NEWARK CASTLE — EXCAVATIONS 1953-6

By M. W. BARLEY AND FREDA WATERS

SINCE 1953 members of the Newark Archaeological Committee have worked in the Castle, to improve the appearance of various parts of it, and also to investigate some problems of its history and structure.

THE CRYPT

It will be recalled, from the account of the castle by Hugh Braun,[1] that beneath the hall of the first stone building was a vaulted crypt or undercroft of three bays which in the 13th century rebuilding was reconstructed on its old plan, the east and south walls being retained from the 12th century work, including the corbels and responds on those sides for the vaulting. The present floor is of earth only, and in 1953 it ran without step or break into the slope of the passage down to the water gate ; at the crypt entrance to this passage the earth floor was clearly at least 1 ft. below the medieval level. Two trenches were cut across the undercroft to explore its mode of construction and the problem of the floor level.

They showed that this part of the castle is sited on a natural hump of Keuper marl, which appeared outside the river front at the foot of the facade wall, and below the undercroft floor in the eastern bay. The marl, which may originally have presented a cliff to the river as at Radcliffe and Clifton, had been cut back by the castle builders to an almost vertical face which falls immediately west of the undercroft piers. In front of this cliff of clay the facade wall was built, and the trench behind it then filled with clean building rubble. The piers are founded in small steps cut into the edge of the cliff. It will be noted from the section shown in Figure I that the most northerly pier stands west of the centre line of its foundations. The result is that the eastern bay is 1 ft. wider than the west. It seems possible that the pier foundations belong to the first stone building, and that the discrepancy is due to the rebuilt wall standing further east than its predecessor. The two trenches exposed the foundations of

[1] In *T.S.T.*, XXXIX (1935), p. 77.

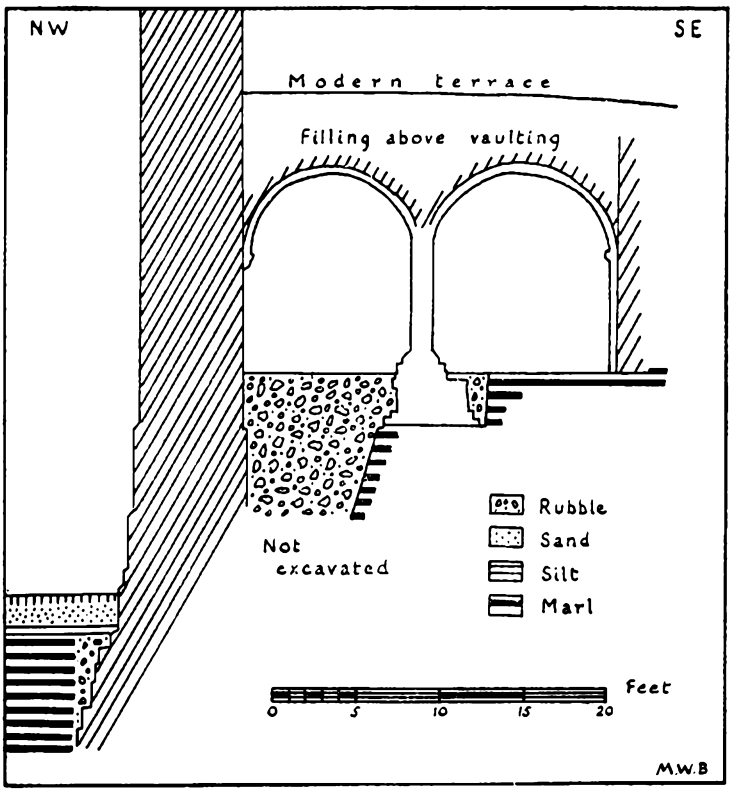

FIG. 1—NEWARK CASTLE : SECTION THROUGH CRYPT

the first and third piers. They are of totally different construction, but no dating material was found in the filling. Round the third pier to the north the filling contained a good many fragments of roofing tile ; they cannot be dated closely, but they may be rubbish from the repair work of the 13th century.

