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SOUTH MIDLANDS ARCHAEOLOGY

Editor: David Hall,
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- DEDDINGTON CASTLE. -

EARTHWORKS 1979

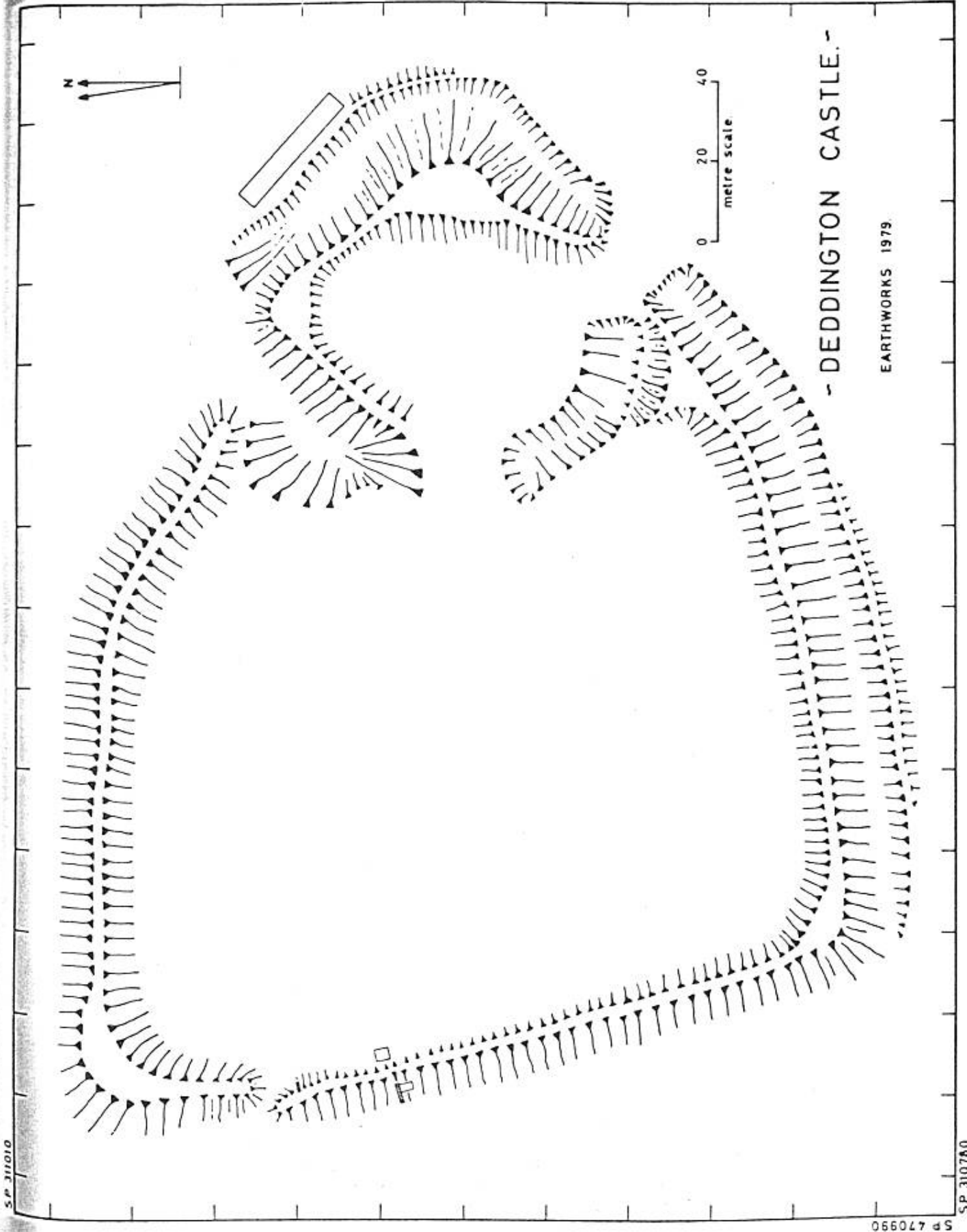metre scale.

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Fig. 11

DEDDINGTON CASTLE, OXFORDSHIRE. A SUMMARY OF EXCAVATIONS 1977-1979 –
R.J. Ivens for Queen's University, Belfast, and DoE.

