

THE FORTIFIED MANOR HOUSE AT NEWTON ST. LOE INTERIM REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS

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Excavation, fieldwork and the investigation of the standing medieval structures in Newton Park in the parish of Newton St. Loe, Avon, have been carried out between 1975 and 1979 by staff and students of Bath College of Higher Education and the Department of Archaeology, University of Leeds. This work is continuing. The fortified manor house lies within the park (ST 693640) (fig. 1). The site is on a natural spur to the south of Corston Brook, on upper deposits of Lias Clay capping the White Lias limestone. The surviving standing medieval structures are the keep and gatehouse. The estate is the property of the Duchy of Cornwall, and is leased to Avon Education Authority.

Outline history of the manor

In 1066 the manor of Newton was given to the Bishop of Coutances from whom it passed to his nephew, Roger of St. Loe in Normandy (for a detailed history of the manor see: Collinson 1791, 342—5; Wood 1903; Humphreys 1967; Vivian-Neal 1948, 10—15). The manor remained with that family until 1375 when it passed, through marriage, to William, Lord Botreaux, of North Cadbury. His granddaughter, Margaret (d. 1477), carried the manor by marriage to Robert, Lord Hungerford, of Farleigh Hungerford. Hungerford's great-granddaughter, Mary, was heiress of Newton and through her it passed to her son, George Hastings, 1st Earl of Huntingdon. Leland visited the site in 1540 and described

'a faire maner place like a castelle building at Newtoun Saint Lo, two miles from Bath by Avon, sumtyme one of the chief houses of the Lordes Saint Lo. The Lorde Hastings Erle of Huntingdon hath it now.'

(Smith. L. T., (ed.), 1964, v. 103)

In 1565 (Public Record Office, Common Pleas, Enrolled Deeds, Michaalmas 7 Elizabeth) the manor of Newton St. Loe was sold by Henry, Earl of Huntingdon to Edward Neville, and his family held the manor until 1666 when the 'manor house' and 'all and singular messuages, curtilages, houses, edifices, buldings, barnes, stables, dovehouses, orchards, gardens, lands' etc. were conveyed to Joseph Langton (Duchy of Cornwall, Neville and Langton deeds). Langton was a Merchant Venturer and in that year Lord Mayor of Bristol. The construction of the new house began c. 1760—2, designed by either Paine or Leadbeter. Loudon noted that 'Merley, Newton Park, Normanton, Lathom House &c. The houses built by Paine and Leadbeter are frequent instances of want of comfort in the two latter forms' (1840, 271). Comparison

