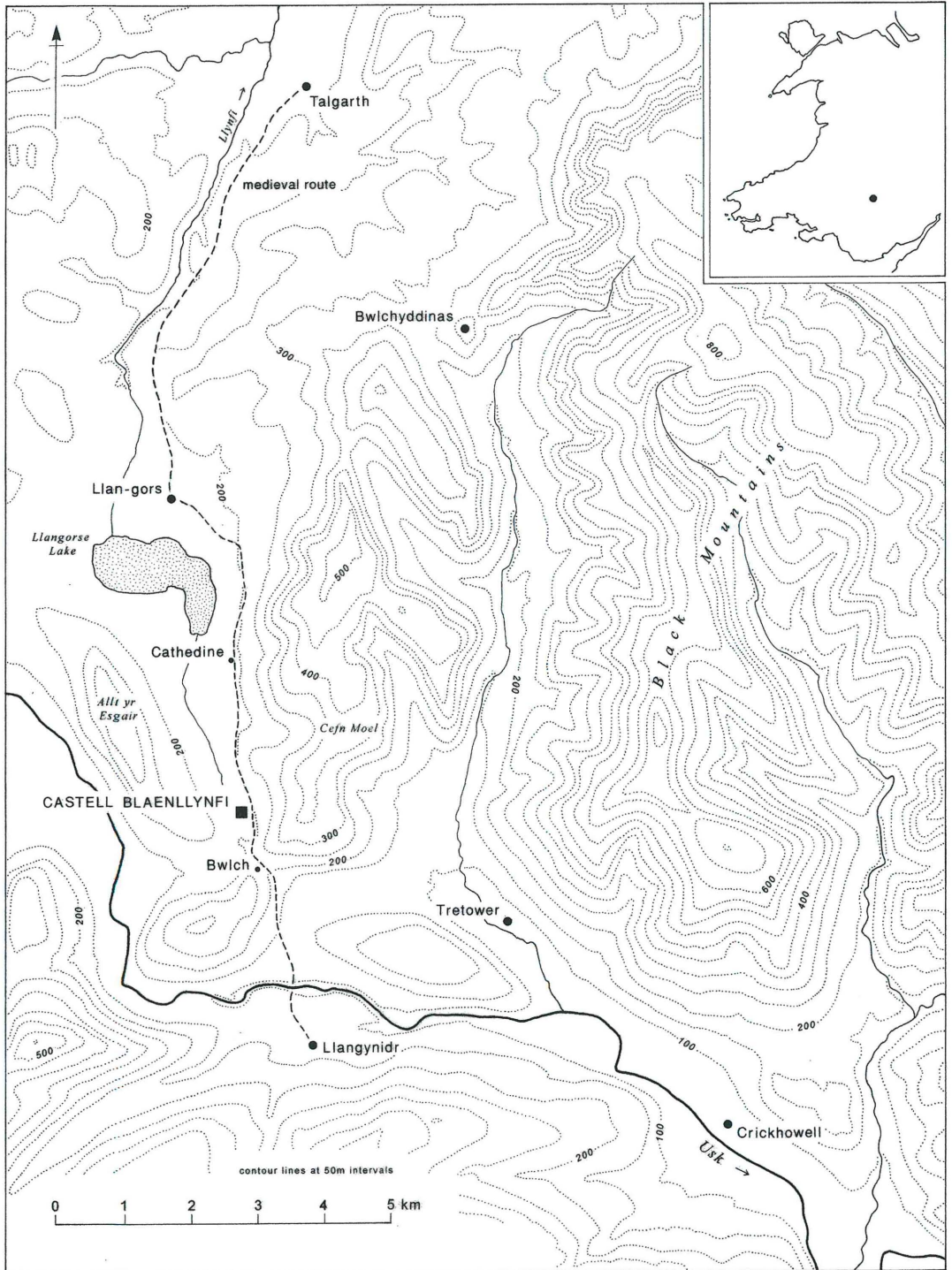
Fig. 1. Location of Castell Blaenllynfi, at the head of the valley of the river Llynfi.

As a result of growing concern about the state of the exposed masonry, a limited programme of conservation and restoration work was initiated by Cadw and the Brecon Beacons National Park in 1990. It commenced with detailed ground survey, undertaken by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, to record the defensive earthworks and features still visible in the excavated areas. This, and subsequent conservation of the standing masonry, has offered new insights about one of Brecknock's major yet lesser known ancient monuments.

THE LORDSHIP OF BLAENLLYNFI AND ITS ORGANISATION
By P. Courtney

Late in the eleventh century Brecknock was invaded by Bernard de Neufmarché who established his control over the region upon the death of the south Welsh prince, Rhys ap Tewdwr, near Brecon in 1093. The lordship with its caput at Brecon passed by marriage to Miles of Gloucester. At the death of Miles' son, Mahel, in 1175 the estate should have been divided between Mahel's three sisters, Margaret de Bohun, Bertha de Braose and Lucy, wife of Herbert fitz Herbert. However, Lucy and Herbert seem to have been largely excluded from the division of Miles' estate.[11] Herbert was only able to pursue his claim when he rose to be a sheriff under Richard I, and subsequently his son, Peter fitz Herbert, became a favourite of King John. The fitz Herberts' claim to a share of the Gloucester inheritance seems to have been settled legally by 1197, though evidence from Gloucestershire suggests that it may have taken up to a decade to resolve in practice.[12] A charter of 1203 or later in which William de Braose confirmed the gift of the churches of Llan-gors and Talgarth to Brecon Priory indicates that he still held Talgarth within his lordship of Brecon.[13]

It remains unclear why King John turned against William de Braose, but he was forced to give up his lands and flee to Ireland in 1208.[14] In September 1208, King John called upon his lords to assist Peter fitz Herbert who was under attack from the Welsh prince Gwenwynwyn.[15] In 1215 Welsh sources record that William's son, Giles de Braose, in alliance with the Welsh, took forcible possession of the castle of Blaenllynfi.[16] On the accession of King Henry III in 1216 the now isolated Reginald de Braose (brother of Giles) was forced to give fealty and deliver the castle back to Peter fitz Herbert.[17]

It thus appears that though Herbert fitz Herbert should have inherited a third of the Gloucester estate in 1175, he remained unable to enforce his claim for decades. The Brecon charter, cited above, demonstrates that Herbert, or his son Peter, only realised the family claim to a share of the Brecon lordship at some point between 1203 and 1208. It remains unclear if William de Braose eventually gave way to the judgment of the courts or whether Peter fitz Herbert had to wait until William's exile. In either case, the loss of the lordship to a loyal follower of John must have upset the balance of power in this area of the March, at least from 1208 onwards.

An early thirteenth-century date seems plausible for the construction of Castell Blaenllynfi (see below). The Herbert family's later financial problems may even have originated with the building of the castle, which must have proved a strain on their finances. Certainly, the fitz Herbert family suffered from the small size of their landed estate which eventually proved insufficient to support their role as marcher lords and the burdens placed upon them by the Crown. Asset stripping had become a major feature of the management of the lordship by the early fourteenth century. John fitz Reginald was forced in 1306 to grant a substantial interest in the manor and borough of Talgarth English to Rhys ap Hywel.[18] In the following year he took the even more drastic step of granting the rest of the lordship of Blaenllynfi to the Crown, in return for £1,000 and the promise of possession during his lifetime.[19]
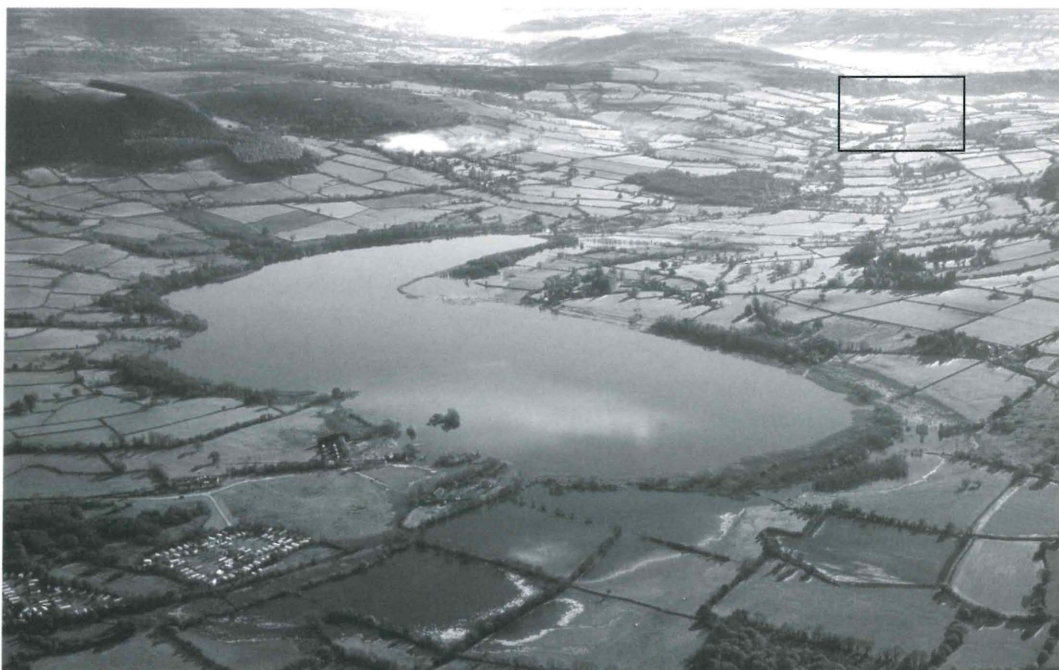
Fig. 2. Aerial view of the valley of the Llynfi from the north with Llangorse Lake in the foreground and the location of Castell Blaenllynf indicated towards the top right. *Photograph: Nigel Jones, © CPAT, 05-C-090.*

Rhys ap Hywel exchanged his Shropshire manor of Pontesbury with the Crown in return for the reversion of Talgarth English on John fitz Reginald's death in 1308–09,[20] and the manor and borough of Talgarth English, thenceforth, had a separate tenurial history from the rest of the lordship. In 1310, the Crown granted the remainder of the lordship of Blaenllynfi (i.e. minus Talgarth English) to Roger Mortimer of Chirk. It was held in succession after forfeitures by Hugh Despenser and Roger Mortimer IV, earl of March. In 1330 the Crown granted the castle and lordship to the temporary care of a custodian, the 'King's yeoman', Hugh Tyrel. A survey was also made of Mortimer's possessions including the castles of Blaenllynfi and Bwlchyddinas (Castell Dinas) (see Appendix 1).[21]

In 1333, Blaenllynfi, Bwlchyddinas and Newcastle Emlyn castles were granted to Gilbert Talbot, the chief justiciar of South Wales to hold for life without rent.[22] The state of repair of the three castles was surveyed by the Crown in 1337 (see Appendix 2).[23] In 1354 the castle and lordship of Blaenllynfi were granted in perpetuity to Roger Mortimer V, earl of March, and thence descended to Richard, duke of York in 1425.[24] The lordship was subsequently absorbed into the Crown estates in 1461, and later royal ministers' accounts give no signs of the castle being maintained.[25]

The lordship of Blaenllynfi included two large sub-manors held by knight's fee: Crickhowell was held by the Turberville family and Tretower by the Picards. The Herefordshire knights' fees of Brimshope and Tullinton, and briefly Dormington and Long, were also attached to Blaenllynfi in the thirteenth century. The lordship of Blaenllyfni had three demesne manors worked directly for the profit of the lords based at Blaenllynfi, and the two pre-Norman centres of Llan-gors and Talgarth. The latter two settlements show signs of planted English settlement and Talgarth had become a borough by the late thirteenth century. However, the lordship as a whole was dominated by the Welsh peasantry. In addition to Castell

Blaenllynfi there was a second stone castle at Bwlchyddinas which is first documented in 1233.[26] In the fourteenth century the latter appears to have acted as the administrative centre for the lordship's adjacent park and uplands.[27]

The 1281 extent for Blaenllynfi records a capital messuage and garden, 287 acres of demesne arable and 19 acres of meadow. Blaenllynfi also had a court for its Welsh tenants.[28] The court may have been held within the castle, but on the evidence of the extent there was almost certainly a manorial centre close to the castle with the agricultural buildings essential for a manor, including a barn, hay house and stock houses, and probably a steward's residence.