Finally the floor of the undercroft was made up to a level which seemed right for the bases of the piers and the level of the way out to the Water Gate. This involved making a new stone sill at this exit and raising the floor level behind it by about one foot. The earth floor was made by sifting the available material, laying first stone and then fine earth, ramming, watering and rolling. The result is a seemly floor which should stand up to the traffic it gets.

THE WATER GATE

From the north end of the undercroft a flight of stone steps, now blocked, rises towards the courtyard; Braun thought them the 13th century entrance to the crypt.[1] The Committee decided to investigate whether there had ever been a flight of steps down to the Water Gate, instead of the present earth slope, continuous from the north end of the crypt. At the bottom of the passage, about 2 ft. 6 ins. below the level of the then sill of the gate, steps were found; some of the earth covering them had no doubt washed from inside the Castle area down the upper flight. At the upper end of the passage the steps had been destroyed, at what date we do not know, but as the earth was removed the bondings of the steps were revealed in the side walls. In the 18th or early 19th century one side of the remaining steps was badly damaged by the insertion of a drain down the slope, to take surface water from the courtyard. At the same time the higher sill to the Water Gate was inserted.

The flight of steps has now been restored in concrete, on the lines of the broken bondings. The flight curves slightly at the top, where a landing has been constructed from which it is now a convenient step into the small room between the crypt and the passage. The Corporation of Newark has restored the sill of the Water Gate to its original level and is to build a new oak-studded door.

THE SOUTH-WEST TURRET

From the dungeon below what is known as John's Room a great deal of rubbish was removed to the level of the original floor, part of the flagging of which remains. The short flight of steps down towards the dungeon had been levelled up with bricks in recent times; these have been removed. A slit in the south wall lighting the passage to this dungeon was completely blocked; the filling has been removed, revealing medieval scratch carvings on the jamb. The Corporation has installed wooden steps, so that visitors can now descend to the floor of the dungeon.

CENTRE TURRET

The lower levels or dungeons of this turret are completely filled up. A circular stair and passage down from the terrace level are visible and have been partly opened by tunnelling.

[1]See Basement Plan of Castle, *Transactions*, XXXIX, p. 58.

Further work, which might expose another room and a dungeon below it, can only be done by breaking through the asphalt terrace. This has not been done, mainly because of the difficulty of making weatherproof any room thus opened.

Norman worked stones in the Crypt

For some years a large number of worked stones, nearly all Norman in character, have been lying in the crypt ; they had been recovered from the River Trent in dredging operations and handed over for preservation in the crypt. An examination of them revealed that there are (*Plate* 1a) :

(1) About 12 stones of a moulded string course with bead ornament identical with that which survives in places on the gatehouse. These fragments include two angular pieces. They suggest that they came from a building contemporary with the gatehouse, and formed part of a doorway or similar opening over which the string course was carried.

(2) Some 46 pieces carrying chevron or zigzag ornament ; of these, 12 pieces had parallel sides, and could have come from an opening with an order or orders of zigzag carried down the sides. Another 43 pieces are voussoir-shaped and are sufficient to make an arch about 31 ft. wide, or, if there were two orders, about half that width.

(3) Some 54 pieces carrying lengths of Greek key ornament ; 10 of them are straight and 44 pieces voussoir shaped : enough for an arch about 14 ft. wide.

(4) 25 stones making 12½ roundels, having a circle of pellets surrounding a sunk circle with scallops and another plain. The panels are voussoir-shaped and at the wider end 1 ft. 1 in. across. That is to say, they could make an opening about 8 ft. in diameter.

(5) Two fragments both cut for voussoirs, with roll moulding, one double, the other single. They are not likely to have come from a doorway.

The stones have not necessarily come from only one opening, such as a doorway, but it is unlikely that they came from any other building than the hall of the castle, and it is at least probable that they came from the doorway to the hall. It is thus inferred that the late Norman doorway survived any rebuilding of and alterations to the hall while the windows did not : a situation paralleled in many parish churches. Presumably the stones were pitched into the river at the slighting of 1646. It is puzzling that the assemblage includes no fragments of capitals or angle shafts. Photographs of the stones were submitted to Dr. G. Zarnecki, who has kindly prepared the following note :

" The carved stones from Newark Castle are of such interest that I regret to have to discuss them only on the basis of

photographs. My remarks must remain tentative suggestions until such time as minute examination and measurement is possible. However, even at this stage certain important conclusions can be drawn from them.