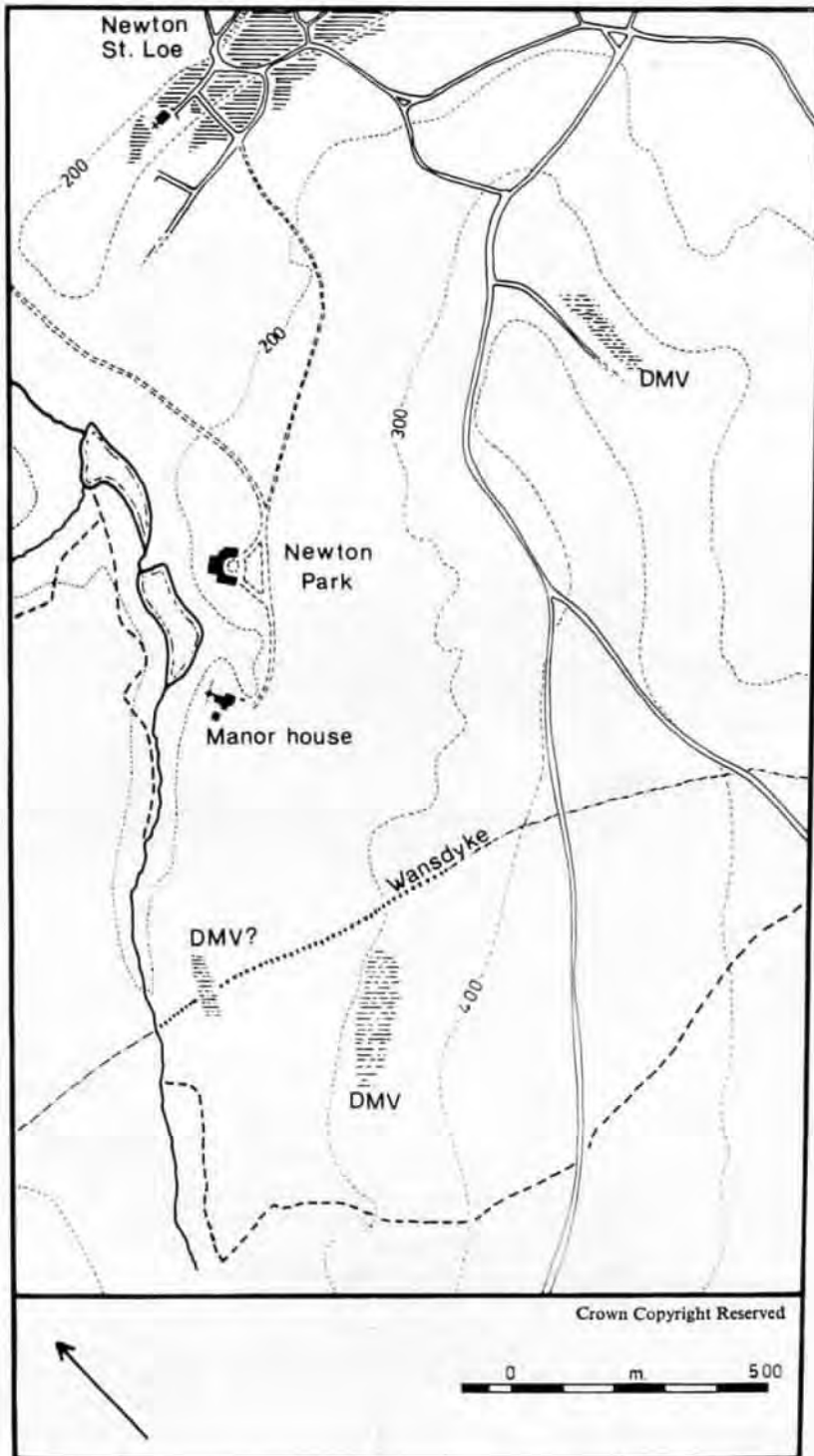


Fig. 1. Newton St. Loe: location of the manor house and other archaeological sites.

with Nuneham Park, Oxfordshire, designed by Leadbeter, makes it very probable that he designed Langton's residence. Capability Brown, who was conducting a number of projects in the Bath area in 1761, was commissioned to landscape the park. Repton writes of Brown's treatment of the layout, particularly the water, and

