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The Ringwork Castles of Medieval Leinster and Meath

Emma Arbuthnot

Volume One – Text, Bibliography and Illustrations

PhD

University of Dublin

2011

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Summary

The aim of this thesis is to examine the evidence for ringwork castles in the medieval territories of Leinster and Meath and their place in the wider context of British and European castle studies. The ringwork castle is a form of earthwork castle that was constructed in the high medieval period as an alternative to the more common motte castle. The identification of ringwork castles in an Irish context poses many challenges due mainly to the presence of many thousands of ringforts in the Irish landscape and the difficulties involved in distinguishing between the two site-types. The issues and challenges of ringwork identification are discussed in this thesis and a new methodology for the future identification of ringwork castles, based on analysis of the archaeological and historical sources, is proposed in Chapter Three. The evidence for the classification of fifty-one previously identified ringwork castles sites in the study area is fully examined. The morphology of the ringwork castle is analysed, based on field work carried out in the study area. The evidence for the timber structures and buildings associated with ringwork castles is also discussed, based on the evidence from ringwork castle excavations in the study area and further afield. Finally, the evidence for the chronology of the ringwork castle and the role it played in the Anglo-Norman invasion and subsequent settlement of Ireland is examined, in addition to the archaeological and historical evidence for the functions, ownership and status of the ringwork castle in medieval society and the relationship between the ringwork castle and the more common motte castle.

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List of abbreviations

E.H.R.	*English Historical Review*
I.H.S.	*Irish Historical Studies*
J.I.A.	*Journal of Irish Archaeology*
J.C.H.A.S.	*Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*
J. L.A.H.S.	*Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*
J.G.H.A.S.	*Journal of the Galway Historical and Archaeological Society*
J.K.A.S.	*Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society*
J.W.H.S.	*Journal of the Wexford Historical Society*
J.R.S.A.I.	*Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*
O.K.R.	*Old Kilkenny Review*
P.R.I.A.	*Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*
N.M.A.J.	*North Munster Archaeological Journal*
U.J.A.	*Ulster Journal of Archaeology*

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the chapter

The objective of this introductory chapter is to introduce the thesis and to place it within the context of Irish castle studies. The aims of the thesis will be outlined in the next section. The place of the present study within the existing literature will be discussed and the evidence from ringwork excavations in Ireland will be summarised. The reasons for the selection of the medieval territories of Leinster and Meath as the field area for this study will be discussed. The methodology used for this study will be described in this chapter, although a revised methodology for the identification of ringwork castles will also be proposed in Chapter Three. The nomenclature utilised in this study and the reasons behind the terms used will be discussed. The final section of this chapter will describe the layout of this thesis.

1.2 The aims of the thesis

This thesis is concerned with the nature of the ringwork castle as a site type and its role in the conquest and lordship of medieval Ireland. The aims of this project are to reappraise the evidence for the construction and occupation of ringwork castles in eastern Ireland and place them in a wider European context, focusing particularly on the ringwork castles of England and Wales. Ringwork castles are a somewhat controversial issue in the context of Irish archaeology because they can be difficult to identify and to differentiate from other types of circular earthworks, including the early medieval ringfort. This thesis will address these issues and will propose a methodology that will enable the differentiation of this site-type from other types of site. Finally, this thesis will explore the role of the ringwork castle in medieval Ireland, placing them in their historical context by evaluating the evidence for the chronology of ringwork construction and occupation, the functions and ownership of ringwork castles and the relationship between ringwork castles and mottes.

1.3 Literature Review

The serious study of earthwork castles in Ireland began in the late nineteenth century with the work of Westropp and Orpen, who held opposing views on the origins of mottes in Ireland. Westropp realised that mottes were not 'Danish' in origin, as

traditionally believed, but believed that they represented pre-Norman fortifications of pre-historic or early medieval origin.[1] Orpen realised that the locations of mottes correlated with historical references to Anglo-Norman castles and correctly interpreted them as Anglo-Norman fortifications.[2] Westropp and Orpen's views on the origin of Irish mottes were published in the context of a wider debate regarding the origin of mottes and early castles. In 1912, Ella Armitage's book on *Early Norman castles of the British Isles* was published.[3] Like Orpen, Armitage recognised that mottes represented early castles constructed by the Normans. Armitage's study covered the whole of the British Isles, including a section on mottes in Ireland. Armitage's nephew, Basil Stalleybrass, visited some mottes in Ireland on her behalf in the early twentieth century and the plans that he drew of these sites are contained in a notebook called 'The Book of Motes', which is now held in the library of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society in Leeds. Although the research of both Orpen and Armitage was focused on motte castles, they identified several earthwork castles that would now be classified as ringwork castles, although the term 'ringwork castle' had not yet been invented. For example, both Orpen and Armitage recognised that the ringwork castle at Dunbrin Lower was an earthwork castle, although they described it as a motte.[4]

Both Orpen and Armitage believed that the motte castle was used by Normans in the context of both the invasion of England in 1066 and the invasion of Ireland in 1169. This was generally accepted until the 1960s when it challenged by Davison. In an article published in 1967, Davison demonstrated that there was little evidence for motte castles in Normandy in the period before 1066 and suggested that the castles built in England during the period between 1066 and 1068 were generally of ringwork rather than motte

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[1] T. J. Westropp, 'The ancient forts of Ireland: being a contribution towards our knowledge of their types, affinities, and structural features' in *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, xxxi (1902), pp 579-730; T. J. Westropp, 'Of Irish mottes and early Norman castles' in *J.R.S.A.I.,* xxxiv (1904), pp 313-45.

[2] G. H. Orpen, 'Mote and Bretasche Building in Ireland' in *E.H.R.*, xxi (1906), pp 417-44; G. H. Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ireland' in *E.H.R.*, xx (1907), pp 228-254; G. H. Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ireland. Part II' in *E.H.R.*, xxii (1907), pp 440-67; G. H. Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ireland' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, xxxvii (1907), pp 123-52; G. H. Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ossory' in *J.R.S.A.I.* xxxix (1909), pp 313-42; G. H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans,* (4 vols, Oxford, 1911-20).

[3] E. S. Armitage, *Early Norman castles of the British Isles* (London, 1912).

[4] Orpen, 'Motes and Norman Castles in Ireland', p. 249; Armitage, *Early Norman castles of the British Isles*, pp 331-2.

type.[5] In a second article published in 1969, Davison expanded on his theory, arguing that few if any motte castles were constructed before William I's campaign of 1168-9 and that the motte castle may have been developed in England and transported back to Normandy rather than *vice versa*.[6] King and Alcock's classic study of the ringwork castle in England and Wales was published in 1969.[7] This study investigated the numbers of ringwork castles compared to mottes in England and Wales, the evidence for the chronology and morphology of ringwork castles and the relationship between ringwork castles and mottes. The research carried out by Davison, King and Alcock was not universally well-received at the time. The historian Allen Brown was particularly vocal in his opposition to the concept of the ringwork castle.[8] However, in the long term, the work of Davison, King and Alcock has proved to be very influential in British castle studies and, as more sites have been identified and excavated, many of their theories have been proved correct. For example, English has summarised the excavated evidence for conquest-period castles associated with towns and has shown that, as Davison suggested, ringwork castles within pre-existing defensive circuits seem to have been the preferred form of fortification in the immediate post-Conquest period.[9]

The place of the ringwork castle in British castellollogy is now well-established and recent studies of earthwork castles in England and Wales, including Higham and Barker's survey of earth and timber castles in the British Isles, Creighton's *Castles and landscapes* and Kenyon's *Medieval fortifications* have discussed the ringwork castle as a straight-forward alternative to the more common motte castle.[10]

Ringwork castles are more difficult to identify in an Irish context due to the presence of many thousands of circular ringforts and enclosures in the landscape. It is for this reason

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[5] B. K. Davison, 'The origins of the castle in England: the Institute's research project' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxiv (1967), pp 202-11.
[6] B. K. Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model' in *Château Gaillard,* iii (1969), pp 37-47.
[7] D. J. C. King, and Leslie Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1969), pp 90-127
[8] R. A. Brown, 'A historian's approach to the origins of the castle in England' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxvi (1969), pp 131-48.
[9] Barbara English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest' in Andrew Ayton and J. L. Pryce, (eds), *The medieval military revolution: state, society and military change in medieval and early modern Europe* (London, 1995), pp 45-61.
[10] Robert Higham and Philip Barker, *Timber Castles* (London, 1992); O. H. Creighton, *Castles and landscapes: power, community and fortification in medieval England* (London, 2002); J. R. Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications* (London, 1990).

that Irish archaeologists in the 1960s and early 1970s seem to have been oblivious to the presence of ringwork castles in Ireland, despite the research that was being carried out in England and Wales; as O'Conor has stated, '...ringworks did not impinge on the academic consciousness.'[11]

The excavation of the earthwork site at Pollardstown in the early 1970s marked the beginning of the study of ringwork castles in Ireland. Only a third of the earthwork was extant when Fanning conducted his excavation and the site has now been completely removed. The excavations were limited to the one cutting across the inner bank and into the western side of the interior, and two small cuttings across the fosse and outer bank.[12] Fanning initially believed that the site was a ringfort. However, the finds, which were high medieval in date and of military character, led Fanning to suggest that the site was an Anglo-Norman ringwork.[13]

Dermot Twohig is generally credited as the discoverer of ringwork castles in Ireland. In a brief article published in 1978, Twohig suggested that the Anglo-Normans may have built ringwork castles in Ireland and identified a number of possible examples, based on his own fieldwork and reinterpretation of excavation reports.[14] Twohig argued that ringwork castles were likely to constitute '...a very significant element of fortification in the Norman conquest of Ireland' because many of the men involved came from southern Wales, an area where ringwork castle density is particularly high.[15]

An article on the evidence for ringwork castles in Ireland was published by Barry in 1983.[16] Building on Twohig's research, Barry pointed out the gaps in the distribution map of motte castles and suggested that ringwork castles might fill gaps in areas where the Anglo-Normans are known to have settled but mottes are inexplicably absent, including parts of Munster and Connacht. Barry produced the first distribution map of

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[11] Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster' (3 vols, PhD, Cardiff, 1993), i, 8.
[12] Thomas Fanning, 'Excavation of a ringfort at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare' in *J.K.A.S.*, xv (1973-4), pp 252-4.
[13] Ibid., pp 259-60.
[14] D. C. Twohig, 'Norman ringwork castles' in *Bulletin of the group for the study of Irish historic settlement*, v (1978), pp 7-9.
[15] Ibid., p. 9.
[16] T. B. Barry, 'Anglo-Norman ringwork castles: some evidence' in Terence Reeves-Smith and Fred Hammond, (eds), *Landscape archaeology in Ireland* (Oxford, 1983), pp 295-309.

ringwork castles in Ireland, which included twenty possible examples.[17] Barry's later published a book entitled *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland*, which discussed the evidence for a number of ringwork castles and included an updated list of possible ringworks, bringing the number of possible ringwork castles up to forty-five.[18] Barry also suggested that, if the ratio of motte to ringwork castles was the same as in England and Wales, there ought to be over 100 ringwork castles in Ireland.[19]

The publication of Twohig and Barry's research seems to have led to increased awareness of the ringwork castle amongst Irish archaeologists. Colfer identified a number of possible ringwork castles during the course of his research on settlement in medieval Wexford.[20] In the 1980s, Graham published two articles on medieval settlement to the west of the Shannon, in which he identified several possible ringwork castles and put forward some controversial theories on ringwork castles.[21] For example, he suggested that the ringwork castle may have replaced the motte as the preferred form of Anglo-Norman fortification soon after 1200, explaining why there seem to be many ringwork castles but few mottes in Connacht and Munster.[22]

In the 1990s, there seems to have been a backlash against the idea of the ringwork castle amongst Irish archaeologists. McNeill and O'Keeffe were most vocal in their objections to the identification of ringwork castles in Ireland, suggesting that many of the examples identified thus far were incorrect. McNeill pointed out that ringwork castles were very difficult to identify in the field and argued that, in the absence of a clear methodology for identification, '...there is nothing to prevent anyone from finding them anywhere.'[23] McNeill also states that ringwork castles could only be identified

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[17] Ibid., pp 300-01.
[18] T. B. Barry, *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland*, (London, 1987), pp 52-3.
[19] Ibid., p. 50.
[20] William Colfer, 'Anglo-Norman settlement in medieval Shelburne, 1169-1307' (MLitt, TCD, 1986); William Colfer, 'Anglo-Norman settlement in County Wexford' in Kevin Whelan and William Nolan, (eds), *Wexford: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1987), pp 65-101; William Colfer, 'Settlement and society in medieval County Wexford, 1169-1400' (PhD, TCD, 2001); Billy Colfer, *Arrogant trespass: Anglo-Norman Wexford, 1169-1400* (Enniscorthy, 2002).
[21] B. J. Graham, 'Medieval settlement in County Roscommon' in *P.R.I.A.*, lxxxviii (1988), Section C, pp19-38; B. J. Graham, 'Timber and earthwork fortifications in western Ireland' in *Medieval Archaeology*, xxxii (1988), pp110-29.
[22] Graham, 'Timber and earthwork fortifications in western Ireland', pp 126-7.
[23] T. E. McNeill, *Castles in Ireland: feudal power in a Gaelic world* (London, 1997), pp 60-63.

once a 'physical definition' of the site-type has been established and that ringwork castles should only be identified in locations where the contemporary documentary evidence shows that a castle existed; until these two conditions have been met, '...the sport of hunting the ringwork should be suspended.'[24] Similarly, O'Keeffe has argued that ringwork castles are impossible to identify and that some of the identified examples are incorrect. O'Keeffe has also questioned the validity of the 'ringwork castle' as a classification, arguing that '...there is, in fact, no exclusively field-morphological distinction to be made between ringforts and ringworks. They are the same thing, and the reason we use different words is to convey what we today perceive to be differences of function, culture, and context.'[25] Some of the points raised by McNeill and O'Keeffe are valid. Ringwork castles are notoriously difficult to differentiate from early medieval ringforts and the archaeologists of the 1980s seem to have identified examples without clearly defining what they meant by the term 'ringwork' and without providing supporting evidence for each identification. Some archaeologists seem to have been overly enthusiastic in identifying possible ringwork castles and some of the possible ringworks identified in the 1980s now seem dubious.

In the 1990s, O'Conor's pioneering research on earthwork castles in Leinster shed new light on earthwork castles and their role in the Anglo-Norman settlement of Ireland.[26] O'Conor identified nine definite ringwork castles and a further ten possible examples within in his study area of medieval Leinster.[27] Significantly, O'Conor demonstrated that there is little evidence for the use of motte castles in the initial post-Conquest period in Ireland and that other fortifications, including walled towns, natural islands and ringwork castles, were utilised during the invasion period. [28]

Many more possible ringwork castles have been identified through fieldwork and excavation over the past two decades. The evidence from excavations will be briefly outlined in the next section. Some probable ringwork castles have also been identified through fieldwork. For example, Sweetman has identified a number of possible

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[24] T.E. McNeill, 'Hibernia pacata and castellata' in *Château Gaillard*, xiv (1990), pp 262-3.
[25] Tadhg O'Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland: an archaeology* (Stroud, 2000), p. 30.
[26] Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster' (3 vols, PhD, Cardiff, 1993).
[27] Ibid., i, 60-61.
[28] Ibid., i, 66-124.

examples in Co. Meath,[29] and elsewhere in Ireland.[30] The place of the ringwork castle is now firmly established in Irish archaeology. The excavations that have been carried out at a number of ringwork castle sites in Ireland, which are briefly described below, have shown ringwork castle undoubtedly existed in Ireland and are not as rare as once believed.

1.4 Ringwork castle excavations in Ireland

The earliest ringwork castle to be scientifically excavated in Ireland was the site of Beal Boru, Co. Clare, which was excavated by O'Kelly in the 1960s.[31] The excavations showed that the site began as an early medieval ringfort, which was re-used in the Anglo-Norman period, when a massive enclosing bank was constructed around the interior. This phase was interpreted by the O'Kelly as an attempt by the Anglo-Normans to build a motte, which was abandoned before completion.[32] However, Talbot, Twohig and Barry have all argued that the Anglo-Norman phase was a completed ringwork castle rather than unfinished motte.[33]

Several more ringwork castle excavations were undertaken in the 1970s. As discussed above (Section 1.2), the ringwork castle at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare, was the subject of a rescue excavation directed by Fanning in 1971.[34] The ringwork castle at Castletobin, Co. Kilkenny, was excavated in 1974-5 ahead of a road-widening scheme. This site was interpreted was originally interpreted as an early medieval ringfort, which was reused in the Anglo-Norman period.[35] However, as Barry has argued, there is no evidence to suggest that the two phases of the site's construction were separated by a significant

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[29] David Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath' in Christiaan Corlett and Tom Condit, (eds), *Above and beyond: essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray, 2005), pp 393-398.
[30] David Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland* (Cork, 1999), pp 4-16.
[31] M. J. O'Kelly, 'Beal Boru, Co. Clare' in *J.C.H.A.S.,* lxvii (1962), pp 1-27.
[32] O'Kelly, 'Beal Boru, Co. Clare', p. 49.
[33] E. J. Talbot, 'Lorrha motte, Co. Tipperary' in *N.M.A.J.,* xv (1972), pp 8-12; D. C. Twohig, 'Norman ringwork castles', *Bulletin of the group for the study of Irish historic settlement*, v (1978), pp 7-9; T. B. Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland* (London, 1987), pp 48-9.
[34] Thomas Fanning, 'Excavation of a ringfort at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare' in *J.K.A.S.*, xv (1973-4), pp 251-261.
[35] Deborah Sutton, *Excavation Bulletin 1974*; http://www.excavations.ie/Pages/Details.php?Year=&County=Kilkenny&id=5557, accessed 4 March 2011; Deborah Sutton, 'Archaeological excavation preliminary report: Castletobin, Callan, Co. Kilkenny. December 1974-Janurary 1975' (unpublished excavation report, licence no: 74E140, 2003).

period of time and the lack of evidence for early medieval occupation indicates that the site probably a ringwork castle, which was constructed in two phases.[36]

The ringwork castle at Trim, Co. Meath,[37] and the possible ringwork castles at Ferns, Co. Wexford,[38] and Clonard, Co. Meath,[39] were excavated by David Sweetman in the 1970s. The excavations at Trim uncovered a deep wide fosse and no evidence for a motte. Sweetman interpreted the site as a ringwork castle,[40] although it was Hayden's excavations in the 1990s (see below) that proved irrefutably that the early castle was of ringwork type. The excavations at Ferns uncovered possible evidence for a ringwork predecessor to the stone castle, in the form of a section of a small, rock-cut, outer ditch to the south-east of the castle,[41] and a deposit of boulder clay, possibly representing the rampart of an earthwork castle, under the south-east corner of the stone castle.[42] O'Keeffe and Coughlan subsequently raised valid concerns over the dating of this small section of fosse, arguing that the associated finds were not necessarily from a primary context.[43] Sweetman has since revised his opinion and now believes that this fosse is probably not associated with an earlier fortification. However, Sweetman still believes that the boulder clay under the south-eastern corner tower may have been a rampart associated with a ringwork castle, although it was not recognised as such at the time of the excavation.[44] The documentary evidence indicates that there was both a pre-Norman and an early Norman fortification at Ferns (see Site Report no. 41). However, further excavation would be needed to prove definitively that one or both of these fortifications took the form of a ringwork castle.

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[36] T.B. Barry, 'Anglo-Norman ringwork castles: some evidence' in Terence Reeves-Smith and Fred Hammond, (eds), *Landscape archaeology in Ireland* (Oxford, 1983), p. 307; T. B. Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland* (London, 1987), p. 48.

[37] P. D. Sweetman, 'Archaeological excavations at Trim Castle, Co. Meath, 1971-74' in *P.R.I.A.*, lxxviii (1978), Section C, pp 227-98.

[38] P. D. Sweetman, 'Archaeological excavations at Ferns Castle, Co. Wexford' in *P.R.I.A.* lxxix (1979), Section C, pp 217-45.

[39] P. D. Sweetman, 'Excavation of medieval field boundaries at Clonard, Co. Meath' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, cviii (1978), pp 10-22.

P. D. Sweetman, 'Archaeological excavations at Trim Castle, Co. Meath, 1971-74' in *P.R.I.A.*, lxxviii (1978), Section C, pp 227-98.

[41] Ibid., p. 224.

[42] Ibid., p. 218.

[43] Tadhg O'Keeffe and Margaret Coughlan, 'The chronology and formal affinities of the Ferns *donjon*, Co. Wexford' in J.R. Kenyon and Kieran O'Conor (eds), *The medieval castle in Ireland and Wales: essays in honour of Jeremy Knight* (Dublin, 2003), p. 135.

[44] P.D. Sweetman, pers. comm., April, 2006.

The excavations at Clonard were carried out in 1976, prior to drainage works on the Clonard River.[45] Sweetman identified a trapezoidal earthwork, which is located across the river from the motte at Clonard in the adjoining townland of Mulpheddar, as a ringwork. The 'ringwork' itself was not excavated although several cuttings were excavated between the earthwork and the river. The pottery indicated that the site was in use in the late-thirteenth and fourteenth century. Although this site was interpreted as a 'ringwork' by the excavator, it is not a very convincing example for several reasons. It is located less than 100m from the motte at Clonard, and as Kenny has suggested, it seems possible that the two earthworks are contemporaneous and, '...may have been connected to each other across the Clonard River and may be the remains of one extensive military fortification.'[46] If this were the case, the enclosure should perhaps be interpreted as a bailey associated with the motte, rather than as a ringwork castle in its own right. Also, the size of the enclosed area seems too large, and the enclosing elements too unimpressive, for a ringwork castle. As O'Keeffe has argued, the earthwork at Clonard should perhaps be left 'unclassified'.[47]

The partial ringwork castle of Carrick, Co. Wexford, was excavated in the 1980s. Three seasons of excavation took place at the site in the 1980s, prior to the opening of the Irish National Heritage Park. The first season excavation was directed by Isabel Bennett in 1984 and a brief excavation report has been published.[48] Further excavations took place in the summers of 1986 and 1987 under the direction of Claire Cotter and an excavation report was submitted to the D.o.E.H.L.G. However, this report is now missing.[49]

In the 1990s, ringwork castles were discovered under the stone castles at Carlow Castle and Kilkenny Castle. The excavations at Carlow Castle, which were carried out in 1996 under the direction of Kieran O'Conor, showed that the stone castle was preceded by an earth and timber castle. Unfortunately, the site had been quite disturbed by the construction of the stone castle and by post-medieval activity and few original features

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[45] P.D. Sweetman, 'Excavation of medieval 'field boundaries' at Clonard, Co. Meath' in *J.R.S.A.I.* cviii (1978), pp 10-22.
[46] Niall Kenny, 'Medieval Clonard' in *J.R.S.A.I.* cxxxvii (2007), p. 67.
[47] Tadhg O'Keeffe, 'The archaeology of Norman castles in Ireland' in *Archaeology Ireland*, iv (3) (1990), p. 17.
[48] Isabel Bennett, 'Preliminary archaeological excavations at Ferrycarrig ringwork, Newtown Td., Co. Wexford' in *J.W.H.S.*, x (1984-5), pp 25-43.
[49] Pers. comm., Rachel Barrett, S.M.R. Archives, D.o.E.H.L.G., 15 June 2009.

were excavated. However, the excavations found the interior of the earthwork castle was bisected by a curvilinear ditch and palisade, which ran from east to west. This site has been classified as a ringwork castle for the purposes of this study as it is a relatively low mound that was probably enclosed originally by a bank and ditch.

A second series of excavations were carried out at Trim in the 1990s, under the direction of Hayden.[50] These excavations proved conclusively that the early castle at Trim was a ringwork castle enclosed by a wide fosse, which was fully excavated. It was found that there were two phases of occupation. The first phase ended in an episode of burning.[51] This fits in well with the documentary evidence, which suggests that the site was destroyed in 1172-3 and rebuilt in 1173.[52]

Finally, in the 1990s, an earthwork site at Ballysimon, Co. Limerick was excavated.[53] This site, which was interpreted as a ringwork castle by its excavators, has aroused some debate amongst Irish archaeologists. The site was interpreted as a ringwork castle because the finds suggested that it was high-medieval in date and it was located on a ridge close to a medieval church, at a probable manorial centre. However, two circular structures were excavated inside the enclosed area and these buildings seem to have more in common with the buildings of early medieval ringforts than with Anglo-Norman ringwork castles.

1.5 The study area

The field area selected for this study consists of the medieval territories of Leinster and Meath, as they were at the time of Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169 (Figure 1). In the immediate pre-Norman period, the territory of Leinster, as held by Dermot MacMurrough, consisted of the modern counties of Carlow, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Wexford and Wicklow in addition to the modern baronies of Coolestown and

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[50] Alan Hayden, Alan, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8' (unpublished excavation report, 2 vols, licence no: 95E077, Archaeological Projects Ltd., 2005).

[51] Ibid., p. 49.

[52] Evelyn Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland. La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande. A new edition of the chronicle formerly known as 'The Song of Dermot and the Earl'* (Dublin, 2002), Lines 3298 – 3301; *Expugnatio Hibernica. The Conquest of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis*, edited by A. B. Scott and F. X. and Martin, (eds), (Dublin, 1978), p. 141.

[53] Tracy Collins and Anthony Cummins, Anthony, *Excavation of a medieval ringwork* at *Ballysimon, Co. Limerick* (Limerick, 2001).

Warrenstown in Co. Offaly. In the Anglo-Norman period, this territory was divided into the lordship of Leinster and the royal lands of Dublin. The territory of Meath was granted to Hugh de Lacy in 1172 by Henry II. The charter recording this grant states that Hugh was to hold Meath as it had been held by the last king of Meath.[54] This area became the Anglo-Norman liberty of Meath and consisted of the modern counties of Meath, Westmeath and Longford, in addition to the baronies of Garrycastle and Kilcoursey, which are located in the north-western corner of modern Co. Offaly.

This study area was selected for two reasons. Firstly, the documentary sources for eastern and south-eastern Ireland are relatively good. This area was the first area to be invaded and settled by the Anglo-Normans and the two most useful literary sources for early Anglo-Norman Ireland, the *Song of Dermot and the Earl* and Gerald of Wales' *Expugnatio Hibernica,* deal mostly with this area.[55] The lordships of Meath and Leinster and the royal lands of Dublin are also relatively well represented in the administrative records. The existence of good documentary sources for the study area facilitates the matching up of possible ringwork castle sites with historical evidence.

The second reason for choosing this study area is that some research has already been carried out. As a result of O'Conor's research on the earthwork castles of Leinster,[56] and Graham's study of the motte castles of the lordship of Meath,[57] Anglo-Norman castles and manorial settlement are relatively well understood in eastern Ireland and these studies provide an excellent background for further research. A new study of ringwork castles seems timely as almost two decades have passed since the production of these two studies and there is no more evidence available, as a result of excavations carried out at ringwork castle sites. It is the aim of this thesis to build on previous studies of

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[54] James Mills and M.J. McEnery (eds), *Calendar of the Gormanston register* (Dublin, 1916), p. 177; Colin Veach, 'Henry II's grant of Meath to Hugh de Lacy in 1172: a reassessment' in *Ríocht na Mídhe*, xviii (2007), 67–94.

[55] Evelyn Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland. La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande. A new edition of the chronicle formerly known as 'The Song of Dermot and the Earl'* (Dublin, 2002). Mullally's translation has been used except where otherwise stated; *Expugnatio Hibernica. The Conquest of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis*, edited by A. B. Scott and F. X. and Martin, (eds), (Dublin, 1978), p. 141.

[56] Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster' (3 vols, PhD, Cardiff, 1993).

[57] B. J. Graham, 'The mottes of the Anglo-Norman liberty of Meath', in Murtagh, Harmon, (ed.), *Irish Midland Studies: essays in commemoration of N.W. English* (Athlone, 1980), pp 39-56.

earthwork castles, re-evaluating the evidence and incorporating more recent data, in order to address some of the major questions regarding ringwork castles in Ireland.

1.6 Methodology

For the purposes of this research, an interdisciplinary approach was taken, which utilised both historical and archaeological evidence and gave equal weight to both types of evidence. The historical sources utilised included literary sources, like the *Expugnatio Hibernica,* the *Song of Dermot and the Earl* and *The History of William Marshal*, in addition to administrative records, charter evidence and annals. The archaeological evidence consisted of information collected during field visits, evidence from excavations and information taken from the SMR files of the Archaeology Archives of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Cartographic sources, including the maps of the Ordnance Survey and the Down Survey maps, were also consulted, and aerial photographs were also used.

A list of sites to be investigated was compiled by taking all of the sites previously identified as possible ringworks castles. These included excavated ringwork castles and sites identified by Barry, O'Conor and Colfer and other sources as possible ringwork castles. All sites classified as possible ringworks in the county inventories or by the RMP (up to January 2008), were also included.

Each of the fifty-one sites was visited and a field report written. The information gathered during these visits was compiled to form the site reports in the Gazetteer (see Section 1.8 below). The earthwork sites that are extant and accessible were measured and sections were drawn where possible (Figures 2-7). Although the county inventories and RMP files contain some measurements, it was felt that taking new measurements for each site would provide a more complete and reliable set of data, with which to work. In some cases, it was not possible to measure the earthwork because the site was inaccessible or because the site was no longer extant. In these few cases, it has been highlighted in the site reports in the Gazetteer and, where relevant, in the main text, that the measurements are not my own. In cases where the site has been excavated, some measurements have been taken from the excavation report and these have been fully referenced.

This thesis represents an attempt to utilise this archaeological evidence combined with the available source material, in order to address some of the questions regarding the use of the ringwork castle in Ireland and its role in the Anglo-Norman invasion and settlement.

1.7 The 'Anglo-Norman' or 'English' invasion of Ireland

The terminology used to describe the ethnic groups in medieval Ireland has been the subject of some debate in recent decades. For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'Anglo-Norman' has been used to describe the people who invaded Ireland in 1169 and subsequently settled, while the term 'Gaelic Irish' has been used to describe the people who already resided on the island.