A Crown survey of the castle's resources in 1330 indicates that demesne farming was still carried on at Llan-gors and that a herd of 55 cows and 17 calves was attached to Bwlchyddinas.[29] There was, however, no indication of demesne sheep farming, though Brecon manor had nearly 1,000 sheep in 1373.[30] The 1330 survey suggests that direct demesne farming had been abandoned at Blaenllynfi. A 1330–31 account roll for Llan-gors suggests that oats were the main crop there with some peas and beans and hay.[31] No livestock are mentioned other than plough oxen which may suggest stock raising had been abandoned, although stock might occasionally be accounted for separately. However, the overall impression given is that demesne farming was contracting here as well.

The borough of Talgarth had a rent of assize in 1286 of £8 6s which would suggest about 166 burgages.[32] The decrease evident in the assize roll of 1310 is almost certainly the result of Rhys ap Hywel holding a substantial portion of the burgage rents and not of contraction.[33] After the granting away of Talgarth English to Rhys in 1310, the lordship of Blaenllynfi ceased to have a borough or market. The reference to Talgarth, Blaenllynfi and Bwlchyddinas as 'towns' in the 1307 Close Roll is perhaps purely formulaic as the 1310 extent demonstrates.[34]
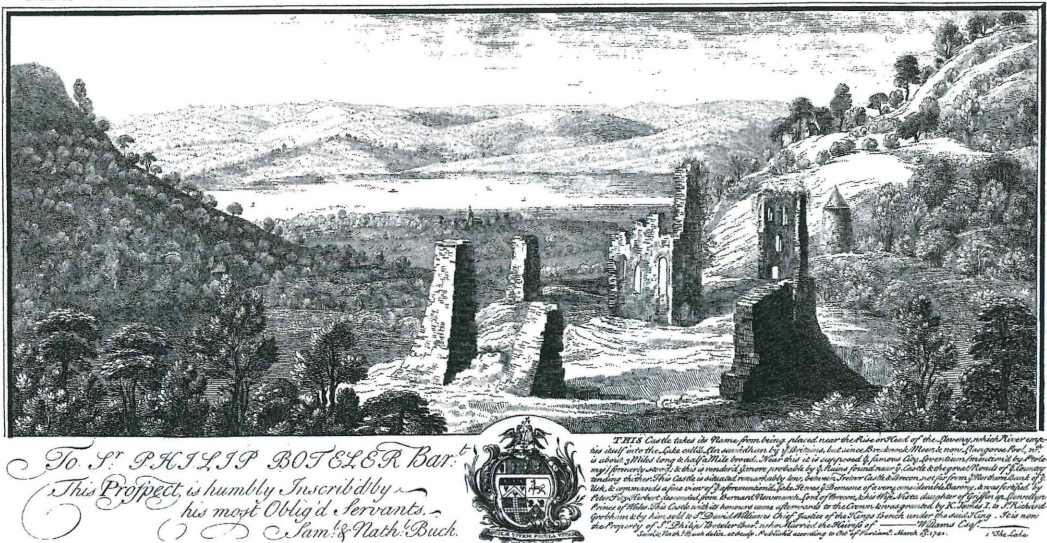

Fig. 3. A view of Castell Blaenllynfi prepared by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck in 1741 and published in 1774. *By permission of The National Library of Wales.*

An account roll of 1365–67 lists 75s assize rent due from 75 burgages in Blaenllynfi with further burgage rents due from Llan-gors and Michaelstone (6s 6d), Crickhowell (10s 6d) and Tretower (13s 6d). Allowance was also made to the reeve for his own burgage and for one unlocated burgage in decay, as well as for 29 burgages in decay in the vill of Blaenllynfi. These burgages were said to have been created from time to time by the earl of March from native land.[35] Leland's description of *c*. 1536–39 'and by [the castle] was a borow [borough] town now also in decay',[36] might be taken either as evidence of an urban focus or perhaps his own inability to comprehend a dispersed borough. Burgage tenure persisted into the early post-medieval period in both Blaenllynfi and Llan-gors.[37]

This looks like a deliberate attempt to create a borough by either Roger Mortimer IV in 1326–30 or more likely by Roger Mortimer V on obtaining the lordship in 1354. It seems likely that a market was also created within the lordship, though this is by no means certain. There is no firm documentation for its existence, but this might be merely a refection of the paucity and abbreviated nature of the late medieval sources. Certainly, the castle would be a logical choice for the siting of such a market. As the burgages were created from existing tenures the borough may or may not have had a physical focus near the castle. However, burgess tenure does not necessarily imply the social and economic characteristics of a town or even a nucleation. In the lordship of the Three Castles in Monmouthshire, burgage tenure was widespread throughout the three manors of the lordship, though only Grosmont has a good claim for urban status.[38]

The documented history of the castle

As noted above the first documentary reference to Castell Blaenllynfi is in 1215, and an early thirteenth-century date seems plausible for the stone castle on architectural grounds, drawing on parallels with Usk Castle in Monmouthshire.[39] It may thus have been built by Peter fitz Herbert, or just possibly his father,

Fig. 4. Watercolour of Castell Blaenllynfi in 1790 by John 'Warwick' Smith.
By permission of The National Library of Wales.

Fig. 5. Etching of Castell Blaenllynfi from a sketch by Sir Richard Colt Hoare in 1805, from Theophilus Jones' *A History of the County of Brecknock* (vol. 1, 1805). *By permission of The National Library of Wales.*

when the lordship was acquired in the years between1203 and 1215. Certainly, the marriage portion of Sybil, daughter of Bernard de Neufmarché, on her marriage in 1121, was described as the manor of Talgarth, castle of Hay and the forest of Ystradyw. These territories presumably corresponded to the later lordships of Hay and Blaenllynfi, but there is no mention of the latter.[40] It is also notable that the *caput* of Blaenllynfi was not located at either of the two known pre-Norman foci in the lordship, Talgarth and Llan-gors, though both were demesne manors and Talgarth a borough by 1286.[41]

In 1233 the castle briefly fell to Llywelyn the Great,[42] but late in that same year it had a royal garrison and by 1235 had been recovered by Peter fitz Herbert. Thereafter, Castell Blaenllynfi probably functioned as the main residence of fitz Herbert and his successors down to 1310, though the survey of 1337 reveals that during the lordship of Reynold fitz Peter (1248–86) the castle became severely dilapidated. It changed hands briefly around 1264 when Peter de Montfort seems to have captured it during the baronial war against Henry III, whom Reynold supported,[43] but it was in the latter's possession again by 1267. John fitz Reynold (1286–1310) also seems to have neglected Blaenllynfi, and after 1310, under the control of the Mortimers and Hugh Despenser, it was presumably manned by officials appointed by these lords, but was probably of minor importance to them.

An inventory of the castle was taken in 1330 (see Appendix 1), and seven years later, when it was held by Gilbert Talbot, though with the Crown retaining an interest, a survey of its state was made by the
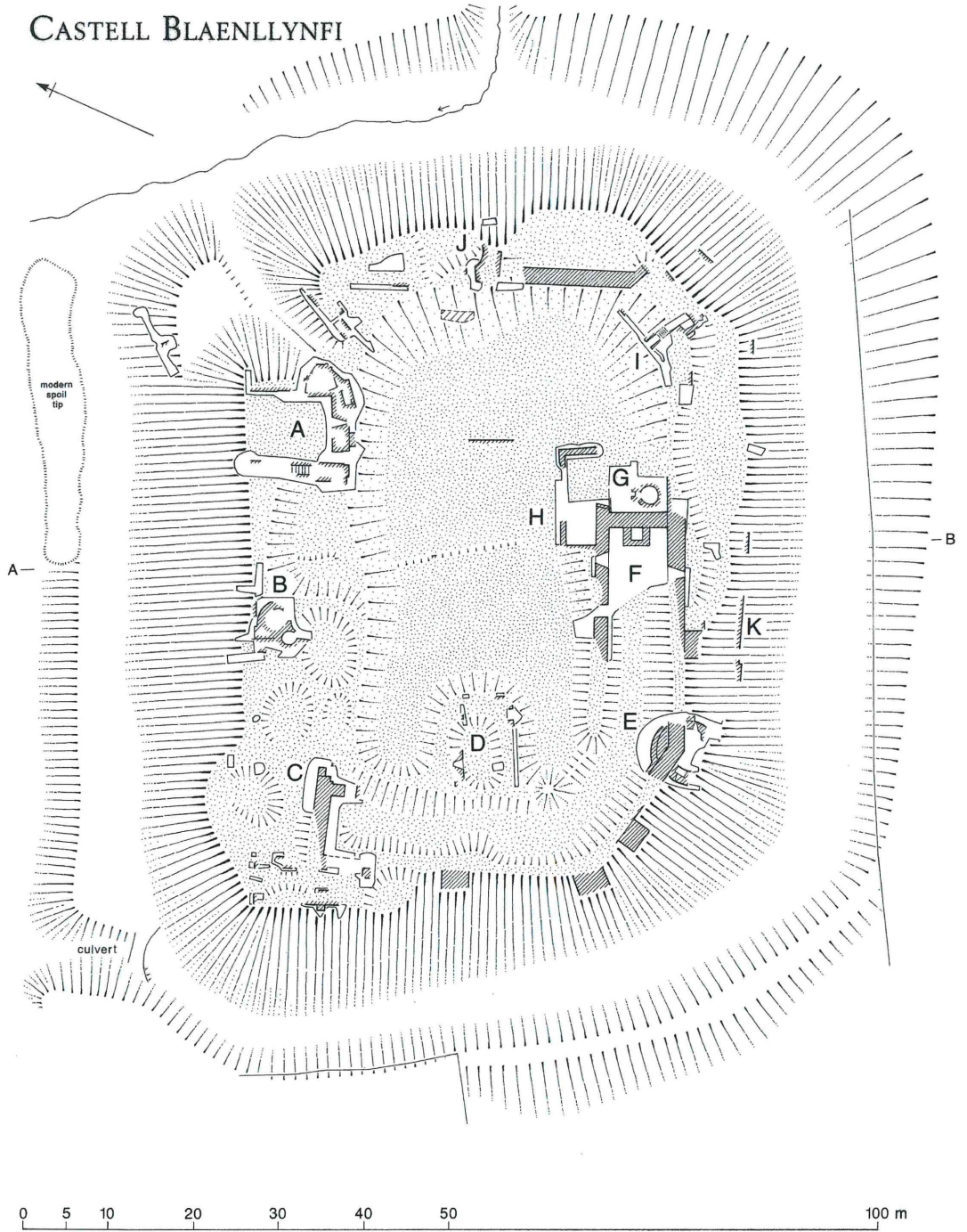
Fig. 6. Plan of Castell Blaenllynfi from a survey by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in 1990, indicating the areas (A–J) described in the text.