Between 1947 and 1951 Prof. E.M. Jope carried out a series of rescue
excavations at Deddington Castle.[1] In 1977 the Department of the Environ-
ment and the Archaeology Department of the Queen's University of Belfast
carried out a short research excavation as part of a programme to complete
the archaeological and historical investigation of the Castle. Work was
continued in 1978 and 1979.

Deddington Castle, situated on the south-eastern edge of the town,
consists of an imposing bank and ditch enclosing an area of some 3.4
hectares, at the east end of which is an inner bailey of about 0.4 hectare.
The outer court and its defences remain unexcavated, though quantities
of late Saxon (St Neot's type) pottery were recovered during its conversion
into playing fields.

During the course of the extensive excavations of the inner bailey
Late Saxon artefacts and the remains of a stone building were found
beneath the primary castle defences. Thus conclusively demonstrating
Late Saxon, pre-castle occupation of the site, though little is known
of the nature of this occupation.

Soon after the Norman Conquest the first castle was built, which
consisted of a large undifferentiated enclosure surrounded by an extensive
embankment and associated with a large motte. Such a defensive work
compares with French baronial castles of the 11th century,[2] and was
almost certainly built for Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, the Domesday lord of
Deddington, perhaps as an administrative and military base for his
extensive Oxfordshire lands[3] (*Fig.11*).

At the end of the 11th, or very early in the 12th century, the inner
bailey was created by the insertion of an earthen embankment. In the
mid-12th century the castle was acquired by William de Chesney, King
Stephen's military governor of the Oxford area, and it was probably he
who erected the first stone defences (see note 3). These consisted of
a mortared ironstone rubble wall, some 2m thick, surrounding the inner
bailey. In about 1200 the defences were modified by the addition of a
gatehouse, and an open gorged wall tower (replacing an earlier tower),
built on the now partially demolished motte. During the later 13th and
14th centuries the castle fell into a period of decay and was eventually
abandoned. The structural history of the castle is illustrated diagram-
atically in *Fig.12*.

A range of domestic buildings was found within the inner bailey
(see General Site Plan *Fig.13*); a chapel, a hall, a solar and several
other structures of uncertain function, all dating to the 11th, 12th
and 13th centuries.

Excavations 1977 and 1978

At the extreme east end of the castle the earthen ramparts swell to
form a small mound, the inner face of which was cut away in the early
years of this century, during the construction of rifle butts. A trial
excavation on top of this mound carried out by E.M. Jope revealed the
presence of a small rectangular tower with a fine battered ashlar facade.
During 1977 and 1978 the whole area of the mound was extensively excavated
(see *Figs 12 and 13*).

Evidence of substantial Late Saxon occupation was found sealed beneath the lowermost level of the mound, which proved to be much more extensive than its present appearance suggests, indeed it covered the whole of Trench I. Because of the requirement to preserve later stone structures it was impossible to do more than establish the existence of this early occupation. The large basal area, coupled with evidence for an originally greater height (see below), suggests that this mound was in the first place a true motte.

During the middle part of the 12th century the inner bailey was enclosed by a mortared ironstone rubble wall some 2m thick. The curtain wall ran continuously through the mound area, the inner or western half of the mound having been demolished. Thus, at this stage the defences in this part of the site consisted of a massive curtain wall, freestanding internally, but backed by a large earthen (mainly clay) mound.

The next activity, revealed archaeologically, was the insertion of a tower into the motte. Due to a subsequent rebuilding of the tower only the inner and lower parts of the original structure remained. In order to construct the tower a further section of the clay mound and a part of the curtain wall were removed (the foundations of the curtain wall were found running beneath the tower). The tower was built of stone on three sides, there being no inner western wall, though the presence of beam slots for horizontal timber lacing could be taken as evidence of a timber western wall.

It is evident from the general site plan (*Fig. 13*) that the curtain wall to the south of the tower is not aligned with the curtain wall north of and beneath the tower, and also that the line of the northern curtain wall is preserved by the clay filled trench (feature 64). Excavation demonstrated that this southern section of the curtain wall had been demolished and rebuilt on a slightly different alignment. The relationship of this wall to the tower shows that the rebuilding took place after the construction of the primary tower and before the rebuilding of that tower.