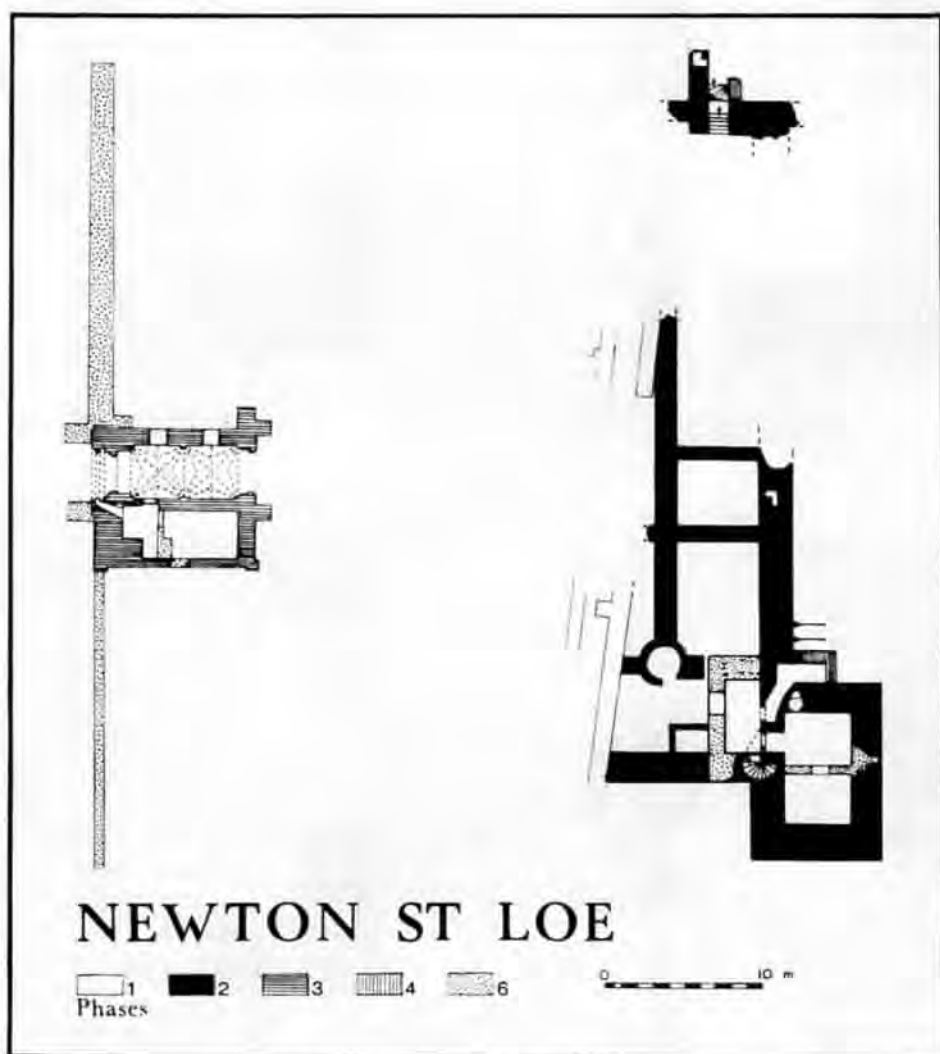


Fig. 2. Newton St. Loë: plan of the excavated and standing structures.

with reference to the two fish ponds formed by damming the Corston Brook says: 'I will do Mr. Brown the justice to observe that in no instance have I seen him inattentive to this consideration' (Stroud 1975, 234). Brown's design included laying out a gravel drive around the upper pond which ran through the manor house necessitating the demolition of all the standing structures except for the keep and gatehouse, to which a number of small alterations were made.