Crown (see Appendix 2). At that time it was maintained by a constable and a gatekeeper who were paid 4½d and 2d a day respectively, as well as a yearly robe.[44] Neither the inventory nor the survey imply a well furbished stronghold in the second quarter of the fourteenth century.

Richard Talbot was in possession from 1346 to 1354, but in that year he gave up his claim and Edward III granted the lordship to Roger Mortimer, second Earl of March. But as Walker pointed out[45] it is unlikely that the Mortimers' interest in the castle extended beyond collecting their rents, so that its descent into ruin continued unchecked.

The castles of Bwlchyddinas, Crickhowell and Tretower were ordered in 1403 to be provisioned against the Welsh uprising of Owain Glyndŵr; how significant the absence of Blaenllynfi from this record is remains unclear.[46] Possibly it was already being allowed to decay. Yet in 1433, a court of Richard, Duke of York held at Blaenllynfi heard that Grimbald Pauncefoot, lord of the knight's fee of Crickhowell, had failed to guard and repair the turret of Blaenllynfi castle known as *Grimbaldestower*.[47] This was no doubt the same as the *Turbervylestour* noted in the 1337 survey, being named after the Turbervilles, predecessors of the Pauncefoots as lords of Crickhowell. Presumably, the Picards of Tretower manor were likewise responsible for repairing *Pichardestour* which was also recorded in the survey. The two sub-lordships almost certainly owed castle guard at Blaenllynfi. *Jeholestour*, it has been suggested, may derive from the name Giles, possibly referring to Giles de Braose who, as noted above, captured the castle in 1215, but the origin of the name *Nurse's Tower*, which also appears in the 1337 survey, is uncertain.[48] It seems unlikely that even this effort at maintenance was maintained once the castle became Crown property in 1461, and Leland's comments in the late 1530s reflect the demise of the castle.

THE CASTLE REMAINS
By R. J. Silvester

The large, near-rectangular earthwork on which the stone castle rests has overall measurements of 120m south-west/north-east by 85m north-west/south-east and a surface area of just about 0.4 hectare or one acre (Fig. 6). It is not simply a platform carved from a natural spur and, while King saw it as utilising a slight natural knoll,[49] the profile (Fig. 7) reveals that the interior of the earthwork has been raised above the natural ground level, with material thrown up from the encircling ditch. There is a raised rim to the earthwork and from this the ground surface drops, usually gently, into the interior. Intermittent in its
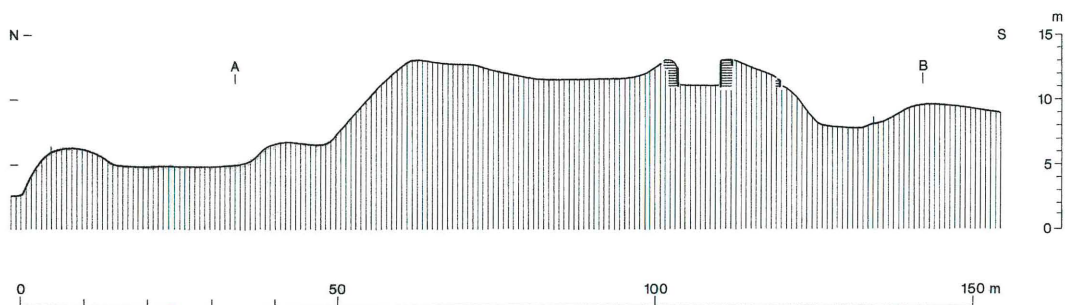

Fig. 7. Profile across the mound of Castell Blaenllynfi (location shown on Fig. 6).

appearance, this rim is not likely to be an original feature but rather the accumulation of debris and other material within and over the foundations and lower walls of the buildings that lay around the perimeter.

Externally, the earthwork defences present a steep but hardly formidable obstacle, the bank dropping down to a broad and now flat-bottomed ditch which runs around the castle on all but the north-west side. This ditch is around 23m wide at the rim and over 7m wide at its base on the south, and it has broadly comparable dimensions on adjacent sides. On the north-west the present height of the earthwork is in excess of 6m at its rim and 5m to the level of the interior. Based on the existing angles of declination of the ditch sides, there could be up to 2m of fill in the ditch, though in all likelihood there is probably rather less. Today, a streamlet breaks through the outer slope of the ditch and trickles along the north-eastern edge creating a boggy base to the ditch, but through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century it ran along the south-eastern side and then into a large pool lying on the north-western side of the castle earthworks which was classed as a 'moat' on early Ordnance Survey maps. Indeed, it was this ditch and the fact that it intercepted two small streams that Cathcart King saw as fundamental to the siting of the castle in this low-lying location.[50] A stone-faced culvert, below the west angle of the castle, runs beneath a narrow bank, and reveals that the water flowed around and on to the north-west side of the earthwork through a spillway between steep-sided slopes. Later maps testify to the gradual shrinkage of this pool and it has now dried up.

An outer bank is apparent beyond the south-western ditch. At the south end it is fairly regular in form, but then deteriorates into a series of irregular dumps linked by more regularly profiled stretches, and is presumably a result of ditch cleaning operations. In the adjacent pasture field further to the north-west there are only slight traces of the outer bank continuing.

Built of sandstone rubble, relatively little remains of the castle structure that was raised on the earthwork. The interior is dominated by a single straight stretch of curtain wall, nearly 13m long, fractionally under 2m thick and about 7m high, on the north-east edge of the mound. It is largely featureless, although parts of the wall-walk were identified during recent conservation work. Its external facing has been robbed to a height of *c.* 1.5–2m, depriving the wall of its batter. Internally, the facing has been removed almost to the wall top.

Elsewhere around the perimeter there are four free-standing buttresses, one each on the south-east and south-west sides, and two close together at the south corner. All are between 3.2 and 3.8m long and *c.* 2.5m thick, and in height are between 3.5 and 5m. Cathcart King believed that these buttresses together with the stretch of curtain wall had been constructed with properly cemented masonry, which explained their survival.[51] Moreover, he adduced that, because of their slanting backs, the wall that the buttresses had supported was in a poor condition when they were constructed. The inner faces of these buttresses, particularly those at the south corner, have been extensively robbed. Externally, the facing stones on the second buttress from the east have not been robbed out and putlog holes are still visible.

Before Mr Blackham commenced his operations these were the main portions of surviving stonework, but it is likely, too, that some wall stubs projected through the vegetation. Cathcart King was mute on this point but Richard Kay who visited the site in 1954, and whose manuscript notes and sketches[52] constitute the fullest record of the site prior to its excavation, commented on the footings of buildings along the south-west side, the foundations of what he took to be the great hall on the south-east, and the extremely scanty remains of angle towers at the east and west corners.

On the south-east side of the castle, half-way down the outer slope of the mound (i.e. more than 2 metres below the crest), at least five short stretches of walling are visible (see Fig. 6; k). Some of these may have been revealed by trenching, but others have probably always been visible. They appear no more than a few centimetres high and could conceivably reflect an earlier phase of the defences, though one near the south corner appears to be lower down the slope than the others.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE EXCAVATED AREAS

It is impossible to determine how many of the walls exposed during the excavations were visible prior to the start of the work. As Kay indicated there were certainly some visible foundations and most if not all of these were further cleared by Mr Blackham and his colleagues. The site drawings include a measured plan of the castle (though it incorporates speculative elements and survives in different versions), ground plans of a number of the trenches, and some sections, as for instance with the kiln, ovens and occasionally of the deposits butting up against specific walls. Most of these resulted from excavations conducted after Mr Blackham's death. Neither the surviving records nor the nature of the excavations permit a conventional archaeological report to be written. The text which follows is an assessment of each excavation area based upon what is visible and what can be gleaned from the site archive; for descriptive purposes these have been called Areas A–J, and are shown on Figure 6. Minor trenches and sondages, apparently devoid of stonework, are depicted on the plan but are not referred to in the text.

Area A

Although not confirmed by excavations in 1986, this area should lie close to the original castle entrance (see below). The main feature is a building, seemingly lying at right-angles to the curtain wall and probably abutting or built into it, though this was not established in the excavations. Its south-east wall has a splayed window embrasure and a doorway with threshold slabs, and the masonry as exposed stands to a height of nearly 2m. The south-west wall, of which only the external facing stones are revealed, contains an internal flight of five steps which have been blocked at the bottom with well constructed, dry-stone masonry. Other wall faces exposed during the excavation bear little obvious relation to this building. There is a wall with a recess, 'floored' at two different levels. The wall turns back on itself in a series of angular alignments, one of these probably parallel to the presumed entrance approach, angled through the earthwork. On the floor of the recess was a thick layer of coal fragments and what was described as slaked lime, with a few sherds of post-medieval pottery. The significance of this material was not determined, but the excavators thought it might be associated with the ovens in Area B. Remnants of an arch showing as voussoirs at a high level in a trench to the north of the polygonal structure cannot be satisfactorily accommodated in any general interpretation of the exposed remains.

On the evidence available it is unclear whether the recessed wall and the building itself are elements of the same phase. The latter may be an entrance tower, the recess finding parallels in other castle entrances.[53] There is, however, no equivalent structure on the east side of this presumed entrance.

A trench excavated lower down the slope to the north revealed only masonry fragments.

Area B

The most conspicuous features in this area, examined in 1982, are two contiguous ovens, almost certainly in contemporary use, though not necessary primary in the occupation of the castle. The larger, more northerly of the two, with an internal diameter of about 2.9m and an opening of 1m, has slumped badly, probably since excavation, and the line of its wall is distinguishable only sporadically. The smaller oven with an internal diameter of 1.75m and an opening of 0.7m, is better preserved and appears to be set into a wall, in contrast to its larger counterpart which was set in its own housing, though only a short distance from the curtain wall. Both ovens had layers of baked clay and charcoal over their laid sandstone slab floors, and each appears to have had a domed superstructure created by corbelling sandstone blocks, the ovens standing to a height of around 0.8m. A rotary quern fragment lies on top of the rubble. A short stretch of wall-face to the north of the larger oven is probably the inner face of the curtain wall. Post-

medieval pottery was noted in the rubble above the floor of the larger oven and also some small lumps of coal, but the fill between the oven and the curtain wall contained only medieval potsherds including fragments of a Kingston Ware jug.

South-west of the ovens are several earthwork hollows, sizeable enough to have been depicted on the large-scale Ordnance Survey map. Their origin is unclear; they could result from stone robbing but the banks that separate them might mask stone walls. Furthermore, there is a more continuous bank that probably represents the wall line of the tower shown on the Bucks' print (Fig. 3).