It is clear that most if not all the stones belonged to one decorative scheme. The most interesting are those which, when joined in pairs, form a circular ornament carved on four planes, a kind of sunk roundel encircled by large beading. This ornament makes it possible to say with confidence that most of the stones came from a doorway. This can be deduced from a remarkably close similarity between Newark stones, especially the roundels, and the west doorway of St. Nicholas' Church at Kenilworth in Warwickshire (*Plate* 1b). It is said that this doorway came originally from Kenilworth Priory, now destroyed. It consists of three orders framed by a carved, rectangular border. In each of the spandrels formed by the frame is a sunk roundel, the right-hand one carved on one slab of stone, the other made of two pieces of stone joined together, exactly as at Newark. Roundels of this type have, to the best of my knowledge, no parallels in any other Romanesque work and one can assume that those at Kenilworth and Newark were executed by the same workshop of masons.

At Newark the thirteen roundels still preserved are voussoir-shaped and thus must have formed an arch of a doorway. However, it is possible that this doorway had a rectangular border like that at Kenilworth, although it is unknown whether the spandrels formed by this border also contained roundels.

The probability that the Newark doorway was framed by a rectangular border is suggested by the survival of two angular pieces of beaded string courses, though I understand that their shape suggests that the string followed the round head of a doorway rather than a rectangular frame. At Kenilworth the corresponding enrichment consists not of beading but nail-heads carved on the inner edge of the large stones of the border. A short length of this ornament found on the vertical, right hand side of the border is carved on a separate narrow piece of stone, a method adopted at Newark. One of the Newark stones is a small section of a circular order with two enriched nail-heads and a cable moulding. I presume that this was part of the label of the outer order of the doorway.

PLATE 1a—ROMANESQUE STONES IN CRYPT

PLATE 1b—KENILWORTH (WARWICKS.) ST. NICHOLAS
W. DOORWAY

The corresponding ornament at Kenilworth is somewhat simpler, consisting of plain nailheads.

The outer order of the Kenilworth doorway is carved with a Greek key pattern, each voussoir having been carved with an identical section of it. There was obviously a similar arch at Newark, as is indicated by some fifty four stones on which a roll-moulding breaks twice under right angles, two stones forming a complete Greek key ornament. Some carved stones in a small museum on the site of Kenilworth Priory include a few with a Greek key pattern from the now destroyed doorway. Without careful measuring it is impossible to be certain whether the other Newark stones belonged to one or more doorways. Some 46 pieces are carved with a chevron ornament, an enrichment which was used at Kenilworth on the soffit of the outer order.

Until now the Kenilworth doorway has been considered an isolated example amongst the English works of the twelfth century. However, the close similarity in form and execution of the two doorways suggests that the Newark example was of similar shape and was even richer in decoration than the Kenilworth doorway. I do not know of any historical facts that would explain such a close relationship. However, the distance between Kenilworth and Newark is only about sixty miles and it would be not unusual for a masons' workshop to move even further afield.

Kenilworth Priory was founded by Geoffrey de Clinton, Chamberlain and Treasurer of Henry I about 1122 (W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. VI, London 1830, p. 219 ff.) but the surviving doorway must date from a period some 30 to 40 years later. I would also date the Newark doorway to between 1150 and 1160.