As Gillingham has outlined, the term 'Anglo-Norman' was adopted by historians began in the nineteenth century as the conquest of Ireland was compared to the earlier invasion of England and it was believed that the men who participated in both invasions were of Norman descent.[58] There are several problems with the term 'Anglo-Norman'. Firstly, it seems inaccurate, as it implies that the invaders and settlers of the late twelfth century were a homogenous group of people, who were of Norman descent but had lived in England for some time. However, the documentary evidence clearly shows that Strongbow's invading army and the settlers who followed later were comprised of a combination of ethnic groups. They included people of Norman descent, who had most recently lived in southern Wales, and this group could more accurately be described as Cambro-Norman. There was also a large contingent of Flemish men in Strongbow's army, as is attested by the commonness of the surname Fleming in late twelfth and early thirteenth-century Ireland. The men who comprised Strongbow's invading army could therefore be more described as Anglo-Norman, Cambro-Norman and Flemish. However, such a long description is too cumbersome to be useful and, as Duffy has argued, the problem with terms like these is that '...they fly in the face of the

[58] John Gillingham, 'Normanizing the English invaders of Ireland' in Huw Pryce and J. L. Watts, (eds), *Power and identity in the Middle Ages: essays in honour of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), pp 85-97.

overwhelming contemporary view that what these years witnessed was, to use Gerald de Barri's phrase, adventus Anglorum, 'the arrival of the English.'[59]

The main problem that historians have with the term 'Anglo-Norman' is that it is a modern construct that no basis in the medieval source material. In recent decades, historians have tended to prefer the term 'English' over 'Anglo-Norman' to describe this ethnic group in medieval Ireland, because 'English' is the term that this group used to identify themselves. This is attested by the contemporary sources, including Gerald of Wales' *Expugnatio Hibernica* and the anonymous poem known as the *Song of Dermot and Earl,* which used the words and the French word 'Anglis' and 'Engleis' respectively. It is notable that the term 'Norman' does appear once in the *Expugnatio Hibernica*, when Gerald of Wales utilises it to describe the entourage that accompanied Prince John's on his visit to Ireland in 1285.[60] It has also been suggested that the term 'English' is more appropriate because the people who settled in Ireland in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries were 'English' in the sense that they were loyal to the English crown. Even in the later medieval later period, those living within the area that became the Pale clearly identified themselves as English rather than Norman or Irish.

Despite these valid reasons for the use of the term 'English', the term 'Anglo-Norman' has been used throughout this thesis. In terms of material culture, the term 'Anglo-Norman' also seems more apt than 'English' because it conveys the idea that there was an introduction of some elements of Norman material culture into England in 1066, in the form of castles and pottery for example, which was then transmitted to Ireland in the late twelfth century. Also, the term 'Anglo-Norman' is still the term generally used by archaeologists working on medieval Ireland, and the introduction of other terms may lead to unnecessary confusion.

1.8 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of two volumes. The first volume contains the text, illustrations and bibliography while the second volume contains the Gazetteer.

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[59] Seán Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1997), p. 59.

[60] John Gillingham, 'The English invasion of Ireland' in John Gillingham, (ed.), *The English in the twelfth century: imperialism, national identity and political values* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp 155-6.

The main text is divided into nine chapters. This first chapter contains introductory material. The second chapter deals with the evidence for ringwork castles in Western Europe, focusing particularly on England and Wales. The aim of this chapter is to provide a wider European context in which the ringwork castles of the study area can be discussed. The third chapter deals with the difficulties and challenges involved in identifying and defining ringwork castles in the context of Irish archaeology, where the presence in the landscape of other types of circular enclosures, including early medieval ringforts, make ringwork castle identification particularly difficult. A methodology for the identification of ringwork castles in Ireland is also proposed in this chapter. The fourth and fifth chapters deal with the morphology of ringwork castles and the associated timber structures. The evidence for morphology is based on measurements taken during the course of field visits and excavated evidence, while the evidence for timber structures is based on excavated evidence from the study area and further afield combined with evidence for traces of structures visible at ground level. In Chapters Six, the siting of ringwork castles in relation to the landscape and pre-existing settlement and communication routes is discussed while Chapter Seven deals with the evidence for the Anglo-Norman settlements and settlement features associated with the ringwork castles in the stuffy area. In Chapter Eight, the evidence for the chronology, ownership and functions of ringwork castles in the study area is discussed and issues including the status of ringwork castles and their relationship with motte castles are discussed. Finally, the conclusions of this study are presented in Chapter Nine.

The illustrations and bibliography are also contained in the first volume. A list of illustrations, which are divided into tables, figures and plates, is given at the beginning of Volume One.

The second volume consists of the Gazetteer, which contains site reports for each of the fifty-one sites investigated. The sites are numbered from one to fifty one. This numbering system was achieved by sorting the townlands by county and then numbering them alphabetically by townland name within the county. For full locational information and site numbers, please refer to Table One.

Each entry in the Gazetteer contains the following locational information; the site name, townland, parish, barony, county and co-ordinates. The RMP number and classification and the *Inventory* number and classification (if applicable) are then given. Finally, the revised classification for the site, reached through the present study, is given. Each site is then discussed under the following headings; siting, field report, documentary references and other sites in the local area. The siting section describes the location of the site in the landscape. The field report contains a description of the site based on the field visit to the site. In cases where the site has been excavated, a section on the excavated evidence has been added. The section on documentary references includes any documentary evidence for the occupation of the site and for Anglo-Norman activity in the local area. The section on other sites in the local area describes any sites that may be associated with the earthwork in question. This is generally confined to the townland within which the site is located. However, some sites that are further away but seem to be associated are also mentioned. Finally, the evidence for or against the classification of the site as a ringwork castle is summarised in the final discussion section.

1.9 Conclusion to the chapter

The purpose of this introductory chapter was to outline the background against which the present study is set, the methodology used and the layout of the thesis. The place of the present study with the field of Irish earthwork castle studies has been described and it has been demonstrated that a re-examination of the evidence for ringwork castles in Ireland is overdue, particularly in light of the evidence uncovered by excavations over the past few decades. This chapter also outlined the reasons behind the selection of the study area and the methodology employed to examine these sites. The aim of the next chapter is to examine the evidence for the origins of the ringwork castle in western Europe and to analyse the evidence for ringwork castles in England and Wales. It is hoped that this chapter will provide a context in which the ringwork castles of the study area can be more fully understood.

Chapter Two – Ringwork castles in Europe, England and Wales

2.1 Introduction to the chapter

The ringwork castles of Ireland cannot be fully understood without first examining the origins and usage of such fortifications in a wider European context. This chapter will examine the evidence for the origins of ringwork castles in north-western Europe and, more specifically, in England and Wales. The role of the ringwork castle in the Norman Conquest of England and the subsequent use of ringwork castles as manorial castles will also be explored. The archaeology of the ringwork castles of England and Wales is particularly relevant to the study of Irish ringwork castles because the majority of the Anglo-Normans who participated in the Norman invasion of Ireland and subsequently settled there were of Anglo-Norman or Cambro-Norman descent.

2.2 The origins of the ringwork castle in Western Europe

The ringwork castle seems to have developed from a variety of fortifications which began to appear in north-western Europe in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Although these earlier fortifications vary considerably in terms of their morphology and function, they may represent the antecedents of the 'true' castle of the high medieval period.

From the late ninth century, large, circular fortifications began to be constructed in coastal areas in response to Viking raiding. These sites, which are common known as 'refuge sites', are known in northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands.[1] These fortifications generally consisted of a circular interior enclosed by large earthen ramparts and wide ditches.[2] The evidence from Zeeland in the south-western Netherlands suggests that the five known refuge sites in the region were constructed in the last quarter of the ninth century.[3] The lack of occupation levels at most of these sites suggested that the fortifications were generally used as refuge sites and were not inhabited continuously.[4] However, at Oost-Souburg in Zeeland and Vourne in western

[1] Johnny de Meulemeester, and Kieran O'Conor, 'Fortifications' in James Graham-Campbell and Magdalena Valor, (eds), *The archaeology of Medieval Europe*, (Aarhus, 2007), p. 316-18.
[2] Ibid., p. 318
[3] R. M. van Heeringen, 'The construction of Frankish circular fortresses in the province of Zeeland (SW Netherlands) at the end of the ninth century' in *Château Gaillard*, xviii, pp 245-6.
[4] Ibid., p. 246.

Belgium, excavations seemed to show that the sites were occupied continuously from the tenth century to the twelfth century.[5]

A second distinct group of fortresses are found in the regions of Gelderland and Overijssel in the central and eastern Netherlands. This second group, which include the Duno, the Heimenberg, the Hunenborg and the Schulenborg, are less homogenous than the coastal group in terms of morphology.[6] For example, the Duno is not circular; the site is located on a promontory and consists of a D-shaped interior enclosed by a crescentic bank and external ditch. Excavations carried out in the 1950s suggested that the site was constructed *c.*1000.[7]

In Denmark, several geometrical fortresses were constructed in the late tenth century. Four such fortifications have so far been identified and excavated, at Trelleborg, Aggersborg, Fyrkat and Odense/Nonnebakken. Although these fortresses varied considerably in size, they have many features in common, including,

> '...outer circular walls with gates at the four points of the compass; gates linked by two axial roads and a ring-road around the inside of the rampart; ditches concentric with the rampart but separated from it by a berm; large, bow-sided houses arranged in quadrangles; one or more in each of the quarters of the fortress' ground area.'[8]

The fortresses at Trelleborg and Fyrkat have been dated using dendro-chronology while Nonnebaken has been dated on the basis of two coin-hoards. The dating evidence all pointed to a date around 980. Although conclusive evidence for the date of Aggersborg is lacking, it is assumed that it is contemporary with the other fortresses.[9] The dating evidence therefore indicates that the fortresses were constructed on the orders of Harold Bluetooth, king of Denmark, in the decade before his death in *c.* 986.[10] The positioning of the fortresses indicates that they were intended to control the kingdom rather than to

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[5] De Meulemeester and O'Conor, 'Fortifications', p. 318.
[6] H. L. Janssen, 'The archaeology of the medieval castle in the Netherlands. Results and prospects for future research' in J. C. Besteman, J. M. Bos and H. A. Heidinga, (eds), *Medieval archaeology in the Netherlands: studies presented to H. H. van Regteren Altena* (Assen/Maastricht, 1990), pp 221.
[7] Ibid., p. 224.
[8] Else Roesdahl, 'The Danish geometrical Viking fortresses and their context' in *Anglo-Norman Studies*, ix (1987), p. 211.
[9] Ibid., p. 215.
[10] Ibid., pp 218-25.

combat external threats.[11] The evidence from the excavations suggested that they were occupied for a relatively short period of time, perhaps a maximum of thirty years.[12] It is notable that there was a gap of over a century between the abandonment of these geometric fortresses in the early eleventh century and the appearance of true castles in Denmark in the mid-twelfth century.[13]

Neither the refuge sites found along the coast of north-western Europe nor the Danish geometrical fortresses are generally considered to be true castles. It is believed that the refuge sites were constructed as communal fortifications, which were intended to protect the local population at times of need, while the geometrical fortresses seem to have been owned and controlled by the crown. It is generally accepted that the true castle of the high medieval period was a fortification constructed for an individual lord; as O'Conor and De Meulemeester have put it, a castle is '...the seriously defended residence of a man of lordly rank.'[14] The fortresses constructed in the ninth and tenth centuries generally seem to have been much bigger than the ringwork castles of the high medieval period; Danish fortresses ranged in size from 120m to 240m in diameter,[15] while the coastal forts of the western Netherlands range from 140m to 265m in diameter.[16]

Archaeologists have tended to look to northern France rather than north-western Europe for the origins of earthwork castles. Traditionally it was believed that the motte castle developed in northern France and was exported to England by the Normans. However, research on the castle sites historically attested in Normandy before 1066 has shown that they tended to be 'promontory' or 'enclosure castles' (or ringwork castles), rather than mottes.[17] As more French castle sites have been excavated over the past few decades, '...the traditional view of mottes as early features of Norman castles...has

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[11] Ibid., pp 225-6; Robert Higham and Philip Barker, *Timber castles* (London, 1992), p. 79; De Meulemeester, and O'Conor, 'Fortifications', p. 319.
[12] Roesdahl, 'The Danish geometrical Viking fortresses and their context', p. 215.
[13] Ibid., p. 217; Robert Higham and Philip Barker, *Timber castles* (London, 1992), p. 79.
[14] De Meulemeester, and O'Conor, 'Fortifications', p. 319.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p. 318.
[17] Davison, B. K., 'Early earthwork castles: a new model' in *Château Gaillard,* iii (1969), pp 37-47; Higham and Barker, *Timber castles,* p. 101.

continued to be eroded.'[18] There is no conclusive evidence for motte castles in northern France before the middle of the eleventh century,[19] and it is now generally accepted that mottes were developing in other regions during the same period. In particular, Herrnbrodt's excavations at Der Husterknupp in Germany have shed new light on the development of the motte castle. The fortification at this site originated as a slightly raised enclosure in the late ninth or early tenth century. In the late tenth century, the mound was heightened slightly and a second enclosure was added. Finally, in the eleventh century, the mound was heightened gradually to form a motte with an associated bailey. The gradual development of fortifications like Der Husterknupp shows that motte castles did not make a sudden appearance in north-western Europe in the mid-eleventh century. It is notable that many eleventh century fortifications, like the earthwork castles identified by Davison in Normandy, seem to have taken the form of ringwork castles.

2.3 The origins of the ringwork castle in England

Traditionally, it was believed that the Normans imported the castle, fully-formed, into England in 1066. This hypothesis was supported by Orderic Vitalis' well-known statement that, '...the fortifications called castles by the Normans were scarcely known in the English provinces, and so the English – in spite of their courage and love of fighting – could put up only a weak resistance to their enemies.'[20] However, more recent research suggests that some castles may have been constructed in England before the Norman Conquest. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* makes several references to castles constructed by Normans at the court of Edward the Confessor in the decades prior to the Norman Conquest. Under the year 1052, it is recorded that the Frenchmen fled London, with some going west to 'Pentecost's castle' and some heading north to 'Robert's castle'.[21] It is generally accepted that the motte at Ewyas Harold in Herefordshire represents Pentecost's Castle.[22] It has also been suggested that Richard's Castle,

[18] Higham and Barker, *Timber castles,* pp 101-2.
[19] Ibid., p. 99.
[20] *The ecclesiastical history of Orderic Vitalis*, edited and translated by Marjorie Chibnall (6 vols, Oxford, 1975-83), ii, 218-9.
[21] Susan Irvine (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a collaborative edition. Vol. 7, MS E* (Cambridge, 2004), pp 83-4.
[22] J. H. Round, 'Normans under Edward the Confessor' in J. H. Round, *Feudal England: Historical studies on the eleventh and twelfth centuries with a foreword by F. M. Stenton* (London, 1895), pp

Herefordshire, and the castle at Hereford itself, which was destroyed in the seventeenth century, may have originated in the pre-Conquest period.[23] Of these three sites, only Richard's Castle has been excavated and the excavations failed to uncover any evidence for pre-Conquest occupation.[24] However, as Kenyon has argued, '...the construction of the keep in the twelfth century must have destroyed any evidence for the earliest occupation on the motte, so its unusually early origin is unlikely ever to be confirmed archaeologically.'[25] Davison has expressed doubts regarding the pre-Norman mottes identified at Ewyas Harold and Richard's Castle, arguing that while there may have been 'castles' in these locations, it does not necessarily follow that the mottes that survive at these sites belong to the primary pre-Norman fortifications.[26]

The castle referred to as 'Robert's Castle' in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is the most interesting of the possible pre-Conquest castles, in the context of this study. Round identified Clavering in Essex as the probable location of Robert's castle, based on its geographic location to the north of London and the fact that Clavering was listed under Robert fitz Wimarc's lands in the Domesday Book.[27] Round's identification of Clavering as Robert's Castle is widely accepted.[28] It is notable that, unlike the three possible pre-Conquest mottes identified in Herefordshire, the castle that survives at Clavering is a ringwork castle. However, it must be remembered that the present appearance of a castle is not necessarily representative of its original appearance; it seems quite possible that the mottes at Ewyas Harold and Richard's Castle and, equally, the ringwork castle at Clavering are post-Conquest in date and merely stand on the sites of pre-Conquest fortifications.

251-2; D. J. C. King, *The Castle in England and Wales: an interpretive history* (London, 1988), p. 34; Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, pp 42-3.

[23] Round, 'Normans under Edward the Confessor', pp 247-57; Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, pp 42-3.

[24] P. E. Curnow and M. W. Thompson, 'Excavations at Richard's Castle, Herefordshire, 1962-1964' in *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, xxxii (1969), pp 105-27.

[25] J. R. Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications* (London, 1990), p. 52.

[26] B. K. Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1967), p. 38.

[27] J. H. Round, 'Domesday Survey' in H. A. Doubleday and William Page (eds), *The Victoria History of the county of Essex*, Volume 1(London, 1903), p. 345.

[28] R. A. Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest* (London, 1969), p. 116; Frank Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (London, 1970), p. 94; Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, p. 43.

The evidence from excavations at Sulgrave[29] and Goltho[30] suggests that, by the mid-eleventh century, some high-status, Anglo-Saxon residences had begun to develop into structures which could be considered castles. However, it is unclear if the pre-Norman defended residences at Sulgrave and Goltho could be described as castles before the arrival of the Normans. As Eales has argued, 'The door is not yet closed on the possibility of private fortification in late Saxon England, despite the problems in demonstrating its existence.'[31]

2.4 Ringwork castles and the Norman Conquest

In the early twentieth century, Armitage proposed that the motte and bailey castle was in use in Normandy in the period before 1066 and was introduced to England by the incoming Normans, playing a major role in the conquest of England.[32] This view was generally accepted until the 1960s when the dominance of the motte in the early Norman period began to be questioned.

Davison's article, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', which was read in 1966 and published in 1969, challenged the traditional perception of mottes as the archetypal Norman earthwork castle. Davison carried out a brief survey of historically attested mid-eleventh century castles in Normandy. Davison found that these castle sites generally lacked mottes and he concluded that, '...the traditional view of the motte-and-bailey as the characteristic form of earthwork castle in Normandy in the period before the Conquest of England is not substantiated by the evidence at present available to us.'[33] Davison went on to argue that, excluding the depiction of the motte at Hastings on the Bayeux Tapestry, there is little evidence for mottes being constructed by William the Conqueror in England in the initial invasion period and that the earliest castles were more likely to have been 'of the old enclosure type' or, in more modern parlance, ringwork castles. Davison suggested that the earliest documented mottes to be

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[29] B. K. Davison, 'Excavations at Sulgrave, Northamptonshire, 1960-76' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxiv (1977), pp 105-14.

[30] Guy Beresford, 'Goltho Manor, Lincolnshire; the buildings and their surrounding defences, *c.*850-1150' in *Proceedings of the Battle Conference,* v (1981), pp 13-36; Guy Beresford, *Goltho: the development of an early medieval manor, c.850-1150* (London, 1987).

[31] Richard Eales, 'Royal power and castles in Norman England' in Robert Liddiard (ed.), *Anglo-Norman castles* (Woodbridge, 2003), p. 44.

[32] E. S. Armitage, *Early Norman castles of the British Isles* (London, 1912).

[33] Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', p. 42.

constructed by the Conqueror were erected in the context of the northern campaign of 1068.[34]

Davison's hypothesis was not universally accepted by his contemporaries. Although the concept of the ringwork castle was gaining ground, particularly following the publication of King and Alcock's ground-breaking article in 1969,[35] there was still opposition in some quarters. Brown notably attempted to rebut many of Davison's ideas in an article entitled 'An historian's approach to the origins of the castle in England'.[36] However, excavations and historical research carried out over the past four decades have revealed little evidence to contradict Davison's theory that ringwork castles rather than motte castles were the main type of castle utilised by the Normans in the period between 1066 and 1068 and it is now generally accepted.

More recently, English has reiterated Davison's hypothesis, taking into account evidence from excavations which have been carried out at the castles in question.[37] The first castle constructed by the Normans on landing in England was located at Pevensey, where a partial ringwork was constructed by cutting off the corner of the Anglo-Saxon *burh*, which was located within a Saxon Shore fort of Roman date.[38] The castles constructed by the Conqueror on his route between Pevensey and London in 1066 generally took a similar form. At Dover, the castle was created by cutting off one corner of the pre-existing *burh* with a ditch and bank, creating a partial ringwork.[39] The morphology of the first castle at Canterbury is unknown but it was almost certainly located within the Roman town walls which protected the Anglo-Saxon *burh* and it was probably similar in form to the fortifications at Pevensey and Dover.[40] The Conqueror's

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[34] Ibid., p. 45; B. K. Davison, 'The origins of the castle in England: the Institute's research project' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxiv (1967), pp 210-11.
[35] D. J. C. King and Leslie Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1969), pp 90-127.
[36] R. A. Brown, 'A historian's approach to the origins of the castle in England' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxvi (1969), pp 131-48.
[37] Barbara English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest' in Andrew Ayton and J. L. Price (eds), *The medieval military revolution: state, society and military change in medieval and early modern Europe* (London, 1995), pp 45-61.
[38] Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', p. 43; English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', pp 48-9.
[39] Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', p. 43; English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', p. 50.
[40] English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', p. 50.

forces crossed the Thames at Wallingford. It is not known whether the Norman castle at Wallingford, which is first mentioned in the sources in 1071, was constructed in 1066 or later. However, it is notable that, as at Pevensey and Dover, the fortification consisted of a partial ringwork formed by cutting off one corner of the Anglo-Saxon *burh*.[41] Excavations carried out at the Tower of London in 1962-3 revealed a bank and ditch, cutting off the south-eastern corner of the Anglo-Saxon city, which was defined by the old Roman wall.[42] It seems probable that this fortification represents William the Conqueror's first castle at London.[43] The first castle at Winchester, which Davison speculated was probably of ringwork castle type, was constructed in 1067.[44] Excavations subsequently proved Davison correct, revealing that the motte at Winchester was constructed slightly later, in *c.*1071-2,[45] while the original fortification consisted of a bank and ditch cutting off the corner of the Anglo-Saxon *burh*.[46] At Exeter, the castle, which survives as a ringwork castle, was similarly constructed in the angle of the pre-existing Roman wall.[47]

As Davison and English have demonstrated, the evidence suggests that all of the early Norman castles mentioned above were of ringwork or partial ringwork type. The only fly in the ointment is Hastings, where the Bayeux Tapestry clearly depicts the construction of a motte shortly after the arrival of the Normans in 1066. The accuracy of this depiction has been the subject of much debate. It is unclear if the depiction is an accurate representation of the castle constructed in 1066 or if it represents the castle as it appeared when the Bayeux Tapestry was being sewn in the 1070s. Alternatively, the artist may not have been familiar with Hastings and may have used a generic image of a castle. The excavation of the motte at Hastings in the 1960s did not shed much light on

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[41] Ibid., p. 51.
[42] D. M. Wilson and D. G. Hurst, 'Medieval Britain in 1962 and 1963' in *Medieval Archaeology*, viii (1964), p. 255.
[43] Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', p. 43; English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', p. 51.
[44] Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', p. 43, note 12.
[45] Martin Biddle, Frank Barlow, Olof von Feilitzen, and D. J. Keene, *Winchester in the early Middle Ages: an edition and discussion of the Winton Domesday* (Oxford, 1976), pp 302-5; Martin Biddle, 'Early Norman Winchester' in J. C. Holt, *Domesday studies: papers read at the Novo-centenary Conference of the Royal Historical Society and the Institute of British Geographers, Winchester, 1986* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp 312-14.
[46] English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', p. 51.
[47] Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', pp 43-5; English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', p. 51.

the matter. The castle had been much damaged by erosion and no conclusive evidence for its date of construction was recovered.[48] As Higham and Barker have stated, the motte, '...could have been built at any time after the Conquest.'[49] There was already an Anglo-Saxon settlement at Hastings, which was located within the defences of an Iron Age hillfort,[50] and it has been suggested that the tower depicted beside the motte on the Tapestry represents the church associated with this settlement.[51] The Normans may have utilised the defences of the pre-existing *burh* to construct a partial ringwork castle, similar to the other known fortifications of 1066. It seems possible that, as English has suggested, '...an original primary defence of a ringwork castle within the Iron Age fort was subsequently turned into a motte and bailey castle.'[52]

As Davison and English have argued, the evidence suggests that the castles constructed by the Normans in 1066-7, with the possible exception of Hastings, lacked mottes and took the form of ringwork or partial ringwork castles. English has pushed this argument further, suggesting that ringwork castles may have continued to dominate in the midlands and north of England in the period between 1068 and 1070 as these castles were similarly constructed, '...at great speed in a situation of extreme danger...'.[53] In 1068, William the Conqueror travelled north to deal with revolt in Northumbria, establishing castles at Warwick, Nottingham, York, Lincoln, Huntingdon and Cambridge. A second castle was subsequently constructed at York in 1069. It is generally accepted that the original castle at Nottingham consisted of an oval enclosure on a rocky outcrop, which can be described as a ringwork castle.[54] Davison believed that the rest of the castles were constructed as motte and bailey castles.[55] However, English has argued that Cambridge, Lincoln, Huntingdon, Warwick and Old Baile, York, '...may have originally been of the same type as the early southern castle, such as

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[48] P. A. Barker and K. J. Barton, 'Excavations at Hastings, 1968' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxiv (1977), pp 80-100.
[49] Higham and Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 156.
[50] Ibid., p. 153; English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', pp 49-50.
[51] Higham and Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 153.
[52] English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', pp 50.
[53] Ibid., p. 48.
[54] Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', p. 45; English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', p. 53.
[55] Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', p. 45.

Pevensey and Dover; that is that they were set within the angles of pre-existing walls, defended by ditch and rampart, with the mottes and baileys being later developments.'[56]

The excavated evidence provides some support to English's thesis. At Lincoln, there are two extant mottes, which support the Observatory Tower and the Lucy Tower. It has generally been assumed that the motte under the Observatory Tower is the earlier of the two, representing the castle built by William the Conqueror.[57] However, excavations uncovered mid or late twelfth-century pottery in the rubble core of this motte, indicating that it cannot have been constructed in 1068.[58] The other probable motte, under the Lucy Tower has not yet been excavated. English believes that both mottes are secondary additions and that the castle originally consisted of a partial ringwork constructed in the angle of the town wall.[59]

In the case of York, the sources record that two castles were constructed in 1068 and 1069. According to Orderic Vitallis, William built a castle at York in the summer of 1068. The castle was subsequently unsuccessfully besieged in 1069. William returned to York, defeated the rebels and constructed a second castle.[60] In 1069, the two castles at York were attacked, with fighting taking place in the '*vallum*', and the attackers were repulsed. Later that year, the castles were attacked again and the garrison, concerned that material from nearby buildings would be used to fill in their ditches, started a fire.[61] The Normans were defeated at York and both castles were subsequently captured. William the Conqueror returned to York and recaptured the city and rebuilt the castles. It is generally accepted that the first castle at York was located on the site of Clifford's Tower while the second was on the same site as Baile Hill. However, English has argued that the mottes extant at these two sites are later additions and that the descriptions of the castles contained in the sources indicate that they were of ringwork

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[56] English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', p. 53.
[57] J. W. F. Hill, *Medieval Lincoln* (Cambridge, 1948), p. 84; H. M. Colvin, (general editor), R. A. Brown and A. J. Taylor, *The history of the King's works: the middle ages*, (3 vols, London, 1963), ii, 704.
[58] Nicholas Reynolds, 'Investigations in the Observatory Tower, Lincoln Castle' in *Medieval Archaeology*, xix (1975), pp 201-205.
[59] English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', p. 53.
[60] *Orderic Vitalis*, ii, 218-23.
[61] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a collaborative edition. Vol.6, MS D,* edited by G. P. Cubbin (Cambridge, 1996), pp 81-3.

rather than motte type. As English has pointed out, it does seem implausible that two mottes could be constructed in 1068-9, demolished in 1069 and rebuilt between Christmas 1069 and January 1070.[62]

There appears to be little evidence for the construction of motte castles in England before the 1070s. The documentary and archaeological evidence suggests that ringwork castles were the preferred form of earthwork castle in this period because they were more suited to campaign conditions. This has major implications for the study of early Anglo-Norman castles in Ireland, where it has generally been assumed that the castles of the conquest period tended to be mottes.

2.5 The siting of early ringwork castles in England

It is notable that nearly all of the ringwork castles known to have been constructed by the Normans in the period 1066-80 were located within the defences of Anglo-Saxon *burhs*, which demonstrates that control of these settlements was a priority for the invading Normans.[63] As English has argued,

> 'The towns were politically important for several reasons. They produced a considerable revenue; they contained the largest clusters of population; they were often located at significant road junctions or river crossings. They contained the Anglos-Saxon administrative structures for the shire and the sheriff, with fiscal and military connections, which implies the existence of some administrative buildings, or at least sites. Towns had mints, law courts and markets, and often Roman or Anglo-Saxon defences. Many...were also episcopal sees.'[64]

The taking over of a town and the construction of a Norman castle would have had a major impact on the local population. In practical terms, the construction of a castle in an established town caused significant disruption as it was generally necessary to demolish buildings to create space for the castle.[65] The erection of a Norman castle must also have had a considerable psychological impact on the inhabitants of the town.

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[62] English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', pp 54-5.
[63] Ibid., 45-8; O. H. Creighton, *Castles and landscapes: power, community and fortification in medieval England* (London, 2002), pp 133-7.
[64] English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', p. 45.
[65] Ibid., pp 46-8; Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, pp 139-40.