Area C

The standing remains of a building dominate this area at the west angle of the castle, and the excavator initially believed that this might have formed the main entrance. The north wall is clearly visible, and stood to a height of 2.05m after excavation, with foundations reaching a depth of 0.7m. The small amount of pottery from the loamy deposit sealing the foundation trench was primarily medieval, but there was also a single sherd of seventeenth- or eighteenth-century earthenware. The structure had a return wall on the east, interrupted by what may have been a doorway. The edge of the west wall is detectable, although the inner facing has been largely robbed out. However, there are uncertainties about the thickness of the south-west wall, particularly where the remnants of a turned arch appear to have a wall or buttress backing against it. It has been suggested that this might be an internal arch to a recess or perhaps a blocked postern. A late thirteenth-century bull-nose moulding lies on the ground surface within this building. A possible return to the wall on the south-east side can be discerned as a slight ridge.

The uniformity of the earthwork circuit is broken at this west corner, the crest pushed outwards, implying a projecting tower or possibly the line of an earlier circuit or even a gateway. A trench dug to test the last of these hypotheses revealed up to 2m of deposits but nothing to confirm an entrance at this point. Several other small trenches exposed wall faces, although it is now impossible to determine a coherent pattern to them; there was at least one window jamb or an arrow slit. The excavators believed there had been a rectangular tower or room projecting from the curtain wall here which was entered through the blocked doorway mentioned above, but this remains unproven.

Area D

This building inside the line of the south-west curtain wall is represented primarily by earthworks, but limited excavations in 1985 revealed part of a wall with a doorway and, in the opposite wall on the north-west, a splayed, window embrasure.

Area E

This is one of the more interesting areas examined for two or even three phases of construction are indicated (Fig. 8). Earliest, perhaps from the beginning of the thirteenth century, are the remnants of a tower, almost certainly circular with an overall diameter of approximately 7.5m, although the front wall is not visible, implying either collapse or demolition, perhaps in the Middle Ages. However, the excavation records, complete with measurements, suggest that some foundations may have been located. Running in from the west is a wall that not only abuts the tower but, as a 'ring' of masonry, also encases it; this early curtain wall then runs off to the north-east. The tower had been superseded by a later curtain wall which retained the earlier change of alignment, but was built over the tower wall. The disappearance of the front of the round tower and the refurbishment of the curtain walls implies that the tower may have collapsed or been destroyed during enemy action, and that whatever remained was largely cleared away when the defences were refurbished.
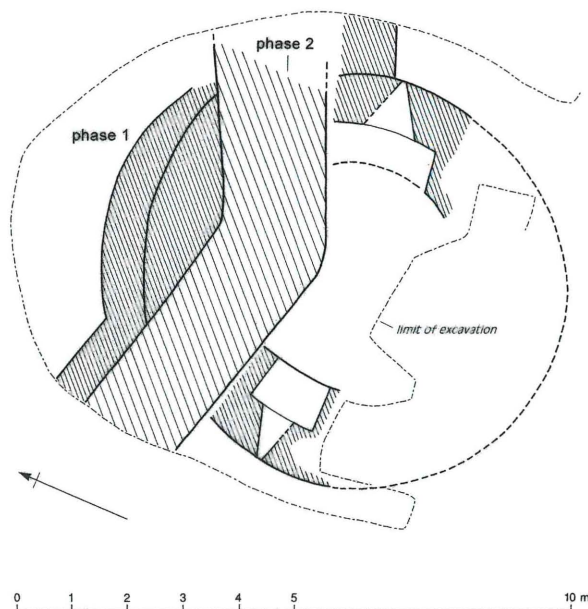
Fig. 8. Plan of Castell Blaenllynfi Area E, showing base of
a round tower overlain by the later curtain wall.

This tower contained two splayed, window embrasures, both set within wall recesses; that on the west produced sherds of an early to mid thirteenth-century Worcester jug from the base of the recess.

In the castle interior adjacent to the tower is a low, unexcavated platform apparently abutting first the curve of the early tower and then the later curtain wall. Its function and indeed its relationship to the other features is uncertain; it appears to be later, but in the absence of excavation, this remains uncertain.

Finally, a slate plaque commemorating Mr Blackham's contribution to the excavation of the castle has been set on top of the later wall.

Area F
A large building, at least 16m long internally, utilises the curtain wall on the south-east. In the long north-west wall are a doorway with quarter-round jambs on one side and squared jambs on the other, and a splayed window embrasure, its lower half blocked. A further window has been revealed in the (external) south-east side but with one splayed side robbed out. A small drain at floor level has been exposed in the east corner, and a curious rectangular structure abuts the north-east wall, its function unknown. Kay and perhaps others, saw the building as the main hall, and nothing in the excavated evidence militates against this, though what can now be seen was presumably a basement or undercroft. However, against this interpretation is its unusual location on the south side of the castle: to introduce light from the south, the main hall was normally on the north side, which seems to be a fairly consistent feature in Welsh castles.[54]

Area G
Contiguous with Area F, this feature was the next room in a range along the inside of the curtain wall. A window embrasure on the north-west wall has been modified, stone infilling reducing its width by c. 0.35m, whilst retaining the splay, and continuing its function as a window even though it appears to
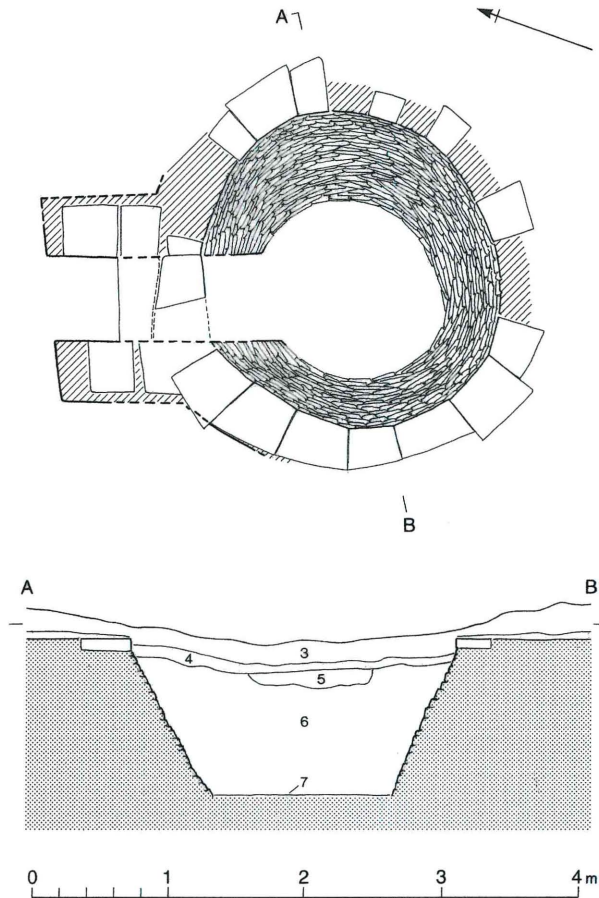
Fig. 9. Plan and section of possible medieval
malting kiln excavated in Area G.

descend to floor level. The original splay retains traces of the springing of its arched recess. There are also traces of earlier foundations in the west corner of this room beneath the window, suggesting alterations over the years, and indeed the width of the party wall shared with the building in Area F appears to have been increased at some point.

The main feature of Area G, examined in 1980–81, was a circular kiln built of dry-stone masonry, and was one of the few features to have both a measured ground plan and scaled section drawing (Fig. 9). It had a maximum diameter of 2.4m and tapered to 1.26m diameter at the base where its floor (7) consisted of clean clay, 1.14m below an adjacent floor layer. The flue, leading off to the north-west, was about 0.6m wide, retained some capstones still in position, though others had collapsed. Three layers of fill were distinguished within the kiln which the excavators considered to represent deliberate backfilling below a layer of overburden (3). Most of the fill consisted of an undifferentiated layer of rubble and earth (6); this was overlain by two thinner deposits (4 and 5) which produced a small amount of medieval coarse pottery and a single jug sherd of thirteenth-century date, as well as a flint scraper which has since been

mislaid. It has been suggested that this could have been a malting kiln belonging to a brewhouse contemporary with the original activity in the castle,[55] though its relationship to the room in which it lies and indeed its date cannot be securely determined from the excavated evidence.

Area H

A smaller room with narrower walls abuts the north walls of the building or buildings in Areas F and G. The foundations alone survive, and these are intermittent.

Area I

The remains of a rectangular tower straddle the line of the curtain wall and abut its sole surviving stretch. A recess in its south-west wall has been cleared, as have an ascending flight of steps. The tower's outline is incomplete and uncertainties remain about the alignment of its front wall, its chronological relationship to the curtain wall, and indeed its size. The recess in the south-west wall might mark a flanking loop to enfilade the outer face of the curtain wall.

The curtain wall to the north-east of the tower shows changes in the mortar. The lowest levels have an earthy mortar which is replaced higher up by good lime mortar, probably indicative of the rebuilding of the upper portion of the curtain wall on the older base.

Area J

The archaeology of this area is confused. There are traces of a circular room with its inner entrance indicated by a single jamb. It appears to be largely of dry-stone walling, yet traces of mortar appear inside. To the south-east a short, almost straight, length of wall must form the outer face of this feature, but it is not at right-angles to the curtain wall to the south which clearly abuts it. Lower down the inner slope of the earthwork, a large chunk of collapsed masonry, up to 3.5m long, lies on the surface. The most likely explanation is that there was a three-quarter round tower here which the later curtain wall ran up to.

Area K

The excavators detected what they considered to be a 'mantlet' wall or chemise around the south-east side of the castle about 6m outside the main curtain wall, protecting the most vulnerable south-east side of the castle. This apparently extended from the circular tower in Area E and ran for the full length of the south-east flank, before running parallel to the north-east side and terminating at or near the entrance where a short section of the wall was reputedly detected before 1983. Intermittent traces of this feature, barely rising above the ground surface, were surveyed on the south-east flank of the earthwork in 1990 (Fig. 6), but no convincing evidence was noted on the north-east and its presence here must be seen as speculative. Similar walls have been identified at Penrice (Glam.)[56] and, from building records, around the Edwardian keep at Builth Wells (Breckn.),[57] and more significantly in this context at Bwlchyddinas, where there were manlets around the free-standing tower and on either side of the main entrance.[58]

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FINDS
By Paul Courtney

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Few of the finds recovered during excavation between the 1960s and 1980s are closely stratified and some are unprovenanced. The following report therefore simply describes and quantifies the material by date and category for the sake of the general light they may throw on the different phases of occupation. None of the finds is illustrated. A finds concordance has been prepared, and this has been lodged with the site archive.

The medieval pottery represents mostly typical regional products of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, utilising clays derived from Old Red Sandstone. It bears very close similarities to the material excavated at nearby Talgarth.[59] Of particular interest are the remains of two highly decorated thirteenth-century jugs, one a Worcester jug, the other a Kingston Ware jug from Surrey. Worcester jugs appear in small quantities at Hereford, Chepstow and Monmouth.[60] The Kingston Ware jug is a rarer find and perhaps arrived in baggage rather than by trade. Together, the jugs suggest a date of around the middle of the thirteenth century for their manufacture and use.

