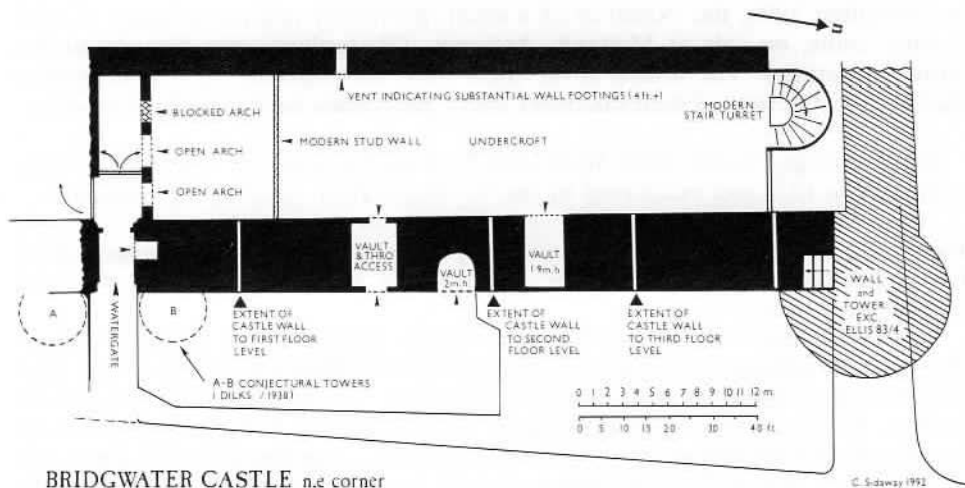


## BRIDGWATER CASTLE, WEST QUAY (ST 300373)

In November 1990, members of the Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society undertook to survey the remaining walls of Bridgwater Castle, enclosed within the redundant 20th century premises of the former Wessex Water (see Fig. 2). The survey resulted from a meeting convened by the Bridgwater and District Civic Society to bring to the attention of interested parties and senior officers of Sedgemoor District Council the lack of attention to, and general deterioration of, the old Castle Watergate.

The survey, from the junction of West Quay and Chandos Street through to the Watergate, revealed that a considerable section of the medieval Castle Wall remains extant, encapsulated within the modern building: parts of the wall survive to full height, i.e. between 20–30 ft (6–9 m). The wall was originally constructed of triassic red sandstone (Wembdon stone) and blue lias rubble, although it had



BRIDGWATER CASTLE n.e corner

Fig. 2 North-East Corner of Bridgwater Castle.

possibly been faced with limestone ashlar in places. Ham stone was used for mouldings and features (as shown by P. Ellis's excavation of the corner tower in 1983–4). A reference in the Bridgwater Borough archives (Dilks 1938, xi) suggests that the Watergate itself was also protected by towers, though these were presumably smaller than the corner towers. The wall thickness is approximately 15 ft (4.5 m) and in three places was cut through or into by post-medieval (wine?) vaults. Behind this section of wall is a brick-lined, barrel-vaulted undercroft, probably of 18th century origin, which may ghost the line of the medieval undercrofts: the back wall, though not comparable to the Castle wall, is of very substantial dimensions in its foundations, and is certainly medieval. The undercroft as it presently exists was latterly a bonded warehouse and gives a name to Bond Street, running between Castle Street and Chandos Street. It continued in use until this century.

In summary, much more of Bridgwater Castle, completed in the first decade of the 13th century, remains in existence than was anticipated, and further work in this area could well prove rewarding. It seems probable (as first suggested by M. Aston) that remains of the medieval quay survive under the present West Quay, and a watching brief on all utility excavations will be continued. Finally, support should be given to the Civic Society in exerting pressure on Sedgemoor District Council and the National Rivers Authority to enhance the Watergate's potential by improving access and undertaking expedient conservation.

#### REFERENCE

Dilks, T.B. (ed.), 1938. *Bridgwater Borough Archives, 1377–1399* (Somerset Record Society, 53).