Monsieur Jean Bony has very kindly drawn my attention to a doorway somewhat similar to the Kenilworth one that exists in St. Pierre at Paray-le-Monial (Saone-et-Loire). Another doorway of this type in France is found at Salles-en-Beaujolais (Rhone) (J. Evans, *Cluniac Art of the Romanesque Period*, Cambridge, 1950, Fig. 55). Although the character of the decoration of those Cluniac buildings is very different to the English examples, and there is no connection between them, the similarity of the general design is probably due to a

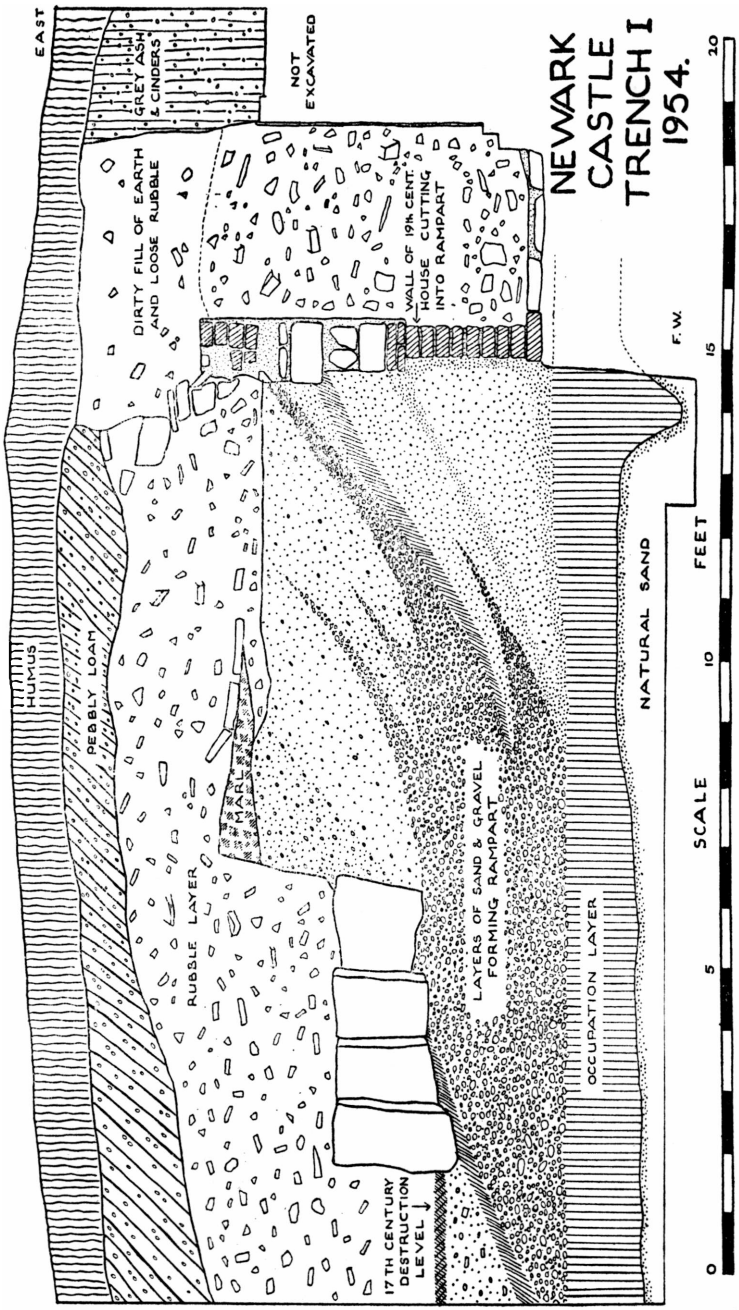
EAST
HUMUS
PEBBLY LOAM
RUBBLE LAYER
MARL
17TH CENTURY DESTRUCTION LEVEL
LAYERS OF SAND & GRAVEL FORMING RAMPART
OCCUPATION LAYER
NATURAL SAND
DIRTY FILL OF EARTH AND LOOSE RUBBLE
GREY ASH & CINDERS
NOT EXCAVATED
WALL OF 19th CENT. HOUSE CUTTING INTO RAMPART
F.W.
NEWARK CASTLE TRENCH I 1954.
SCALE
0
5
10
15
20
FEET