The post-medieval assemblage dates largely to the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and is typical of the region, though a lack of later wares may suggest selection. There are no recognisable fifteenth- or sixteenth-century products such as Malvernian oxidized or Cistercian-type wares in the excavated assemblage.

Medieval pottery

A. Kingston Ware (Surrey White ware) baluster jug. Wheel-thrown, white ware; sandy fabric with very fine mica. Splashed and mottled green-glaze with added copper; highly decorated with applied same-colour strips, pellets and ring-and-dot stamps. Mid thirteenth-century.[61] Eighteen sherds from one vessel. Area B.

B. Worcester jug. Green-glazed wheel-thrown jug with bridge spout. Smooth, fine-sandy reduced fabric with some oxidation on surface. Applied same-colour vertical strips and brown colouring (iron mineral) over vertical applied same-colour strips. Thirteenth-century, and probably from first half of the century when the distribution was at its widest. Manufactured in the Worcester area.[62] Twelve sherds from one vessel. Area E.

C. Herefordshire-type jugs. Reduced or oxidised glazed jugs with sandy-micaceous fabrics from Old Red Sandstone-derived clays. Clwyd-Powys medieval ceramic type series type MC; a source in west Herefordshire, north Monmouthshire or Brecknock. Probably thirteenth/fourteenth century. 36 sherds.[63]

D. Herefordshire-type cooking pots. Sandy micaceous reduced cooking pots in Malvern–influenced forms (cylindrical with inturned rims); external sooting common. Dating and possible sources as Herefordshire-type jugs. 22 sherds.

Medieval roof furniture

E. Ceramic roof finial. A single fragment from the shaft and junction of the globe on a globular finial of south-east Welsh/Herefordshire type was recovered from the north-east tower (Area A). The fabric is mostly oxidized red with fine quartz and muscovite mica from an Old Red Sandstone source (as with the Herefordshire pottery types above). The finial has a patchy mottled green glaze on the exterior with vertical, thumbed striations as decoration. Globular finials were decorative features which slotted into specially made ridge tiles. Comparable examples from Usk and Hereford.[64] This find implies the use of ceramic ridge tiles, though none was found in the excavated assemblage. One sherd.

Post-medieval pottery

F. North Devon gravel-tempered ware. Seventeenth or early eighteenth-century. Fifteen sherds.

G. Lead-glazed red earthenware of seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century date. Typical of north Monmouthshire and west Herefordshire kilns. Sixty-nine sherds.

H. Bristol/Staffordshire Yellow Slip Ware, *c.* 1680–1760. Seven sherds.

I. Mottled Ware tankards, *c.* 1680–1760. Probably Staffordshire or Bristol. Three sherds.

J.   Press-moulded dishes with slipped decoration on yellow glaze. Late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century. Staffordshire and other Coal Measures sources. Two sherds.

K.   Tin-glazed earthenware. Seventeenth- to mid eighteenth-century. Two sherds.

L.   Blackware. Black-glazed redware drinking vessels. Seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century. A variant of the Lead-glazed red earthenware. Four sherds.

M.   Westerwald stoneware. Grey stoneware with cobalt blue decoration. Late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century. Rhineland. Two sherds.

N.   Pearlware. Industrial whiteware with blue tinge. Late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century. One sherd.

O.   Developed whiteware, nineteenth- or twentieth-century. Two sherds.

Metal artefacts

P.   Two cast pewter spoon handles of rounded spatula type, one with plain initial 'W' with simple scroll underneath. Eighteenth-century.[65] From the north-east tower.

Q.   Rectangular copper alloy shoe-buckle frame. Eighteenth-century. Abbitt type 1.[66] From the north-east tower.

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT
By Sian E. Rees

The recent programme of work at Blaenllynfi resulted from the recognition that the remains, after the termination of the excavations, required some management work to protect the upstanding masonry and the exposed wall footings. The castle is unusual in that it is a major masonry medieval castle in private ownership; the majority of such sites are owned or managed by the state or by a local authority. Its importance, however, was recognised almost from the start of protective legislation in the UK by its statutory protection as a monument of national importance as early as 1937.[67]

The castle was unusual, also, in the devotion of its owner in the 1960s, the late Mr J. Anstie Blackham, who equipped himself with the surveying, excavation and conservation skills sufficient to obtain permission from the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works in 1969 to undertake excavation of upper courses of buried walling, with the condition that all excavated areas were surveyed, and then either conserved or backfilled, and that excavations were kept well above floor or occupation levels. Excavations continued until 1986, Mr Anstie Blackham being joined by two friends, Mr R. Smith and Mr P. Mumford, in 1977. Some exposed masonry was conserved by Mr Blackham's mason after training with specialist masons (at Brecon Gaer Roman fort) and grant aid from the Department of the Environment (the predecessor of Cadw) and was left open for display, while other trenches were backfilled for protection.

The continuing care of any site after excavation is difficult, but on those with a combination of high upstanding masonry in poor condition, an immediate environment of marshy woodland and stretches of excavated walling, it is especially challenging. By 1990 the condition of the castle was giving rise to some concern. The standing masonry, never having received conservation treatment, was in poor condition, and suffered from periodic falls of stone. Unstable, over-mature sycamores in the interior of the castle were threatened by wind throw, while sycamore regeneration, with ash and elder scrub, was colonising excavated areas, and the wall tops exposed during the excavations and the sides of the excavation trenches were weathering, despite the earlier consolidation.

Blaenllynfi, as a masonry castle with considerable potential for archaeological research, further excavation and visitor access, clearly merits assistance from the various conservation agencies with

responsibility for the management of the historic environment. In 1990 Cadw and the Brecon Beacons National Park commissioned a detailed ground survey from the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust to plot the excavated areas and their features and the defensive earthworks (Fig. 6), and urgent selective tree felling with the removal of ailing or over mature trees followed in April 1991.

A management plan was then compiled for the site by the National Park, which considered three main, inter-related issues—masonry conservation, vegetation control and public access with interpretation— and this formed the basis of a joint programme of conservation and study.

The primary cause for concern was the condition of the higher, standing masonry. The buttresses were constructed of the local sandstone which tends to split into small slabs suitable for building, but has a tendency to laminate and fracture with time. The original lime mortar had deteriorated and, especially in the wall core, the masonry was weak and subject to continuous stone loss. The conservation of the buttresses, undertaken between 1993 and 1995, comprised the re-pointing of their fine, battered outer faces with matching lime mortar and occasional replacement of fractured stone, especially around putlogs, while the rougher inner face, built originally against the curtain, required masonry consolidation and re-bedding.

The conservation of the main surviving stretch of curtain on the north-east in 1996 proved informative as the original wall-walk and associated steps at the south end were revealed during the work. On the northern end, the wall-walk slabs were covered with degraded but apparently coursed and mortared *in situ* masonry, suggesting that they may have been covered over and the wall raised later in the medieval period. Finally, in 1997, a small stretch of the south-western curtain wall and the footings of the early, round, mural tower were conserved (Area E), revealing the relationship between the two structures and the two splayed windows of the tower. The removal of a large tree stump from the outer wall of this tower revealed the complete loss of the original masonry and demonstrating the devastation caused presumably largely by the tree growth since the excavations when the footings were discovered.

Conservation of all the masonry exposed by the excavations was deemed to be impractical as much of the walling was visible only within trenches excavated below the level of the adjacent ground surfaces. The backfilling of trenches to ground level, leaving only a few courses of the previously conserved masonry visible, was agreed as the preferred option. This would allow the main excavated plan of the castle to be discerned, while the removal of surface irregularities would also permit stock to be reintroduced to the site for controlled grazing. This should assist in curbing weed growth and regeneration of woodland and it is hoped that the site will remain as a lightly wooded sycamore glade. In the autumn of 2005 the preparatory clearance of engulfing brambles and sycamore saplings was carried out by BTCV (formerly the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) under Cadw supervision. The earthwork stabilisation and the backfilling of the excavation trenches will be undertaken by the same agents in 2006. The owner has indicated that public access will be allowed once management works are complete. Narrow approach lanes and adjacent properties make the site unsuitable for wider promotion and an unobtrusive access arrangement with a stile and small interpretation panel will probably be most suitable. The castle should then take its rightful place among the accessible historic sites of Brecknock.

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DISCUSSION

By R. J. Silvester

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The castle and its landscape

Castell Blaenllynfi, the *caput* of a medieval lordship, was strategically sited to control access along what Cathcart King termed the 'thickly-fortified valley' of the Llynfi, yet its natural setting is not a defensive

one. Viewed from the north it dominated the head of the Llynfi valley, but for defence it had to rely solely on its own intrinsic strength.

Neither the visible remains nor the evidence unearthed by Mr Blackham provide anything close to a full picture of the stone castle that was constructed in the thirteenth century. The present ground plan can, however, be supplemented by the mid eighteenth-century drawing of Samuel and Nathaniel Buck. It is evident that the site has seen some changes in the intervening period, less perhaps than might be expected, but the Buck brothers did depict two structures which no longer appear to exist (Fig. 3). On the east flank of the earthwork, close to the north-east angle and the position of the gateway, they show the shattered remnants of a tower of at least three storeys. Displayed also on 'Warwick' Smith's watercolour (Fig. 4), this appears to be a part of the building in Area A, though it is difficult to correlate the orientation of the structure as drawn by the Bucks with the ground remains or indeed with Smith's watercolour. Towards the centre of the castle the Bucks also showed the ruin of a tall building with at least two walls seemingly standing to a greater height than any of the surviving parts of the curtain; a ground floor entrance and three tall windows lighting the first floor are shown, and there are traces of further window openings for a second floor. No trace of such a building now survives in the relatively featureless interior of the earthwork, and allowance should probably be made for the perspective adopted by the Bucks to create a balanced illustration; Smith's watercolour sketch, viewing the castle from the north-east—the Bucks show it from the south-east—hints at a masonry structure closer to the curtain. Colleagues of Mr Blackham speculated in archive notes that the building might be that against the south-west side of the earthwork (here Area D), but it is perhaps more likely that it lay towards the north-west side and could be reflected in the embanked feature south-west of the kilns in Area B (see Fig. 6) or even that in Area C. The excavation records also contain a schematic plan of the castle with a keep set at the centre of the castle; there is no information on how this plan was compiled and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, the influence of the Bucks' drawing might be assumed. However, though the position of this 'lost' building may be open to debate, the architectural detail could be accurate and seems to confirm the survival of another tower into the eighteenth century.

Mr Blackham initially believed that the original gateway to the castle was at the west angle, but his subsequent excavations revealed only a tower-like structure projecting beyond the anticipated course of the perimeter defence. In practice, the only feasible position for the entrance appears to have been at the north corner where a hollow-way reaches up to the interior of the earthwork and where the earthwork banks are splayed outwards. Here, too, a platform has been terraced into the outer slope, although this may not be an original feature. 'Warwick' Smith's drawing shows a deep cleft in the earthwork with surviving masonry rising above it and this is what the Bucks drew in greater detail. Kay considered the possibility of a fore-building or barbican here. Opposite this cutting the outer slope of the ditch has all but disappeared and, though there have been later modifications to the ground form in this area, this is also likely to reflect the approach to the castle.