While mainly built of coursed and mortared ironstone, the battered outer face of the secondary tower contained very finely tooled limestone ashlar quoins, a plinth, and the remnants of a string course forming the first vertical level. Clearly this facade was intended for display, even the ironstone parts had been carefully rendered with mortar. Such a display would involve the removal of much of the remaining mound. This operation was never carried out; the tower's construction trench was back-filled, and the whole facade concealed by rubble make-up levels. The reason for this change of plan is far from clear, it may be that there was insufficient high grade ashlar all of which appeared to be re-used and in several instances was poorly carved and fitted.

The rebuilding of the tower was carried out from the top of the highest remaining level of the original motte and involved the partial demolition of the primary tower and the excavation of part of the mound in order to form a construction trench round the perimeter of the new tower. The rebuilding of the tower also involved modifications to the top of the motte, outside of the stone defences. The highest surviving level of the original motte was a clean blue-grey clay which was sealed by an irregular stone setting, consisting of large iron-stone flags set edge to edge, forming a series of linked pathways. Between these pathways, which appear to have been constructed to facilitate movement on the clay motte top, was a thin layer of mixed dirty clay, probably
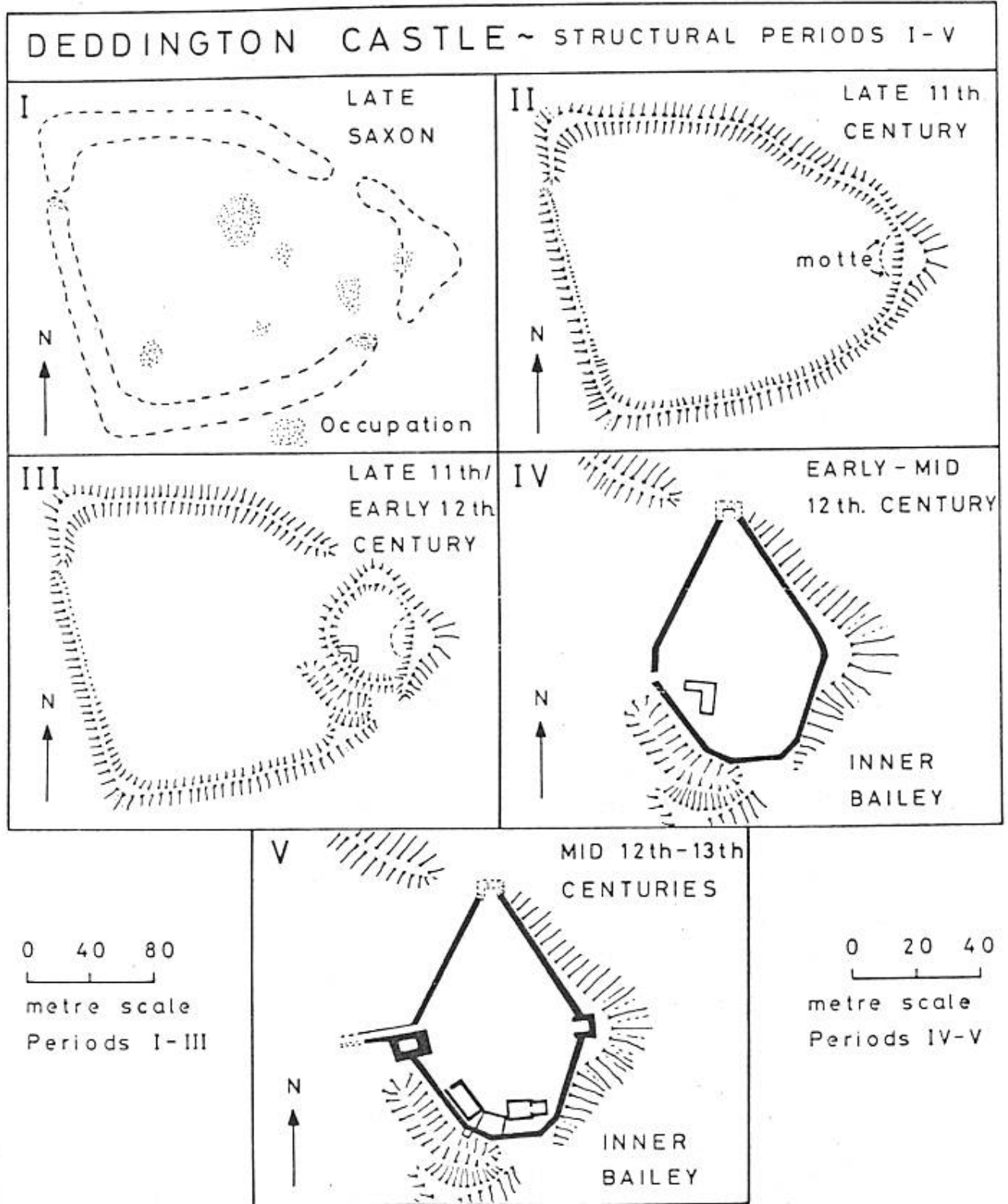
DEDDINGTON CASTLE ~ STRUCTURAL PERIODS I-V