The siting of many earthwork castles constructed after the initial Conquest period suggests that the Normans continued to reuse and adapt pre-existing earthworks and fortifications. The ringwork castles at Old Sarum, Wiltshire (Plate 1a),[66] and British Camp in the Malvern Hills both occupy positions at the centre of Iron Age hillforts.[67] However, as Creighton has argued, it is more usual for the motte or ringwork to be located in a peripheral position within the hillfort,[68] as at Caer Penrhos in Ceredigion,[69] Caus Castle in Shropshire,[70] and Almondbury in West Yorkshire.[71] Roman fortifications were also frequently re-utilised by Norman castle builders. Excavations at the ringwork castle at Colwyn Castle, Glascwm, in Powys have shown that the ringwork and bailey castle was modelled out of a Roman fort.[72] At Caerwent in Monmouthshire, a small motte castle was constructed in the angle of the Roman town wall.[73] Excavations at Silchester in Hampshire have shown that the amphitheatre associated with the Roman town of Calleva was reused as a ringwork castle.[74] In many of these cases, the Iron Age or Roman fortification used by the Normans had been abandoned for many centuries. However, the structure would still have been very visible in the landscape and may still have held some importance for the local population, if only as a landmark. The main reasons for utilising pre-existing fortifications seem to have been practical ones; the earlier structure would have provided some shelter and defensive capability while the new fortification was being constructed, and the adaptation of an existing structure would also have saved the Normans time and labour.

It is evident that, in the immediate conquest period and later, the Normans had a tendency to re-use both the fortifications of inhabited Anglo-Saxon *burhs* and long-abandoned Iron Age and Roman fortifications and were particularly inclined to construct castles within pre-existing urban centres. This has major implications in terms of Irish castle studies. On arriving in Ireland, the Anglo-Normans would have been

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[66] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes,* pp 38-9
[67] Ibid., pp 38-9; Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, p. 200 and p. 239.
[68] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 39.
[69] Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, p. 236.
[70] Ibid., p. 237.
[71] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 172.
[72] Sheppard Frere, 'The Roman fort at Colwyn Castle, Powys (Radnorshire)' in *Britannia*, xxxv (2004), pp 115-20; Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, p. 238.
[73] Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, p. 7.
[74] M. G. Fulford, *The Silchester amphitheatre: excavations of 1979-85* (London, 1989), pp 193-5.

confronted with some towns on the coast, some occupied Gaelic Irish fortifications and many thousands of presumably abandoned ringforts. The evidence from England suggests that re-use of a pre-existing structure was always the preferred option for the Normans and the probability of underlying Gaelic sites must be considered when approaching Anglo-Norman castles in Ireland. The evidence for such re-use will be fully discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.5).

2.6 Distribution and relationship with mottes

Most of the early castles discussed above were urban castles, constructed on the orders of William the Conqueror, which remained under royal control. However, ringwork castles continued to be constructed alongside motte castles in the context of the subinfeudation process and, like mottes, were occupied as manorial castles.

Ringwork castles seem to have been significantly fewer in number of England and Wales than motte castles. King and Alcock identified 723 mottes and 198 ringwork castles in England and Wales, suggesting a ratio of approximately 3.7 mottes to 1 ringwork.[75] However, they argued that this ratio was likely to change as more research was carried out;

> 'We can however, suggest the probable direction in which closer investigation is likely to modify them [the figures]; if our own experience during the introductory work for this paper is any guide, the number of mottes is likely to diminish, that of ringworks to increase, so that the present proportion of 3.7 mottes to 1 ringwork, already decidedly lower than that which was obtained at the beginning of our investigation, is likely to be reduced still further, perhaps as low as 3 to 1.'[76]

King and Alcock believed that numbers of ringworks would increase as more sites were identified through fieldwork and excavation while the numbers of mottes would remain static, or even decrease due to past mis-identification. Spurgeon's research subsequently showed that King and Alcock's projected ratio of 3 mottes to 1 ringwork castle was correct, at least for Wales. His count of earthwork castles found that, by 1987, there were 242 known mottes and seventy-seven ringwork castles in Wales.[77]

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[75] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 98.
[76] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 98.
[77] C. J. Spurgeon, 'Mottes and castle-ringworks in Wales', in J. R. Kenyon and Richard Avent, (eds), *Castles in Wales and the Marches: essays in honour of D. J. Cathcart King* (Cardiff, 1987), pp 23-4.

King and Alcock noted that the proportion of ringworks to mottes varied considerably from county to county in England and Wales and that ringwork castles tended to occur in clusters (Figure 8). Although ringwork castles are found in nearly all the counties of England and Wales, they are much more common in some areas than others and the ratio of ringworks to mottes varies dramatically. Ringworks occur frequently in localized clusters and it is difficult to make sense of the overall distribution pattern. Ringwork castles are particularly common in south-west England. In Cornwall, ringwork castles outnumber mottes, with five known ringwork castles as opposed to three known mottes. In neighbouring Devon, there are nine ringworks and thirteen motte castles. There is a notable cluster of ringwork castles in Wiltshire, Dorset and Hampshire. In the midlands, there is a group of ringwork castles between Warwickshire and Northamptonshire and a similar cluster in a band across western Bedfordshire, northern Hertfordshire and north-western Essex. There are also clusters of ringwork castles in Norfolk, where the ringwork castles include the impressive examples at Castle Rising and Castle Acre, and in Kent, where it is notable that the ringwork castles mostly stand on the eastern bank of the River Medway.[78] Ringworks are particularly common in south Wales. There are two notable clusters of ringwork castles in Glamorgan, located in the south of the county and on the Gower Peninsula, where there are no mottes at all. In total, there are twenty-seven ringworks and only sixteen mottes in Glamorgan.[79] The scarcity of ringwork castles in some counties is equally interesting. There are very few ringwork castles in the West Midlands. In northern Wales, Spurgeon has noted that, in the areas corresponding to medieval Gwynedd, Powys and Perfeddwlad, there are seventy-five mottes but only seven ringworks.[80]

It is difficult to explain the overall distribution pattern of ringwork castles in England and Wales; as King and Alcock commented, '... no historical or geographical explanation seems applicable.'[81] However, research on Welsh ringwork castles has suggested that geology may have played a significant role in the choice between a motte or ringwork castle. Neaverson's research on mottes in northern Wales found that these

[78] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 103.
[79] Spurgeon, 'Mottes and castle-ringworks in Wales', p. 27.
[80] Ibid.
[81] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 103.

mottes were generally constructed on glacial drift deposits, which provided 'suitable substratum' for motte-building.[82] Neaverson did not comment on ringwork castles, which are rare in northern Wales. Spurgeon has built on Neaverson's work and has argued that geology may partially account for the prevalence of ringwork castles in some areas of Wales and their scarcity in others.[83] Although much of Wales is covered by glacial drift deposits, the coastal areas of southern Wales, including southern Pembrokeshire, western Carmarthenshire, the Gower peninsula and the Vale of Glamorgan, are not. Spurgeon's study of the earthwork castles of south Wales has shown that, in general, the mottes are located on glacial drift or alluvium while the ringwork castles tend to have been constructed on shallower soils. For example, in the Vale of Glamorgan, all of the mottes are clearly located on glacial drift, with the possible example of Castell Coch, where it is thought that the primary castle may have been a motte. With the exception of the ringwork castle of Llanilid, the ringworks lie to the south of the glacial drift on shallower soils directly overlying rock.[84] While the distinction is not quite so clear in other parts of south Wales, it seems that Spurgeon's argument does go some way towards explaining the distribution of mottes and ringworks, at least in Wales. At first glance, Spurgeon's theory does not seem to be widely applicable in England, although Creighton has suggested that geological factors may explain the cluster of eight ringwork castles in the Derbyshire Peak District.[85] Further in-depth research on the relationship between earthwork castles and their underlying geology may shed some light on the factors which informed the choice between motte and ringwork castles.

Local fashions or trends may also have played a role in the choice between a motte or ringwork castle. It is clear from King and Alcock's distribution map that ringwork castles tend to occur in localized groups. It seems probable that lesser lords imitated the castles of their social superiors and the expertise available in the local area may also have informed their choice; as King has argued, '...the local castle-builders are likely to

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[82] Ernest Neaverson, *Mediaeval castles in North Wales: a study of sites, water-supply and building stones* (Liverpool, 1947).
[83] C.J. Spurgeon, 'The castles of Glamorgan: some sites and theories of general interest' in *Château Gaillard,* xiii (1987), pp 203-26; Spurgeon, 'Mottes and castle-ringworks in Wales', pp 32-6.
[84] Spurgeon, 'Mottes and castle-ringworks in Wales', pp 35-6.
[85] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, pp 48-9.

have been influenced in their choice whether by emulation or by the expert advice available in their own district.'[86]

Other factors may also have played a part in the choice between a motte and a ringwork castle. The nature of the site available would inevitably have influenced the form of the castle. For example, ringworks are often located on ridges. Where the site already commanded good views, the height offered by a motte was not necessarily needed. However, many mottes were constructed on sites which already had the advantage of height. For example, at Almondbury, the motte and bailey and adjoining borough were established within the defences of an Iron Age hill-fort, which commanded exceptional views over the surrounding countryside. In cases where there was pre-existing settlement, a ringwork castle may have been more suitable than a motte, '...either where the need arose to defend a complex or domestic buildings in a time of crisis, or where an earlier manorial centre was fortified as an act of usurpation and conquest.[87] At Notre-Dame-de Gravenchon (Seine-Maritime) in France,[88] and Sulgrave in Northamptonshire,[89] ringworks were erected around pre-existing aristocratic residences. Finally, the personal taste or preference of the castellan must always have played an important role.

Excavations have shown that some Conquest period ringwork castles subsequently developed into motte castles. At Castle Neroche in Somerset, excavations showed that there were four main phases of construction (Figure 9). The first fortification on the site consisted of a rampart and ditch, which cut off the end of an inland promontory, enclosing an area of approximately 30,000m².[90] Although no datable finds were recovered from this phase, the excavator has argued that it is pre-Norman in origin and may represent an Iron Age hillfort or an Anglo-Saxon fortification.[91] The second phase

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[86] King, *The Castle in England and Wales: an interpretive history*, pp 42-3.
[87] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 49.
[88] Jacques Le Maho, 'Notre-Dame-de-Gravenchon (Seine-Maritime). La Fontaine-Saint-Denis' in 'Chroniques des fouilles médiévales en France' in *Archéologie Médiévale*, xvii (1987), pp 247-50; Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, p. 5.
[89] B. K. Davison, 'Excavations at Sulgrave, Northamptonshire, 1960-76' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxiv (1977), pp 105-14; Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, p. 5.
[90] B. K. Davison, 'Castle Neroche: an abandoned Norman fortress in South Somerset' in *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society*, cxiv (1972), p. 19.
[91] Davison, 'Castle Neroche: an abandoned Norman fortress in South Somerset', p. 23.

of the castle was a partial ringwork constructed within the area of the earlier fortification. This partial ringwork consisted of a bank and external ditch, enclosing a D-shaped area of about 8000m². This phase was dated to the immediate post-Conquest period based on the pottery finds. The pottery associated with this phase was of North French type and was described by the excavator as, '...presumably the work of a Norman potter travelling in the retinue of his lord.'[92] The historical background of this ringwork castle is unclear as there are no known contemporary references to a castle in this location. Davison has suggested that the ringwork castle may have been constructed in response to the rebellion in south-west England in 1067-9 and functioned as '...the base of a striking force, rather than a garrison point or fortified manor.'[93] In its third phase, the castle was at Castle Neroche was transformed into a motte and bailey castle; the motte, which measured between 6m and 7.5m in height above ground level, was constructed over the ringwork bank at the northern tip of the promontory and the partial ringwork became the bailey.[94] Davison has argued that Count Robert of Mortain, brother of William the Conqueror, was probably responsible for the construction of this motte and bailey castle as he held the manor of Staple, including Castle Neroche, at the time of Domesday Book.[95] The date of the motte is unclear but, as Davison has argued, '...it is difficult to fit the building of a residential castle at Neroche into any context, political or economic, later than 1088...'.[96] Davison has also suggested that Castle Neroche may have been Robert's original *caput* castle, although the documentary evidence attests that his *caput* was at Montacute by 1088.[97] The final phase of the castle, which consisted of a miniature shell-keep and bailey constructed on the summit of the motte, may represent a reoccupation of the castle during the 'Anarchy' of Stephen's reign.[98]

The earthwork castle at Goltho seems to have undergone a similar transformation form Conquest-period ringwork castle to motte. As discussed above (Section 2.3), Beresford's excavations at Goltho have shown that the site originated as a high-status

[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., p. 24.
[94] Ibid., pp 21-2.
[95] Ibid., pp 24-5.
[96] Ibid., p. 25.
[97] Ibid., pp 24-5.
[98] Ibid., p. 26.

defended residence in the late Saxon period, which developed over time into a ringwork castle. The excavator dated this ringwork phase (Phase 5) to *c.*1000-1080.[99] However, the chronology of the various phases at Goltho has been reinterpreted and it is now generally accepted that the enclosed hall of Phase 3 is approximately fifty years later than originally thought, dating to *c.*900 rather than *c.*850.[100] This pushes the later phases forward, '...so that the Phase 5 ringwork... may well be Norman or even span the Conquest...'.[101] A motte was later constructed within the area of the ringwork, creating a small motte and bailey. Beresford dated the motte and bailey phase (Phase 6) to *c.*1080-1150.[102] According to the revised chronology of the site, a date of *c.*1140-1150 is more likely and it has been suggested that the motte and bailey may represent an Anarchy-period castle.[103]

The revised chronology of the site at Goltho suggests that the development of the castle from ringwork castle to motte was slower than at Castle Neroche; the ringwork at Goltho was occupied for up to ninety years before the motte was added while at Castle Neroche, the evidence suggests that the ringwork phase was probably occupied for less than a decade. A third example of a motte that developed from a ringwork castle was excavated at More in Shropshire.[104] Unfortunately, an excavation report has not yet been published. Although no evidence for motte castles built on top of earlier ringwork castles has been excavated in Ireland, the future excavation of motte castles in Ireland may '...indicate a similar sequence from ringwork castle to motte in certain cases.'[105]

Although the issue of re-sited castles is somewhat controversial, the examination of these sites may shed some light on the relationship between mottes and ringwork castles. Creighton has argued that, 'the physical relocation of a castle from one site to another in the immediate locality is by far the most common reason for the juxtaposition

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[99] Guy Beresford, Goltho: the development of an early medieval manor, c.850-1150 (London, 1987), pp 121-2.
[100] Richard Hodges, 'Origins of the English castle' in *Nature*, cccxxxiii (1988), pp 112-3; David Stocker, 'Review of G. Beresford, *Goltho: the development of an early medieval manor, c.850-1150*' in *Archaeological Journal*, xiv (1989), pp 627-9; Creighton, *Castles and landscapes,* pp 21-2.
[101] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes,* p. 22.
[102] Beresford, *Goltho: the development of an early medieval manor, c.850-1150*, pp 85-6.
[103] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes,* p. 22 and p. 24.
[104] Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, p. 198.
[105] Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster' (3 vols, PhD thesis, Cardiff, 1993), i, 341.

in close proximity of two castle sites.'[106] Sometimes castles were occupied for a period of time before being re-sited, while in other cases, the first castle was abandoned unfinished. This seems to have been the case at Berden in Essex, where a ringwork castle seems to have been abandoned unfinished and a second ringwork was constructed on a superior site nearby.[107] Occasionally, the re-siting of a castle is recorded in the documentary sources. For example, it is recorded that William de Albini, second earl of Arundel, moved his *caput* castle from Old Buckenham to New Buckenham, approximately 2.5km to the south-east, in the mid-twelfth century. It seems likely that William's ringwork and bailey castle at New Buckenham was near completion by 1146, as a charter records that the site of the old castle was given to the Augustinians at this time.[108]

Ringwork castles often seem to have been replaced by nearby mottes. This can be seen at Caus in Shropshire, where the motte and bailey known as Caus Castle seems to have replaced the ringwork castle of Hawcock's Mount, which stands just over 1km away. It is believed that the name 'Hawcock's Mount' represents a corrupt form of 'Old Caus Mount', indicating that the ringwork castle is the older of the two castles.[109] King and Alcock have suggested that the ringwork castles at Castell Madoc (in the parish of Llanfihangel Fechan in Breconshire) and Ystum Enlii (in Llanedy in Carmarthenshire), were abandoned when the adjacent mottes were built. This argument is based on the fact that these ringwork castles appear to be 'badly mutilated', suggesting that each was deliberately slighted when it was abandoned in favour of the adjacent motte.[110] The excavations at Castell Madoc supported King and Alcock's hypothesis to some extent, showing that the occupation of the ringwork castle was short-lived.[111] However, without excavating the motte, it is impossible to be certain that it replaced the ringwork. King and Alcock also suggested that the partial ringwork castle of Green Castle, Humbleton,

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[106] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 60.
[107] Ibid., pp 60-1.
[108] Paul Rutledge, 'New Buckenham' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxvii (1980), pp 352-3; Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, pp 163-4; Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 61.
[109] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 100; P. A. Barker, 'Caus Castle and Hawcock's Mount' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxviii (1981), p. 34.
[110] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 100.
[111] E. J. Talbot and B. V. Field, 'The excavation at Castell Madoc ringwork, Lower Chapel, Breconshire: an interim report' in *Brycheiniog,* xii (1967-8), pp 131-2; Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, p. 24.

which is located high on a cliff above a gorge, represents the original castle of Wooler. The motte at the centre of the town of Wooler (approximately 1.2km to the east of the ringwork) may have been constructed as a replacement for the ringwork castle, as it is in a far more convenient location.[112] Similarly, at Bradfield in South Yorkshire, it has been suggested that the ringwork castle known as Castle Hill was abandoned in favour of the motte and bailey known as Bailey Hill, which is located beside the parish church approximately 600m away.[113]

King and Alcock suggested that, in a few cases, ringwork castles may have replaced earlier mottes. For example, it was suggested that the large ringwork castle at Hay in Breconshire replaced the nearby motte castle, based on the fact that the post-medieval buildings inside the ringwork were occupied until relatively recently.[114] However, the nearby motte occupies a site adjacent to the medieval church suggesting that it was at the core of the medieval settlement. Without excavating both sites, it is not possible to draw any conclusions regarding the chronological relationship between the two castles. King and Alcock also suggested that the large ringwork castle of Barley Pound in Hampshire was constructed as a replacement for the nearby motte known as Powderham Castle.[115] However, more recently, both Powderham Castle and a second small motte known as Bentley Castle have been interpreted as siege castles constructed during the siege of Barley Pound Castle in 1147.[116]

In general, the evidence supports King and Alcock's hypothesis that, where a ringwork castle and motte castle stand close together, '...so that it appears that one has been occupied in succession to the other, the ringwork seems more commonly to be the older of the two.'[117] However, without excavating both castles in each case, it is impossible to be certain which castle is earlier. It is also possible that the number of re-sited castles has been overestimated as few pairs of such castles have been excavated. It seems that,

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[112] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 100.
[113] Julian Birch, 'Bailey Hill, Bradfield' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxvii (1980), pp 457-8; Julian Birch, 'Castle Hill, Bradfield' in *Archaeology Journal*, cxxxvii (1980), pp 458-9; Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, pp 61.
[114] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 100.
[115] Ibid., p. 100
[116] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 58.
[117] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 100.

in some cases, the pair of castles may represent a castle with an associated siege-work rather than a re-sited castle.

2.7 The chronology and functions of ringwork castles

Ringwork castles seem to have been the castle type of choice in the initial conquest period. However, they continued to be constructed and occupied alongside mottes and stone castles throughout the late eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, fulfilling all of the roles associated with medieval castles, including administrative, military and residential functions. The documentary and archaeological evidence suggests that most mottes in England were constructed between the late eleventh century and the mid-twelfth century.[118]

Ringwork castles seem to have been preferred in campaign situations long after the conquest period. The archaeological and documentary evidence indicates that a large number of ringwork castles in England were constructed during the 'Anarchy' of Stephen's reign. As Coulson has stated, the study of the castles of the Anarchy, '...has been bedevilled by a tendency to treat all fortifications of this period as a single category.'[119] In fact, the castles constructed during Stephen's reign included castles that would have been built in peaceful circumstances in addition to siege castles and counter-castles.

Ringwork castles were particularly suitable as siege-works because they could be constructed quite quickly and could accommodate a large garrison. As King and Alcock have pointed out, '...almost all siege-works, or suspected siege-works, are ringworks.'[120] Renn's study of 31 known siege-works found that they tended to be constructed within 200-300 yards (183m-274m) of the castle under siege; ideally, they should be, '...overlooking the besieged and just out of bowshot.'[121] Many of the historically attested siege-works associated with the warfare of the Anarchy have not

[118] King, *The Castle in England and Wales*, p. 26; Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, p. 8.
[119] Charles Coulson, 'The castles of the Anarchy' in Robert Liddiard, (ed.), *Anglo-Norman castles* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 179.
[120] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 100.
[121] D. F. Renn, 'Mottes: A Classification' in *Antiquity*, xxxiii (1959), p. 107.

survived.[122] This is perhaps unsurprising as they tended to be built hastily and were intended to function as temporary fortifications. However, some of these ringwork siege-castles have survived in the landscape.

In 1993, a ringwork castle known as Danes Castle was excavated approximately 275m to the north-east of Exeter Castle (Plate 1b). This ringwork castle was quite small, enclosing an area of only 17.5m in diameter. However, it was relatively well defended by a bank, which measured up to 2m in height, and an external ditch, which was 7-9m wide and up to 3.8m deep. [123] The historical sources record that Exeter Castle, which was being occupied by Baldwin de Redvers, was besieged by Stephen's forces in 1136. Although the *Gesta Stephani* contains a detailed account of this siege, it does not mention any siege-works constructed by the king.[124] However, the location of the ringwork castle in relation to Exeter Castle suggests that it represents a siege-castle erected by Stephen's forces.[125] It is generally accepted that the siege-work known as The Rings, which is located 270m to the south-west of Corfe Castle in Dorset, was also constructed by Stephen's army (Figure 10).[126] The *Gesta Stephani* records that Stephen's forces unsuccessfully besieged Corfe Castle in 1139, stating that, '...he lingered for a very long time, thinking to reduce the enemy by siege-engines or starve them out, but at length, on the advice of his counsellors, he raised the siege...'.[127] The siege-work at Corfe takes the form of a ringwork and bailey castle, shaped like a figure of eight. Although the erection of such siege-works was common during the 'Anarchy', their construction was not limited to this period; the ringwork castle known as Pampudding Hill is believed to have been constructed by Henry 1 during the course of his siege of Bridgnorth Castle (Shropshire) in 1102.[128]

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[122] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 56.
[123] B. S. Nenk, Sue Margeson and Maurice Hurley, 'Medieval Britain in 1993' in *Medieval Archaeology*, xxxviii (1994), pp 203-4.
[124] *Gesta Stephani*, edited and translated by K. R. Potter (Oxford, 1976), pp 31-43.
[125] Nenk, Margeson and Hurley, 'Medieval Britain in 1993', pp 203-4; Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 56.
[126] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 56.
[127] *Gesta Stephani*, pp 84-5.
[128] N. J. G. Pounds, *The medieval castle in England and Wales: a social and political history* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 52; Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 56.

Other temporary castles were constructed further away from the enemy castles. These counter-castles, which could be located up to fifteen miles away from the enemy castle, were not intended to enable a siege but rather to, '...protect lands that had been subject to raiding (thus preserving good lordship) and to make it difficult for the enemy garrison to forage for supplies.'[129] The ringwork castle at Silchester in Hampshire may fall into this category. Excavations have shown that this ringwork castle was adapted from a long-abandoned Roman amphitheatre and was occupied for a brief period in the twelfth century.[130] It seems possible that the ringwork castle was constructed as an 'adulterine' castle and Fulford has suggested that it may be the castle of 'Silva' mentioned in the *Gesta Stephani.*[131] The usefulness of ringwork castles as siege castles, counter-castles and adulterine castles during the period of the Anarchy may partly explain some clusters of ringworks on the distribution map, particularly in the Midlands. It seems possible that this accounts in part for the fact that ringwork castles seem to be less common in Ireland than in England.

2.8 The late occupation and construction of ringwork castles

Although few motte castles seem to have been constructed after 1154, some mottes continued to be occupied throughout the thirteenth century and even into the fourteenth century. The evidence from excavated ringwork castle sites in England suggests that their chronology corresponds with that of motte castles, with most ringworks being constructed between the late eleventh and mid-twelfth century but inhabitation continuing much longer in many cases. There is little evidence for new ringwork castles being constructed in England after the mid-twelfth century, although King and Alcock have pointed out that licenses to crenellate were granted in relation to the ringwork castles of Ashley[132] and Basing,[133] both of which are located in Hampshire, in 1200 and 1261 respectively.[134] However, King and Alcock regarded the earthwork at Ashley, which survives as a large enclosure defined by a weak bank and shallow ditch, as a

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[129] Sarah, Speight, 'Castle warfare in the *Gesta Stephani'* in *Château Gaillard,* xix (2000), p. 271.
[130] Fulford, *The Silchester amphitheatre: excavations of 1979-85*, pp 193-5.
[131] M. G. Fulford, 'Excavations on the sites of the amphitheatre and forum-basilica at Silchester, Hampshire: an interim report' in *The Antiquaries Journal*, lxv (1985), p. 77; Fulford, *The Silchester amphitheatre: excavations of 1979-85*, p. 195.
[132] *Rotuli chartorum in turri Londinensi asservati*, edited by T. D. Hardy (2 vols, London, 1837), i, 70.
[133] *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1258-66, p. 172.
[134] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 96.

'...rather dubious example of a ringwork'.[135] The wording of the license granted in relation to Basing indicates that it referred specifically to the erection of a palisade on a pre-existing bank; 'Grant to Robert de Sancto Johannes that he may fortify with a paling his house at Basing upon his dyke now thrown up there, and keep it so fortified at the king's will.' However, it is interesting that a timber palisade was added or replaced as late as 1261.

The evidence from Wales suggests that earthwork castles may have been constructed and occupied later than those in England. Spurgeon has noted documentary references to thirty-seven earthwork castles in Wales in the period between 1200 and 1403.[136] These late castles, none of which incorporate any surviving masonry features, include the three ringwork castles of Carreghofa (Montgomeryshire), Sentence (Pembrokeshire) and Old Aberystwyth (Cardiganshire). The documentary evidence suggests that all of these castles originated in the eleventh or early twelfth century but may have been occupied into the thirteenth century. In the case of Carreghofa, the construction of the castle was recorded by Florence of Worcester under the year 1102.[137] The castle was apparently still in use a century later as royal expenditure on the castle is recorded under the year 1212-3.[138] Sentence Castle also seems to have been occupied into the thirteenth century. The historical sources record that it was destroyed by Rhys Fychan in 1257.[139]

The case of the ringwork castle of Old Aberystwyth is more complicated. It was constructed by Gilbert fitz Richard, who had been granted Ceredigion by Henry I in 1110. The castle was unsuccessfully besieged by Gruffydd ap Rhys in 1116,[140] and was attacked by the Welsh and burned in 1136.[141] Having driven the Normans out of Ceredigion, Cadwaladr seems to have used Aberystwyth as his *caput* castle; when he was overthrown in 1143 the *Brut* records that 'Cadwaladr's castle at Aberystwyth' was

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[135] Ibid., p. 96.
[136] Spurgeon, 'Mottes and castle-ringworks in Wales', pp 31-2.
[137] *A history of the kings of England by Florence of Worcester,* a facsimile edition of the Joseph Stephenson translation (Felinfach, 1988), p. 162.
[138] H. M. Colvin (general editor), R. A. Brown and A. J. Taylor, *The history of the King's works: the middle ages*, (3 vols, London, 1963), ii, 602-3.
[139] Spurgeon, 'Mottes and castle-ringworks in Wales', p. 32.
[140] *Brut y Tywysogion or the Chronicle of the Princes, Peniarth MS. 20 version,* translated with introduction and notes by Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1952), pp 42-3.
[141] Ibid., p. 51.

burned.[142] It is generally accepted that these references relate to the ringwork castle excavated at Tan-y-castell, also known as Old Aberystwyth.[143] The excavated evidence supports this hypothesis as it indicates that the castle was constructed in the early twelfth century.[144] However, the excavations also revealed that there were two distinct phases of occupation. Houlder interpreted these phases as a Norman phase and a Welsh phase representing Cadwaladr's occupation of the site between 1137 and 1143.[145] Griffiths later argued that, based on the pottery, the second phase could be dated to the turn of the twelfth century and possibly represents the short-lived castle erected by Falkes de Breaute 'for the king' in 1211.[146] The documentary sources hint that there may have been a second castle near Aberystwyth from the mid-twelfth century. In 1164, the *Brut* records that Rhys ap Gruffydd attacked the castle of 'Aber-Rheidol' and burned it,[147] and it has been argued that the use of a different name suggests a change of site.[148] Griffiths has suggested that the castle of 'Aber-Rheidol' and the Aberystwyth castle recorded between 1197 and 1221,[149] may represent one castle, possibly located at Plas Crug, to the north of the first Norman castle of Old Aberystwyth.[150] The archaeological and historical evidence seems to support Griffiths' argument that the ringwork castle at Old Aberystwyth was constructed and occupied in the first half of the twelfth century and was briefly refortified in the early thirteenth century. Therefore, Moody's suggestion that the ringwork castle was still in use in 1221, when a castle at Aberystwyth was destroyed by Llewellyn Fawr,[151] seems unlikely.[152]

Although evidence for the occupation of ringwork castles in thirteenth-century Wales seems rather scarce, it seems probable that ringwork castles were occupied into the later

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[142] Ibid., p. 53.
[143] E. A. Lewis, 'The castle of Aberystwyth' in John Ballinger, (ed.), The *National Union of Teachers. souvenir of the Aberystwyth Conference* (London, 1911), pp 52-64; C. H. Houlder 'Recent excavations in Old Aberystwyth' in *Ceredigion,* iii (1957), pp 114-15; R. A. Griffiths 'The three castles at Aberystwyth' in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, cxxvi (1977), pp 80-1.
[144] Griffiths 'The three castles at Aberystwyth', pp 80-2.
[145] Houlder 'Recent excavations in Old Aberystwyth', pp 114-17.
[146] *Brut*, p. 86; Griffiths 'The three castles at Aberystwyth', p. 82.
[147] *Brut*, p. 63.
[148] Houlder 'Recent excavations in Old Aberystwyth', p. 115; Griffiths 'The three castles at Aberystwyth', pp 80-7.
[149] *Brut*, p. 79, p. 83 and p. 98.
[150] Griffiths 'The three castles at Aberystwyth', pp 83-7.
[151] *Brut*, p. 98.
[152] Spurgeon, 'Mottes and castle-ringworks in Wales', p. 32.

medieval period, as were motte castles. Spurgeon has demonstrated that many motte castles in Wales seem to have been occupied in the thirteenth century and beyond.[153] A notable example is the earthwork castle at Sycharth, which functioned as the main residence of Owain Glyndwr until its destruction by English forces in 1403.[154] Excavations at the site have shown that the castle's buildings and defences were entirely constructed in timber. The excavations produced pottery shards dating to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with most dating to the later fourteenth century.[155] The lack of fifteenth-century finds suggests that the site was not refortified following its destruction in 1403.[156] The castle of Sycharth is described in a late fourteenth poem by Iolo Goch (see Section 7.5) and it is notable that Goch seems to have been genuinely impressed by the splendour of Owain Glyndwr's castle; although the poem is undeniably sycophantic in tone, it must have been credible to listeners that an earth and timber structure could be an impressive and high-status residence.