FIG. 2

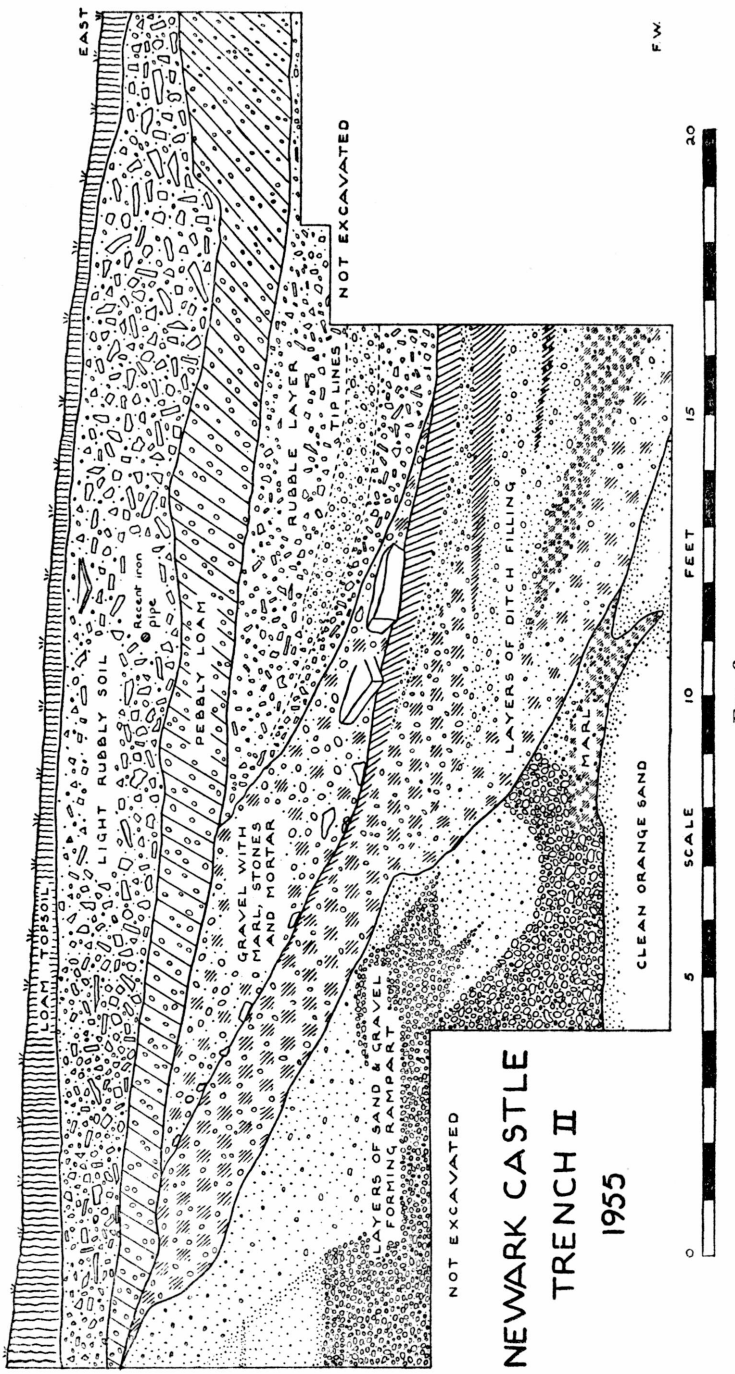
EAST
F.W.
LOAM TOPSOIL
LIGHT RUBBLY SOIL
Recent iron pipe
PEBBLY LOAM
GRAVEL WITH MARL, STONES AND MORTAR
RUBBLE LAYER
TIP LINES
NOT EXCAVATED
LAYERS OF SAND & GRAVEL FORMING RAMPART
LAYERS OF DITCH FILLING
MARL
CLEAN ORANGE SAND
NOT EXCAVATED
NEWARK CASTLE
TRENCH II
1955
0
5
SCALE
10
FEET
15
20

FIG. 3

common source which was Muslim architecture. The Kenilworth doorway more strongly than that at Paray-le-Monial or Salles-en-Beaujolais resembles the doorways of Arab buildings with their rectangular frames and roundels in the spandrels. In Muslim architecture this type of doorway appeared in the ninth century and the oldest example is the doorway of the great mihrab of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo (K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, part II, Oxford, 1940, p. 348, p. 122). This type of doorway, as so many other features of Muslim art, was introduced to Western Europe by the way of Spain, Byzantium or by direct contact, especially at the time of the Crusades (R. L. Devonshire, *Quelques Influences Islamiques sur les Arts de l'Europe*, Le Caire, 1929).