I — LATE SAXON — Occupation

II — LATE 11th CENTURY — motte

III — LATE 11th/EARLY 12th CENTURY

IV — EARLY-MID 12th. CENTURY — INNER BAILEY

V — MID 12th-13th CENTURIES — INNER BAILEY

0 40 80 metre scale Periods I-III

0 20 40 metre scale Periods IV-V

Fig. 12

SP 311000

SP 47160

SP 310820

SP 471220

0   20   40
metre scale

11th & Early 12th Cents.
c 1140
Later 12th Cent.
c 1200
13th Cent (or earlier)
13th Cent.
14th Cent.

N

~DEDDINGTON CASTLE~
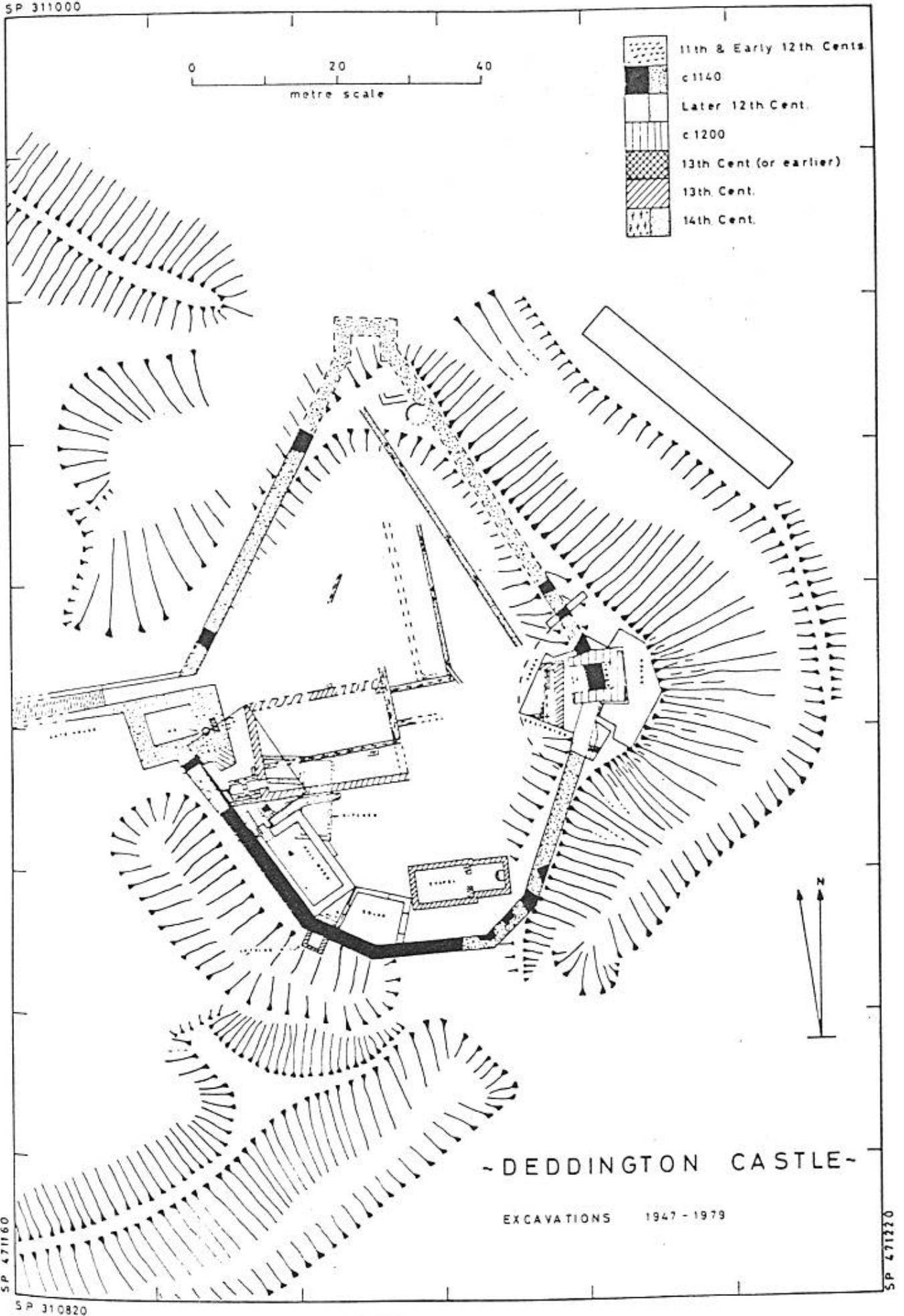
EXCAVATIONS   1947 - 1979