The evidence from Scotland similarly suggests that earthwork castles were both constructed and occupied later than in England. In Scotland, as in Ireland, it was traditionally assumed that the motte was the main type of earthwork castle used and that ringwork castles were quite rare. However, since the 1980s, the research of Eric Talbot and other Scottish archaeologists has led to the identification of many ringwork castles, demonstrating that ringworks are not as rare in Scotland as previously believed. It is notable that, like motte castles, ringwork castles in Scotland seem to be relatively late in date.

Five probable ringwork castles have been identified to the south and south-west of Glasgow; at Crookston, Pollok Park, Camphill, Castlehead and Carmunnock. These earthworks are all located on the lands held by Walter fitz Alan, steward of David I and Malcolm IV, and Talbot has suggested that they represent ringwork castles constructed

[153] Ibid., pp 31-2.
[154] R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dwr* (Oxford, 1995), p. 133.
[155] D. B. Hague and Cynthia Warhurst, 'Excavations at Sycharth Castle, Denbighshire, 1962-3' in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, cxv (1966), p. 122.
[156] Hague and Warhurst, 'Excavations at Sycharth Castle', p. 113.

by Walter and his followers.[157] Walter entered the service of David I (1124-53) in or before 1136. Walter received some of his lands, including Renfrew, from David I and these lands were added to by Malcolm IV (1153-65) later on.[158]

The most impressive ringwork castle of this group encloses the late medieval tower house known as Crookston Castle, on the southern fringes of Glasgow. This ringwork is exceptionally large, enclosing an oval area measuring approximately 80m by 55m, and is defended by a large ditch and counterscarp bank.[159] The name Crookston is derived from the name of Robert le Croc, a knight of Anglo-Norman or English descent, who held the manor of Crookston of Walter fitz Alan.[160] It seems probable that the ringwork represents a castle constructed by Robert in the second half of the twelfth century. Although a castle is not specifically mentioned in contemporary sources, a charter issued *c.*1180 records that Robert received permission to construct a chapel within his close (*clausum*).[161] Excavations were carried out at Crookston Castle in the 1970s, under the direction of Eric Talbot. A report for these excavations, which investigated both the defences of the ringwork castle and the late medieval tower house located within it, was published by Lewis in 2003.[162] The excavations uncovered no dating evidence for the original construction of the ditch and counterscarp bank and showed that these features had been remodelled in the later medieval period.[163] However, a groat of Robert III, issued between 1403 and 1406, was excavated underneath the south-east tower, which indicates that the stone castle was constructed in the early fifteenth century.[164] Talbot has suggested that the ringwork castle may have been occupied from

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[157] E. J. Talbot, 'Early Scottish castles of earth and timber: Recent fieldwork and excavation' in *Scottish Archaeological Forum*, vi (1974), pp 48-50; E. J. Talbot, 'The defences of earth and timber castles' in Caldwell, D. H., (ed), *Scottish Weapons and fortifications, 1100-1800* (Edinburgh, 1981), p. 3.

[158] G. W. S. Barrow, The kingdom of the Scots. Government, church and society from the eleventh to the fourteenth century (2nd edition, Edinburgh, 2003), p. 314.

[159] John Lewis, 'Excavations at Crookston Castle, Glasgow, 1973-75' in *Scottish Archaeological Journal*, xxv, no. 1 (2003), pp 27-56.

[160] Barrow, *The kingdom of the Scots*, p. 316; Lewis, 'Excavations at Crookston Castle, Glasgow, 1973-75', p. 28.

[161] *Registrum Monasterii de Passelet: cartas privilegia conventiones aliaque munimenta complectens a domo fundata A.D. MCLXIII usque ad A.D. MDXXIX*, edited by C.N. Innes (Aberdeen, 1832), p. 78.

[162] Lewis, 'Excavations at Crookston Castle, Glasgow, 1973-75', pp 27-56.

[163] Ibid., pp 36-7.

[164] L. E. Webster and John Cherry, 'Medieval Britain in 1974' in *Medieval Archaeology*, xix (1975), p. 242. (pp 220-260).

the twelfth century until the construction of the stone castle was begun in the fifteenth century.[165]

A probable ringwork castle was excavated at nearby Pollok Park in the 1950s.[166] Although no datable finds were found, Talbot has argued that, '... the character of the site is quite in accord with what is known of ringworks in England and Wales.'[167] A second, partially destroyed, circular earthwork has been noted to the south of the probable ringwork at Pollok Park,[168] and Talbot has speculated that this second earthwork may represent a siege-work.[169] The lands of Pollok were not held as a single manor; under Walter fitz Alan; Pollok formed part of the fee held by Peter, son of Fulbert, also known as Peter of Pollok, and part of the fee of his brother, Robert of Stenton, also known as Robert of Pollok.[170] At nearby Camphill, excavations on the sub-circular earthwork, which was previously believed to be an Iron Age hill-fort, uncovered only medieval finds.[171] Talbot has suggested that this earthwork may represent a ringwork castle associated with the fee held by Reginald of Cathcart in the twelfth century and may have been the predecessor of nearby Cathcart tower-house.[172]

Talbot also tentatively identified possible ringwork castles at Carmunnock, on the southern side of Glasgow, and Castlehead, to the south of Paisley, suggesting that these earthworks could represent ringwork castles associated with Walter fitz Alan and his followers.[173] It is notable that the group of ringwork castles and possible ringworks identified by Talbot occur in a cluster and seem to be associated with an individual baron and his followers. In nearby Glasgow, the earthwork castle of the medieval bishops of Glasgow has recently been excavated and has proved to be another example

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[165] Talbot, 'The defences of earth and timber castles', p. 3.
[166] A. H. Johnson, 'Pollok Estate, Glasgow' in *Discovery and excavation* (1959), pp 25-6; A. H. Johnson, 'Pollok Estate, Glasgow' in *Discovery and excavation* (1960), pp 29-30.
[167] Talbot, 'Early Scottish castles of earth and timber: Recent fieldwork and excavation', p. 48.
[168] I. D. Shanks and E. J. Talbot, 'Pollok Estate: Medieval ringwork?' in *Discovery and excavation* (1973), p. 27.
[169] Talbot, 'Early Scottish castles of earth and timber: Recent fieldwork and excavation', pp 48-9.
[170] Barrow, *The kingdom of the Scots. Government, church and society from the eleventh to the fourteenth century*, p. 317.
[171] Horace Fairhurst and J. G. Scott, 'The earthwork at Camphill in Glasgow', *Proceedings of the Society Antiquaries of Scotland,* lxxxv (1950-1), pp 146-56.
[172] Talbot, 'Early Scottish castles of earth and timber: Recent fieldwork and excavation', p. 49 and p. 52.
[173] Ibid., p. 49.

of a ringwork castle in this area. It is notable that the ringwork castles so far identified in Scotland seem to be late in comparison to English ringwork castles, generally dating to the second half of the twelfth century. This is not unexpected as it has traditionally been accepted that the widespread construction of earthwork castles in Scotland was a phenomenon associated with the Davidian Revolution, although some royal castles, including Edinburgh, already existed. As Higham and Barker have argued, castles appeared in Scotland, '...as a result of the deliberate efforts of its twelfth century kings to settle an immigrant feudal aristocracy.'[174]

Excavations have shown that some motte castles in Scotland were exceptionally late by English standards. The mottes known as the Peel of Lumphanon (Grampian),[175] and Castle Hill, Strachan (Grampian),[176] were both constructed in the mid-thirteenth century and occupied into the fourteenth century. The excavation of the motte of Roberton (Strathclyde) revealed that this motte was even later in date, having been constructed in the late thirteenth century or early fourteenth century.[177] Higham and Barker have speculated that, '...other mottes, assumed to be of twelfth century date, may also have been built in the troubled period of Scottish-English warfare.'[178] It seems possible that some Scottish ringwork castles may be similarly late in date, although none have yet been excavated.

In some ways, the archaeology of the ringwork castles of Scotland seems less relevant to the present study than the archaeology of ringworks in England and Wales; those who participated in the Norman invasion of Ireland and subsequently settled in Ireland were far more likely to be of Anglo-Norman, Cambro-Norman or Flemish descent than Scottish. However, it is notable that, in many cases, the ringwork castles of Scotland are

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[174] Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, pp 66-7.

[175] E. J. Talbot, 'Peel of Lumphanon' in *Discovery and excavation in Scotland: an annual survey of Scottish Archaeological discoveries, excavation and fieldwork* (1980), pp 11-12; N. S. Newton and E. J. Talbot *et al.*, 'Excavations at the Peel of Lumphanan, Aberdeenshire,1975-9' in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,* cxxviii (1998), pp 653-70.

[176] P. A. Yeoman *et al.,* 'Excavations at Castle Hill of Strachan, 1980-81' in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, cxiv (1984), pp 315-64.

[177] C. J. Tabraham, ' Norman settlement in Upper Clydesdale – recent archaeological fieldwork' in *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, liii (1977-8), pp 114-28; George Haggarty and C. J. Tabraham, 'Excavation of a motte near Roberton, Clydesdale' in *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, lvii (1982), pp 51-63.

[178] Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, p. 67.

closer in date to Irish ringworks than the English or Welsh examples. It is generally accepted that the widespread construction of earthwork castles in Scotland commenced in the reign of David I (1124-53), when there was an influx of Anglo-Normans into Scotland.[179] As Higham and Barker have argued, the process of settling Anglo-Normans in Scotland was slow and covered the reigns of David I and his grandsons, Malcolm IV and William I (the period 1124-1214).[180] The archaeological evidence indicates that many of the ringwork castles so far identified in Scotland were constructed in this period, making them roughly contemporaneous with the majority of the known Irish examples.

2.9 Conclusion to the chapter

The evidence suggests that earthwork castles began to develop in north-western Europe in the tenth and eleventh centuries. There is limited evidence for possible earthwork castles in the immediate pre-Norman period, in the form of castles constructed by Normans at the court of Edward the Confessor and high-status residences like Goltho and Sulgrave, which developed over time. Research in England has shown that ringwork castles were the favoured form of castle in campaign situations. The evidence suggests that ringwork castles may have been used almost exclusively in the period between the arrival of the Normans in England in 1066 and 1068. Many ringwork castles were constructed within the defences of pre-existing urban centres and some ringwork castles also utilised Iron Age and Roman fortifications. Ringwork castles continued to be constructed alongside motte castles in the late eleventh century and the first half of the twelfth century. There is little evidence for the construction of earthwork castles in England after 1153. The evidence from both Wales and Scotland suggests that earthwork castles were both constructed and occupied later than in England. To a large extent, this can be attributed to the fact that later medieval England, with the exception of its border areas, was a more peaceful place than either Scotland or Wales. In terms of the necessity of fortification, later medieval Ireland probably had more in common with contemporary Wales and Scotland than with England.

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[179] P. A. Yeoman, *Medieval Scotland: an archaeological perspective* (London, 1995), p. 86; C. J. Tabraham, *Scotland's Castles* (London, 1997), pp 15-18.
[180] Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, p. 67.

Chapter Three – The problems of defining and identifying ringwork castles

3.1 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter will attempt to define the term 'ringwork castle' and will consider exactly what is meant by the term. This term 'ringwork' is somewhat problematic because the way in which it is used has changed over time and its meaning remains somewhat controversial in the context of Irish archaeology. This chapter will also outline the challenges involved in identifying ringwork castles and differentiating them from other site-types, focusing particularly on early medieval ringforts. A methodology for the identification of ringwork castles, based on key identifying characteristics of ringwork castles, will also be proposed.

3.2 The definition of the term 'ringwork castle'

The meaning of the term 'ringwork castle' is problematic because it has changed over time and can vary according to context. The term was inherited from England where it was traditionally used in a rather broad sense to describe any circular earthwork, regardless of its chronology and function. In the 1960s, the ringwork or enclosure castle came to be recognised as an alternative form of medieval earthwork castle to the motte and the term 'ringwork' began to be used in a more specific sense to refer to this group of earthwork castles. The term 'ringwork' was not universally accepted at first; Brown, writing in 1969, commented that, '..."ring-work" is an absolutely dreadful term, ambiguous beyond all toleration, which should be abandoned or at least qualified before it does more damage than it has done already.'[1] The ambiguity of the term 'ringwork' led King and Alcock to recommend the use of the terms 'castle-ringwork' and 'military ringwork' as these terms emphasise the military nature of an earthwork and serve to avoid the potential confusion of the term 'ringwork' being interpreted in a more general sense.[2] While the terms 'ringwork' and 'ringwork castle' are now generally used to refer specifically to earthwork castle sites of ringwork type, the term is still occasionally

[1] R. A. Brown, 'A historian's approach to the origins of the castle in England' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxvi (1969), p. 134.
[2] D.J.C. King and Leslie Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1969), p. 90.

used by English archaeologists working in earlier periods to describe generic circular earthworks.

In Irish archaeology, the term 'ringwork' has been in common usage since the late 1970s and is used specifically in relation to ringwork castles of high medieval date. For several reasons, the term 'ringwork castle' has been used throughout this thesis, in preference over the terms 'ringwork' and 'military ringwork'. Firstly, the term 'ringwork' is overly similar to the term 'ringfort' and this can cause confusion, particularly in the context of Irish archaeology. Also, the term 'ringwork' is still occasionally used to refer to generic circular earthworks and the addition of the word 'castle' helps to avoid any confusion in this regard. The term 'military ringwork', was proposed by King and Alcock as an alternative to 'ringwork' or 'ringwork castle'. This term has not really taken off and its use may cause confusion by implying to the reader a meaning distinct from that of the term 'ringwork'. Also, while it is important to note that ringwork castles, like all castles, were inherently military structures, the use of the term 'military ringwork' implies that the military functions of the castle took precedence over all over functions. While military considerations were always important, residential and administrative functions could be of equal or more importance. In short, the term 'ringwork castle' seems the most appropriate as it avoids potential confusion and also incorporates the word 'castle', implying that the earthwork in question fulfilled all of the usual functions of a medieval castle.

The definition of the term 'ringwork castle' is still somewhat problematic as there is no universally accepted definition. McNeill has argued that the lack of a clear definition makes it impossible to identify ringwork castles.[3] This is a rather negative assessment as, while it is challenging to accurately define the ringwork castle in a way that excludes other site-types, there is a generally accepted understanding of what the term 'ringwork castle' means. The definitions used in the context of English archaeology are somewhat vague. For example, the thesaurus of the English National Monuments Record defines a ringwork as, '...a defensive bank and ditch, circular or oval in plan, surrounding one or

[3] T.E. McNeill, *Castles in Ireland: feudal power in a Gaelic world* (Abingdon, 1997), pp 60-1.

more buildings.'[4] The *Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology* contains the following definition of a ringwork castle:

> 'Early form of medieval castle originating in Germany in the 10th century AD and at first little more than a fortified manor. Introduced to England immediately before the Norman conquest, numerous examples were built in the later 11th and early 12th century. More elaborate examples comprise a ringwork and bailey where the ringwork takes the place of the more usual motte and the bailey provides a military stronghold'.[5]

Although these definitions accurately describe what a ringwork castle is, they are not applicable in an Irish context. The first definition would encompass a wide variety of earthwork sites, including early medieval ringforts, which differ from the ringwork castle in terms of their morphology, function and chronology, while the second definition does not describe the morphological characteristics of the ringwork castle. The definition currently used by the Irish National Monuments Service seems equally unsuitable; it states that a ringwork castle is, '...an early form of castle consisting of a circular, oval or polygonal area enclosed by an earth and stone bank and outer fosse. Constructed by the Anglo-Normans in the 13th century AD.'[6] This definition excludes many ringwork castles on the basis of their morphology, which can vary considerably from site to site, and is inaccurate in stating that ringworks date exclusively to the thirteenth century and were constructed only by Anglo-Normans. As the definitions currently in use seem unsuitable, the following definition was formulated for the purposes of this study:

> 'A ringwork castle is an earth and timber castle of high medieval date, usually consisting of a circular or sub-circular platform enclosed by at least one bank and ditch'.

As the morphology of the ringwork castle varies considerably from site to site, the morphological aspect of the definition is deliberately vague. The 'typical' morphology of the ringwork castle is discussed in Chapter Four. In addition to describing the morphology of the ringwork castle, it also seems necessary to define the site-type in terms of the historical context in which it was generally occupied. The construction of ringwork castles seems to have been limited to the high medieval period (AD1000-1300). This means that the definition excludes earlier fortifications, such as refuge

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[4] English Heritage, *NMR Monument Type Thesaurus*, http://thesaurus.englishheritage.org.uk/thesaurus.asp?thes_no=1, accessed 2 November 2007.
[5] Timothy Darville, *The concise Oxford dictionary of archaeology* (Oxford, 2002), p. 361.
[6] National Monuments Service, http://www.archaeology.ie/smrmapviewer/mapviewer.aspx#, accessed 2 November 2007.

sites,[7] which may represent the antecedents of the ringwork castle but cannot be considered true castles.

The term 'castle' has been deliberately included in the definition because it implies that ringwork castles fulfilled various functions in medieval society, including residential and administrative functions, but were primarily military fortifications. The term 'Anglo-Norman' has been deliberately omitted from the definition as it seems illogical to exclude sites which fulfil the other requirements of the definition on the grounds of ethnicity. Although ringwork castle sites were typically constructed in the context of Anglo-Norman manorial settlement, it seems probable that some sites that could be classified as ringwork castles were also constructed by the Gaelic Irish.

3.3 The problems and challenges of ringwork castle identification

The identification of ringwork castles in the field is a problematic issue, primarily because it can be very difficult to differentiate ringwork castles from other types of earthwork. Ringwork castles are morphologically similar to ringforts, which generally date to the early medieval period; as Barry has stated, ringwork castles are 'virtually indistinguishable' from ringforts on the grounds of morphology alone.[8] The sheer number of ringforts in the Irish landscape makes it extremely difficult to identify the relatively few ringwork castles hidden amongst them. Stout has calculated that there are approximately 45,119 ringforts in Ireland,[9] and this estimate is generally accepted.[10] However, as Stout has pointed out, the uncertainties surrounding rates of ringfort destruction, combined with the difficulties of distinguishing between ringforts and other types of enclosure, make it impossible to reach a definitive figure.[11]

The difficulties associated with the identification of ringwork castles and differentiating them from other types of earthwork sites has led to a somewhat negative attitude

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[7] See Chapter Two (Section 2.2).
[8] T. B. Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland* (London, 1987), p. 45.
[9] Matthew Stout, *The Irish ringfort* (Dublin, 1997), p. 53.
[10] Eamon Cody, 'A brief look at aspects of ringfort morphology and distribution' in Christiaan Corlett, and Tom Condit, (eds), *Above and beyond: essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray, 2005), p. 6; Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, 'Native enclosed settlement and the problem of the Irish ring-fort' in *Medieval Archaeology*, liii (2009), p. 271.
[11] Stout, *The Irish ringfort*, pp 48-53.

towards ringwork castles in Irish archaeology. For example, McNeill has commented that ringwork castles in Ireland are, '...in the present state of knowledge, impossible to define or identify',[12] and '...in the absence of means of recognising ringworks, there is nothing to prevent anyone from finding them anywhere.'[13] Elsewhere McNeill has argued that ringwork castles can only be identified with any certainty once a 'physical definition' of the site type has been reached and only in locations where the contemporary documentary evidence shows that a castle existed. Until these two conditions have been met, '...the sport of hunting the ringwork should be suspended.'[14] McNeill has raised some valid concerns; the lack of both a clear definition of what a ringwork castle is and a usable metholodology for field identification has contributed to the classification of many dubious 'ringwork castles'. This is attested by the number of previously identified 'ringwork castles', which were investigated and discarded during the course of the present study, as discussed below (Section 3.6). However, the problems and issues involved in identifying ringwork castles do not justify disregarding the role that ringwork castles played in the Anglo-Norman invasion and subsequent settlement. Indeed, ignoring ringwork castles could potentially lead to a distorted view of the function, distribution and nature of early Anglo-Norman fortifications in Ireland.

O'Keeffe has gone further than McNeill, questioning the validity of the 'ringwork castle' as a classification. According to O'Keeffe, '...there is, in fact, no exclusively field-morphological distinction to be made between ringforts and ringworks. They are the same thing, and the reason we use different words is to convey what we today perceive to be differences of function, culture, and context.'[15] O'Keeffe's argument that ringforts and ringwork castles are morphologically 'the same thing' may be valid to some extent as it can indeed be difficult to differentiate between ringforts and ringwork castles based on their appearance alone. However, it fails to acknowledge that it is the current morphologies of ringforts and ringwork castles which are similar rather than their original appearances; excavation has shown that ringwork castles were generally more heavily defended and had a range of associated timber buildings more similar to

[12] McNeill, *Castles in Ireland*, p. 63.
[13] Ibid., p. 60.
[14] T.E. McNeill, 'Hibernia pacata and castellata' in *Château Gaillard*, xiv (1990), pp 262-3.
[15] Tadhg O'Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland: an archaeology* (Stroud, 2000), p. 30.

those associated with motte castles and stone castles rather than typical ringfort structures. Although the earthworks, as they appear in the modern landscape, may appear to be 'the same thing', they would originally have differed significantly in terms of their appearance and function. O'Keeffe's primary objection to the term 'ringwork castle' seems to stem from the fact that the classification is based on 'differences of function, culture, and context' and had no meaning in the medieval world. To a certain extent, the same criticism can be applied to many of the classifications used in Irish archaeology. Terms like 'moated site', 'rural borough' and 'tower house' are not derived from the medieval sources but can still be usefully applied to archaeological sites to convey a modern meaning. Furthermore, most field classifications are based on certain assumptions regarding a site's function and historical context as classifying earthworks on the basis of morphology alone would lead to vague, meaningless classifications. For example, while mottes and tumuli can be similar in terms of appearance, as both site-types essentially consist of earthen mounds, their function and historical context are of primary importance in classifying and understanding them.

While the views expressed by McNeill and O'Keeffe represent a rather negative attitude towards ringwork castles, they do raise some very valid points regarding the nature of the ringwork castle and the issues involved in differentiating ringwork castles from ringforts. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that Irish archaeologists have tended to treat ringforts as a homogenous group; as Lynn has stated, the term ringfort '...has too often been used uncritically as a portmanteau term.'[16] Similarly, Fitzpatrick has argued that,

> 'The reductive processing of enclosed settlement into the 'simple' 'ring-fort' masks a complex range of site types including earthen enclosures with banks and ditches, those that combine earth and stone in their construction and stone enclosures without ditches. In addition, there are univallate, bivallate and multivallate forms, as well as platform and counterscarp enclosures.'[17]

This tendency to group all circular enclosures under the umbrella of the term 'ringfort' has somewhat hindered the study of Irish earthworks and, to a certain extent, has made

[16] C. J. Lynn, 'The medieval ring-fort: an archaeological chimera?' in *Irish Archaeological Research Forum*, ii (1975), p. 29.
[17] Fitzpatrick, 'Native enclosed settlement and the problem of the Irish ring-fort', p. 274.

the task of differentiating ringwork castles from ringforts seem more daunting than it actually is. In reality, relatively few of the earthworks included in the ringfort class are substantial enough to be easily confused with ringwork castles. The morphological characteristics of the ringwork castle will be fully analysed in Chapter Three. However, in short, the morphology of the 'typical' ringwork castle can be summarised as consisting of a circular or sub-circular platform, which is often raised above surrounding ground level, enclosed by two banks and an intervening fosse. The 'typical' ringfort, if there is such a thing, tends to be less heavily defended and therefore less impressive than a ringwork castle. Stout has calculated that approximately 80% of ringforts are univallate, meaning that they are enclosed by a single bank, while approximately 19% of ringforts are multivallate.[18] Generally, multivallate ringforts are more easily confused with ringwork castles than univallate ringforts. Stout has argued that the owners of multivallate ringforts were of higher social status than those of univallate ringforts and that the ratio of multivallate ringforts to univallate ringforts '...constitutes evidence for a consistent and widespread settlement hierarchy which must mirror a similar social stratification.'[19]

The presence of raised and platform ringforts in the landscape adds another dimension to the problem of differentiating earthwork castles of both motte and ringwork type from Gaelic Irish ringforts. These ringforts, which survive as earthwork enclosure sites whose interiors are raised significantly above external ground level, can owe their morphologies to a number of different construction methods. Some ringforts stand higher than the surrounding landscape because they make use of natural raised features, such as drumlins. For example, the excavations at Dromore in Co. Antrim showed that the ringfort had been scarped from a natural drumlin.[20] The term 'raised ringfort' is generally applied to ringforts which became raised above natural ground level through the gradual accumulation of occupation debris, while the term 'platform ringfort' is generally used to describe ringforts where the interior has been deliberately raised in a single event.[21] Excavations at the ringforts of Rathmullan,[22] Ballynarry[23] and

[18] Stout, *The Irish ringfort*, pp 17-18.
[19] Ibid., p. 18.
[20] A.E.P. Collins, 'Excavations at Dromore ringwork, Co. Antrim' in *U.J.R.*, xxxi (1968), pp 29-66.
[21] C. J. Lynn, 'Excavations on a mound at Gransha, County Down, 1972 and 1982: an interim report' in *U.J.A.*, xlviii (1985), p.81; Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland*, pp 44-5; Nancy Edwards,

Ballyfounder,[24] all in Co. Down, and Ballingarry Down, Co Limerick, [25] have shown that all of these earthworks are 'raised ringforts', which were heightened gradually as occupation debris built up over a long period of time. In contrast, excavations at the ringforts of Gransha, Co. Down,[26] and Deer Park Farms, Co. Antrim,[27] showed that these earthworks are 'platform ringforts', which were deliberately heightened to create a raised mound. Without resorting to excavation, it is rarely possible to distinguish between 'raised ringforts' and 'platform ringforts' as their surface morphologies offer few clues regarding the processes involved in their construction. Raised and platform ringforts seem to have been most prevalent in Ulster and seem to have been particularly common in Co. Down. As platform and raised ringforts appear to have been relatively rare in the study area of medieval Leinster and Meath,[28] differentiating ringwork castles from raised and platform ringforts is less problematic in the study area than it would be in Ulster.

The existence of 'raised' and 'platform' ringforts, in addition to more typical univallate and multivallate ringforts, contributes to the problem of identifying both motte and ringwork castles in the field. The chronological relationships between the various types of ringforts, and between ringforts and earthwork castles, are unclear. It has traditionally been accepted that the majority of ringforts date to the early medieval period.[29]

The archaeology of early medieval Ireland (London, 1990), p. 14. There appears to be some confusion regarding the meaning of the terms 'raised ringfort' and 'platform ringfort'; for example, Kerr uses the term 'platform ringfort' to describe ringforts created by scarping a natural feature, such as a drumlin, and the term 'raised ringfort' to refer to ringforts which were heightened either through the gradual accumulation of occupation debris *or* in a single deliberate event (T.R. Kerr, *Early Christian settlement in north-west Ulster* (Oxford, 2007), p. 3).

[22] C.J. Lynn, 'The excavation of Rathmullan, a raised rath and motte in County Down', *U.J.A.*, xliv and xlv (1981-2), pp 147-52.

[23] B.K. Davison, 'Excavations at Ballynarry Rath, Co. Down' in U.J.A., xxiv and xxv (1961-2), pp 78-83.

[24] D.M. Waterman, 'Excavations at Ballyfounder *Rath,* Co. Down' in *U.J.A.*, xxi (1958), p. 51.

[25] S.P. Ó Ríordáin, *Antiquities of the Irish countryside* (5th edition, London, 1979), p. 57.

[26] Lynn, 'Excavations on a mound at Gransha, County Down, 1972 and 1982', pp 81-90

[27] C.J. Lynn, 'Deer Park Farms, Glenarm, Co. Antrim' in *Archaeology Ireland*, i, no. 1 (1987), pp 11-13.

[28] T. E. McNeill, 'Early castles in Leinster' in *J.I.A.*, v (1989-90), p. 57; Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', (3 vols, PhD, Cardiff, 1993), ii, 56.

[29] Ó Riordan, *Antiquities of the Irish landscape*, p 31-3; C. J. Lynn, 'The dating of raths: an orthodox view' in *U.J.A.*, xxxviii (1975), pp 45-7 (response to G.F. Barrett and B.J. Graham, 'Some considerations concerning the dating and distribution of ringforts in Ireland' in *U.J.A.*, xxxviii (1975), pp 33-45); Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland*, pp 16-18; Edwards, *The archaeology of early medieval Ireland*, pp 18-19.