Thus, the former appearance of the castle was of a rectangular curtain wall, at least two of its angles chamfered off to a polygonal form, with buildings set against the internal perimeter face, and the whole edifice raised on a ditched platform. Unusual as this design appears, there are broad parallels, though whether these imply anything more than the movement of ideas is doubtful. There are superficial similarities with the square masonry castle at Aberedw, 25 kilometres to the north in Radnorshire[68] and, at a considerably greater distance, the much larger structure of Sherborne Old Castle in Dorset built by Bishop Roger of Salisbury in the earlier twelfth century.[69] But the closest parallel is without doubt Usk Castle 33 kilometres to the south-east.

The second major phase of Usk Castle has been attributed to William Marshal the elder, lord of Chepstow, who transformed the earthwork castle with its Norman keep into a major stone castle between

1212 and his death in 1219.[70] Its layout was an irregular rectangle with a round keep, and a simple gateway next to the Norman keep and opposite Marshal's new round keep. There are several points of similarity with Blaenllynfi. Both occupy slightly elevated positions as a result of the construction of earthworks specifically designed to create platforms. Their sizes are remarkably similar—the approximate dimensions of Usk from curtain wall to curtain wall are 76 by 52 metres, for Blaenllynfi they are 75 by 54 metres. Usk has a simple gateway and there is nothing to indicate that its counterpart at Blaenllynfi was particularly elaborate. Both Usk and Blaenllynfi had round towers directly opposite their entrances. At Usk there is a profusion of half-round salient angle towers and the rectangular keep was later incorporated as a salient tower, while at Blaenllynfi both half-round and square salient towers are in evidence. On this evidence Usk is not precisely comparable, yet the builders of Blaenllynfi may well have attempted to emulate the works of William Marshal, one of the great magnates of the early thirteenth century. Comparisons with Usk might even signal the presence of an earlier earthwork castle at Blaenllynfi, and that at some point after fitz Herbert recovered the castle from the de Braose family in 1216 a complete stone enceinte was constructed, but it should be stressed that there is no substantive evidence for such a succession.

The subsequent architectural history of the castle is obscure. At least two constructional phases were revealed in the excavations, and others should probably be assumed. Cathcart King pointed to the properly cemented masonry of the surviving stretch of curtain wall and also the buttresses, and contrasted these with the clay-bonded masonry elsewhere.[71] Certainly, the buttresses can be treated as secondary features, but obvious too is the dramatic rebuild in Area E, and secondary activity can also be discerned in Area G and possibly in the stretches of walling visible well below the crest of the earthwork.

Blaenllynfi has few claims, so it appears, to be a well-built structure. Cathcart King noted the poor earthy mortar used for the first stone castle and the attempts to bolster the curtain wall with a series of heavy buttresses and there is, too, the abandonment of the round tower and a new length of the curtain wall raised over it, the decade after the 1337 survey being arguably an appropriate time for some of this activity.[72] There is nothing to suggest that the whole curtain wall was renewed: to do so would probably have required the demolition of the range of buildings on the inside of the curtain wall. But it is possible that the surviving stretch of curtain wall on the north-east, without any obvious buildings abutting against it, was rebuilt, for while the lowest courses seem to be set in the earthy mortar, thick and better lime mortar was used for much of the wall, perhaps indicating rebuilding on earlier foundations.

At this point we can return to the 1337 survey (Appendix 2). Spurgeon has suggested[73] that at Castell Blaenllynfi the survey followed an anti-clockwise circuit and that the five towers which can be identified on the ground can be matched with the five listed in the survey (Fig. 10). Assuming the first building to be described was adjacent to the entrance, the structure in Area A would equate with the five-storeyed *Jeholestour*, a keep-like building which can be paralleled elsewhere in south Wales in its position next to the entrance to the castle (cf. Ogmore and Coity in Glamorgan). The kitchen and hall with tower adjoining would then be equated with Area B and the square tower at the north-west corner (Area C), typically placing the hall on the sunny north side, although this does not help to locate the 'Knight's Chamber'. Perhaps, however, the tall, ruined building drawn by the Bucks fits here. The structure in Area D, aligned almost east to west and projecting into the castle courtyard would logically be the chapel, this position explaining why its comes at the end of the description rather than in the circuit. The *Turburvylestour* can then be associated with the round tower on the south (Area E). Following the anti-clockwise circuit the bakehouse and brewhouse (Areas G and H) would be followed by *Pichardestour* (Area I) and *Nurse's Tower* (Area J). At least two of these towers—*Turburvylestour* and *Pichardestour*—related to tenants of sub-manors of the lordship, at Crickhowell and Tretower respectively and, as was the situation at Swansea Castle, were no doubt used by the tenants when fulfilling feudal duties at
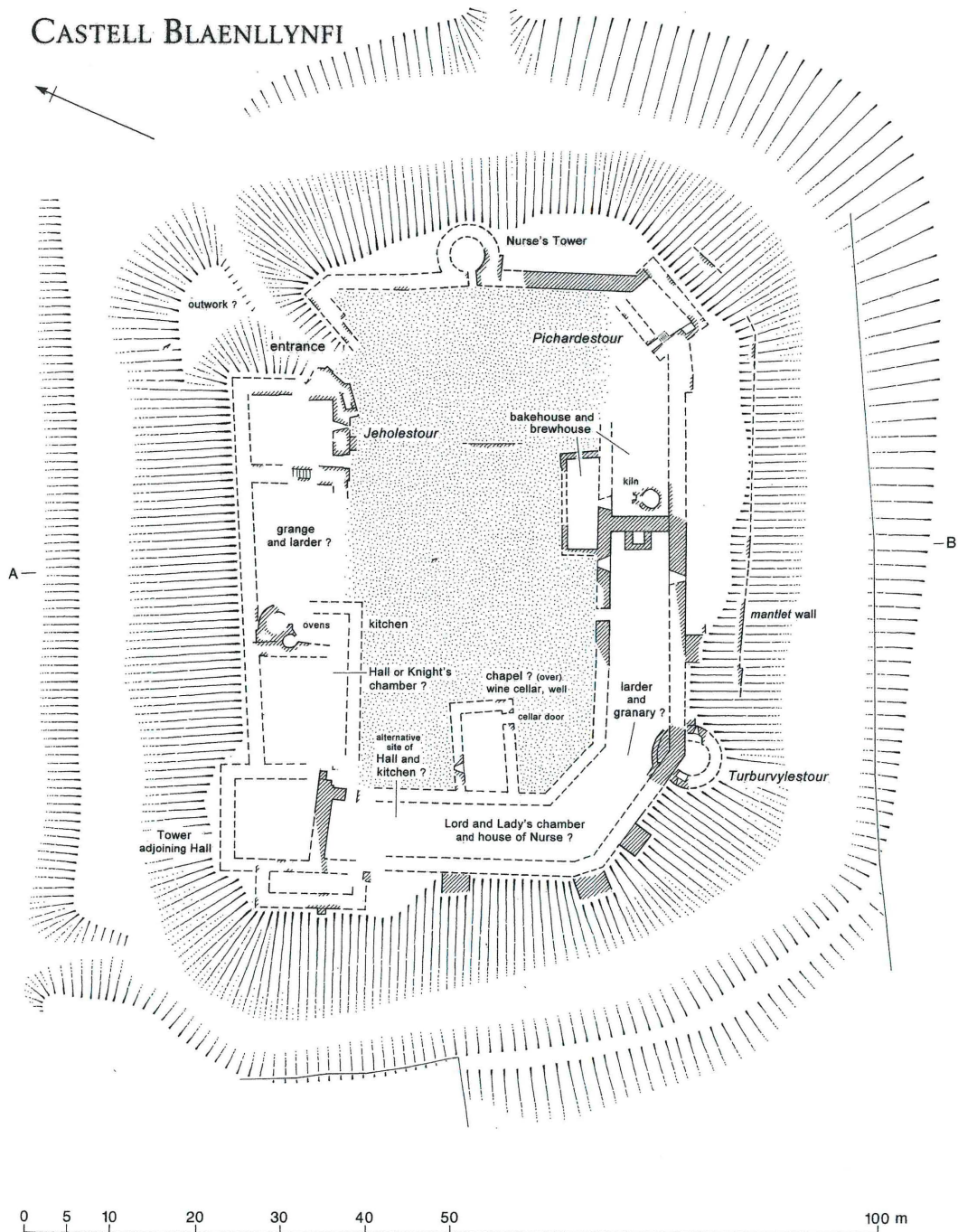
Fig. 10. Interpretative plan of Castell Blaenllynfi.

Blaenllynfi. Unlike the Bwlchyddinas survey there is no mention of a gateway at Castell Blaenllynfi in 1337, reinforcing the view that the entrance was little more than a simple arched entrance in the wall, as at Usk, and not requiring detailed reference in the survey.

No later use of the castle has been documented. Certainly there is nothing on any one of the three antiquarian drawings to suggest that the ruins were being used, other than as a convenient source of dressed stone. Both the ovens and the kiln might be seen as features contemporary with the medieval occupation of the castle, but the appearance of post-medieval pottery amongst the rubble of the larger oven and its inherent instability upon excavation might argue for a later date, as indeed Mr Blackham's colleagues had concluded in their unpublished writings. The castle ruins were clearly a source of stone in later centuries; facing stones have been removed and rubble too may have been carted away. The survival of the buttresses and a stretch of curtain wall may be more than fortuitous—the more resilient lime mortar will have handicapped the stone robbers.

The castle earthworks

The earthworks on the north-west side of Castell Blaenllynfi complicate the emerging picture of a defensive structure. A flat terrace or berm, some 5–6 metres wide fronts the castle platform and beyond this is a broad flat boggy area, well over 20 metres wide and now no more than 2 metres deep, quite different in appearance to the castle ditch (Fig. 11).[74] This must have functioned as a moat or pool. Part of its inner lip has been enveloped by spoil from the modern excavations, but in outline it is plainly visible on early Ordnance Survey maps, and the stream now meanders through it. In front of it is a broad bank, up to 1.5 metres high with a profile much steeper on the outside than on the inside, which runs the length of this moat and is formed of material dug from it. At both ends of the bank are detached mounds of similar height. The one at its south-west end is of irregular form, possibly little more than a landscaped spur projecting from the rising ground to the west, and sheared off from the main bank by a gully that effects the outflow of the streams that have run around the castle.