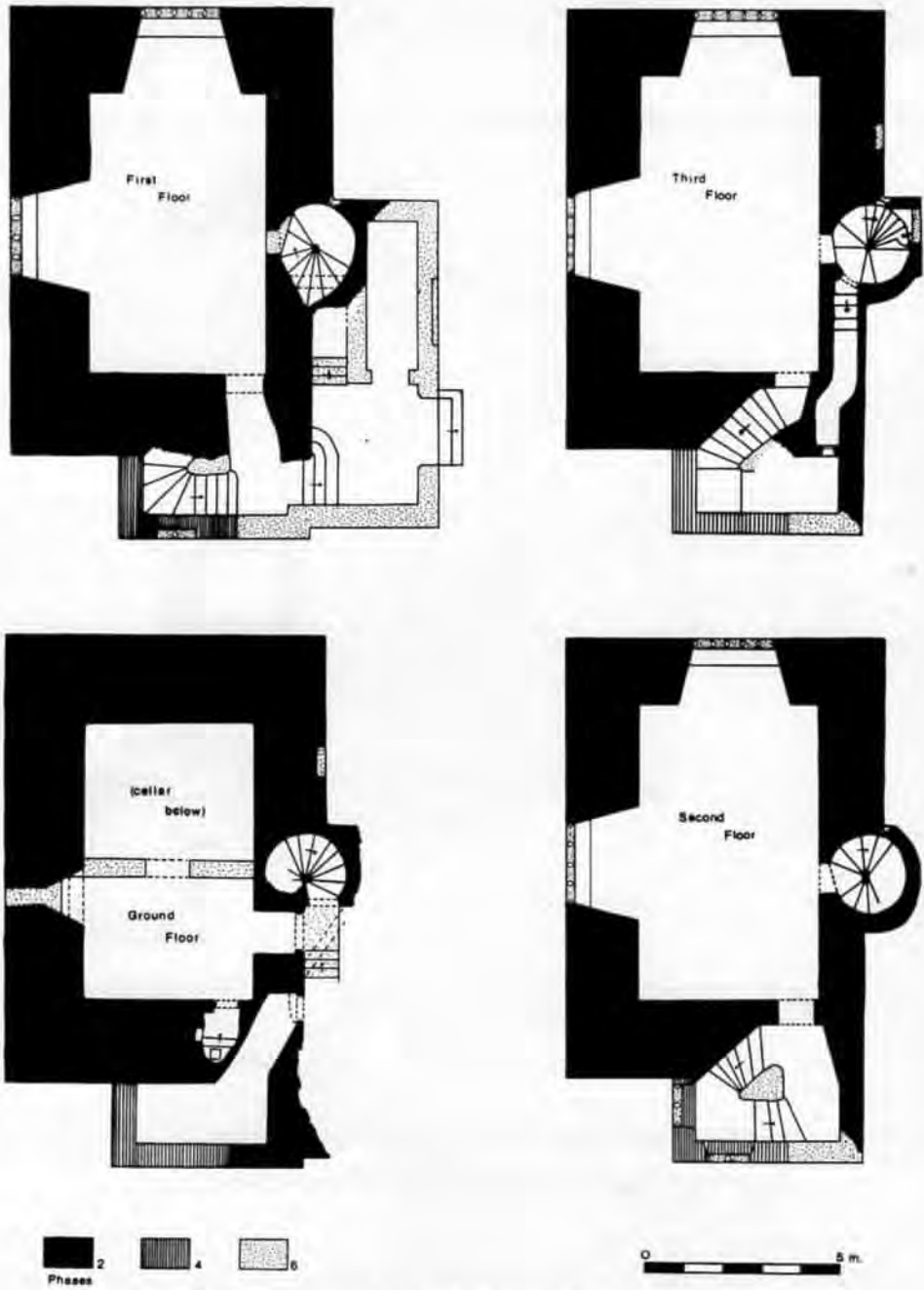


Fig. 3. Newton St. Loc: floor plans of the keep.

Standing Structures

The keep (fig. 2), constructed in the early fourteenth century, is of four storeys. The ground floor consists of a chamber with a central, splayed window on the east side, fireplace on the south, garderobe on the north, with the entrance to the west. In the southern half of the chamber is a cellar, below. In the eighteenth century a barrel vault was inserted supported by a cross wall which blocked the window. The original layout of the ground floor is repeated above. Access was by means of a spiral staircase which begins beside the entrance to the ground floor chamber and is lighted by tiny windows on the south side. From the uppermost floor access was available through a doorway (now blocked) to the west, direct from the staircase, onto the wall walk of a building whose gable roof line is preserved on the west wall of the keep. Similar access was provided to the north by a passage through the west wall with an external door jamb at the end, where it now terminates at the modern stairwell. The present entrances from the modern stairwell into the rooms of the upper three floors are directly over the entrance to the garderobe of the ground floor. In the sixteenth century a projection was built on the north side, probably to provide more extensive garderobe facilities, although now forming the modern stairwell. At a similar date three tiers of four-light transomed windows were added on the south and east sides, which were restored in 1945. The crenellations, like the porch on the west side, are of Bath stone, and are certainly not original work; they are perhaps best viewed as eighteenth-century additions. The outside face of the parapet carries, amongst others now very worn, the arms of the St. Loe family with three points, and the arms of Botreaux.

The gatehouse (fig. 3), of the middle of the fifteenth century, consists of a passage vaulted in two bays with an open arcade on the north side and a door into a side chamber on the south. This room is matched by another on the first floor with a large chamber over the passage. The entrance to the gate reveals the grooves for a portcullis, with a gunloop on the south side, and the surviving pair of doors may be original. This building was also altered in the eighteenth century with the addition of small, square angle 'towers' on either side of the entrance and continuous crenellations between. There are no indications of buildings originally abutting the gatehouse, apart from the scar of the original curtain wall on the south side replaced in the eighteenth century by a narrow garden wall which also continues to the north. A blocked doorway survives on the south side on the ground floor. Serious subsidence on the west side of the gate house has been checked by the addition of a pair of massive buttresses on either side of the entrance passage.