Although many ringfort excavations produce relatively few datable finds, the dendrochronology and radiocarbon dating results obtained from ringfort excavations generally seem to support the hypothesis that most ringforts were constructed and occupied exclusively in the early medieval period. As Stout has shown, in the case of two-thirds of the ringforts, cashels and crannógs that have been dated scientifically, the midpoints of the date ranges fell between AD 600 and 900.[30] Kerr's recent study of ringforts in north-western Ulster reached similar conclusions, suggesting that univallate, multivallate and counterscarp ringforts typically date to between AD 600 and 900, while platform ringforts are slightly later, with average occupation stretching from the mid-eighth century to the mid-eleventh century.[31] While the conclusions reached by Stout and Kerr are interesting, both studies are compromised by the relatively small number of dendrochronology and radiocarbon dates available for analysis, due to the limited number of excavated ringfort sites.

It has been suggested that the occupation of ringforts may have continued into the Anglo-Norman period and even beyond in some areas. Based on both the documentary evidence and the contrasting distribution patterns of ringforts in 'Anglo-Norman' and 'Gaelic Irish' areas, Barrett and Graham argued that ringforts may have been occupied into the high and late medieval periods, particularly in areas controlled by the Gaelic Irish.[32] O'Conor has also argued the case for the late occupation of ringforts, suggesting that the *longport* sites mentioned in the high and late medieval Gaelic sources may represent well-defended, high-status ringforts.[33] However, Fitzpatrick has argued that the term '*longport*' may not have been used in such a specific sense, stating that it '...is generic and has no specific correlative in the landscape.'[34] Unfortunately, matching up *longport* references in the sources with earthworks on the ground has proved problematic. Whilst much circumstantial evidence exists for the late occupation of ringforts, the excavations carried out to date have yielded little archaeological evidence

[30] Stout, *The Irish ringfort*, p. 24.
[31] Kerr, *Early Christian settlement in north-west Ulster*, p. 117.
[32] Barrett, and Graham, 'Some considerations concerning the dating and distribution of ringforts in Ireland', pp 33-45.
[33] Kieran O'Conor, *The archaeology of medieval rural settlement in Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), pp 93-4.
[34] Fitzpatrick, 'Native enclosed settlement and the problem of the Irish ring-fort', p. 275.

to support this hypothesis. However, this may be partially due to the fact that relatively few ringforts have yet been excavated.

Although ringfort excavations have revealed little evidence for the continuity of ringfort occupation into the Anglo-Norman period, excavations carried out in Ulster have shown that many motte castles of Anglo-Norman date were constructed on top of pre-existing ringforts. For example, the raised ringfort at Rathmullan and the platform ringfort at Lismahon, both in Co. Down, seem to have been heightened deliberately in the high medieval period to form motte castles.[35] The raised ringforts at Ballynarry and Ballyfounder in Co. Down were also heightened in the high medieval period, although the nature of the secondary occupation at these sites is unclear.[36] Although far fewer excavations have been carried out in Leinster, fieldwork has suggested that some Leinster mottes may also have been constructed on top of ringforts. O'Conor has suggested that the morphology of seven mottes in Leinster, located at Donode Big, Co. Kildare, Middlemount, Co. Laois, Raheenamanagh, Co. Laois, Ballinaclogh Lower, Co. Laois, Ballykilleen, Co. Offaly, Drumcooly, Co. Offaly, Killegney, Co. Wexford, and Newcastle, Co. Wexford, indicates that they were constructed on top of pre-existing ringforts.[37] More recently, O'Drisceoil has identified a number of other motte sites that appear to have been constructed on earlier ringforts.[38]

The results of the excavations of complex, multi-period earthwork sites like Rathmullan, Gransha, Lismahon, Ballynarry, Ballyfounder and Ballingarry Down have served to illustrate the difficulties of classifying sites on the basis of surface morphology alone. The identification of ringwork castles is clearly problematic but the problem is more complex than simply differentiating ringwork castles from ringforts. It seems likely that the Anglo-Normans constructed many of their earthwork castles on pre-existing ringforts and, in many cases, earthwork castles represent the final phase of

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[35] Lynn, 'The excavation of Rathmullan, a raised rath and motte in County Down', pp 99-100; D.M. Waterman, 'Excavations at Lismahon, Co. Down', *Medieval Archaeology*, iii (1959), pp 165-9; E.M. Jope (ed.), *An archaeological survey of County Down* (Belfast, 1966), pp 186-7.

[36] Davison, 'Excavations at Ballynarry Rath, Co. Down', pp 81-3; *Waterman*, '*Excavations at Ballyfounder* Rath, *Co. Down*', pp 45-6.

[37] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 62;

[38] Coilin O'Drisceoil, 'Recycled ringforts: the evidence from archaeological excavation for the conversion of pre-existing monuments to motte castles in medieval Ireland' in *J.C.L.A.H.S.*, xxv (2002), pp 189-201.

a complex and evolutionary process. Large, multivallate ringforts and raised and platform ringforts would have been obvious candidates for Anglo-Norman reuse as they could easily be adapted into ringwork castles or used as platforms for mottes. As discussed in Chapter Two, excavations in England have shown that high-status Anglo-Saxon fortified residences were frequently taken over and adapted into castles by the incoming Normans and excavations in Ulster seem to show a similar pattern of adaptation and reuse. While adapting high-status ringforts into earthwork castles made sense on a practical level, the symbolic significance of reusing pre-exsiting centres of power cannot be overstated. Regardless of whether or not these high-status ringforts were still in widespread use by 1169, the Anglo-Norman appropriation of earthworks that occupied key positions in the early medieval landscape would have had a major psychological effect on local populations.[39]

While the accurate classification of earthworks is clearly an important issue, it must be noted that not all earthworks fit neatly into modern classification schemes as some earthworks inevitably fall between two stools. Also, classification schemes tend to focus on a site's latest incarnation and frequently fail to consider that a site may have evolved from one site-type into another. The difficulties of differentiating between motte and ringwork castles and between ringwork castles and moated sites are discussed below (Section 3.6).

3.4 A methodology for identifying ringwork castles in an Irish context

As discussed in the previous section, attitudes towards ringwork castles have tended to be rather negative, primarily due to the difficulties involved in identifying ringwork castles in an Irish context. Ringwork castle detractors have tended to focus overwhelmingly on the challenge of differentiating between ringwork castles and other site types on the basis of morphology. However, a site's surface appearance is not the only aspect on which a classification should be based. It is generally accepted that it is not possible to distinguish ringwork castles from other types of earthwork site, including ringforts, on the basis of morphology and other characteristics must be taken

[39] The evidence for the conversion of ringforts into mottes and ringwork castles will be fully discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.5).

into account.[40] It is therefore necessary to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, utilising a methodology which takes into consideration all of the available historical and archaeological evidence, in order to enable the identification of unexcavated ringwork castles in the field.

The methodologies used to identify ringwork castles have tended to vary. Barry emphasised the importance of defensive siting as an identifying characteristic, stating that, '...it might be possible to narrow down the potential number of potential sites by selecting for closer investigation only those ringforts which were built in naturally defensive positions.'[41] However, as Creighton has pointed out, a surprisingly number of English castles are located in relatively poor locations,[42] and defensive siting is only really useful as an identifying characteristic when considered along with other factors.

O'Conor's methodology for identifying ringwork castles also emphasised the importance of the earthwork's defensibility but stressed that other factors must also be taken into account. O'Conor particularly stressed the importance of proximity to either a historically attested manorial centre or a medieval church site as a criterion for identifying a ringwork castle.[43] Sweetman has approached the identification of ringwork castles from an archaeologist's viewpoint, emphasising the importance of an earthwork's morphology, in addition to its siting in the local landscape and its proximity to an Anglo-Norman manorial settlement.[44]

For this research project, an interdisciplinary approach has been taken, which takes into account the morphology of each earthwork, in addition to all of the available

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[40] T.B. Barry, 'Anglo-Norman ringwork castles: some evidence' in Terence Reeves-Smyth and Fred Hamond, (eds), *Landscape archaeology in Ireland*, (Oxford, 1983), p. 308; Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland*, p. 45; O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, p. 59; Kieran O'Conor, 'Anglo-Norman Castles in Co. Laois' in P.G. Lane, and William Nolan (eds), *Laois: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1999); P.D. Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland* (Cork, 1999), p. 30.

[41] Barry, 'Anglo-Norman ringwork castles: some evidence', p. 308.

[42] O.H. Creighton, *Castles and landscapes: power, community and fortification in medieval England* (London, 2002),

[43] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 60;

[44] Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland*, pp 10-14; P.D. Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath' in Tom Condit and Christiaan Corlett, (eds), *Above and beyond: essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray, 2005), pp 393-4.

archaeological and historical evidence. The following four categories of evidence have been identified as being particularly relevant for the identification of ringwork castles, without resorting to excavation. In order for an earthwork to be classified as a definite ringwork castle, there must be evidence to support this classification under some, if not all, of the following four headings:

1) Morphology
2) Siting in the landscape
3) Siting in relation to high medieval settlement
4) Documentary evidence

1) Morphology

In order for an earthwork to be classified as a ringwork castle, its morphology must be consistent with a ringwork classification. The morphology of ringwork castles tends to vary widely. However, it is possible to make some generalisations regarding their typical appearance. Ringwork castles generally consist of a circular or sub-circular platform enclosed by at least one bank and ditch. The enclosed area tends to measure between 35m and 50m in diameter and is often, although not necessarily, raised above external ground level. Typically, a ringwork castle is by defended by two banks with an intervening fosse. However, some ringworks are enclosed by a single fosse and external bank or by a bank and external fosse.[45]

2) Siting in the landscape

In order to be classified as a ringwork castle, an earthwork should be sited in a location which can be described as strategic or at least defensive. Some ringwork castles are truly 'strategic' from a military viewpoint as they are positioned to overlook and control river crossings or mountain passes. For example, the partial ringwork castle at Carrick (site no. 36), overlooking the mouth of the River Slaney, in an ideal position to both monitor traffic on the river and control a ferry-crossing on the river. Some ringwork castles are located on coastal and inland promontories, allowing them to utilise the natural defences of the site to defend the earthwork castle on one or more sides. Some

[45] The morphological characteristics of ringwork castles are discussed fully in Chapter Three.

sites have no specific strategic advantages but are 'defensive', in that they command good views of the surrounding countryside. Ringwork castles that fall into this category are often located at the manorial centres of small manors. In many cases, the Anglo-Normans responsible for constructing the ringwork castle would have been limited to looking for a site within the confines of a particular manor. While each ringwork site is not necessarily outstanding in terms of its defensibility, it should be the best site available in the immediate vicinity. The positioning of castles within the landscape and the differences between typical ringwork castle and ringfort siting will be discussed fully in Chapter Six.

3) Siting in relation to high medieval settlement

As O'Conor and Sweetman have emphasised, ringwork castles tend to be located close to medieval churches at known manorial centres.[46] Proximity to a medieval church site is therefore an important identifying characteristic. However, it can be difficult to ascertain whether or not a church and earthwork are associated, particularly when there is a distance of more than a few hundred metres between the sites. The parameters of proximity and the nature of association between sites will be further discussed in Chapter Six. While churches are generally the most visible components of manorial settlements in the landscape, the presence of other medieval features, including burgage plots and house sites, mills, rabbit warrens, fishponds, deer parks and tower houses, can also be indicators of medieval settlement in a particular location. While the majority of earth and timber castles were associated with manorial settlements, the absence of evidence for a medieval settlement cannot be counted as definitive evidence against an earthwork being a ringwork castle. In some cases, all traces of medieval settlement have been destroyed and, in other cases, ringwork castles originally existed in isolation in the landscape, having been constructed as hunting lodges or temporary campaign castles, which never developed into manorial castles.

In formulating the definition of the term 'ringwork castle' for the purpose of this study, the term 'Anglo-Norman' was deliberately omitted in favour of 'high medieval'. While it is generally accepted that ringwork castles were commonly constructed by Anglo-

[46] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 60; Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland*, p. 13; Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath', pp 393-4;

Norman settlers in the context of Anglo-Norman manorial settlement, it cannot be assumed that all owners of ringwork castles were of 'Anglo-Norman' ethnicity. Recent research has shown that moated sites, which were traditionally assumed to be of Anglo-Norman origin, were also constructed by the Gaelic Irish.[47] There is no reason to believe that Gaelic Irish lords did not construct ringwork castles in imitation of their Anglo-Norman neighbours. The ringwork castle excavated at Ballysimon may be an example of such a site,[48] although the interpretation of Ballysimon as a ringwork castle has been the subject of much debate[49] Also, some Gaelic Irish ringforts may have been occupied into the later medieval period and may have developed into sites which, to all intents and purposes, functioned as ringwork castles. While it can be demonstrated that all of the twenty-one sites classified as definite ringwork castles by this project were occupied by Anglo-Normans, based on either direct or circumstantial documentary evidence, it seems probable that sites which could be classified as Gaelic Irish ringwork castles do exist, particularly in the west of Ireland.

4) Documentary evidence

The importance of historical evidence in identifying ringwork castles cannot be overstated. In some cases, the documentary records, which can include administrative records and literary sources, contain direct references to castles. Where these references relate to a particular location where there is an earthwork which is morphologically acceptable as a ringwork castle, this provides evidence for the identification of a site as a ringwork castle. Direct references to castles are relatively scarce in the documentary sources for medieval Ireland. However, in many cases, the sources show that an earthwork is located at a historically-attested manorial centre. In these cases, although the castle is not directly mentioned, the documentary evidence for a manor in a particular location can be accepted as supporting evidence for the classification of an earthwork as a ringwork castle.

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[47] Kieran O'Conor, 'The ethnicity of Irish moated sites' in *Ruralia* iii (2000), pp 92-102; Thomas Finan and Kieran O'Conor, 'The moated site at Cloonfree, Co. Roscommon' in *J.G.A.H.S.*, liv (2002), pp 72-87.

[48] Tracy Collins and Anthony Cummins, *Excavation of a medieval ringwork* at *Ballysimon, Co. Limerick* (Limerick, 2001).

[49] See Chapter Five (Section 5.6).

Other evidence, including cartographic evidence, place-name evidence, local tradition, and the historical geography of the local area, can also be of use in identifying possible ringwork castles. Historical maps, including the First Edition Ordnance Survey maps published in the mid-nineteenth century, depict many sites which have since been removed. Ordnance Survey maps also show castle sites in locations where local tradition maintains that there was a castle.

Place-names often offer an insight into the origin of earthwork sites. At a basic level, townland names can be divided into those which are Anglo-Norman and Gaelic in origin. Many townlands which had medieval castles in them include the word 'castle' in their names. Townland names may also be derived from the name of the family who held the land in the medieval period. For example, the townland name of Danestown (site no. 20) is derived from the Anglo-Norman de Aveni family who held the manor in the late twelfth century.

The historical geography of the local area is also relevant to the identification of ringwork castles. Ringwork castles tend to be located in townlands which have the same name as the civil parish in which they are located, indicating that these townlands were important when parishes were being formed in the twelfth century. This will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

3.5 Ringwork castles identified using this methodology

The evidence in favour of classifying each of the fifty-one sites included in the study was considered in view of the identifying characteristics listed above (Figure 7). The evidence for each site is discussed in detail in the Gazetteer of Sites (Volume Two) and the revised classification for each site is given at the beginning of the site report. Twenty-one (41%) of the fifty-one sites in the study area were classified as definite ringwork castles. A further twenty-four (47%) of the fifty-one sites were classified as possible ringwork castles. The earthworks in this category were classified as possible examples because the evidence was inconclusive, or, in the case of six sites (site nos. 5, 9, 16, 39, 42 and 43), because the earthworks were no longer extant and could not be examined for the purposes of this study. Six sites (12%) were discarded because the

archaeological and documentary evidence indicated that these sites, which had previously been identified as possible ringwork castles, should be classified as other types of site.

3.6 Discarded sites

Six sites in the study area were discarded for the purposes of this study because the evidence suggested that they are not ringwork castles, although they have previously been identified as such.

Two earthwork sites were excluded because their morphology was more compatible with a motte classification. The morphological distinction between a motte and a ringwork is difficult to quantify. Graham has implied that earthworks have to be a certain height to qualify as mottes; his study of the mottes in the Norman liberty of Meath included only mottes that were more than 4m in height.[50] However, many of the sites classified as mottes by the RMP do not meet this criterion. For example, the motte at Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath, measures between 2.5m and 3m in height,[51] and the motte at Fethard, Co. Wexford, is even lower, measuring between 1.4m and 2.2m in height above external ground level.[52] Recent geophysical survey at Fethard has identified a circular structure, possibly representing a timber tower, on the summit of the motte.[53] McNeill's definition of a mottes as '...round, flat-topped mounds at least 2m high',[54] seems more reasonable. However, as discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.2), the interiors of many ringwork castles are raised significantly above external ground level. The morphological difference between mottes and ringworks is therefore not a difference of height but a difference in overall appearance. As Barry has stated, the main defensive element of a ringwork castle, '...was not the height of the mound but was the peripheral bank and ditch, as well as the fortified gate-tower.'[55] While ringworks often have raised interiors, it is their enclosing banks and ditches that give them the appearance of a ringwork. However, some mottes also have enclosing banks

[50] B. J. Graham, 'The mottes of the Anglo-Norman liberty of Meath', in Harmon Murtagh, (ed.), *Irish Midland Studies: essays in commemoration of N.W. English* (Athlone, 1980), p. 48.
[51] *Inventory,* no. 1627, p. 158; ME044-033 (001).
[52] *Inventory,* no. 1450, p. 157; WX050-011 (002).
[53] Ben Murtagh, pers. comm., September 2010.
[54] McNeill, 'Early castles in Leinster', p. 57.
[55] Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland*, p. 45.

and ditches around their bases and O'Conor has noted that seven mottes in Leinster have low banks around the perimeter of their summits, a feature that is very unusual in England.[56]

As the boundary between the classifications of motte and ringwork is inevitably a blurred one, there are some earthwork castles which fall somewhere between these categories and could be described as mottes or ringworks. For example, the earthwork castle of Newcastle McKynegan, Co. Wicklow (site no. 50), has been described alternatively as a ringwork castle[57] and a motte castle.[58] There is no doubt that this site is an earthwork castle as the documentary sources attest that there was a royal castle and manor at Newcastle from the late twelfth century.[59] From the late thirteenth century, the castle was utilised as a base for royal forces engaged in warfare against the Gaelic Irish of Co. Wicklow (see Site Report no. 50). The earthwork castle consists of a raised circular platform, which measures approximately 60m in diameter (Plate 2a). There are traces of a slight inner bank around the perimeter of the platform. The interior is defined by a steep scarp on its northern, southern and western sides, while at the east of the site, a fosse and the remains of an external bank divide the castle form the rest of the natural ridge on which the site is located. Although the interior of the site measures up to 5m in height above external level, it seems more reasonable to classify the site as a ringwork for three reasons. Firstly, the earthwork castle is defended by an inner bank, fosse and external bank in places, giving it the profile of a ringwork castle, if only from certain angles. Secondly, the entrance to the castle, which consists of a ramped entrance protected by a stone gatehouse, is a typical ringwork castle entrance, comparable to those of ringwork castles like Exeter Castle, Devon,[60] and Llanstephan, Carmenthenshire.[61] Thirdly, the castle seems to have functioned in the same way as a ringwork castle; the enclosed area is much larger than that of the average motte summit

[56] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 385-6.
[57] RMP WI019-050; *Inventory*, no. 1120, p. 180.
[58] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', ii, 615; Brian Shanahan, 'The manor in east county Wicklow' in James Lyttleton and Tadhg O'Keeffe, (eds), *The manor in medieval and early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), pp 132-59.
[59] Charles McNeill, (ed.), *Calendar of Archbishop Alen's register, c.1172-1534* (Dublin, 1950), p. 31.
[60] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 108; Robert Higham, 'Early castles in Devon, 1068-1201', in *Château Gaillard*, ix-x (1982), p. 109; B.K. Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model' in *Château Gaillard,* iii (1969), p. 45.
[61] Leslie Alcock, 'Castle Tower Penmaen: A Norman ringwork in Glamorgan' in *Antiquaries Journal*, xlvi, no. 2 (1966), p. 190; King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 108;

and the ramped entrance would have allowed carts and animals to be brought into the interior, which would never have been possible for most motte summits.

While Newcastle McKynegan seems more like a ringwork castle than a motte, two other ringwork castles in the study area were discarded because they seemed to resemble motte castles more than ringwork castles. The earthwork sites at Rathregan, Co. Meath (site no. 24), and Castlesow, Co. Wexford (site no. 37), have both been previously identified as possible ringwork castles. However, in each of these cases, the morphology of the earthwork makes a motte classification more appropriate. The earthwork site at Rathregan, which is classified as a ringfort by both the *Inventory* and the RMP,[62] was identified as a possible ringwork castle by Rice.[63] It seems likely that this site represents an earthwork castle as it is located adjacent to a medieval church site at a historically attested manorial centre. However, the morphology of the earthwork is not consistent with a ringwork castle classification. The site consists of a low mound, which measures up to 2.3m in height above surrounding ground level (Plate 2b). The summit, which is sub-circular in shape, measures 36m in diameter from north to south and 31m from east to west. As the site is a simple mound, which lacks an enclosing bank or ditch, it seems more reasonable to classify the site as a low motte, comparable to those identified at Dunshaughlin and Fethard, as discussed above.

The earthwork at Castlesow was identified as a 'great ringwork' by Nicholls,[64] and was subsequently included in Barry's list of possible ringwork castles.[65] Colfer has also treated the site as a ringwork castle in his work on medieval Wexford.[66] However, as O'Conor has pointed out, the morphology of the site is more like that of a motte than that of a ringwork castle.[67] The site consists of a raised, sub-circular summit, which measures up to 16m in diameter. The summit is defined by a fosse and external bank, giving it the appearance of a ringwork. However, because the site is located on a

[62] *Inventory*, no. 857, p. 88; ME044-20.
[63] Gerard Rice, *Norman Kilcloon, 1171-1700* (Navan, 2001), p. 24.
[64] K. W. Nicholls, 'Anglo-French Ireland and after' in *Peritia*, i (1982), p. 391.
[65] Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland*, pp 52-3.
[66] William Colfer, 'Anglo-Norman settlement in County Wexford' in Kevin Whelan and William Nolan, (eds), *Wexford: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1987), p. 77; William Colfer, *Arrogant trespass: Anglo-Norman Wexford, 1169-1400* (Enniscorthy, 2002), pp 56-7 and p. 60.
[67] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', ii, 479.

promontory, the summit is up to 10m in height above ground level on three sides. On the eastern, landward side, where the bank is absent, the drop from the summit to external ground level is only 2.5m. The small summit area and its average height above external ground level make a motte classification seem reasonable. The site has also been classified as a possible motte by the *Inventory* and as a motte by the RMP.[68]

Although earthwork castles tend to be categorised as either mottes or ringworks, it is important to remember that this is a modern classification system, invented for the convenience of archaeologists. Although the word '*mota*' appears occasionally in the medieval sources in relation to the motte element of an earthwork castle, the term 'ringwork' has no medieval parallel. Contemporary sources generally used the simple term '*castrum*' to describe any type of earthwork castle.

Two sites in the study area were discarded because they appeared to resemble circular moated sites more than ringwork castles, in terms of both their morphology and the historical context in which they were inhabited. It has long been recognised in England that circular moated sites exist although they are much less common than rectilinear moated sites.[69] It has been suggested that circular moated sites in England were generally constructed in the twelfth century.[70] However, as O'Conor has pointed out, there is little conclusive evidence to support this theory as few circular moated sites have been investigated.[71]

The earthworks at Boley (site no. 35), Rathnageeragh (site no. 44) and Finshoge (site no. 41) are located in close proximity to one another in southern Co. Wexford. Boley and Rathnageeragh were identified by Colfer as possible ringwork castles,[72] and were subsequently included in Barry's list of possible ringwork castle sites.[73] However, O'Conor has argued convincingly in favour of classifying the sites at Boley and

[68] *Inventory*, no. 942, p. 91; WX032-022.
[69] H. E. J. le Patourel, 'The excavation of moated sites' in F. A. Aberg, (ed.), *Medieval moated sites* (London, 1978), p. 41; C. C. Taylor, 'Moated sites: their definition, form and classification' in F. A. Aberg, (ed.), *Medieval moated sites* (London, 1978), p. 8;
[70] Le Patourel, 'The excavation of moated sites', p. 41.
[71] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 349.
[72] William Colfer, 'Anglo-Norman settlement in medieval Shelburne, 1169-1307' (MLitt, TCD, 1986), pp 78-81.
[73] Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland*, pp 52-3.

Rathnageeragh as circular moated sites.[74] The earthwork at Boley consists of a circular interior defined by a wet fosse and an external bank (Figure 12). As O'Conor has pointed out, the siting of this earthwork on low-lying ground and its wide wet fosse are more reminiscent of a moated site than a ringwork castle.[75] The earthwork at Rathnageeragh is similar, consisting of a sub-circular interior enclosed by a possible inner bank and a wet fosse (Figure 13). However, in terms of siting, Rathnageeragh seems more defensive than Boley, as the earthwork is located on a slight rise and commands reasonably good views.

Both Boley and Rathnageeragh are located on lands that were held by the Cistercians of Tintern Abbey in the Anglo-Norman period. These lands were granted to Tintern Abbey by William Marshal in the first decade of the twelfth century. Marshal's charter, which was preserved by Hore, stated that the lands granted to the abbey consisted of the lands which had belonged to Meilyr the Serjeant to the west of the Owenduff River.[76] This charter indicates that Boley was definitely included in the original grant to Tintern, although it is unclear if the monks acquired Rathnageeragh, which is located to the west of the Owenduff River, at this stage. The deforestation charter issued by Richard Marshal between 1231 and 1234 indicates that the monks may have held these lands by this time; it states that the boundary of the Forest of Ross ran past 'the bridge of the sheep of the monks',[77] and, as Orpen and Brooks have suggested, it seems probable that this bridge was located at Rathnageeragh.[78] The place name of 'Rathnageeragh' can be translated as the 'rath of the sheep' and the townland of Rathnageeragh is located in roughly the correct location in relation to the other places listed along the boundary. The present bridge known as Rathnageeragh Bridge crosses the Owenduff River approximately 500m to the south-west of the site, possibly on the same site as the medieval bridge. The documentary evidence shows that both Boley and Rathnageeragh

[74] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 343-53.
[75] Ibid., i, 350.
[76] P. H. Hore, *The history of the town and county of Wexford* (6 vols, London, 1900-11), ii, 19.
[77] J. T. Gilbert, (ed.), *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin, with the register of its house at Dunbrody and Annals of Ireland* (2 vols, Dublin, 1884), ii, 154; G. H. Orpen and E. St J. Brooks, 'Charters of Earl Richard Marshal of the Forests of Ross and Taghmon' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, lxiv (1934), p. 56.
[78] Orpen and Brooks, 'Charters of Earl Richard Marshal of the Forests of Ross and Taghmon', p. 56.

were definitely in the possession of Tintern Abbey at the time of the Reformation,[79] and in view of the other evidence, it seems likely that they had been since the early thirteenth century.

Based on the morphology of the two sites and the documentary evidence, O'Conor has suggested that the earthworks at Boley and Rathnageeragh were circular moated sites, which functioned as monastic granges owned by the monks of Tintern Abbey.[80] Colfer appears to have revised his views on this site, discussing both earthworks as circular moated sites and monastic granges in his later work.[81] The documentary evidence indicates that tower houses were constructed at both Boley and Rathnageeragh in the late medieval period; the *Civil Survey* recorded that there was a 'decayed castle' at Rathnageeragh and a 'ruined castle' at Boley in the mid-seventeenth century,[82] and both earthworks are labelled as 'site of castle' on the First Edition O.S. map. These tower houses, along with the tower houses at Tellarought, Taylorstown, Ballygarvan and Nash seem to have formed a defensive line along the northern periphery of the Tintern lands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[83]

The classification of these sites as circular moated sites and monastic granges seems reasonable and these sites were therefore ruled out as ringwork castles for the purposes of the present study. However, the case for the classification of the earthwork at Finshoge as a circular moated site seems less clear-cut. O'Conor classified this site as a circular moated site based on its siting and morphology.[84] The siting of the earthwork, at the bottom of a small valley, is exceptionally poor as it is overlooked by higher ground from all directions. However, the scale of the defences on its western side suggests that the site was originally well-defended and is simply poorly preserved. On this side, the site consists of a raised interior enclosed by a wide fosse and a substantial earthen bank, measuring up to 3m above the base of the ditch and 2m above external ground level. The earthwork seems more heavily defended than the average ringfort.

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[79] N. B. White, (ed.), *Extents of the Irish monastic possessions, 1540-1541* (Dublin, 1943), p. 359.
[80] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 351.
[81] Colfer, *Arrogant trespass,* pp 190-1.
[82] R. C. Simmington, (ed.), *The Civil Survey, AD 1654-1656. Volume 9: County of Wexford* (Dublin, 1953), p. 179.
[83] Colfer, *Arrogant trespass*, p. 191.
[84] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 349-50.

Unlike the sites at Boley and Rathnageeragh, the earthwork at Finshoge was not located on church lands and was therefore not a monastic grange. The documentary evidence suggests that the small manor of 'Ballikermuth', which was held for ¼ of a knight's fee in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, was located at Finshoge.[85] However, there is no evidence to suggest that there was a church or manorial settlement at Finshoge in the Anglo-Norman period. It seems probable that the earthwork represents a high-status Anglo-Norman residence but, without excavating, it is difficult to ascertain whether this site should be classified as a ringwork castle or a moated site. Taylor has commented that,

> '...it is sometimes difficult to draw a clear distinction between large moated sites and small castles. This lack of distinction may be important in that, in terms of status and function, the two types of site are related. Indeed, there are many examples of moated sites becoming castles and castles being reduced to moated sites.' [86]

Future excavation may shed more light on the nature of the occupation of this earthwork site. For the purposes of the present study, the site at Finshoge has been included as a possible ringwork castle as, unlike with Rathnageeragh and Boley, its function and status is unclear.