At the opposite end of the bank, in a private garden on the far side of the lane, is a second mound, again a little irregular in shape. Kay's belief that this originally formed the terminal of the linear bank, becoming detached only when the road was pushed through, seems altogether unlikely, and would not explain why the bank extended so far beyond what appears to be the edge of the pool, nor why the mound has a higher elevation. The Bucks' drawing (Fig. 3) shows a round structure with a conical roof perched on rising ground beyond the castle ditch and broadly in the right place for the second mound. An explanation is provided by Walter Davies who in his travels in 1802 described the sparse ruins of the castle, postulated Roman origins which can be safely ignored, but also recorded that 'on the north-eastern [side is] a circular pigeon house . . . a longitudinal section of which is still remaining', his description being accompanied by a sketch.[75]

The Bucks' engraving does not, however, assist in elucidating these earthworks on the north-west flank of the castle. It is not easy to see how these could have functioned within the defensive framework of the castle, nor how they could have enhanced its defensive capability; rather the opposite is true, in that the presence of the terrace, at least in its present form, would have weakened the defences on this side. Conceivably, a ditch formerly existed here and was deliberately filled in, but if so absolutely no trace of it remains. A more logical explanation is that the terrace was an integral feature from the beginning, and these earthworks were designed landscape features, the broad depression a functioning pool held back by a dam with platforms at either end, a view that Walter Davies espoused. Speculatively, they might have been related to gardens below the castle, and the large pool possibly used for fish, the water levels maintained by a sluice mechanism in the small dam for letting water into the spillway. There is an increasing body of evidence from Wales and beyond for the presence of contemporary gardens and
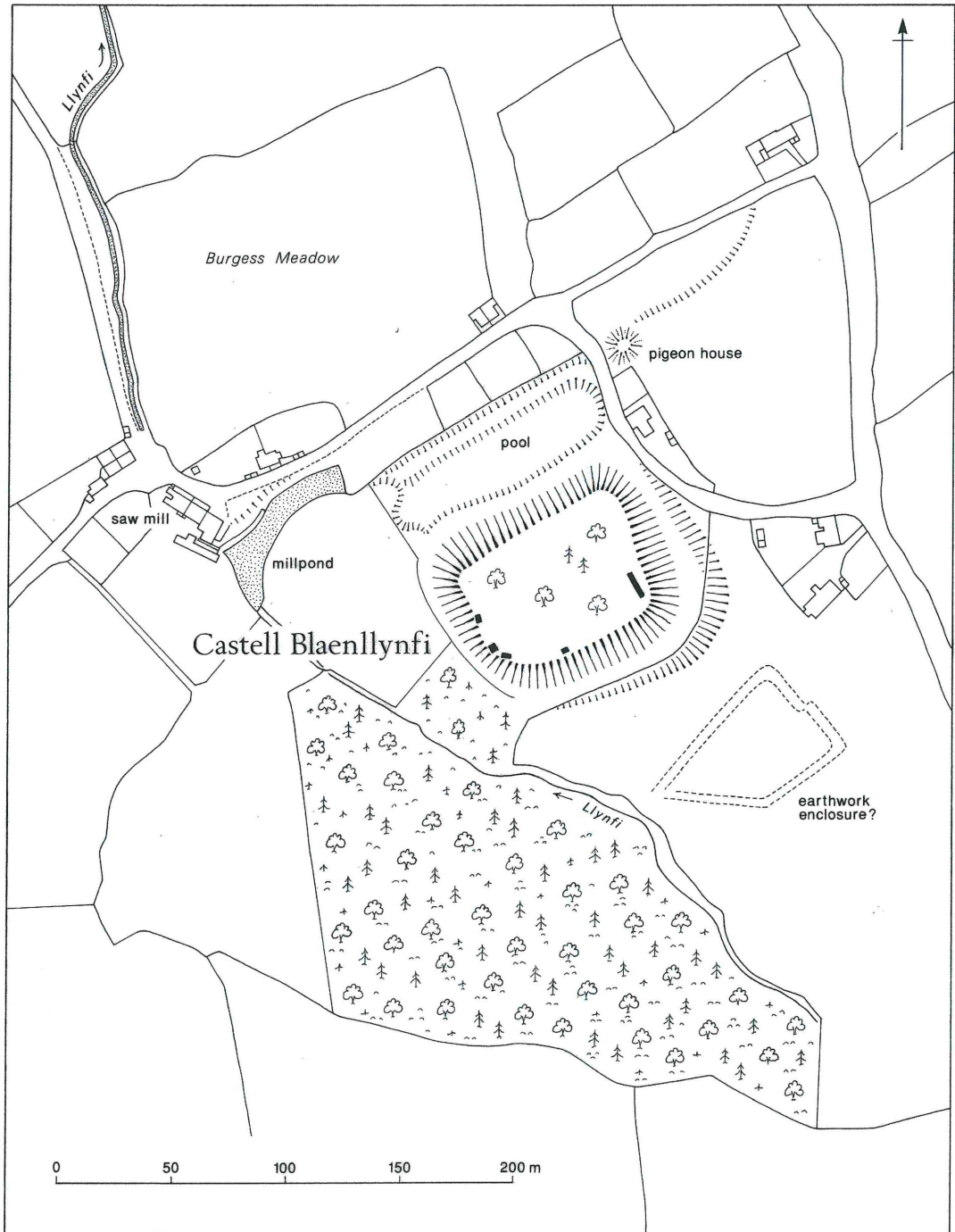
Fig. 11. Castell Blaenllynfi and its immediate environs.

fishponds with later medieval castles.[76] It is necessary only to go as far as Coity in Glamorgan where a similar feature was recognised[77] or Manorbier on the Pembrokeshire coast to find both a medieval dovecote and fishponds in close association with the castle there.[78]

The Llynfi rises a few hundred metres to the south of the site. It passes within 40 metres of the southern corner of the earthworks and in the last century served a sawmill below the castle before continuing on towards Llangorse Lake. There is an earthwork dam containing some stone and up to one metre high across the course of this fledgling watercourse near the southern corner of the castle. This may have served to regulate water running down the Llynfi towards the nineteenth-century sawmill, but its location implies an earlier origin and it may have diverted water into the castle ditch. Kay in the 1950s detected a masonry revetment around the external face of the ditch, though this is no longer visible, and also referred to a sluice at this point which can only have functioned as an inlet.

There are several 'park' names recorded in the mid nineteenth-century Tithe apportionment, upslope and south of the castle, and though it is not now possible to define the park enclosure it is perfectly reasonable to assume that there was a medieval deer park across the rising ground above the castle.

The medieval borough

The question of whether Blaenllynfi once had an associated nucleated medieval borough and described by Leland in the early sixteenth century has given rise to considerable speculation.[79] There is certainly little surviving evidence that one had ever existed in the vicinity of the castle, and as noted by Paul Courtney above, a reference to a 'town' at Blaenllynfi in the 1307 Close Roll is probably purely formulaic[80] though, as he also notes, an extent of 1281 implies that a manorial centre comprising a steward's residence and other buildings lay close by. The nearest present-day settlement is at Bwlch, about a kilometre to the south, but this can be shown to be wholly the creation of post-medieval enclosure on a common.[81]

However, it has been reported that the field to the east of the castle still displayed low earthworks including platforms and a track in the early 1980s which were identified then as the remains of a deserted settlement.[82] These were not examined or surveyed at the time and appear to have been largely obliterated during subsequent land improvement; faint earthwork traces are still visible, and aerial photographs, too, show anomalies though these are too amorphous to be interpreted. The Tithe survey of 1839 records the field to the north of the road immediately below and to the north of the castle as 'Burgess Meadow' (Fig. 11), but the significance of this name is open to debate.

Interesting, too, is the evidence for an earthwork visible on aerial photographs in the field to the south, in the form of an irregularly shaped enclosure, defined by a broad moat-like depression that forms a complete circuit (see Fig. 11). Parts of this feature might be natural, particularly where a drainage channel defining the south-east side, but the rest appears to be artificial. Unfortunately it has not been possible to examine this earthwork on the ground. The dating of this putative enclosure is speculative, but there is at least a possibility that it served some extra-mural function to the castle.

Donald Moore for advice on the Bucks' illustrations; and John Kenyon for commenting on an earlier draft of the text. Publication drawings are by Brian Williams.

APPENDIX 1

INVENTORY OF BWLCHYDDINAS, BLAENLLYNFI AND LA MERE IN 1330
(The National Archives: Public Record Office, SC6/1236/1)
Translation by R. F. Walker

From 1 December in the fourth year [1330] to 30 December next following. Concerning the revenues of the castles of Bwlchyddinas and Bleynleveny and the hamlet of La Mere [Llangorse Lake] with their appurtenances from the said first day of December in the fourth year up to 30 December next following . . .

Concerning the goods and chattels in the said castle [Blaenllynfi]. The same renders account of 2 brass pots each worth 2s 6d, 1 pitcher (*urciolum*) worth 1s, another pitcher worth 6d, 1 cooking pot (*cacubus*) worth 1s, 4 trestle tables with trestles each worth 6d, half a cask for putting bread in worth 4d, 1 pair of worn out wheels bound with iron worth 2s each, one wagon bound with iron worth 16s, 1 chest worth 4d, 1 leaden vessel for water worth 6d, 1 portable altar (*superaltar*) worth 1s, 1 leaden vessel for holy water (*aqua benedicta*) worth 2d, 1 censa (?*turris pro fumor*) worth 6d, 1 draught beast worth 2s, 6 oxen each worth 6s 8d, 1 cart with its tackle worth 1s, 1 bell worth 2s, 1 chair worth 3d, 1 portable altar [repeated?] worth 1s, 1 coffer and 1 cross worth 1s, 1 mortar with a pestle worth 6d, 3 pairs of gives, 1 bolt of iron and 1 ladder, worth 1s. All of which remained in the said castle for its stock in the keeping of Hugh Tyrel, keeper there, as is contained in the aforesaid indenture, which the said Hugh should answer by the said writ.

APPENDIX 2

SURVEY BY THE CROWN OF THE STATE OF BLAENLLYNFI IN 1337
(The National Archives: Public Record Office, C145/129/18)
Translation by R. F. Walker

Inquisition taken in the castle of Bleynleveny [Blaenllynfi] on the Thursday next after the feast of St Vincent in the tenth year of king Edward the third after the conquest [23 January 1337], before Philip de Clanmowe, knight, and Robert Clement, appointed by the king's writ patent from Chancery to enquire into the defects of the aforesaid castle by the oaths of John le Brut, Hugh de Pedwardin, John ap Llewelyn, John Gunter the younger, John son of Walter, Peter Poleyn, Robert ap Ieuan, David Don, Ieuan ap Hany, John ap Philip, Philip Don and John Gunter the elder, who say on their oaths that there is a tower which is called Jeholestour in which there are five floors, which began to deteriorate both in its wall and in its timber in the time of Reynold fitz Peter, and so it continued to deteriorate in the time of different lords up to the time of the lord Hugh Despenser, in whose time it was weak and ruinous both in joists and roofing, the defects of which cannot be repaired for less than £10, and the weakness in the wall of the said tower cannot be repaired for less than £10. They also say that there was a larder, built like a shed, adjoining the wall of the castle, which fell down completely in the time of John fitz Reynold and it cannot

be built in timbers and roofing for less than £3. They also say that there was a chamber which is called the Knight's Chamber with a garderobe one storey high and it is so weak in its timbers and joists that it must be built anew, and this deterioration happened in the time of Hugh le Despenser and it cannot be built for less than £10. They also say that there was a grange between the aforesaid tower and the Knight's Chamber that fell down in the time of John fitz Reynold, which cannot be built anew for less than 100 marks. They also say that there was a kitchen by the hall which fell down completely in the time of Hugh le Despenser, which cannot be repaired for less than £5. They also say that there is a hall with a tower adjoining the said hall and it is weak and ruinous both in its walls and in its joists and roof, and this weakness happened in the time of the lords Reynold fitz Peter and John fitz Reynold and other lords up to now and it cannot be repaired before being rebuilt and this building cannot be done for less than £100. They also say that the chamber of the Lord and Lady and the house of the nurse are so weak and ruinous both in walls and in joists and roofing and they began to deteriorate from the time of Reynold fitz Peter up to the time when the aforesaid castle came into the hands of the lord king after the death of the lord Hugh le Despenser, which defects cannot be built for less than £100 and cannot be built unless built anew. And there is a larder with a granary between the chapel and the Turburville Tower which fell down completely in the time of Hugh le Despenser and it cannot be built for less than £20. They also say that there is a tower which is called Turburvylestour which deteriorated in the time of Hugh le Despenser both in roofing and in wall, which cannot be repaired for less than £5. They also say that there is a bakehouse which fell down completely in the time of John fitz Reynold and a brewhouse which fell down completely in the time of Reynold fitz Peter, and they cannot be built anew for less than £40. They also say that there is a tower which is called Pichardestour in which there were four floors and a roof, which fell down completely except for the walls in the time of Reynold fitz Peter, the defects of which cannot be repaired for less than 100 marks. They also say that the defects of the walls of the said castle and the circuit of the same castle and the tower which is called the Nurse's Tower started to deteriorate in the time of Reynold fitz Peter and got continually worse in the time of other lords since, up to the time when the aforesaid castle came into the hands of the lord king after the death of Hugh le Despenser and cannot be repaired for less than £5. They also say that there is a chapel, weak and ruinous in joists and roofing, under which there is a cellar for storing wine in which there is a water well, which is deteriorating for lack of cleaning, and the defects began from the time of John fitz Reynold and cannot be repaired for less than £5. They also say that there is a leaden water conduit within the said castle which deteriorated in the time of the present king's father and cannot be repaired for less than £5. In witness of which the seals of the aforesaid jurors are appended to this inquisition. Dated the day, year and place aforesaid.