Archaeological investigation 1975 — 79

Excavation (fig. 3) has been directed towards areas on the north and west sides of the keep. Other archaeological sites have been identified and surveyed within the parish (fig. 1) including two deserted settlements, possibly of medieval date. One lies astride the eroded remains of Wansdyke which traverses the Park (ST 689636), the other immediately outside the valley (ST 651636). The earliest surviving part of the present village of Newton St. Loe is the church, particularly the south aisle and porch, which are of early fourteenth-century date. The present village site may have been established to allow the clearance of earlier settlements within the park.

The excavated structures and their relationship to the standing remains may be sub-divided into a series of phases (fig. 3).

Phase 1 No evidence of occupation on the site of the fortified manor house has been revealed prior to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. From that period comes a small quantity of residual pottery and a large deposit concentrated within a series of localised fires between two walls of pre-fourteenth-century date. The walls are not necessarily contemporary, but ran in parallel on a north-south alignment with occasional buttressing on the western side. They were totally demolished before the construction of the manor house, except for a single section which was incorporated into the west wing of Phase 2.



Fig. 4. Newton St. Loe: decorated floor tiles.

Phase 2 The major construction phase was confined to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, when an L-shaped structure was erected with the surviving keep in the angle. The western wing consisted of two parallel walls, abutting against a section of the eastern side of the walls of Phase 1. Much of the interior of this structure was destroyed either during or after its demolition, although part of the pennant sandstone flagging and a cellar survived. In the north wall, in the angle with the north wing, was a spiral staircase with jambs indicating that access was, unusually, possible both to the interior of the west wing and externally. Thus, the keep was provided with a separate staircase to which access could only be gained from the ground floor of the west wing, which had a separate isolated means of access to its upper floors. The southern wall of the wing was considerably thicker than the northern.

The north wing consisted of two chambers with flagstone floors, the northern chamber being the smaller. The east wall of this wing was thicker than the west. To the east of the wing, in the angle with the keep, the bedrock had been cut away to a depth of at least 2m, either forming a continuous ditch along the outside of the wing or, more probably, as a garderobe pit, fed by the series of garderobes in the north wall of the keep. A garderobe was also present in the east wall of the wing.

The thickness of the walls of the two wings suggests that they were external walls. It is to the top of these that access could be gained from the tower. The extent of the southern 'curtain' wall is not clear due to disturbance as the result of recent construction, but excavation to the south of the gatehouse failed to reveal its continuation. The eastern curtain wall apparently continues to a structure lying to the north of the keep on the scarp of the peninsula, although truncated by later landscaping.

Prior to excavation this feature appeared as a low, round mound jutting out from the natural line of the slope, and was earlier scheduled as a motte. Excavation, limited due to the four metres of covering demolition rubble, revealed a tower standing at the termination of the east curtain wall, provided with a central room below ground level, to which access was gained by a flight of steps. The western wall contained a garderobe. The complete plan of the structure could not be recovered, although it was ascertained that curtain walls extended from the rear of the tower to the east and west, the former possibly linking up with a second low mound on the north-east corner of the peninsula (a third is apparent on the south-east corner), the latter presumably linking with the western defences into which the gatehouse was later constructed.

Future work will be designed to determine the nature of the occupation to the east of the keep in view of the fact that the peninsula may be enclosed on at least two sides. There is no evidence, however, that another wall originally joined the east side of the keep.

Phase 3 During the fifteenth century the gatehouse was constructed. The provision of a north curtain wall implies that the gatehouse was incorporated into a pre-existing defensive system, although the gatehouse itself and the area to the north has yet to be investigated. Excavation to the south of the gatehouse revealed no medieval structures.