In addition to the sites of Rathregan, Castlesow, Boley and Rathnageeragh, the earthworks at Ballygarvan, Co. Wexford (site no. 32), and Templetown, Co. Wexford, (site no. 45), were discarded on the grounds of morphology, combined with a lack of other evidence to support their classification as ringwork castles. The earthwork at Ballygarvan was included in Barry's list of possible ringwork castles, on the basis of information supplied by Isabel Bennett, who believed that the earthwork was unlike other Wexford ringforts and may therefore have been a ringwork castle.[87] However, the morphology of this site seems unimpressive; it consists of a slightly raised sub-circular interior, defined by a single earthen bank, and there is no evidence for an enclosing fosse. Although the early modern sources suggest that the Cistercians of Tintern Abbey may have had a tower house and monastic grange at Ballygarvan in the late medieval

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[85] E. St J. Brooks, *Knights' fees in counties Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny* (Dublin, 1950), p. 18.
[86] C. C. Taylor, 'Moated sites: their definition, form and classification' in F. A. Aberg, (ed.), *Medieval moated sites* (London, 1978), p. 5.
[87] Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland*, pp 52-3.

period,[88] there is no evidence to suggest that there was an Anglo-Norman castle or manorial centre in this location. The First Edition O.S. map indicates that the site of the tower house was located approximately 500m to the south of the earthwork site. It seems probable that the earthwork is an early medieval ringfort.

Colfer identified a possible ringwork castle at Templetown, adjacent to the ruined medieval church,[89] and this earthwork was subsequently included in Barry's list of possible ringwork castles.[90] Although the site was removed in the 1970s, Colfer's description and drawing suggest that it consisted of a platform, which was raised approximately 1m above external ground level and measured 25m in diameter (Figure 14).[91] The morphology of the site before its destruction sounds remarkably unimpressive and it is notable that the site was not enclosed by either a bank or a fosse. Colfer believed that the site was a ringwork castle, which was constructed by the Knights Templar who held the manor of Kilcloggan, which included Templetown, in the Anglo-Norman period.[92] Colfer also suggested that there is a link between military orders and ringwork castles and has also identified a possible ringwork castle associated with the Hospitaller manor at Ballyhoge (site no. 33).[93] However, both of these identifications seem somewhat dubious. In the case of Templetown, Colfer's later suggestion, that the earthwork represented a medieval windmill mound, seems more likely.[94] An early fourteenth-century inventory of the manor of Kilcloggan, which was taken following the arrest and imprisonment of the Templars in 1307, makes no mention of a castle. However, the extent does record that the Templars' possessions included '...iron for the repair of the broken sail of the windmill.'[95] This reference supports Colfer's suggestion that the earthwork at Templetown may have been a

[88] Simmington, (ed.), *The Civil Survey, AD 1654-1656. Volume 9: County of Wexford*, p. 179; Colfer, *Arrogant trespass,* p. 191.
[89] Colfer, 'Anglo-Norman settlement in medieval Shelburne, 1169-1307', p. 77; Colfer, *Arrogant trespass,* p. 57 and p. 196.
[90] Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland*, pp 52-3.
[91] Colfer, 'Anglo-Norman settlement in medieval Shelburne, 1169-1307', p. 77.
[92] Colfer, *Arrogant trespass,* p. 57 and p. 196.
[93] Ibid., p. 205.
[94] Colfer, *Arrogant trespass*, p. 200, footnote 97.
[95] Hore, *The history of the town and county of Wexford*, iii, 277.

windmill mound.[96] The earthwork at Templetown was therefore discarded for the purposes of the present study.

3.7 Conclusion to the chapter

There are many problems associated with the identification of ringwork castles in Ireland. The identification of possible examples by archaeologists in the field has been hampered by the lack of a clear definition and a lack of understanding with regard to ringwork castle morphology. This chapter has attempted to resolve some of these issues through the formulation of a definition of the ringwork castle as a site-type and a methodology for identifying ringwork castles. This methodology is based on four types of evidence that point to a ringwork castle classification; morphology, siting in the landscape, proximity to an Anglo-Norman manorial settlement, which is usually represented by a church site, and documentary evidence for a castle or Anglo-Norman manorial settlement. The case for the classification of fifty-one sites was analysed and it was found that twenty-one sites could be described as definite ringwork castles. A further twenty-four sites were classified as possible ringwork castles. Six sites were discarded because the evidence suggested that they had been incorrectly identified and that they represented other types of archaeological site. The evidence for each site's classification is discussed in full in the Gazetteer.

[96] Colfer, *Arrogant trespass,* p. 200, footnote 97.

Chapter Four – Morphology

4.1 Introduction to the chapter

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the morphology of the ringwork castle. One of the criticisms that have been levelled at the classification 'ringwork castle' is that it has sometimes been used as a catch-all category for sites that are earthwork castles but not mottes. This criticism is valid to some extent as it is true that the term 'ringwork castle' has been used to describe a wide variety of morphologically different sites. However, it will be shown in this chapter that, although ringwork castles can vary significantly in terms of morphology, some generalisations regarding the morphology of the typical ringwork castle can be made. It is important to define what exactly is meant by the term ringwork castle in terms of morphology as this will enable the identification of more ringwork castles in the future.

4.2 Shape, size and height

The interiors of ringwork castles tend to vary widely in terms of shape and size. Although ringwork interiors are generally circular or sub-circular in shape, as their name suggests, D-shaped and irregular interiors are also relatively common. Of twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area, thirteen (62%) have enclosed areas that can be described as circular or sub-circular in shape, three (14%) are D-shaped and two (9%) are partial ringworks, located on irregular promontories. It was not possible to ascertain the original shape or size of the remaining three ringwork castles, which are Pollardstown (site no. 3), Kilkenny Castle (site no. 8) and Carlow Castle (site no. 1). In the cases of Kilkenny Castle and Carlow Castle, the ringwork castles lie under major stone castles and only small areas of the earthworks have been excavated. The interior of the ringwork castle at Pollardstown was reportedly oval in shape and the site had an overall diameter of approximately 70-80m.[1] However, it is not possible to give any more detailed measurements for Pollardstown as the site is no longer extant and more details measurements are unavailable (Figure 15).

[1] Thomas Fanning, 'Excavation of a ringfort at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare' in *J.K.A.S.*, xv (1973-4), p. 253.

Of the thirteen circular or sub-circular ringwork castles, ten (77%) have average diameters measuring between 36m and 50m (site nos. 2, 6, 10, 11, 12, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27). Only the ringwork castles at Dunbrin Lower (site no. 13), Rathangan, (site no. 4), and Newcastle McKynegan (site no. 50), which have average diameters of 23m, 60m and 62.5m respectively, fall outside this range. These measurements were calculated by averaging the maximum and minimum diameters of the interior of each ringwork castle. Measurements were taken from the base of the inner bank, if an inner bank was present, or from the edge of the fosse, at sites where there was no evidence for an inner bank.

The ringwork castles at Clonmacnoise (site no. 28), Ballyvolan Lower (site no. 47) and Kilpipe (site no. 49) can be described as D-shaped. It is more difficult to calculate the exact areas of the interiors of these sites as they are irregular in shape. The interior of the ringwork and stone castle at Clonmacnoise measures approximately 2800m², while the interior of Ballyvolan Lower measures roughly 800m² and Kilpipe measures approximately 1015m². The interiors of the partial ringwork castles at Carrick (site no. 36), and Baginbun (site no. 31) are similarly irregular in shape as each is located at the end of a natural promontory. The enclosed area at Carrick measures approximately1000m², while the earthworks at Baginbun enclose an area measuring roughly 7200m².[2] It seems possible that the interiors of these partial ringworks may originally have been larger as coastal erosion may have decreased the area of the spaces enclosed. This seems particularly likely in the case of Baginbun. As O'Conor has argued, the alignment of the linear defences suggests that a chunk of land has been lost into the sea on the southern side of the promontory and the friable shale that composes the sea cliffs at Baginbun is particularly prone to rapid erosion.[3]

The enclosed interiors of ringwork castles, including both circular and irregularly shaped examples, vary widely in terms of size, ranging from 414m² to 7200m². However, it is notable that, of the eighteen ringwork castles measured, twelve (66%) have enclosed areas measuring between 1000m² and 2000m². Dunbrin Lower and

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[2] Kieran O'Conor , 'A reinterpretation of the earthworks at Baginbun, Co. Wexford' in Kieran O'Conor and J. R. Kenyon, (eds), *The medieval castle in Ireland and Wales* (Dublin, 2003), p. 22.

[3] Kieran O'Conor, '"At Baginbun Ireland was lost and won": the archaeology of Ireland's first Anglo-Norman fortification', lecture given at Waterford Museum of Treasures, 22 October 2009.

Ballyvolan Lower are smaller than this while the ringwork castles at Rathangan, Newcastle McKynegan, Clonmacnoise and Baginbun are larger. The partial ringwork at Baginbun is significantly larger than all of the others, measuring approximately 7200m². This partial ringwork lies within the area enclosed by an outer defensive line which cuts off the whole headland, an area of approximately twelve hectares (see below, Section 4.5).[4]

King and Alcock, in their classic study of ringwork castles in England and Wales, noted that, in the majority of cases, '...the central area is not sensibly raised above external ground level.'[5] Only thirty-four of the 198 ringwork castles identified by King and Alcock had interiors that were significantly raised above external ground level.[6] King and Alcock also stated that, in order an earthwork to be considered as a ringwork castle, its enclosing bank must measure more than 2m in height above external ground level.[7] However, Irish archaeologists have tended to misinterpret King and Alcock's definition and have stated that the interior rather than the bank of the ringwork castle should be more than 2m in height above external ground level.[8]

Analysis of the morphology of the ringwork castles in the study area has shown that they are more likely to have raised interiors than English and Welsh ringwork castles. Of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area, twelve (57%) are raised more than 2m above external ground level on at least one side of the site (site nos. 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 20, 25, 26, 28, 49, 50). However, as many of these ringwork castles are modelled out of natural hills or are located on the end of natural ridges, the height of the interior above ground level varies greatly from one side of the site to the other. For example, the interior of the ringwork castle at Rathtroane (site no. 25) is raised up to 8m above ground level on its southern side, while at the north, the interior is only 2m in

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[4] O'Conor , 'A reinterpretation of the earthworks at Baginbun, Co. Wexford', p. 19.
[5] D. J. C. King and Leslie Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1969), p. 94.
[6] Ibid., p. 94.
[7] Ibid., p. 90.
[8] B. J. Graham, 'Medieval timber and earthwork fortifications in western Ireland' in *Medieval Archaeology*, xxxii (1988), p. 111; P. D. Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland* (Cork, 1999), p. 4; P. D. Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath' in Christiaan Corlett and Tom Condit, (eds), *Above and beyond: essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray, 2005), p. 391.

height above the rest of the of the ridge. Similarly, at Dunbrin, the ringwork castle measures between 50cm and 1m in height above external ground level on it western side. However, on its eastern side, the interior has been built up to create a flat platform, which measures up to 4m in height above the base of the external ditch.

At a further five (24%) of the twenty-one ringwork castles in the study area, it was noted that the interior was slightly raised above external ground level (site nos. 4, 10, 23, 27, 47). In all of these cases, the interior was raised between 50cm and 2m in height above external ground level. The interiors of the partial ringwork castles at Baginbun and Carrick were not raised above external ground level. This may have been partly due to local geology as there does not appear to be sufficient earth available in the immediate vicinity of either site. It is unclear from the excavation reports if the interiors of the ringwork castles excavated at Kilkenny Castle and Castletobin were raised or not.

It is generally accepted that motte castles tend to be the result of a deliberate heightening episode, although some mottes utilise natural mounds. The morphology of the ringwork castles in the study area suggests that their raised profiles were achieved through the careful selection of suitable sites rather than through the movement of large amounts of earth. Generally, the raised ringwork castles in the study area seem to have been modelled out of ridges or natural hillocks.[9] While it may have been necessary to move some earth to create a level platform, there is little evidence to suggest that ringwork interiors were heightened any more than was necessary. While the data discussed above suggests that the majority of ringwork castles in the study area were raised significantly above external ground level, albeit through the use of naturally elevated sites, this may be because raised ringwork castles are easier to identify in the Irish landscape than ringwork castles with interiors that are not raised. Raised ringwork castles are morphologically more similar to mottes and less similar to early medieval ringforts than non-raised examples and are therefore more likely to be identified as possible ringwork castles by archaeologists in the field.

[9] See Chapter Six (Section 6.2).

4.3 Enclosing banks and ditches

The interior of the ringwork castle is often defined by an earthen bank or lip around its perimeter. There is evidence for an inner bank or lip at thirteen (62%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area (site nos. 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 13, 20, 25, 28, 31, 36, 47, 50). These inner banks vary considerably in terms of size. At Clonmacnoise, the massive enclosing bank measures between 1.5m and 4.5m in height above the interior. The inner bank at Carrick measures between 1.5m and 2m in height above the interior of the partial ringwork. It is flat-topped and measures approximately 1.5m in width across its summit. At Rathangan, it seems likely that there was originally a substantial inner bank although it seems to have subsided. The interior now appears to be dished, with the perimeter measuring up to 1.5m in height above the centre of the interior.

The inner banks of ringwork castles generally seem to have been less substantial than those mentioned above. The inner banks at Kilcarn, Danestown (site no. 20), Rathealy (site no. 12), Pigeonpark (site no. 10) and Dunbrin Lower are much smaller, measuring between 50cm and 80cm in height above the interior. At Rathtroane, it seems likely that there was a similar small bank or lip as the ground is slightly raised around the perimeter of the interior. The ringwork castle excavated at Pollardstown, which is no longer extant, also had an inner bank.[10]

The inner bank of the ringwork castle seems to have been intended to support a timber palisade or enclosing wall.[11] It is notable that there is no evidence for an inner bank at seven (33%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area. It seems possible that some of these sites, including Rodanstown (site no. 26), Moone (site no. 2), Kilpipe and Purcellsinch (site no. 11), originally had inner banks, which have not survived. However, at Trim Castle[12] and Castletobin (site no. 10), [13] the excavated evidence suggests that these ringwork castles never had enclosing banks. As argued in Chapter Five (Section 5.2), it seems possible that the sophisticated nature of the palisade

[10] Fanning, 'Excavation of a ringfort at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare', pp 251-261.
[11] The evidence for such structures is fully discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.2).
[12] Alan Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8' (unpublished excavation report, 2 vols, licence no: 95E077, Archaeological Projects Ltd., 2005), i, 49.
[13] Deborah Sutton, 'Archaeological excavation preliminary report: Castletobin, Callan, Co. Kilkenny. December 1974-Janurary 1975' (unpublished excavation report, licence no: 74E140, 2003), p. 7.

at Trim precluded the need for an enclosing bank. At Ballyvolan Lower, the remains of a stone wall, possibly on the line of an earlier timber palisade, enclose the interior.

All of the definite ringwork castles in the study area are enclosed by at least one fosse, with the exception of the ringwork castle that preceded Carlow Castle, where the form of the original defences is unknown. The fosses of ringwork castles tend to be deep and wide and would have constituted significant defensive barriers. In terms of width, they vary widely. The enclosing fosses at Rathangan (site no. 4), Clonmacnoise, Rathealy, Ballyvolan Lower, Danestown (Plate 3a) and Baginbun (Site 2) are particularly wide, measuring between 10 and 15m in width at their widest points. However, many ringwork castle fosses are not so wide, measuring between 5m and 10m in width. For example, the excavated fosse at Castletobin measured only 5.5m in width and 2m in depth. [14] This ringwork castle also lacked an enclosing bank and no evidence for a palisade was uncovered during the excavations, although it seems probable that a palisade originally existed. Ringwork castle fosses generally appear to be U-shaped and flat-bottomed rather than V-shaped in profile. The current appearance of the enclosing fosse of a ringwork castle does not necessarily reflect its original morphology. Fosses are frequently fully or partially filled in, particularly when the earthwork is located on farmland and the depth of the fosse poses a danger to livestock. For example, the fosse enclosing the possible ringwork castle at Ballyorley Upper is now an extremely unimpressive feature, measuring between 8m and 12m in width but only 50cm in depth. However, as O'Conor has recorded, the landowner filled in this fosse, which previously measured up to 8ft (2.43m) in depth, approximately forty years ago.[15] At Trim (site no. 27), the excavated fosse of the ringwork castle measured between 6m and 10.5m in width and between 1.6m to 2.5m in depth (Figure 16).[16] However, as Hayden has argued, '...erosion and periodic cleaning of silt from the ditch could have extended its width...', between the early 1170s, when the fosse was dug, and the later thirteenth century, when it was filled in.[17] Hayden has suggested that the ditch may originally

[14] Ibid.
[15] Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster' (3 vols, PhD, Cardiff, 1993), ii, 706.
[16] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, 40.
[17] Ibid., i, 46.

have been up to 4m narrower, measuring only 5-6m in width.[18] The fosse had very steep-sides but varied in profile from U-shaped to V-shaped.[19]

External banks were observed at thirteen (62%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area (2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 20, 25, 26, 28, 31, 47, 49, 50). Although these banks varied considerably in terms of height and basal width, they are all more than 1m in height, with the exception of the small outer bank at Purcellsinch. There was no evidence for an outer bank at six (29%) of the remaining ringwork castles (site nos. 4, 6, 10, 23, 27, 36). Excavations at Trim, Carrick and Castletobin showed that there was never an external bank at these three ringwork castles. However, it seems possible that the ringworks at Pigeonpark (Danesfort), Rathangan and Kilcarn (site no. 23), originally had external banks which have not survived. External banks are more prone to being removed as a result of modern agricultural activity than internal banks, as the removal of an external bank would increase the area of the land available for farming of crops. It is unclear if the ringwork castles that preceded Kilkenny Castle and Carlow Castle had external banks. At three sites in the study area (site nos. 12, 25, 26), an extra external bank and fosse is present. As discussed below and in Chapter Six, the evidence suggests that these ringwork castles were adapted from pre-existing early medieval ringforts.

4. 4 King and Alcock's classification scheme

King and Alcock devised a classification scheme for ringwork castles, based on their morphology (Figure 17). This classification scheme divided ringwork castles into six groups and was intended to form '...a convenient shorthand to convey the present surface aspect of the earthworks.'[20] However, as King and Alcock noted, these categories '...cannot pretend to indicate with any accuracy their original appearance, and least of all do they represent categories of species, function or date.'[21]

According to King and Alcock's classification system, three (14%) of the twenty-one ringwork castles in the study area are Category A ringworks (site nos. 4, 10, 23).

[18] Ibid., i, 49.
[19] Ibid., i, 40.
[20] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 93.
[21] Ibid, p. 94.

Ringworks in this category consist of an interior, which is not raised significantly above ground level, enclosed by a bank and external ditch. Seven (33%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area are Category Bb ringwork castles (site nos. 3, 12, 13, 20, 28, 47, 50). These sites consist of a raised interior, enclosed by an inner bank, a fosse and an outer bank. One (5%) of the twenty-one ringwork castles is a Category C ringwork castle (site no. 36). This partial ringwork, located at Carrick, Co. Wexford, consists of an interior that is not raised above external ground level, defended by a bank and external ditch on its landward side. Partial ringworks are discussed in greater detail below.

It is not possible to assign Kilkenny Castle or Carlow Castle to any of these categories as the form of their defences is unclear. Excavations at Kilkenny Castle have shown that the ringwork castle was defended by a bank and external ditch; it may have been a Category A, B or Bb ringwork. The earthwork castle that preceded Carlow Castle seems to have been a ringwork castle located on a raised natural knoll. As the edges of this knoll have been quarried away, it is unclear if there was originally an enclosing bank and fosse or not. It seems probable that this ringwork castle was a Category B or Bb ringwork.

King and Alcock's classification system does not seem to fit Irish ringwork castles particularly well. No definite examples of Category B, D or Dd ringwork castles were identified in the study area and eight (38%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles did not fit into any of King and Alcock's six categories (site nos. 2, 6, 11, 25, 26, 27, 31, 49). In the case of Baginbun, the partial ringwork, which O'Conor has labelled Site 2,[22] is defended on its landward side by an inner bank and fosse and an external bank and fosse. This makes it a Category C ringwork defended by two banks and ditches rather than one bank and ditch. Similarly, the earthworks at Rathealy and Rathtroane would be Category Bb ringworks if both sites were not enclosed by an extra bank and ditch. Both sites consist of raised interiors enclosed by three banks with intervening fosses. The earthwork at Rodanstown is morphologically similar, consisting of a raised platform defended by two fosses with external banks. In this case, there is no evidence for an

[22] O'Conor, 'A re-interpretation of the earthworks at Baginbun, pp 17-31.

inner bank although it is possible that there was one originally. As discussed in Chapter Six, there is evidence to suggest that the ringwork castles at Rathtroane, Rathealy and Rodanstown, in addition to the ringwork castle at Rathangan, were adapted from pre-existing early medieval ringforts. This may explain the unusual form of their morphology as there are no known examples of trivallate ringwork castles in England and Wales.

The ringwork castles at Purcellsinch, Moone and Kilpipe do not fit into King and Alcock's classification scheme because they are all enclosed by a fosse and external bank rather than a bank and external fosse. While there is no evidence for an inner bank at any of these sites, it seems possible that they originally had an inner bank that has not survived. Finally, excavations at Trim[23] and Castletobin[24] have shown that both of these ringwork castles were defended by a fosse and no evidence for an enclosing inner or outer bank was uncovered at either site.

The evidence from the ringwork castles in the study area shows that their morphology varies considerably. Although King and Alcock's classification scheme is useful to a certain extent, there are a number of sites that do not easily fit into any of the categories. While it is necessary to accurately describe the morphological characteristics of each particular site to gain an understanding of the typical morphology of the ringwork castle, the process of attempting to fit sites into boxes seems somewhat meaningless. As King and Alcock have pointed out, there is no evidence to suggest that differences in ringwork castle morphology have any implications in terms of their chronology and function.[25] Also, it is important to remember that the majority of the sites under discussion are unexcavated and their current appearance is not necessarily representative of their original morphology. Perceived morphological differences may be the result of poor preservation rather than real variance in terms of original morphology.

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[23] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, 49.
[24] Sutton, 'Archaeological excavation preliminary report: Castletobin, Callan, Co. Kilkenny. December 1974 - January 1975', p. 10.
[25] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', pp 93-4.

4.5 Partial ringwork castles

The term 'partial ringwork' is used to describe ringwork castles that are not fully enclosed by earth and timber defences but rather are enclosed by a combination of earth and timber defences and natural defences. Typically, partial ringworks were constructed on the ends of natural headlands or promontories, necessitating the erection of earth and timber defences only on the landward sides. King and Alcock found that '...this kind of stronghold found considerable favour among the lords of Wales and the March, where suitable sites are common, but where labour was scarce, and the necessities of war might well restrict the time available.'[26] In Wales and Monmouthshire, there are thirty-four partial ringworks and thirty complete ringwork castles.[27]

Partial ringwork castles do not seem to have been common in the study area; only two (9%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area can be described as partial ringworks. These sites are located at Carrick and Baginbun, both in Co. Wexford. The documentary evidence attests that the fortifications at Carrick and Baginbun were both constructed during the initial conquest period of 1169-71 and excavations at Carrick in the 1980s confirmed a late-twelfth century date for the castle's construction.[28] The ringwork castle at Carrick is situated on a headland above the River Slaney (Figure 18), while the site at Baginbun is located on a coastal promontory (Figure 19). Both sites are defined by high cliffs combined with earthwork defences, consisting of a bank and external fosse, on their landward sides. There is also an outer line of defences at Baginbun, cutting off the whole of the headland. O'Conor has argued convincingly that this outer linear earthwork (labelled Site 1 on the plan) represents a secondary phase of the fortification while the partial ringwork castle on the promontory (Site 2) is the 'castle' described in the contemporary sources.[29] O'Conor has suggested that this outer defensive line was constructed in the months after the battle at Baginbun in 1170, and was intended to function as a base for Strongbow's army when they arrived. However, as O'Conor has argued, '...political and military events in Ireland

[26] Ibid., p. 94.
[27] Ibid.
[28] The documentary evidence for the occupation of Baginbun and Carrick is discussed in Chapter Eight (Section 8.2).
[29] O'Conor, 'A reinterpretation of the earthworks at Baginbun, pp 17-31.

had moved faster than Strongbow had originally anticipated back in Wales and, therefore, he never had any need to utilize this base directly.'[30]

The ringwork castle at Dunbrin Lower, Co. Laois has been described as a partial ringwork by O'Conor because it is located above the River Barrow and the ground drops away steeply at the east of the site[31]. However, in this case, it seems more logical to describe the earthwork as a full ringwork castle as Basil Stalleybrass' description of the site indicates that, when the site was visited in the early twentieth century, the site was fully enclosed by an enclosing fosse and external bank.[32] In order to be classified as a partial ringwork castle, a site must be defended by natural defences rather than an enclosing bank and fosse, on at least one side of the site; as King and Alcock have stated, '...only the exposed front is embanked.'[33]

Four other possible partial ringwork castles were noted in the study area, at Dunanore (site no. 38), Toberfinnick, (site no. 46) and Ballyhoge (site no. 33), and the Black Castle in Wicklow Town (site no. 48). Dunanore was included on Barry's list of possible ringworks, based on information supplied by Isabel Bennett, and is currently classified as a 'ringwork' on the RMP and as a 'possible ringwork' in the *Inventory*.[34] Colfer noted that the site is similar to the partial ringwork castle of Carrick and suggested that the site may have been a ringwork castle, which functioned as the *caput* castle of the de Denne lords of Kayer.[35] In terms of morphology and siting, the site is notably similar to the partial ringwork castle at Carrick, consisting of a triangular promontory enclosed by two substantial earthen banks and an intervening fosse. However, as O'Conor has pointed out, the lack of documentary evidence for an Anglo-Norman castle or manorial centre in this location makes it less than convincing as a ringwork castle.[36] Toberfinnick has also been compared to the partial ringwork castle at Carrick. In terms of morphology and siting, this earthwork is very impressive. It is

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[30] Ibid., pp 30-31.
[31] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', ii, 711.
[32] E. S. Armitage, *Early Norman castles of the British Isles* (London, 1912), pp 331-2.
[33] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 94.
[34] T. B. Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland* (London, 1987) pp 52-3; WX026-012001; *Inventory*, no. 959, p. 93.
[35] William Colfer, *Arrogant trespass: Anglo-Norman Wexford 1169-1400* (Enniscorthy, 2002), p. 48.
[36] Kieran O'Conor, 'Field Report', 23 October 1987, WX026-012001.

located on a promontory overlooking a bend in the River Sow. However, there are no known documentary references to a castle in this location and the nature of its relationship with the motte at Castlesow (site no. 37), which stands on the opposite bank of the river, is unclear. The site at Ballyhoge is located in a similar position, on an inland promontory overlooking a tributary of the River Slaney. The defences of this site are relatively unimpressive, consisting of a shallow fosse on its landward side. Also, the site seems to have been landscaped in the nineteenth century by the owners of nearby Brookville House. Colfer identified this site as a possible ringwork castle associated with the Hospitaller manor of Ballyhoge.[37] However, the site's unimpressive defences and its distance from the church site at Ballyhoge, which lies approximately 2km to the north-east, do not make it a particularly convincing partial ringwork.

It has also been suggested that the stone castle known as the Black Castle in Wicklow Town may have been preceded by a partial ringwork castle, if it was not conceived as a stone castle from the beginning.[38] However, it seems unlikely that this site could have been a partial ringwork for several reasons. The site's exposed location, on a triangular promontory to the south of Wicklow Town, makes it more suitable for a stone castle (Plate 3b). Also, as O'Conor has pointed out, the lack of earth covering the bedrock on this promontory would make the construction of an earth and timber castle difficult.[39] O'Conor's second suggestion, that the castle represents an early Anglo-Norman stone castle, constructed on the orders of Henry II in 1172 or 1173, seems more likely.[40] The issue of identifying the earliest Anglo-Norman castle at Wicklow is further complicated by the presence of a mound, known as the Round Mount, close to the site of the medieval parish church. It seems possible that this mound represents an early Anglo-Norman motte.[41]

A number of possible partial ringworks have been identified outside the study area. At Glanworth Castle in Co. Cork, a possible partial ringwork has been identified based on an aerial photograph, which seems to show a ditch, represented by differentiated

[37] Colfer, *Arrogant trespass*, p. 57 and p. 62.
[38] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', ii, p. 115.
[39] Ibid., i, 115.
[40] Ibid., i, 115-17.
[41] Ibid., ii, 666-8.

vegetation, cutting off the end of an inland promontory.[42] The siting of the stone castle suggests that this is a likely location for a conquest period ringwork castle. It has been suggested that Raymond le Gros may have been responsible for constructing an early earthwork castle here, before granting the lands to one of his de Caunton nephews.[43] This is particularly interesting because Raymond le Gros is known to have been responsible for the comparable partial ringwork castle at Baginbun, which is discussed above. However, the possible partial ringwork castle at Glanworth Castle has not been excavated and it seems possible that the feature noted on the aerial photograph represents nothing more than an outwork associated with the later stone castle.

Graham has also identified a number of probable partial ringwork castles in the west of Ireland, including Castleconnor and Castlecarra, both in Co. Mayo.[44] At Castleconnor, a wall and fosse cut off a promontory above the River Moy. The partial ringwork was accessed via a ruined gatehouse that stands at the centre of the wall and a probable hall-house is located within the enclosure.[45] This castle is thought to have been constructed by Piers de Bermingham in the first half of the thirteenth century.[46] The partial ringwork at Castlecarra is similar, consisting of a coastal promontory, defined on its landward side by a wall and external fosse. The ringwork seems to have been accessed via a stone gatehouse and the remains of a square stone building, possibly representing a keep, are visible in the interior. The *Annals of Lough Cé* records that a castle was constructed at 'Cera' in 1238 and, as Graham has argued, it seems likely that this reference relates to the partial ringwork castle.[47] The documentary evidence indicates that Adam de Staunton held both Castlecarra and the ringwork castle at Dunbrin Lower, Co. Laois in the early thirteenth century. Future research and excavation may show that some of the 'promontory forts' around the coast of Ireland, which are generally presumed to be prehistoric in origin, represent Anglo-Norman partial ringworks.