NOTES

1. Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT), 7a Church Street, Welshpool, SY21 7DL.
2. 20 Lytton Road, Clarendon Park, Leicester LE2 1WJ.
3. Cadw, Plas Carew, Unit 5/7 Cefn Coed, Parc Nantgarw, Cardiff, CF15 7QQ.
4. The name Castell Blaenllynfi has been adopted, in keeping with its use by the Ordnance Survey from the end of the nineteenth century and the name of the adjacent watercourse which flows down to Llangorse Lake. An alternative spelling—Blaenllyfni—has an antiquarian ancestry, being used by Theophilus Jones in the early nineteenth century, and it has seen continued if intermittent currency in works such as D. Cathcart King's *Castellarium Anglicanum* (1983). Blaen Lleven[n]y appears to have been the original form, at least in some early documentation, but is a name that is no longer encountered. The name, Blaenllynfi has the Welsh meaning 'source of the [river] Llynfi';

see R. Morgan and R. F. Peter Powell, *A Study of Breconshire Place-Names* (Gwasg Garreg Gwalch: Llanrwst, 1999), 41–2.

5. L. T. Smith, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535-1543*, 5 vols (London, 1906), vol. 3, 107.

6. S. Buck and N. Buck, *Buck's Antiquities or Vernacular Remains of about Four Hundred Castles, Monasteries and Palaces . . . in England and Wales*, 2 vols (London, 1774), 12; 350.

7. National Library of Wales (NLW), Department of Manuscripts and Maps, PD9263.

8. Cardiff Library, MS 3 127, vol. 3, p. 12.

9. T. Jones and J. R. Bailey, *A History of the County of Brecknock*, 4 vols (Brecon, 1911), vol. 3, 62.

10. Most of the site records which are fuller and better illustrated from the later years of the excavation are lodged at Brecon Museum, as are the finds; some other complementary records are housed in the National Monuments Record at Aberystwyth who also hold a copy of most of those in Brecon. In addition a few papers of relevance are retained by the present owner, Mr J. A. V. Blackham. Some of the finds had been examined by John Lewis, formerly of the National Museum of Wales. The original site plan and associated drawings from the new survey in 1990 have been retained by CPAT.

11. Though for an alternative view see R. F. Walker, 'Bwlchyddinas castle, Breconshire, and the survey of 1337', *Brycheiniog* 31 (1998–99), 19.

12. D. Walker, 'The "honours" of the earls of Hereford in the twelfth century', *Trans. Bristol and Gloucs. Archaeol. Soc.* 79 (1960), 204; R. F. Walker op. cit. (note 11), 20.

13. R. W. Banks, 'Cartularium Prioratus S. Johannis Evang. de Brecon', *Archaeol. Cambrensis* 4th ser. 14 (1883), 155–6.

14. B. W. Holden, 'The making of the middle March of Wales', *Welsh History Review* 20, part 2 (2000), 223; W. L. Warren, *King John*, 2nd edn (London, 1978), 185.

15. T. D. Hardy (ed.), *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium in Turri Loninensi asservati,* Record Commission (London, 1835), vol. 1, 86.

16. T. Jones (ed), *Brut y Tywysogyon, or The Chronicles of the Princes* (Red Book of Hergest Version) (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 1973).

17. T. D. Hardy (ed.), *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Loninensi asservati,* Record Commission (London, 1833 and 1835), vol. 1, 316.

18. The National Archives: Public Record Office (PRO), C143/62/4; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1301–07*, 441.

19. *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1307–13*, 22, 27 and 62.

20. PRO, E151/62/4; *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1300–26*, 125.

21. PRO, SC6/136/1; R. F. Walker op. cit. (note 11), 21–2.

22. *Calendar of Fine Rolls 1327–37*, 220; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1330–4*, 476.

23. PRO, C145/128/18: R. F. Walker op. cit. (note 11).

24. *Calendar of Close Rolls 1354–60*, 18.

25. Ibid.

26. R. F. Walker op. cit. (note 11), 20.

27. British Library (BL), Egerton 8704–8.

28. PRO, C133/45/2.

29. PRO, SC6/1236/1.

30. W. Rees, *South Wales and the March 1284–1415: a Social and Agrarian Study* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1924), 257.

31. PRO, SC6/1208/5.

32.   PRO, C133/45/2.

33.   PRO, C134/15/10.

34.   *Calendar of Close Rolls* 1307–13, 46.

35.   BL, Egerton 8707.

36.   Smith op. cit. (note 5), vol. 3, 107.

37.   Glamorgan Record Office, Cardiff Library MSS 4.441.

38.   P. Courtney, *Medieval and Later Usk* (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 1994), 15.

39.   C. J. Spurgeon, pers. com.

40.   PRO, DL 10/6: C. Johnson and H. W. C. Davies (eds), *Regista Regum Anglo Normannorum 1066-1154*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1956), vol. 2, no. 1280.

41.   PRO, C133/45/2.

42.   R. F. Walker op. cit. (note 11), 20.

43.   Ibid.

44.   *Calendar of Close Rolls* 1337–39, 172–3.

45.   R. F. Walker op. cit. (note 11), 29.

46.   *Calendar of Patent Rolls* 1401–4, 296; *Calendar of Close Rolls* 1401–5, 111.

47.   BL, Egerton 8708.

48.   Morgan and Powell op. cit. (note 4), 42.

49.   D. J. C. King, 'The castles of Breconshire', *Brycheiniog* 7 (1961), 74.

50.   Ibid., 72.

51.   Ibid., 74.

52.   R. E. Kay's manuscript notebooks are held in the National Monument Record, Aberystwyth.

53.   C. J. Spurgeon, pers. com.

54.   C. J. Spurgeon, pers. com.

55.   H. Thomas, pers. com.

56.   RCAHMW, *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Glamorgan. Volume III – Part 1b. The later castles from 1217 to the present* (Aberystwyth, 2000), LM16.

57.   C. J. Spurgeon: pers. com.

58.   R. F. Walker op. cit. (note 11), 26.

59.   P. Courtney, 'The medieval pottery', in N. Ludlow, 'Excavations within medieval Talgarth', *Brycheiniog* 32 (2000), 11–48.

60.   A. G. Vince, 'The ceramic finds', in R. Shoesmith (ed.), *Hereford City Excavations, Vol. 3, The Finds* (York, 1985), 52–4; A. G. Vince, 'The medieval pottery' in R. Shoesmith, *Excavations at Chepstow 1973–1974*, Cambrian Archaeological Monograph 4 (Aberystwyth, 1991), 121; S. Clarke, pers. com.

61.   J. Pearce and A. G. Vince, *Surrey Whitewares* (London & Middlesex Archaeology Society: London, 1988).

62.   Vince 1985 op. cit. (note 60), 51.

63.   P. Courtney and N. Jones, 'The Clwyd-Powys medieval fabric series', *Medieval and Later Pottery in Wales* 10 (1988), 9–32; Courtney 2000 op. cit. (note 59).

64.   Courtney 1994 op. cit. (note 38), 78 and fig. 48; Vince 1985 op. cit. (note 60), 67 and figs 61, 2–2 and 62).

65.   I. N. Hume, *A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America* (New York, 1970).

66.   M. W. Abbitt, 'The eighteenth-century shoe buckle', in A. N. Hume *et al.*, *Five Artifact Studies* (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1973), 32–6.

67.   Scheduled Ancient Monument, Brecknock 009.

68.   Jones, N and Frost, P, 1994, 'Aberedw Castle', *Archaeology in Wales* 34, 76–8.

69.   D. J. C. King, *Castellarium Anglicanum* (New York, 1983), 128; RCHME, *An Inventory of Historical Monuments in the County of Dorset, Volume 1, West* (London, 1952), 64.

70.   J. K. Knight, 'Usk Castle and its affinities' in M. R. Apted, R. Gildyard-Beer and A. D. Saunders (eds), *Ancient Monuments and their Interpretation: Essays Presented to A. J. Taylor* (Chichester, 1977), 139–53, 141, fig. 2, 151; J. K. Knight, 'The road to Harlech: aspects of some early thirteenth-century Welsh castles', in J. R. Kenyon, and R. Avent (eds) *Castles in Wales and the Marches* (Cardiff, 1987), 78; S. G. Priestley and R. C. Turner, 'Three castles of the Clare family in Monmouthshire during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries', *Archaeol. Cambrensis* 152 (2003), 9–52.

71.   King 1961 op. cit. (note 49), 74.

72.   C. J. Spurgeon, pers. com.

73.   Pers. com. On the day that followed the survey of Blaenllynfi in 1337, the surveyors reported on the castle of Bwlchyddinas. Walker made a strong case for the structures being described in clockwise order: R. F. Walker op. cit. (note 11), 27.

74.   The extra-mural earthworks did not form an integral part of the 1990 survey; the details shown here are derived from early large-scale Ordnance Survey maps.

75.   National Library of Wales, MS 1730B, p. 15.

76.   C. C. Taylor, 'Medieval ornamental landscapes', *Landscapes* 1.1 (2000), 38–55; R. Liddiard, *Castles in Context. Power, symbolism and landscape, 1066 to 1500* (Macclesfield, 2005).

77.   RCAHMW, *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Glamorgan. Volume III – Part 1a. The earlier castles from the Norman Conquest to 1217* (Aberystwyth 1991), 253.

78.   D. J. C. King and J. C. Perks, 'Manorbier Castle, Pembrokeshire', *Archaeol Cambrensis* 119 (1970), 93.

79.   Smith op. cit. (note 5), 107.

80.   See note 34.

81.   Silvester forthcoming. 'Landscapes of the poor: encroachment settlements in east Wales'.

82.   G. Mein, pers. com.