Phase 4 During the sixteenth century a number of alterations were made to the defences and the domestic buildings. The ground floor entrance and flight of stairs into the tower were blocked and a spiral staircase inserted inside the central chamber, the negative of the wooden treads surviving in the wall plaster.

A projection was built on the north-east side of the tower, outside the curtain wall, containing a latrine, thereby replacing the garderobe in the adjacent wall.

A similar projection was added to the north side of the keep and against the curtain wall, within the garderobe pit, designed to provide more spacious garderobe facilities with a new outflow into the rock-cut feature below. The construction of this projection necessitated the insertion of a doorway at ground floor level from the new work into the west wing, the arch of which survives internally below the present ground, originally first, floor. A horizontal roof-line survives above the present roof.

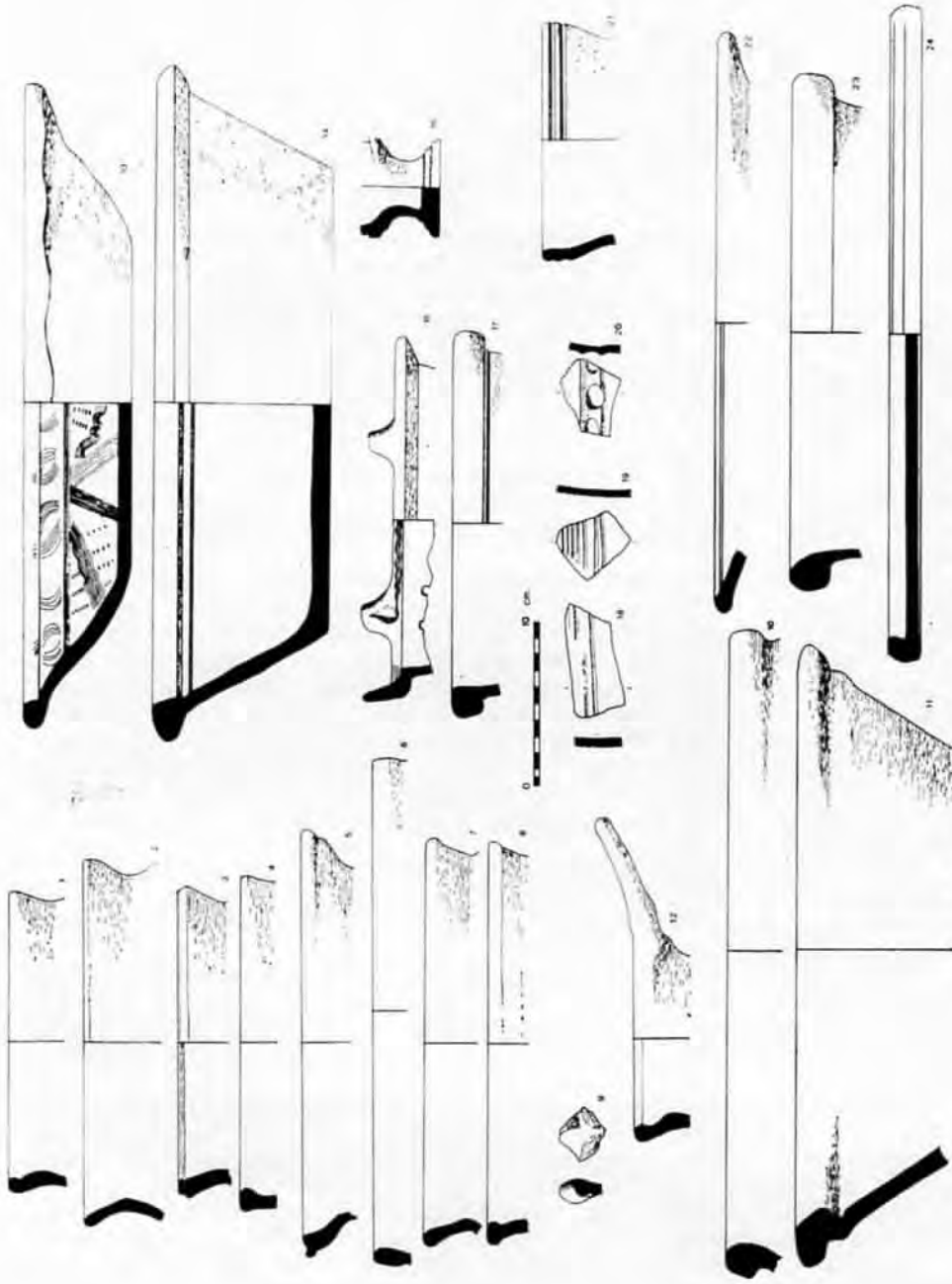


Fig. 5. Newton St. Loe: Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery.