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[42] Conleth Manning, *The history and archaeology of Glanworth Castle, Co. Cork: excavations 1982–4* (Bray, 2009), p. 136.

[43] Paul MacCotter, 'The sub-infeudation and descent of the Fitzstephen/Carew Moiety of Desmond' in *J.C.H.A.S.*, cii (1997), p. 90; Manning, *The history and archaeology of Glanworth Castle, Co. Cork: excavations 1982–4,* p. 136.

[44] Graham, 'Medieval timber and earthwork fortifications in western Ireland', p. 123.

[45] MA022-085.

[46] Graham, 'Medieval timber and earthwork fortifications in western Ireland', p. 123; G. H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans,* (4 vols, Oxford, 1911-20), iii, 200-01.

[47] W. M. Hennessy, (ed.), *The annals of Lough Cé*, (Dublin, 1939; reprint of edition published in London, 1871), *s.a* 1238; Graham, 'Timber and earthwork fortifications in western Ireland', p. 123.

It is notable that Carrick and Baginbun, the two earliest documented Anglo-Norman castles in Ireland, are both of partial ringwork type. Partial ringworks would have involved less labour and would have been quicker to construct than full enclosure ringwork castles, making them particularly suitable as campaign castles. It may also be relevant that partial ringworks are very common in southern Wales. The excavated partial ringwork castle of Castle Tower, Penmaen, is a good example of this type. It consists of the triangular apex of a headland, enclosed by a bank and external fosse. Excavations have shown that the entrance to the site was defended by a timber gatehouse and there was also a hall within the ringwork.[48] Many of the men involved in the invasion, including Raymond le Gros and Robert fitz Stephen, were of Cambro-Norman descent and their familiarity with the partial ringwork castles of southern Wales may have made them more likely to construct fortifications of this type when they first arrived in Ireland.

4.6 Ringwork castle entrances

It is not always possible to determine where the original entrances to ringwork castles were located. At Pollardstown, Kilkenny Castle and Carlow Castle, only parts of the ringwork castles were excavated and entrance features were not identified in the excavated areas. The ringwork castles at Moone, Pigeonpark (Danesfort) and Dunbrin Lower are in a relatively poor state of preservation and the locations of their original entrances are unclear. However, in the case of Pigeonpark, it seems logical to assume that the entrance was located close to the detached bailey, which lies to the south-west of the ringwork castle.

In some cases, there are multiple possible entrances to the ringwork castle, making it difficult to identify the original entrances. In the cases of Carrick, and Ballyvolan Lower, there are two possible entrances. At Carrick, the excavations failed to identify a definite entrance. However, the excavators have speculated that the original entrance was probably located at either the south-east or the south-south-west of the site. At the south-east, adjacent to the cliff-edge, there is a break in the enclosing bank. However, as

[48] Leslie Alcock, 'Castle Tower Penmaen: A Norman ringwork in Glamorgan' in *Antiquaries Journal*, xlvi (2), pp 178-210.

Bennett has noted, this area of the partial ringwork at Carrick looks quite disturbed and, in the 1980s, the break in the bank looked very fresh and recent.[49] Cotter's excavations revealed possible evidence for an entrance at the south-south-west of the site, where the enclosing fosse is narrowest. Cotter's excavations uncovered burnt timbering was excavated on the inner edge of the ditch at this point,[50] and a possible posthole had previously been excavated by Bennett on the base of the ditch here.[51] The floor of the ditch also seemed to be rougher at this point than elsewhere. Cotter has suggested that there may originally have been a rock causeway at this point, which was later replaced by a timber bridge, represented by the burnt timbering and the posthole.[52] However, the curtain wall on the enclosing bank is unbroken at this point, perhaps indicating that the entrance was located elsewhere.[53] In view of this, the break at the south-south-east seems a more likely location for the original entrance and this positioning of the entrance would be comparable to that of the ringwork castle at Dinas Powys in southern Wales, where the entrance to the partial ringwork was adjacent to the cliff-edge.[54] At Ballyvolan Lower, there are also two possible entrances, located at the south and east of the site. The modern drive, which allows access to the bungalow in the interior of the ringwork castle, crosses the fosse at the south of the site. There is also a possible causeway across the fosse at the east of the site.[55] The original entrance could have been in either of these locations.

It was possible to identify probable original entrances at thirteen (62%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in study area (site nos. 4, 6, 10, 12, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 49, 50). Although this is a rather small sample, it is possible to make some general observations regarding the morphology of ringwork castle entrances. Ringwork castle entrances typically consist of a ramped causeway over the fosse and corresponding gaps in the enclosing banks. Typically, the gap in the inner bank tends to be the narrowest

[49] Isabel Bennett, 'Preliminary archaeological excavations at Ferrycarrig ringwork, Newtown townland, Co. Wexford' in *J.W.H.S.*, x (1984-5), p. 40.
[50] Claire Cotter, pers. comm., March 2009.
[51] Bennett, 'Preliminary archaeological excavations at Ferrycarrig ringwork', p. 35.
[52] Claire Cotter, pers. comm., March 2009.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Leslie Alcock, *Dinas Powys: an Iron Age, Dark Age and early medieval settlement in Glamorgan* (Cardiff, 1963), pp 78-9.
[55] Linzi Simpson, 'Anglo-Norman settlement in Uí Briúin Cualann, 1169-1350' in Ken Hannigan and William Nolan, (eds), *Wicklow: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1994), pp 191-235.

with the causeway and the gap in the outer bank getting progressively wider. In terms of width, ringwork castle entrances vary significantly. At its narrowest point, where there is a stone-faced gap in the inner bank, the probable entrance at Rathtroane measures only 1.3m in width.The entrances at Kilcarn, Rathealy and Rathangan are also relatively small; the entrance gaps at Kilcarn and Rathealy measure only 2.5m, while at Rathangan, the entrance is 2.9m wide at its narrowest point. The entrances at Purcellsinch and Danestown are wider, measuring 4m and 4.5m in width respectively, at the point where the entrance ramp meets the interior. At Baginbun, the partial ringwork on the promontory (which O'Conor has labelled 'Site 2'),[56] seems to have been accessed via a gap in the inner bank which measures approximately 6m in width. The entrance to the excavated ringwork castle at Trim, which consisted of an uncut section of fosse, was exceptionally wide, measuring 20m in width.[57]

It is clear that some of these ringwork castle entrances are less well-preserved than others and it seems possible that some of the gaps in enclosing banks may have been widened over time as a result of agricultural activity. However, the varying widths of the entrances may also reflect that ringwork castles were protected by different types of timber structures, which varied from simple gates to elaborate gatehouses.[58]

4.7 The orientation of ringwork castle entrances

The orientation of ringwork castle entrances is of particular interest because it seems possible that the orientation of ringwork castle entrances is more arbitrary than that of ringfort entrances and may be of use in differentiating between the two site-types. As stated above, it was possible to identify probable original entrances at thirteen of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in study area. The entrance associated with the partial ringwork castle at Baginbun is orientated towards the north-west. However, as the site is located on a natural promontory, the choice of entrance orientation would have been quite restricted as the entrance had to be located on the landward side of the site. The remaining twelve entrances vary considerably in terms of orientation. Five of

[56] O'Conor, 'A reinterpretation of the earthworks at Baginbun, Co. Wexford', pp 17-31.
[57] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8'), i, 40.
[58] The excavated evidence for timber structures associated with ringwork castle entrances is discussed fully in Chapter Five (Section 5.3).

the entrances are located in the south-eastern quadrant; the entrance at Kilcarn is orientated to the east, Rathangan to the east-south-east, Rodanstown and Kilpipe to the south-east and Purcellsinch to the south-south-east. The entrances at Danestown and Trim Castle are both orientated towards the south-west. At Newcastle, the entrance is at west. At Rathtroane, the entrance was located at the west-north-west, while at Clonmacnoise, the entrance is at the north-west. The entrance excavated at Castletobin was at the north-north-west. Finally, the entrance at Rathealy is orientated towards the east-north-east.

It is notable that five (42%) of these twelve ringwork entrances are located in the south-east quadrant of the ringwork castle, echoing the trend for Gaelic Irish ringfort entrance orientation. Geraldine Stout was the first to note this trend in relation to ringforts in the barony of Ikerrin, Co. Tipperary.[59] Matthew Stout has shown that ringforts in other parts of Ireland also conform to this trend; 50% of ringforts in the south-west midlands, 47% of ringforts in north Kerry, 78% of ringforts on the Iveragh Peninsula, Kerry, and 72% of ringforts in the Cruachain complex in Roscommon, have entrances between the east and the south.[60] Bennett found that ringfort entrances in Co. Wexford varied widely in terms of their orientation, stating that they, '...faced all points of the compass, generally respecting the topography of the area in which the ringforts were sited in that they opened downhill from the site.'[61] However, Bennett's data clearly shows that ringfort entrances in Wexford were more likely to be located on the eastern side of the ringfort than the western half. Stout has suggested that the trend for south-eastern facing entrances may represent an attempt to protect ringforts from the prevailing south-westerly wind and colder winds, which generally come from the north, while taking advantage of the available sunlight.[62] However, as Cody has commented, '...in time the practice may have assumed the status of custom.' [63]

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[59] Geraldine Stout, *Archaeological survey of the barony of Ikerrin* (Roscrea, 1984), p. 29.
[60] Matthew Stout, *The Irish ringfort* (Dublin, 1997), pp 18-19.
[61] Isabel Bennett, 'The settlement pattern of ringforts in County Wexford' in *J.R.S.A.I.,* cxix (1989), pp 50-61.
[62] Ibid., p. 19.
[63] Eamon Cody, 'A brief look at aspects of ringfort morphology and distribution' in Christiaan Corlett and Tom Condit, (eds), *Above and beyond: essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray, 2005), p. 5.

These reasons would have been equally valid considerations for the Anglo-Normans when they were constructing ringwork castles. However, it seems possible that the trend for south-eastern facing entrances indicates that the Anglo-Normans were refortifying pre-existing ringfort sites and were choosing to leave the entrance in its original position. In the cases of Rathangan and Rodanstown, where the entrances are at the east-south-east and south-east respectively, Rathealy, where the entrance is at the east-north-east, and Rathtroane, with its probable entrance at the west-north-west, there is evidence to suggest that the ringwork castles are based on pre-existing early medieval ringforts, as discussed in Chapter Six. It seems unlikely that the Anglo-Normans would have moved the entrance when adapting a ringfort into a ringwork castle as this would have involved unnecessary labour.

The location of the ringwork castle in relation to the associated manorial settlement may also have played a major role in determining the orientation of the entrance. Many ringwork entrances seem to be orientated towards the site of the medieval church. The entrances to the ringwork castles at Danestown and Rathangan are orientated directly towards nearby medieval church sites. O'Conor has observed that the entrance to the ringwork castle at Rathangan is approached by a raised track-way which extends for approximately 20m towards the Church of Ireland church, which stands on the site of the medieval parish church. As O'Conor has suggested, this feature may represent a medieval roadway linking the castle and church (Plate 4a).[64] At Rodanstown, the entrance is orientated towards the modern road that leads that leads to the Church of Ireland church, which stands on the site of the medieval church, approximately 550m to the south-east. Similarly, at Rathtroane, the entrance is aligned with a possible sunken way which runs alongside the modern field boundary. This possible sunken way is aligned with the modern road, which takes a sharp right turn approximately 50m to the west-north-west of the site and continues around the site. It seems possible that this road originally led right up to the ringwork castle entrance.

[64] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster, ii, 721.

4.8 Ringwork and bailey castles

Relatively few ringwork and bailey castles have been identified in Ireland to date and only four sites are currently classified as ringwork and bailey castles by the RMP. These four sites, which are all located in the southern part of Co. Tipperary, in the townlands of Ballyherberry/Curraghtarsna,[65] Bullockpark,[66] Moanroe,[67] and Monalumper,[68] were first identified by O'Brien.[69] The earthwork castle at Castlerahan, Co. Cavan,[70] has also been identified as a ringwork and bailey castle, although there has been some debate regarding two possible baileys associated with the ringwork (Plate 4b). Davies, writing in the 1940s, identified the wedge-shaped area to the east of the ringwork as a possible bailey.[71] O'Donovan and Parker have also argued in favour of this wedge-shaped 'bailey', which adjoins the probable entrance to the ringwork.[72] However, it is notable that this area measures only 34m north-south and 22m east-west,[73] making it unusually small in relation to the interior of the ringwork.[74] Alternatively, Sweetman has suggested that the large D-shaped enclosure to the south-east of the ringwork may represent a bailey.[75] This area is defined by a post-medieval wall and is bisected by a v-shaped wall. The north-western section of the enclosure contains a graveyard and the ruins of an eighteenth century church.[76] It seems possible that both of these enclosures represent baileys as many earthwork castles in England appear to have had more than one associated bailey.[77]

Within the study area, probable baileys have been identified in association with three (14%) of the twenty-one ringwork castles, at Kilpipe, Pigeonpark/Danesfort, and Rathealy. At Kilpipe, both the ringwork castle and the medieval church site are located

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[65] TS061-064.
[66] TS069-019.
[67] TS077-034.
[68] TS052-009.
[69] Caimin O'Brien, 'The classification of the earth and timber castle in North Tipperary and their place in a wider European context', (MLitt thesis, TCD, 2001).
[70] CV038-008; *Inventory*, no. 1787, p. 225.
[71] Oliver Davies 'The castles of County Cavan. Part 1' in *U.J.A.*, x (1947), p. 88.
[72] P.F. O'Donovan and Ciaran Parker, 'The castle at Castlerahan, County Cavan' in Conleth Manning, (ed.), *From ringforts to fortified houses: studies of castles and other monuments in honour of David Sweetman* (Bray, 2008), p. 58.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Davies 'The castles of County Cavan. Part 1', p. 88.
[75] Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland*, p. 13.
[76] O'Donovan and Parker, 'The castle at Castlerahan, County Cavan', p. 58.
[77] Robert Higham and Philip Barker, *Timber Castles* (London, 1992), pp 199-200.

on a high natural ridge while the bailey is located to the south-east of the ringwork, in the field below (Plate 5a). The bailey, which is depicted on the Second Edition O.S. map (1887), consists of a large D-shaped enclosure, measuring approximately 80m north-south and 50m east-west. It is defined by a small flat-topped bank and external ditch (Plate 5b). The bank measures approximately 20cm in height above internal ground level and approximately 50cm above the base of the ditch. The ditch is approximately 1m wide and 40cm in depth below external ground level. A steep slope separates the bailey from the ringwork enclosure.

The bailey at Pigeonpark (Danesfort) is similarly detached from its associated ringwork (Plate 6a). It is located to the south-west of the ringwork, on slightly lower ground, and a distance of approximately 10m separates it from the ringwork (measuring from the outer edge of the ringwork's fosse to the outer edge of the bailey's fosse). The two enclosures that make up the ringwork and bailey are both currently classified as 'ringforts' by the RMP.[78] O'Conor identified the bailey enclosure as a ringwork castle, recognising that the site is located at a known Anglo-Norman manorial centre, but dismissed the adjacent enclosure as a 'ringfort'.[79] It seems most probable that these earthworks represent a ringwork and bailey with the smaller, slightly raised enclosure functioning as the ringwork and the larger enclosure functioning as a bailey. The 'bailey' consists of a large circular enclosure, measuring approximately 52m from north to south and 64m from east to west internally. This makes it much larger than the ringwork enclosure which has an internal diameter of approximately 43m. Like the ringwork itself, the bailey is enclosed by substantial defences, consisting of an earthen bank, measuring up to 1.5m in height above the interior, and an external ditch, which measures between 6m and 8m in width and up to 3.8m in depth below the top of the bank. The bailey is bisected by a low bank, which runs from east to west. Orpen, who visited the site in the early twentieth century, recorded that this linear feature was a wall.[80] Although this feature may represent nothing more than a post-medieval field-boundary, it is also possible that it is an original feature, which divided the bailey into two parts. Orpen also recorded that 'traces of buildings' were visible within the

[78] KK023-057 (ringwork) and KK023-058 (bailey).
[79] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', ii, 709-10.
[80] G. H. Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ossory' in *J.R.S.A.I.* xxxix (1909), p. 321.

enclosure,[81] in addition to 'traces of a circular tower (?) and other buildings on the bank,'[82] although nothing of these structures can now be seen at ground level.

The ringwork castle at Rathealy in Co. Kilkenny also has a possible associated bailey. Directly to the east-south-east of the ringwork, between the ringwork and the ruined medieval church, lies a rectangular enclosure with rounded corners (Plate 6b). A distance of approximately 10m separates this enclosure from the ringwork. It is defined by a low bank, which can be seen on aerial photographs, and measures approximately 40m east-west by 30m north-south. It seems possible that this enclosure represents a bailey associated with the ringwork castle.

It is notable that the probable baileys at Kilpipe, Pigeonpark (Danesfort) and Rathealy all seem to have been slightly detached from their associated ringwork castles. From a military viewpoint, detached baileys are less than ideal as, when under attack, defenders would have been unable to withdraw from the bailey into the ringwork enclosure without exposing themselves to enemy fire. Based on the surviving earthworks, it is difficult to ascertain how the baileys at Kilpipe, Pigeonpark and Rathealy were accessed from their associated ringworks. At Kilpipe, there is a steep slope from the ringwork down to the bailey below. Pictorial and archaeological evidence from England shows that many mottes had wooden steps leading from the summit of the motte to the bailey below. It seems possible that steps of this kind were employed at Kilpipe. The modern entrance to the bailey at Pigeonpark/Danesfort is located at the south-south-west of the site. There is also a probable entrance at the north-north-east of the bailey, just west of the dovecote, at the closest point to the ringwork enclosure. Both entrances consist of causeways over the fosse and corresponding gaps in the enclosing bank. It seems possible that both entrances are original with the first allowing access from the settlement into the bailey and the second facilitating access from the bailey into the adjacent ringwork enclosure.

Sweetman has also suggested that a feature associated with the possible ringwork castle at Drumsawry in Co. Meath (site no. 23) may be a bailey.[83] This possible bailey consists

[81] Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, iii, 92.
[82] Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ossory', p. 321.

of a crescent-shaped annexe attached to the possible ringwork from north-north-east to north to south-west (Plate 7a). Crescent shaped baileys are not unknown in England and Wales; for example, the bailey associated with the earthwork castle at Sycharth in Powys is crescent-shaped.[84] However, the 'bailey' at Drumsawry seems to be too narrow in width to be useful as a bailey and there are several alternative interpretations of this feature. As suggested in the *Inventory*, it may represent an outer bank which originally enclosed the whole site.[85] Alternatively, if the site originated as an early medieval ringfort, it may be a crescent-shaped annexe associated with that phase of occupation. Several other ringfort sites in the local area, including the ringfort at Ballinvally,[86] which lies approximately 150m to the north-east of the possible ringwork castle of Drumsawry, have similar lunate annexes.

Of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area, only three (14%) appear to have had associated baileys. In contrast, it has been stated that approximately 30% mottes in Ireland have associated baileys,[87] although O'Conor has suggested that 34.5% is more accurate.[88] It is important to note that these figures are based on the visible remains in the landscape; some mottes and ringworks may originally have had baileys which have not survived as visible earthworks. Baileys tended to be enclosed by less substantial defences than those of their associated motte or ringwork and are therefore more vulnerable to destruction through agricultural activity. Also, some baileys may have been enclosed by a simple timber palisade rather than earthworks, making them less likely to survive as visible features. However, it seems logical that mottes were far more likely to have associated baileys than ringwork castles. As the area enclosed by a typical ringwork castle tends to be larger than the average motte summit, ringwork owners would have been less likely to need the additional space provided by a bailey.

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[83] Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath', p. 396.
[84] D.H. Hague, and Cynthia Warhurst, 'Excavations at Sycharth Castle, Denbighshire, 1962-3' in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, cxv (1966), pp 108-27.
[85] *Inventory*, no. 644, p. 71.
[86] *Inventory*, no. 485, p. 58; ME008-058.
[87] T. E. McNeill, 'Hibernia pacata and castellata' in *Château Gaillard*, xiv (1990), p. 265; Tadhg O'Keeffe, 'The archaeology of Norman castles in Ireland' in *Archaeology Ireland*, iv, no. 3 (1990), p. 16.
[88] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 294.

4. 9 Conclusion to the chapter

The morphology of the ringwork castles in the study area varies considerably. The However, it is possible to make some generalisations regarding the 'typical morphology' of ringwork castles. The area enclosed tends to be circular in form although D-shaped and sub-circular ringwork castle are also common. In contrast to the ringwork castles in England and Wales, which tend to have interiors that are not raised significantly above external ground level,[89] the majority of the ringwork castles in the study area have raised interiors. However, this seems to be the result of careful site selection and does not generally represent a deliberate heightening of the interior. The enclosed area tends to be defined by a small inner bank or lip. In some cases, where the bank has subsided, this gives the interior a dished appearance. All of the ringwork castles in the study are enclosed by at least one fosse and the majority of ringwork castles also have an outer bank, which tends to be more substantial than the inner bank. If King and Alcock's ringwork classification scheme is applied to the ringwork castles in the study area, the majority of sites fit into their Bb and A categories. However, this scheme does not allow for some of the morphological idiosyncrasies of the Irish ringwork castles and some sites do not fit into any of King and Alcock's categories.

The ringwork castles in the study area can be divided into two groups; full ringwork castles and partial ringworks. The ratio of ringworks to partial ringworks in the study area seems to be 9:1. Possible baileys were identified in association with 14% of the ringwork castles in the study area. In contrast, approximately 34.5% mottes are believed to have had associated baileys.[90] It seems logical that baileys would have been more commonly associated with mottes, as motte summits were generally far smaller than the areas enclosed by a ringwork castles and there would therefore have been more need for extra space.

Ringwork castle entrances tend to be easier to identify than ringfort entrances, generally consisting of gaps in the enclosing bank/s and a causeway over the fosse. As the ringworks in the study area tend to have raised interiors, the entrance way tends to have a ramped appearance. The orientation of ringwork castles entrances varies widely.

[89] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 94.
[90] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 294.

However, it is notable that 42% of ringwork entrances are in the south-eastern quadrant. This matches the trend for ringfort entrances to be orientated towards the south-east. It seems possible that, in some cases, the ringwork castles were adapted from pre-existing ringforts and the positioning of their entrances was left unchanged.

Analysis of the morphological characteristics of the ringwork castles in the study area shows that the 'typical' ringwork castle consisted of a raised circular interior, defined by a small bank, a deep, wide fosse and a substantial outer bank. The enclosing elements tend to be far more substantial and defensive than the defences of an early medieval ringfort. The ringwork castle at Danestown, Co. Meath, seems to represent a 'typical' ringwork castle, consisting of a raised interior, defined by an inner bank, fosse and outer bank. While morphology is vital in identifying ringwork castles in the field, it is most useful when analysed in conjunction with the other identifying criteria, as outlined in the methodology for ringwork castle identification proposed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Five: The evidence for structures associated with ringwork castles

5.1 Introduction to the chapter

The defences and buildings of ringwork castles were generally timber constructions. Our knowledge of the timber structures and buildings associated with earth and timber castles is generally based on excavated evidence as medieval timber structures rarely survive. To a large extent, the excavated evidence for timber structures and buildings consists of no more than post-holes, and while post-holes may enable the reconstruction of the ground-plans of a building, they offer few clues regarding its three-dimensional appearance. The reconstruction of excavated buildings is often based partly on comparison with surviving medieval timber structures, including bell, towers and church roofs.[1] Pictorial evidence can also be a useful source of information, although contemporary depictions of castles are relatively rare. The depictions of motte castles on the Bayeux Tapestry are particularly notable, although the accuracy of these representations has been the subject of much debate.[2] The excavated evidence shows that the structures associated with earth and timber castles were not dissimilar to those associated with contemporary stone castles, although they were often more modest in scale.

The timber structures associated with ringwork castles are important because they allow an insight into the daily life of an earthwork castle. The timber structures associated with ringwork castles also serve to demonstrate the differences between ringwork castles and early medieval ringforts; while the earthworks of these two site-types may appear to be morphologically similar, the excavated evidence shows that their associated timber structures were notably different, due to the difference in their functions. As O'Conor and De Meulemeester have argued, '...the timber defences seen on ring-works were more complex than those seen on other forms of defended enclosure. Simply, being castles, ring-works were better defended in comparison to different types of ring-fort.'[3]

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[1] Robert Higham and Philip Barker, *Timber Castles* (London, 1992), p. 244.
[2] Ibid., pp 147-56.
[3] Johnny De Meulemeester and Kieran O'Conor, 'Fortifications' in James Graham-Campbell and Magdalena Valor, (eds), *The archaeology of Medieval Europe*, (Aarhus, 2007), p. 326.

In this chapter, the excavated evidence for the timber structures associated with ringwork castles will be discussed, including enclosing palisades, gate-towers, entrance ways, keeps and halls. The evidence for structures identified at unexcavated sites and the documentary evidence for ringwork castle buildings will also be addressed.

5.2 Palisades and curtain walls

Evidence from excavations indicates that the interior of a ringwork castle was generally defined by a bank surmounted by a timber palisade. These timber palisades could vary considerably in terms of their construction and complexity.

Excavations at Carrick in Co. Wexford (site no. 36) and Carlow Castle (site no. 1) have revealed evidence for simple palisades, each consisting of a single line of stake-holes. At Carrick, Co. Wexford, the excavations revealed evidence for a possible palisade on top of the enclosing bank. In 1984, Bennett's excavation at the south-west of the site uncovered five possible stake-holes on the crest of the bank, which ranged from 2.5cm and 18cm in width.[4] The excavation report does not specify exactly how big each of the stake-holes were and a hole measuring 2.5cm in diameter seems rather small to be interpreted as a stake-hole. However, Cotter's later excavations also revealed 'random stake-holes' at the east of the site, underneath the rectangular building known as Structure A. These stake-holes ranged from 8cm to 10cm in diameter.[5] Both Bennett and Cotter have suggested that the excavated stake-holes represent a timber palisade associated with the conquest-period castle,[6] and the excavated evidence does seem to match up well with Gerald of Wales' description of the site. According to Gerald, the castle of Carrick was besieged in 1171 and Robert fitz Stephen and his men were '...in the midst of their enemies, trapped in a most ill-fortified castle, which was enclosed by

[4] Isabel Bennett, 'Preliminary archaeological excavations at Ferrycarrig ringwork, Newtown townland, Co. Wexford' in *J.W.H.S.*, x (1984-5), p. 40.

[5] Claire Cotter, http://www.excavations.ie/Pages/Details.php?Year=&County=Wexford&id=3635, accessed 9 August 2010.

[6] Bennett, 'Preliminary archaeological excavations at Ferrycarrig ringwork', p. 40; Claire Cotter, http://www.excavations.ie/Pages/Details.php?Year=&County=Wexford&id=3635, accessed 9 August 2010.

a flimsy wall of branches and sods.'[7] Although the excavated defences seem more substantial than is implied by Gerald's description, the excavated bank with possible palisade may represent Gerald's 'flimsy wall of branches and sods'.

Excavations at Carlow Castle also uncovered evidence for a simple palisade associated with the earthwork phase of the castle. In this case, the palisade was associated with a curving ditch which seemed to bisect the interior of the earthwork castle. The evidence for the palisade consisted of an arc of ten post-holes, which were evenly spaced (50cm apart) and measured between 10cm and 14cm in diameter.[8] The palisade and ditch seem to be contemporary as the palisade follows the line of the ditch and both features clearly pre-date the masonry castle.[9]

Some ringwork castles were enclosed by more complex palisades. At Trim Castle (site no. 27), Hayden's excavations uncovered the remains of a substantial palisade, which was destroyed by fire at the end of the first phase of the Trim ringwork before being rebuilt. A section of the rebuilt palisade of the second phase of the ringwork castle, measuring 35m in length, was excavated to the north-west of the keep (Figure 20). This palisade consisted of large postholes spaced between 3m and 4m apart with smaller post-holes in between. These post-holes were situated within a slot trench. An inner line of post-holes was excavated between 1m and 2m behind this and were linked to the frontal slot trench by more slot trenches.[10] Hayden has argued that the slot-trenches linking the two lines of the palisade would have held horizontal timber breastplates '...securing the posts together and supporting and bracing the whole structure', and the frontal slot trench may also have held horizontal timbers.[11] It is possible that the space between the two lines of posts was in-filled with clay and rubble to add further support to the structure. This technique, known as *garillum*, was commonly used in castle

[7] *Expugnatio Hibernica. The Conquest of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis*, edited by A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin, (eds), (Dublin, 1978), pp 80-1.
[8] Kieran O'Conor, 'Carlow Castle preliminary excavation report', (unpublished report, excavation no. 96E0105, 2002), p. 31.
[9] Ibid., pp 31-2.
[10] Alan Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8' (unpublished excavation report, 2 vols, licence no: 95E077, Archaeological Projects Ltd., 2005), i, 44.
[11] Ibid., i, 50.

construction.[12] No conclusive evidence for this technique was uncovered at Trim, although some deposits of stones associated with the palisade were excavated.[13]

The excavated evidence suggests that the palisade at Trim was a solid, sophisticated structure. It is generally accepted that palisades of this type were intended to support a wall-walk or fighting platform; as King has put it, '...the outer line of posts carried a timber wall, planked or wattled, probably daubed in clay as some protection against fire, and topped by a parapet, much like that of a stone curtain and most likely designed to imitate one. Meanwhile the inner posts were shorter and helped to carry a wall-walk along the rear of the parapet.'[14] A similar palisade was excavated at the ringwork castle of Old Castle Camp, Bishopston in Glamorgan.[15] Excavations at Abinger in Surrey revealed a double row of post-holes encircling the motte summit, possibly representing a palisade with a sentry-walk (Figure 21).[16] However, Higham and Barker have noted that the post-holes at Abinger are quite closely spaced so that the fighting platform would have been very narrow.[17] Comparable palisades have also been excavated in association with several castle baileys, including those at Hen Domen, Montgomery,[18] Tamworth Castle in Staffordshire,[19] and Launceston in Cornwall.[20] The palisade that enclosed the bailey of Launceston Castle differed slightly from the palisade at Trim in terms of its construction. However, the reconstruction of the Launceston palisade offers a general impression of what these palisades looked like and how they functioned (Figure 22).