The Newark stones have no artistic value in the form in which they have come down to us, but they add new and valuable information about the complex origins of Romanesque art ".

The East Wall of the Castle

Although the line of the south wall of the Castle and its thickness are clearly visible today, and the direction of the north wall east from the Gatehouse, nothing is known of the line of the wall on the east or Castle Gate side. In three seasons, 1954-6, three trenches have been cut in the south-east corner of the Castle Gardens, in the hope of finding the line of the wall. Because of the lay-out of the gardens it was not possible to lay down a single trench of sufficient length; three separate trenches were planned, within limits imposed by paths, trees, etc., so that the wall was certain to be encountered if it ran parallel to Castle Gate. It now appears either that this last assumption was incorrect, or that the wall had been removed even to foundation level. The former appears more likely; it is unfortunate that the trenches could not be laid down close enough together to eliminate the possibility of the wall eluding this search.

The first trench (*see fig.* 2) revealed part of the earthern rampart of the first castle, c. 1133.[1]. It had been cut back

[1]See *Registrum Antiquissimum* (Linc. Record Soc.) I, pp. 23, 33-5, 38, for a group of writs of Henry I which indicate this date for the establishment of the castle; in *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, ed. C. Johnson and H. A. Cronne, No. 1770, the writ referring specifically to the castle is dated July (?) 1133.

from the east to a vertical face against which a house had been built in the 19th century.[1] The west wall of the house had been built from the east side, and the mortar squeezes between its courses had not been removed on the side against the rampart. The top of the rampart had also been levelled off, at an unknown date ; the rubble layer above it produced no finds. The possibility that the stone wall of 1150-60 stood here but had in 1646 or later been removed, even to the foundations, is one that cannot be discarded. The rampart was built of sand and gravel whose tip lines were very clear. A very large piece of tumbled wall core, measuring about 4 ft. each way, completely filled the west end of the trench ; its bottom rested at a depth of 6 ft. 8 ins. from the surface, and it must have fallen down the back of the rampart.

The tail of the rampart had been cut into, either at the time it was built or shortly afterwards, to lay a circular foundation. It was about 4 ft. in diameter and consisted of large thin pieces of oolithic limestone set on edge without mortar. Below it and above the gravel of the tail of the rampart was a dirty layer, 3 ins. thick, which must represent the construction layer for this foundation. A few fragments of pottery, soft and soapy to the touch with much pounded shell, were found in this layer ; they are of the well known Saxo-Norman type known as St. Neots' ware which will be discussed later. There were also sherds of a hard sandy ware similar to that found in a kiln at Torksey, Lincs., and regarded as Norman in date. It is clear that this structure, whatever its purpose, is not much later than the rampart. Another similar foundation, about 3 ft. wide, was found in the south face of the cutting, about 6 ft. from the west end of the trench, but without any distinct construction layer. There was no mortar between the stones in either case, nor any sign of burning.

Below the rampart was a layer of dark loam, about 1 ft. thick ; it contained plentiful traces of occupation : that is, much charcoal and wood ash, fragments of animal bone and pottery sherds. These traces were bounded by, at the east end of the trench, a shallow gully cut into the natural sand,

[1]There is in the Newark Museum a photograph of this house, which survived until about 1890. After it was demolished, and the gardens laid out, a public lavatory was built whose west wall, faced with slates, is shown at the east end of the section.

and near the west end of the trench, a vague line of stones. About 4 ins. down in the loam a layer of red marl, at times about 2 ins. thick, was discernible, particularly at the west end. It seems that the trench had cut through a peasant hut which was destroyed to make way for the castle, its walls being marked by the gully or sleeper trench on one side and the indistinct stone foundation at the other. Unfortunately the floor was so poor that it was not recognised until much of it had been removed, and the western end of the trench collapsed in heavy rain before it was recorded.