Fig. 13

the result of trample during building operations. The trample layer and stone pathways were stratigraphically later than the construction of the rebuilt southern curtain wall. Consequently, the surviving clay surface of the motte must have been freshly, and probably only briefly, exposed during the tower building operations. It is on the basis of this evidence that it is suggested that the motte was originally of a greater height. The strains on the masonry, caused by these earthworks, may be the reason for the repeated rebuildings and alterations to the stone defences.

Following the rebuilding of the tower and the abandonment of the intention to display its battered facade, the top of the mound was raised up to the level of the first vertical course of masonry by a series of rubble layers. Contained within these make-up layers was a complex of stone lined and capped drains, running from the tower to the mound's edge.

The interior of the tower was occupied throughout the 13th and into the 14th century. The later occupation was of a squatter-like nature, the tower walls were heavily burnt and a thick deposit of burnt material lay against the east wall. Beneath this fireplace a large inverted pot was discovered. The scale of burning indicates that the upper parts of the tower must have been out of use during this latest, squatter occupation.

Judging by the associated finds the tower was demolished in the later 14th century and its interior filled with tumbled stone and mortar. However, the south-east corner was turned into a small cess or rubbish pit by the construction of an ephemeral revetting wall. It was from this pit that three complete hawk skeletons were recovered.[4] This major demolition marked the final occupation of the motte and may be related to the purchase of dressed stone by Bicester Priory in 1377 (see note 3).

Following the rebuilding of the tower, and prior to the general demolition phase, a large stone building was erected immediately to the west of the tower. Little can be said of this mid-13th century structure as only a small part was excavated, though the debris on the occupation surface suggests that it had a domestic function. Subsequent, late-13th century alterations include: the narrowing of the building by the insertion of a secondary wall, and the addition of a stair footing, a domestic fireplace, and a mortar floor. In this form the building survived the general demolition phase and could be the chamber referred to in 1310 (see note 3).

Excavations 1979

In the summer of 1979 an area to the north of the first floor hall was completely excavated (*Fig. 13*). This area had been partially excavated by E.M. Jope between 1947 and 1951 and the features exposed by a mechanical earthmover planned.

The excavations revealed a long and complex sequence of stone buildings, though the pottery found in the primary soil indicate that this area was substantially open land until the later 11th century.

The first substantial evidence of occupation found in 1979 was the west end of the stone L - Building (*Fig. 13*), the interior of which contained seven superimposed floor levels, and had previously been excavated by E.M. Jope (see note 1). At the extreme west end of this

building a small latrine pit was discovered, suggesting that the
structure was an early hall. Lying against and outside of the north
wall of the L - Building were a series of dumped layers containing
much pottery and animal bone, which have every appearance of being
occupation debris from that building. Sealing these deposits, and
at the same level as the top of the surviving L - Building walls, was
a heavy rubble spread, perhaps from the demolition of the upper levels
of the L - Building. Professor Jope's excavations established that
this building was partly sealed by the mid-12th century first floor
hall.