Phase 5 During the second half of the seventeenth century a cobbled surface, with surface drain, was inserted into the western end of the west wing, involving the partial demolition of the building. A raised cobbled pathway gave access into the redesigned building from the north, which was presumably used as a byre or stable.

Phase 6 In the second half of the eighteenth century a major part of the surviving building complex was demolished after the removal of re-useable material, flagstones, timbers and faced stone. Imported material was used to level the site, thereby raising the level considerably. The keep, for instance, is at present entered at the original first-floor level. A flight of steps was incorporated into the design of the porch when it was added at this time, leading down to the original ground floor. Following its demolition the scar of the east curtain wall was refaced flush with the north face of the sixteenth-century projection of Phase 4, leaving a straight-joint to mark the original junction. The additions to the outside of the gatehouse were made during this phase.

In the 1940s the interior of the keep was modernised involving the adaptation of the garderobe block into a stairwell with a new door into the west side of the keep, thereby slighting the remains of the junction of the east curtain wall with the keep. The whole interior of the keep has been plastered making detailed structural analysis impossible, and no record survives of the appearance of the keep prior to these alterations.

The Finds

The major components of the finds are floor tiles and pottery. The inlaid floor tiles occur in large quantities in the eighteenth century demolition debris, concentrated on the west side of the keep, and none have been found *in situ*. It seems probable, especially when flagstones were the normal flooring material on the ground floor, that the tiles were used in an upper storey.

Four designs are represented (fig. 4):-

1. Coat of arms, bend sinister with label of five points, with floral motif in lower corners. The St. Loe arms, reversed. The arms must belong to either the second or fourth Sir John St. Loe, the former of the early fourteenth century, the latter of the late fourteenth.
2. The royal arms, three lions rampant, reversed.
3. Circular, floral design enclosing a pair of birds looking backwards to central *fleur-de-lys*.
4. The arms of the Berkeleys.

The tiles are inlaid, with four or five keyholes on the reverse, and the fabric indicates the clay source was either local or, more probably, from Nash Hill, Lacock, although no parallel designs have been recovered from that site. A date range of 1290—1320 is normally attributed to such tiles, consistent with the dates of the second Sir John. Sir John, grandson of Sir Roger, was in Palestine with Prince Edward in 1271, and attended Edward I at Carlisle in 1299 with horse and arms to march against the Scots (Vivian-Neal 1948, 10—11).

The pottery consists of a long, although uneven, sequence from the 11th to the 18th century. The earliest forms are hand turned micaceous and quartzitic wares and other handmade vessels known also from Bath (fig. 5. 1—4). While much of this material is residual a few large stratified groups have been recovered. Two groups of thirteenth-century Ham Green pottery have also been excavated (fig. 5. 5—8). The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are represented by Bristol, Redcliffe St. Peters jugs (fig. 5. 9) and glazed ridge tiles, and north Wiltshire ridge tile, which overlap chronologically with the fifteenth and sixteenth century ridge and floor tiles from Malvern Chase. Late sixteenth and seventeenth century material has been recovered from the garderobe pit, including imported north French wares and Raeran and Frecken stonewares. From the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are North Devon gravel tempered wares (fig. 5. 10—12), Bideford combed slipware (fig. 5. 13), Bristol slipware, a total of twenty-nine forms from the Donyatt kilns (fig. 5. 14—24) and Bristol brown-glazed wares. Late fine ceramics are represented by Lambeth and Bristol Delft plate, and five wall tile designs.

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