Pottery sherds came from above and below the floor and no distinction can be made between the two groups. Pottery from late Saxon to Norman times shows no distinctive development and wares formerly regarded as late Saxon are now known to continue well into the 12th century. The sherds found consisted of (*see fig.* 4) :

A. *St. Neots' ware.* This ware, as has been said, is shell-filled, wheel-turned[1] ; the colour ranges from a pinkish buff to dark grey ; the lighter coloured sherds were uniform in section ; four sherds, probably from the same pot, had a dark fracture. The following forms are illustrated in fig. 4 :

(1) Rim of cooking pot ; pinkish buff, fairly thick ; rim curving out towards shoulder ; cf. *Saxo-Norman Pottery*, Fig. 4, 15.

(2) Cooking pots with everted rim in grey fabric ; cf. ' *Saxo-Norman Pottery* ', Fig. 4, 47.

(3) Large deep bowl with square rim thickened externally.

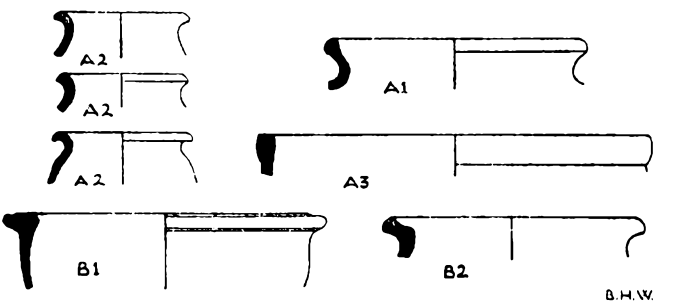

FIG. 4—SAXO-NORMAN POTTERY FROM NEWARK CASTLE. (¼).

[1]See *T.S.T.*, LVIII (1954), p. 28 : ' Excavations on Castle Hill, Thurgarton 1953 ' by H. W. Hodges, for description of St. Neots' ware found there. This report will be referred to as Castle Hill Thurgarton. See also J G. Hurst, ' Saxo-Norman Pottery in E. Anglia', *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, XLIX (1956), pp. 43-70 for a general discussion of this ware.

B. *Sandy Wares.* This ware too was one of the main classes at Castle Hill Thurgarton.[1] At Newark sherds of this ware were the most plentiful but only one rim was found. Three fragments occurred of sagging bases. The pottery is hard, well-fired and sandy to the touch; in colour it is uniformly dark grey. It is somewhat less sandy than that from the Torksey kiln.

(1) Large deep bowl with squared off rim; very close to *Castle Hill Thurgarton*, Fig. 4, 15, but with less thickening inside the rim.

C. *Lemon glaze ware* is the third class of Saxo-Norman pottery at Newark as at Thurgarton.[2] Nine sherds were found, all of which could have come from one vessel; there was no part of a rim. Three of them had part of a line of thumb-impressed strap ornament. The fabric is of fine quality, whitish and very well fired, with a yellow glaze on both sides, suggesting that the vessel was a bowl; the glaze was slightly more green inside than outside. Mr. G. C. Dunning has called this pottery Stamford ware,[3] since some of it was made there. He points out that the distribution ranges from Thetford in E. Anglia to the E. Midlands, and that the pottery has come in particular from Norman castle sites at Alstoe Mount and Oakham, Rutland; Duffield and Peveril, Derbyshire, as well as from Newark. Professor Swinnerton considered that the Newark sherds were identical with sherds from Hungate, York, but were not of such good quality as those from Stamford; he concluded that they were made from Upper Estuarine Clays, but not at Stamford.[4] In addition one small sherd from Newark appears to be unglazed Stamford ware.

In 1955 a further section was cut (*see fig.* 3) about 50 ft. further north, on a line clear of trees, from the outer fence for a distance of 29 ft. into the gardens. Once more the trench failed to locate the castle wall and could not be extended westwards owing to trees. This time, however, the outer slope of the earth rampart was found, at a depth of 2 ft. at the inner end of the trench, and sloping steeply down without a break or change of angle into the castle ditch. The rampart

[1] *Saxo-Norman Pottery*, p. 30.