On the surface of the site a slight earthwork can be seen separating
the inner and outer bailies; excavation proved this to be the remnant of
what must have been a very much larger rampart the upper parts of which
had been removed during later medieval building activities. This
rampart lay directly on the primary turf and against the west end of
the L - Building. The finds from within and beneath this rampart
indicate that it was built at the end of the 11th or early in the
12th century, and consequently proves that the L - Building is at
least as early. Although only a short section of the rampart was
excavated, it seems probable that it marked the original division
of the primary undifferentiated castle enclosure into an inner and
outer bailey. The construction of the stone building (260) across the
line of this rampart, which was in turn cut by the mid-12th century
curtain wall, suggests that the earthwork was a temporary expedient,
perhaps dictated by some emergency such as the invasion of Duke Robert
in 1101 or the White Ship disaster of 1120.

The stone building (260), with its associated mortar floor, formed
the north-east corner of a structure located outside of the curtain
wall by E.M. Jope. This structure clearly pre-dated the mid-12th
century curtain wall and must have been out of use by the time the
curtain wall was built. However, the portion within the line of the
curtain wall continued in use well into the 13th century and appears
to have been used as an ante-chamber to the ground floor entrance to
the first floor hall.

The next detectable event in the archaeological record was the
building of the first stone defences, which consisted of the curtain
wall with a simple entrance. Due to extensive stone robbing only the
pitched stone footings of the curtain wall survived, these were some
0.8m deep and 2m wide.

Towards the end of the 12th century an approximately rectangular
gatehouse was built straddling the original entrance, and a new
entrance was pierced through the curtain wall to the north of the
gatehouse. At some time in the 13th century the gatehouse was
modified to accommodate a water cistern, and the whole structure
fell into disuse at the end of that century. The interior of the
gatehouse was excavated by E.M. Jope (see note 1) and contained a
mortar floor and a well.

During the 13th and 14th centuries complexes of stone buildings
(and buildings with stone footings) were erected. The largest of these
appears to have been a 13th century replacement for the first floor hall.
The remaining structures were all butted on to this major structure,
and represent later sub-divisions and additions to it, of the nature

of store and other out-houses, one may have been a garderobe tower. All appear to belong to the period of the castle's decline in the later 13th and 14th centuries.

Finally, a widespread robbing of all the masonry structures left little that was originally above ground. The finds suggest a major late 14th century demolition phase though stone robbing continued long after that date.

The general site plan, (Fig.13), shows the basic layout of all the main features and structures found during all the excavations at Deddington Castle. The structures excavated in 1977, 1978 and 1979 are indicated within the excavation trenches, the remaining structures are those discovered during the course of E.M. Jope's excavations. The most important of these are the hall, solar, and chapel, located to the south of the gatehouse, all dating to the 12th and 13th centuries. The northern part of the inner bailey was occupied by a sequence of rather poorer and later buildings, which may be related to the activities of the Appletree family who leased the Castle and its manor after 1364 (see note 3).

In addition to the extensive structural evidence a considerable quantity of pottery and other artefacts were recovered. The quantity of pottery recovered and the quality of the stratigraphy has enabled a very detailed chronological pottery sequence to be developed, a sequence which extends from the mid-11th century to the later 14th century. The changing pattern of the occurrence and frequency of various pottery types at this site also throws interesting light on the marketing pattern of medieval pottery through this period.

References

1. Jope, E.M. and Threlfall, R.I., 1946/7 'Recent Medieval Finds in the Oxford District' Oxoniensia 11/12 (1946/7) 165-171; and

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    I would like to thank Professor Jope for allowing me to consult his excavation records which have been of invaluable help in interpreting the results of my excavations.

2. Le Maho, J. 1976 'L'apparition de Seigneuries chatelaines dans le Grand-Caux a l'epoques ducales' Archaeologie Medievale 6 (1976) 5-148, especially 83-107.

3. Ivens, R.J. 198 'The History of Deddington Castle, Oxfordshire and the English Honour of Odo of Bayeux'.

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