[2] *Saxo-Norman Pottery*, p. 30-1.

[3] He discusses it in *Dark Age Britain*, ed. D. B. Harden, pp. 228-31.

[4] *Loc. cit.*, p. 230.

was of clean sand and gravel, as before ; it was identified with certainty by pottery sherds found at a depth of 4 ft. 9 ins. at the inner end of the trench (that is, 2 ft. 9 ins. down in the body of the rampart) in a patch of dark sand. Three of them were of St. Neots' ware, three of sandy ware, including a rim which is illustrated in Fig. 4 (B2). The rim comes from a cooking pot with everted rim hollowed internally for a lid ; compare *Saxo-Norman Pottery*, Fig. 4, 31. The section was excavated to a depth of nearly 11 ft., and the line of the ditch was still falling towards Castle Gate. As far as can be judged from relating the two sections, the rampart must have been about 48 ft. wide, and the wall must stand on its crest, in the 12 ft. intervening between the two sections. The width of the ditch cannot be estimated ; it presumably occupied about half the width of Castle Gate, the further side of which was set back by bishop Alexander with the king's consent.[1]

The bottom 4 ft. or so of the filling of the ditch was marl and sand with pebbles. Three small sherds of pottery from it suggest a 16th century date for the filling of the ditch ; one had a thin green glaze and another a thick shiny chestnut coloured glaze. The moat may well have been partially filled between 1547 and 1642 when the Castle, having become Crown property, was leased successively to Sir Francis Leeke, the earl of Rutland and Lord Burghley. Above the sandy marl was a very distinct layer of fine dark loam, about 4 ins. thick at the maximum, which must represent a turf line on the partially filled ditch. Lying on it, strewn down its slopes, were large worked stones and other smaller fragments, clearly from the Castle wall itself ; several of them were chamfered as if part of a plinth. They must have rolled into the ditch when the Castle was slighted in 1646. Above this level, the ditch was filled with material which produced no dating evidence of any kind. Most of the material from the destroyed wall was no doubt spread within the castle courtyard, especially in view of the large lump found in the first trench ; the gardens are at present about 10 ft. above the level of the tail of the earth rampart.

In 1956 a third trench was cut, parallel to trench II and south of the tree which prevented its westward extension ;

[1] *Reg. Ant.*, I, p. 23.

it was made 15 ft. long. No wall was found, and the features in the section were too different from trench II to be related closely to it. The one positive gain was the discovery of more sherds of the three main types of pottery described above. They came from the lower levels of a layer of dark loam, more or less equivalent to the pre-rampart loam in trench I. The loam occurred at a depth of 3 ft. 5 ins. from the surface and was 2 ft. 1 in. thick. The natural brown sand on which it rested had a surface so compacted, stained and darkened with ash that it must have been the floor of another peasant house, though none of its walls were encountered. Thus it is clear that the building of the castle involved the clearance of a part of the town which naturally, since it was close to the river, was already built up in 1130. It is also possible that the east wall ran due north between the east end of trench I and the west end of trench III. In that case the wall was not parallel with Castle Gate, as might be assumed,[1] but more or less parallel with the river facade and divergent from Castle Gate. Such a divergence is suggested by the property boundaries in the plan of the castle in 1823 printed by Cornelius Brown.[2] The laying out of the Castle Gardens in 1889 made impossible any comprehensive attempt to recover the plan of the castle and its buildings.

Acknowledgments. The writers wish to express their thanks to the Corporation of Newark, for permitting the excavations and for help in other ways; to Mr. A. Smith, Borough Librarian and Curator, Newark-on-Trent, for constant assistance and participation; to Mr. B. H. Waters for drawing the pottery and to the other members of the Newark Archaeological Committee for their part in the work.

[1] *e.g.*, H. Braun assumed it: see his plan in *Transactions*, XXXIX, facing p. 59.

[2] *Hist. of Newark*, II, p. 315.