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[12] D.J.C. King, *The castle in England and Wales: an interpretive history* (London, 1988), pp 54-5; Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, 50.
[13] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, 50.
[14] King, *The castle in England and Wales: an interpretive history*, pp 54-5.
[15] W. L. Morgan 'Excavations at the Old Castle camp, Bishopston, Gower' in *Archaeologia Cambrensis,* xiv (1899), pp 254-6.
[16] Brian Hope-Taylor, 'The Norman motte at Abinger, Surrey and its wooden castle' in R.L.S. Bruce-Mitford (ed.), *Recent archaeological excavations in Britain* 1939-1955 (London, 1956), pp 236-7.
[17] Higham and Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 294.
[18] Robert Higham and Philip Barker, *Hen Domen, Montgomery: a timber castle on the English-Welsh border: a final report* (Exeter, 2000), pp 57-60; Higham and Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 331.
[19] R.A. Meeson, 'Tenth Tamworth excavation report, 1977: the Norman bailey defences at the castle' in *Transactions of the Staffordshire Archaeology and History Society*, xx (1980), pp 21-3; Higham and Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 293.
[20] Andrew Saunders *et al., Excavations at Launceston Castle*, Cornwall (Leeds, 2006), p. 234.

No evidence for palisades was uncovered by the excavations at Kilkenny Castle (site no. 8), Pollardstown, Co. Kildare (site no. 3), and Castletobin, Co. Kilkenny (site no. 6). In the cases of Kilkenny and Pollardstown, this is perhaps unsurprising; the presence of the stone castle at Kilkenny means that relatively little of the preceding earthwork was available for excavation and the site was quite disturbed, while the ringwork castle at Pollardstown was in an exceptionally poor state of preservation when the rescue excavation took place; only one-third of the earthwork remained when Fanning conducted his excavation.[21] However, the conspicuous absence of evidence for palisades has been noted in relation to several excavated ringwork castles in Wales and England, including Castle Tower in Penmaen,[22] Pen-y-pill in St Mellons,[23] Coed-y-Cwm in St Nicholas,[24] and Sulgrave in Northamptonshire.[25] In the opinion of the excavator, the lack of evidence for a palisade at Castle Tower, Penmaen, was due to the nature of the bank as, '...post-traces are unlikely to be preserved in a rampart make-up of loosely-piled carboniferous limestone rubble.'[26] In the case of Pen-y-pill, St Mellons, it was suggested that erosion of the bank had removed all traces of the posts of the palisade.[27] Although the absence of a palisade can often be attributed to erosion or other factors, it has also been suggested that some ringwork castles lacked a timber palisade altogether.[28] At Llantrithyd Castle the positioning of one of the buildings, on the crest of the bank, indicated that there could not have been an enclosing palisade on that side of the site as there would not have been enough space.[29] However, it seems unlikely that many ringwork castles were protected only by earthworks as they would have been extremely vulnerable to attack. It seems possible that some of these earthwork castles

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[21] Thomas Fanning, 'Excavation of a ringfort at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare' in *J.K.A.S.*, xv (1973-4), p. 253.
[22] Leslie Alcock, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen: a Norman ringwork in Glamorgan' in *Antiquaries Journal*, xlvi , no. 2 (1966), p. 183.
[23] E.J. Talbot, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen. Appendix II: Timber breastworks', in Leslie Alcock, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen: a Norman ringwork in Glamorgan' in *Antiquaries Journal*, xlvi no. 2 (1966), p. 207.
[24] Ibid., p. 207.
[25] B.K. Davison, 'Excavations at Sulgrave, Northamptonshire, 1960-76' in *A.J.*, cxxxiv (1977), p. 112.
[26] Alcock, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen: a Norman ringwork in Glamorgan', p. 183.
[27] Talbot, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen. Appendix II: Timber breastworks', p. 207; D.J.C. King, and Leslie Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1969), p. 108.
[28] Talbot, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen. Appendix II: Timber breastworks', p. 207; King, and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 108.
[29] Pat Charlton, John Roberts and Vanda Vale, *Llantrithyd: a ringwork in South Glamorgan* (Cardiff, 1977), pp 18-20; Higham and Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 303.

were enclosed by palisades constructed on sill-beams, which would have left very little trace.[30]

5.3 Gate-towers and ringwork entrances

The entrance to any castle was the most vulnerable point in its defences. Although some ringwork castles may have been accessed via a simple gap in the enclosing bank, excavations have shown that many ringwork castle entrances were protected by a gate-tower, constructed in timber or stone or a combination of the two. The gate-tower protected the entrance to the ringwork castle and was the key to its defences.[31]

In England and Wales, there is evidence for stone gate-towers associated with ringwork castles from a relatively early date. For example, the stone gate-tower associated with the royal ringwork castle at Exeter seems to a primary feature. The construction of the castle began in 1068, on the orders of William the Conqueror,[32] and the gate tower can be dated to this early period on stylistic grounds.[33] The gate-tower consisted of a square tower, with a projecting barbican, which had storeys of chambers above the entrance passage.[34] Creighton has suggested that the gatehouse 'looks backwards' as the windows appear to be Anglo-Saxon rather than Norman in style. This may indicate that the windows are re-used or may represent a conscious attempt to reference the appearance of an Anglo-Saxon burh-geat.[35] The gate-tower at Llanstephan in Carmarthenshire, which was probably added to the curtain wall enclosing the ringwork castle in the early thirteenth century, is a simpler version of a masonry gate-tower.[36]

It seems likely that most ringwork castles were accessed via timber rather than stone gate-towers. Excavations carried out at a number of ringwork castles in England and Wales have also produced some evidence for these gate-towers, although reconstructing

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[30] Kieran O'Conor, pers. comm.

[31] J. R. Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications* (London, 1990), p. 58.

[32] H. M. Colvin, (general editor), R.A. Brown and A.J. Taylor, *The history of the King's works: the middle ages*, (3 vols, London, 1963), ii, 647-9.

[33] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 108; Robert Higham, 'Early castles in Devon, 1068-1201', in *Château Gaillard*, ix-x (1982), p. 109; B.K. Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model' in *Château Gaillard,* iii (1969), p. 45.

[34] Alcock, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen: a Norman ringwork in Glamorgan', p. 189.

[35] Oliver Creighton, pers. comm., March 2010.

[36] Alcock, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen: a Norman ringwork in Glamorgan', p. 190; King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 108;

their plan and appearance based on the scanty excavated evidence can prove difficult. At Castle Tower, Penmaen, in Glamorgan, evidence for a complex timber gate-tower was excavated. Four post-holes, measuring up to 1.2m in diameter and 90cm in depth were excavated and, from these four post-holes, it was possible to predict that, if the building was symmetrical, two more post-holes must have existed, forming two parallel lines of three posts each. The exact chronology of the gate-tower at Penmaen is unclear. Its destruction by fire seems to mark the end of the first phase of occupation.[37] The excavator has suggested that the gate-tower's destruction may have occurred in 1217, as the Norman family who held Penmaen were probably disseized when Rhys Gryg destroyed '...all the castles of Gower and their fortifications and expelled all the English population.'[38] The second phase of occupation at the castle seemed to be less 'Norman' in terms of material culture than the first phase, leading the excavator to suggest that this phase represents a brief Welsh occupation of the castle.[39]

In Ireland, excavations at ringwork castles have produced very little evidence for entrance features. This is primarily because many of the excavated ringworks are situated underneath stone castles, making it difficult to access large parts of the pre-existing earthworks. At both Carlow Castle and Kilkenny Castle, nothing is currently known regarding the nature of the entrance features of the pre-existing ringwork castles. This is also true of the excavated ringwork castle at Pollardstown, where only the western third of the earthwork was intact by the time it was excavated.[40]

There is evidence for stone-gate-towers at only two of the ringwork castle sites in the study area; Newcastle Middle, Co. Wicklow (site no. 50), and Castletobin, Co. Kilkenny. At Newcastle, a rectangular stone gatehouse stands on the western side of the ringwork castle. Although is has been suggested that this gatehouse sixteenth-century in date,[41] McNeill has shown that the core of the gatehouse dates from the late thirteenth

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[37] Alcock, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen: a Norman ringwork in Glamorgan', p. 184.
[38] *Brut y tywysogyon or The chronicle of the princes: Red Book of Hergest version*, critical text and translation with introduction and notes by Thomas Jones, (Cardiff, 1955), 1217.
[39] Alcock, 'Castle Tower, Penmaen: a Norman ringwork in Glamorgan', p. 196-7.
[40] Fanning, 'Excavation of a ringfort at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare', pp 251-2.
[41] G. H. Orpen, 'Novum Castrum McKynegan, Newcastle, County Wicklow' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, xxxviii (1908), p. 128; Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', (3 vols, PhD, Cardiff, 1993), i, 182.

century. The gate-house was originally an Edwardian-style gate-house with twin, projecting D-shaped towers (Figure 23). However, the structure was altered considerably at ground level and was rebuilt from the first-floor upwards in the sixteenth century.[42] McNeill's interpretation is supported by the documentary evidence, which shows that large amounts of money were spent on works at the castle in the late thirteenth century, when the royal castle of Newcastle McKynegan was being used as a base for royal forces in the war against the Gaelic Irish of Leinster (see Site Report no. 50). Generally, the documentary sources record expenditure on the castle but do not elaborate on the nature of the 'works' being carried out. However, between 1280 and 1282, it is recorded that the constable of the castle, David de Offyntoun, was paid £74 6*s.* 9*d.* to 'build a tower'.[43] It seems probable that the tower mentioned was the gate-tower as there is no evidence for a second tower or keep having existed at Newcastle. Further payments for works at the castle in the late 1270s and early 1280s may also have been for the construction of the gate-tower. In 1279, £12 was paid to Hugh de Cruys for works at the castle,[44] and three further payments, totalling £18 18*s.* 10½ *d.*, were made to Hugh in 1279 and 1280.[45] In 1282, £110 17*s* was paid to John de Stratton,[46] and £213 14*s.* 8*d.* was paid to John de Bentley for works at the castle.[47]

At Castletobin, the entrance seems to have been located at the north-west of the site. A square stone tower, measuring approximately 1.9m internally, was excavated immediately to the south of the probable entrance. The north, south and east walls of the tower measured between 0.55m and 0.65m in thickness. The western, outer wall was thicker, measuring approximately 1m in width, and had a slight batter.[48] Very few finds were found in association with the tower. However, a sherd of probable Ham Green Ware was found in the internal fill at the base of the tower, suggesting that the tower

[42] T. E. McNeill, *Castles in Ireland: feudal power in a Gaelic world* (London, 1997), pp 127-8.
[43] Irish Pipe Roll, 9th Ed. I, 36th Report of the Deputy Keeper, p. 53; Orpen, 'Novum Castrum McKynegan, Newcastle, County Wicklow', p. 131.
[44] H. S. Sweetman, (ed.), *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland,* (5 vols, London, 1875-83), ii, 309; Philomena Connolly, *Irish Exchequer Payments, 1270-1446* (Dublin, 1998), p. 32.
[45] Connolly, *Irish Exchequer Payments, 1270-1446*, pp 33-4 and p. 38.
[46] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.,* ii, 442-3 and 536
[47] Ibid., ii, 440 and 535.
[48] Deborah Sutton, 'Archaeological excavation preliminary report: Castletobin, Callan, Co. Kilkenny. December 1974-Janurary 1975' (unpublished excavation report, licence no: 74E140, 2003), p. 8.

may have been in use in the thirteenth-century.[49] It seems probable that the stone tower represents a gate-tower, intended to overlook and protect the entrance. Whereas most English and Welsh ringwork gate-towers, of both stone and timber construction, seem to have been located in the entrance gap, so that entry was through the building itself, the stone tower at Castletobin seems to have been located to one side of the entrance gap. There is limited evidence from England and Wales for towers being located to the side of entrances; King and Alcock suggested that the stone gate-tower at Ogmore may be contemporary with the original ringwork castle and may have functioned in this way.[50] King and Alcock also speculated that the flattening of the bank close to the entrance gap, noted at some ringwork castles, may indicate the existence of a timber tower; '...heightening, widening and flattening of the bank to one side of the entrance is a common feature of ringworks, and argues for timber towers overlooking the entrance...'[51] Further excavation of ringwork castle entrances may prove this speculation to be correct although evidence is currently lacking.

Excavations at Trim, Co. Meath, and Carrick, Co. Wexford, showed that the probable entrances of both ringwork castles had been much disturbed by later activity and neither excavation produced any evidence for a gate-tower structure. The evidence for the two possible entrances to the partial ringwork castle at Carrick is discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.4). At Trim, the excavations showed that the entrance was located at the south-south-west of the site where there was an un-dug section of fosse, measuring 20m in width.[52] In the 1970s, Sweetman's excavations uncovered a rectangular building between the terminals of the fosse. It was believed that this structure was contemporary with the fosse of the ringwork castle and that these features '...represented the earliest defences of the castle.'[53] However, Sweetman expressed reservations about interpreting this building as a gate-tower, stating that it '...is certainly not a normal feature of this type of fortification...'[54] Hayden has since offered a convincing re-interpretation of this structure, arguing that it represents a seventeenth-century house rather than a twelfth-

[49] Ibid., p. 8.
[50] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 109
[51] Ibid.
[52] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, 49.
[53] P.D. Sweetman, 'Archaeological excavations at Trim Castle, Co. Meath, 1971-74' in *P.R.I.A.*, lxxviii (1978), Section C, p. 133.
[54] Ibid., p. 186.

century gate-tower.[55] This leaves us with a disappointing lack of evidence regarding the original entrance to the ringwork castle at Trim. However, excavations under the western gate-tower at Trim revealed that this stone building was preceded by a stone-footed timber structure, which lay outside the excavated ringwork castle.[56] Although the precise chronology of this structure is unclear, it may be contemporary with the first phase of the ringwork because it too was destroyed by fire.[57] As Hayden has argued, this is interesting because it suggests that, '...much of the hilltop on which the ringwork was situated was occupied by the Anglo-Normans from an early stage. If the building uncovered beneath the western gate-tower was an early gate-tower then the ringwork formed only the core of the early Norman site.'[58] Hayden has also suggested that the ringwork castle and this gate-tower may have been linked by a ramped causeway, possibly constructed using up-cast from the fosse of the ringwork castle.[59]

A possible gatehouse was also excavated at the possible ringwork castle of Ballysimon in Co. Limerick It was tentatively suggested by the excavators that a line of four post-holes running north-south may mark the western end of a building while two small slot trenches may mark the eastern end. This building would have been roughly square and would have measured approximately 4m by 4m.[60] However, the plan of the excavated site shows that approximately twenty-five post-holes and stake-holes were excavated in this area, in addition to the two slot-trenches. While these features undoubtedly represent structures, it is possible to manipulate them into many possible different shapes and the square 'gate-house' does not seem much more likely than a dozen alternatives.

As discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.4), most of the entrances of unexcavated ringwork castles in the study area (where the original entrance can be identified) are represented by no more than a break in the enclosing bank and a causeway over the fosse. It seems probable that some of these entrances were protected by timber gate-

[55] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, 31-2.
[56] Ibid., i, 43.
[57] Ibid., i, 51-2.
[58] Ibid., i, 52.
[59] Ibid., i, 50.
[60] Tracy Collins and Anthony Cummins, *Excavation of a medieval ringwork* at *Ballysimon, Co. Limerick* (Limerick, 2001), pp 26-7.

towers of the type excavated at Castle Tower, Penmaen. At Rathealy in Co. Kilkenny (site no. 12), possible evidence for a timber entrance-tower was noted during the course of fieldwork. A rectangular depression is visible in the entrance gap, where the ramped entrance meets the interior (Plate 6b). This depression, which is visible both at ground level and on aerial photographs of the site, measures approximately 5m north-south by 3m east-west. It seems possible that this depression represents a collapsed timber gate-tower, although this cannot be proved without excavation.

It may be unreasonable to expect to find elaborate gate-towers at all of the ringwork castles in the study area. At Dinas Powys, the entrance associated with the Norman ringwork phase of the site consisted of a simple entrance passage, which was 8m in width and was closed with a timber, double-leaved gate, hung on timber posts.[61] The gateway at Baginbun (site no. 31), which is mentioned in Gerald of Wales' account of the battle of Baginbun, may have been similar to that at Dinas Powys. According to Gerald, the Anglo-Normans went out to meet the Irish but were forced to turn back towards their camp and, '...in their haste to enter it, they allowed the enemy, who were pursuing them from behind, inside the doors, which had not been completely hung up on their hinges.'[62] The entrance which survives at Baginbun seems to be a rather complex Y-shaped feature, consisting of a gap in the inner bank, a causeway over the fosse and two gaps in the outer bank.[63] Without excavation, it is not possible to tell if these gaps original. As many of the ringwork castles in the study area seem to have been associated with rather small manors, their entrance features may have been similarly simple, consisting of no more than a gate located in the gap in the enclosing bank. As discussed in Chapter Four, there is evidence for the terminals of the banks at some ringwork castle sites being stone-lined, possibly indicating a simple entrance passageway.

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[61] Alcock, *Dinas Powys: an Iron Age, Dark Age and early medieval settlement in Glamorgan*, pp 78-9.

[62] *Expugnatio Hibernica,* pp 56-7.

[63] Kieran O'Conor, 'A reinterpretation of the earthworks at Baginbun, Co. Wexford' in Kieran O'Conor and J. R. Kenyon, (eds), *The medieval castle in Ireland and Wales* (Dublin, 2003), p. 23.

5.4 Towers, keeps and halls

Like motte castles, many ringwork castles seem to have been centred on a principal building. This building, which was often located in a central position in the interior of the ringwork, could take the form of a tower or keep structure or a hall building.

Some ringwork castles seem to have had stone keeps from the beginning. It is generally accepted that the massive stone keeps at Castle Cary, Somerset,[64] and Castle Rising, Norfolk,[65] are primary structures, constructed at the same time as their earthworks. In other cases, stone keeps were added to ringwork castles later on. At Castle Acre, Norfolk, the excavations revealed that the stone keep was converted from a 'country house', demonstrating that the history of such structures can be more complex than immediately obvious.[66]

The evidence from excavations shows that some motte and ringwork castles originally had timber towers, which may represent the timber antecedents of Norman stone keeps. At Ludgershall in Wiltshire, the remains of a probable timber keep were excavated in the interior of the ringwork castle. The structure, which seems to date to *c.*1100, was interpreted as a '...massive timber tower with large posts set in deep holes on gigantic pad-stones.'[67] It is notable that there was also a hall within the ringwork interior at this stage. A stone keep was subsequently constructed at Ludgershall, probably in the first half of the twelfth century.[68] Similar timber towers were excavated on the summits of the mottes at Abinger in Surrey and Goltho in Lincolnshire. At Abinger, the excavated post-holes show that the tower was a square structure and it was suggested by the excavator that the tower stood on stilts, allowing the inhabitants to move freely between the posts, across the motte summit.[69] However, as Higham and Barker have argued, the excavated evidence indicates that the posts were too closely spaced to allow easy access

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[64] R.R.C. Gregory, 'Site of Cary Castle' in *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, xxxvi (1890), pp 168-74; King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 109.
[65] R.A. Brown, *Castle Rising, Norfolk* (London, 1987), pp 5-9.
[66] J.G. Coad and A.D.F. Streeten, 'Excavations at Castle Acre, Norfolk, 1972-77: country house and castle of the Norman earls of Surrey' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxix (1982), pp 191-4.
[67] P.V. Addyman, 'Excavation at Ludgershall Castle, Wiltshire, England (1964-72)' in *Château Gaillard*, vi (1973), p. 8; Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, p. 27.
[68] Addyman, 'Excavation at Ludgershall Castle, Wiltshire, England (1964-72)', pp 8-9.
[69] Hope-Taylor, 'The Norman motte at Abinger, Surrey and its wooden castle', p. 242.

between them and it seems more likely that the ground floor of the tower was enclosed.[70] At Goltho, the basement level of a timber tower was excavated on the summit of the motte.[71] The basement level of the tower measured 2.7m square,[72] and it has been suggested by the excavator that the tower may have stood up to 9m high, which would have allowed it a view of the base of the motte.[73] This seems unlikely as the evidence from other sites does not suggest that towers were generally intended to have a view of the base of the motte. Beresford assigned the tower at Goltho to Period 6 (c. 1080-1150) in his chronology of the site.[74] However, the chronology of the site as a whole has been re-evaluated and it is now generally accepted that this phase of the site is later than originally thought, dating to *c.*1140-1150.[75]

In Ireland, the remains of possible towers have been excavated on the summits of the mottes at Doonmore, Co. Antrim, Lismahon, Co. Down and Lurgankeel, Co. Louth. At Doonmore, the excavations uncovered the foundations of a stone-footed structure, which was interpreted as a tower intended to overlook the entrance way.[76] The excavations at Lurgankeel also uncovered evidence for a similar tower but a report for this excavation has not been published. [77] At Lismahon, a timber tower seems to have been attached to a small stone-footed house.[78]

Timber towers associated with earth and timber castles may have fulfilled some of the functions of stone keeps, although they were clearly smaller, more modest structures. In the opinion of the excavator, the tower at Abinger functioned as a watch-tower rather

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[70] Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, pp 295-6.
[71] Guy Beresford, *Goltho: the development of an early medieval manor, c.850-1150* (London, 1987), pp 103-6.
[72] Ibid., p. 103.
[73] Ibid., p. 106.
[74] Ibid., p. 106.
[75] David Stocker, 'Review of G. Beresford, *Goltho: the development of an early medieval manor, c.850-1150*' in Archaeological Journal, xiv (1989), pp 627-9; O. H. Creighton, *Castles and landscapes: power, community and fortification in medieval England (*London, 2002), pp 21-2 and p. 24.
[76] V.G. Childe, 'Doonmore, a castle mound near Fairhead, Co. Antrim' in *U.J.A.*, 3rd series, i (1938), p. 125 and p. 128; O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 369.
[77] T.B. Barry, Edward Culleton and C.A. Empey, 'Kells Motte, County Kilkenny' in *P.R.I.A.,* lxxxiv (1984), Section C, pp 159-60; C.J. Lynn, 'The excavation of Rathmullan, a raised rath and motte in County Down' in *U.J.A.*, xliv and xlv (1981-2), pp 112; O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 369.
[78] D.M. Waterman 'Excavations at Lismahon, Co. Down' in *Medieval Archaeology*, iii (1959), pp 167-70; O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 369-70.

than a residential structure; 'It was a look-out tower, a vantage point, and the motte as a whole existed as an observation-post and a place of refuge in times of need.'[79] However, it seems possible that some timber keeps were more similar to their stone counterparts and incorporated residential space.

Excavations at ringwork castles in the study area have produced no evidence for timber towers of this type. At both Carlow Castle and Kilkenny Castle, the excavations were inhibited by the presence of the later stone castles and little for the internal structures of the pre-existing ringwork castles was uncovered. At Pollardstown, the excavations revealed no evidence for buildings or structures. However, this is unsurprising as only a small proportion of interior was available for excavation.[80] At Carrick in Co. Wexford, the First Edition O.S. map, published in 1840, shows a rectangular building at the centre of the interior of the partial ringwork. It seems possible that this depiction represented a stone or stone-footed keep or hall associated with the medieval castle. Unfortunately, Cotter's excavations showed that the construction of the imitation round tower in the mid-nineteenth century had caused major disturbance, removing all trace of any pre-existing structure at the centre of the interior.[81]

Although excavations have so far produced no evidence for towers associated with ringwork castles in the study area, possible traces of such structures have been identified at several unexcavated sites. At Rathtroane in Co. Meath (site no. 25), there is a large circular depression at the centre of the interior, which may represent the foundations of a keep or tower (Plate 7b). The earthwork at Rathtroane was first identified as a possible ringwork castle by Sweetman, based on its siting and morphology.[82] The documentary evidence supports this identification; in 1420, James, earl of Ormond, leased Rathtroane to John Roche of Cloncurry on condition that, 'John and his heirs or assigns shall make vaults, parapets and battlements (*voltabunt tabellient et batalliabunt*) for the castle of Great Ratron at their own expense within the first seven years of the term and shall

[79] Hope-Taylor, 'The Norman motte at Abinger, Surrey and its wooden castle', p. 242.
[80] Fanning, 'Excavation of a ringfort at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare', p. 257.
[81] Claire Cotter, http://www.excavations.ie/Pages/Details.php?Year=&County=Wexford&id=3635, accessed 9 August 2010.
[82] P. D. Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath' in Christiaan Corlett and Tom Condit, (eds), *Above and beyond: essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray, 2005), pp 396-7.

rebuild the old walls and parapets.'[83]. There is a large circular depression at the centre of the interior of the ringwork castle at Rathtroane and Sweetman has suggested that this, '...could originally have been the site of a wooden tower'.[84] The depression measures 11m internally and up to 1.9m in depth and is surrounded by a low bank around its rim, which measures between 1m and 1.5m in width and up to 1.5m in height above the interior. The presence of the bank around the edge of the depression and the large amount of stone visible in the sides of the depression suggest that the structure may have been stone or stone-footed rather than purely a timber construction. The possible keep at Rathtroane may have been comparable to the polygonal towers associated with the mottes at Shanid in Co. Limerick and Castleknock in Co. Dublin, although these structures are slightly smaller, with internal diameters of 6m and 7m respectively.[85]

Possible keeps or towers have also been identified at Drumsawry, Co. Meath (site no. 22), and Rathasker, Co. Kildare (site no. 5). At Drumsawry, the remains of a rectangular structure stand in the interior of the possible ringwork castle (Plate 7b). It consists of a depression lined with stone walls. The structure measures 8.7m in length and 5.2m in width internally. The walls stand to a height of up to 1.1m above the interior of the structure. There is an un-dug square area at the centre of the structure, which stands 0.7m in height. The entrance to the building appears to have been at the south-east where there is a well-defined gap in the wall, measuring 0.8m in width. This entrance is orientated towards the entrance to the enclosure. Sweetman, who first identified this site as a possible ringwork castle, has suggested that the structure may represent a stone-footed tower.[86] At Rathasker, there was a similar structure within the interior of the possible ringwork castle; a rectangular building, labelled 'castle (in ruins)', is shown on the First Edition O.S. map and the existence of a ruined 'castle' at Rathasker was recorded by Cooper, writing in the late eighteenth century,[87] and by O'Donovan, writing

[83] Edmund Curtis, (ed.), *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 1172-1603* (6 vols, Dublin, 1932-43), iii, 29-30.
[84] Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath', p. 396.
[85] David Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland* (Cork, 1999), p. 85.
[86] Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath', p. 395.
[87] Liam Price (ed), *An eighteenth century antiquary. The sketches, notes and diaries of Austin Cooper*, p. 26.

in the mid-nineteenth century.[88] Sweetman visited the site in 1971 and recorded that there was a depression near the centre of the interior, which appeared to represent the remains of a stone building.[89] It seems possible that this was a stone or stone-footed keep or hall of Anglo-Norman date. However, O'Keeffe has argued that the structure is '...not Anglo-Norman but later', although this statement is not backed up with any evidence.[90] As this earthwork site has been destroyed, it is not possible to ascertain the building's dimensions or function.

The excavated evidence from England and Wales shows that the principle structure in the interior of a ringwork castle was often a hall rather than a tower. Medieval halls ranged from elaborate structures with one or two side aisles to more modest structures. They could be constructed in stone, timber or a combination of the two and varied widely in terms of size.

Excavations at the ringwork castles of Sulgrave in Northamptonshire and Llantrithydd in Glamorgan have shown that the main structure enclosed by the ringwork in each case was a hall building. The ringwork castle at Sulgrave seems to have originated as a high-status Anglo-Saxon defended residence, which incorporated a large timber hall from the late tenth century.[91] In the mid-eleventh century, presumably following the Norman conquest, a small stone hall, measuring approximately 12.19m by 5.49m internally, was constructed. Shortly later, the enclosing bank was heightened so that the bank directly abutted the external walls of the hall. This pressure seems to have led to the structure's subsequent partial collapse.[92] It seems likely that the a Norman called Ghilo de Picquigni was responsible for the construction of the hall and the strengthening of the

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[88] Michael Herity, (ed.), *Ordnance Survey letters Kildare: letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Kildare collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1837, 1838 and 1839* (Dublin, 2002), i, 59.
[89] Sweetman, Field Report, 1971, SMR File KD024-001001.
[90] Tadhg O'Keeffe, 'The archaeology of Norman castles in Ireland' in *Archaeology Ireland* iv, no. 3 (1990), p. 17.
[91] B.K. Davison, 'Excavations at Sulgrave, Northamptonshire, 1960-76' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxiv (1977), pp 105-14; Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, pp 50-51.
[92] Davison, 'Excavations at Sulgrave, Northamptonshire, 1960-76', p. 106; Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, p. 112.

ringwork castle; by the time that the Domesday Book was compiled, Ghilo held the manor of Sulgrave as part of an honour worth fifteen knights' fees.[93]

The excavated evidence suggests that the hall enclosed by the partial ringwork castle at Llantrithyd was a rather unimpressive structure. It was a stone-footed structure and was sub-rectangular in shape, with rounded corners.[94] The structure measured 14.2m by 8.2m internally and was therefore relatively small for a hall building.[95] However, it seems to have been largest of the buildings enclosed by the partial ringwork and, for this reason, it was identified as the castle's hall. As Kenyon has commented, 'If it were not for the fact that, on existing evidence, it was the main domestic building for the castle, one would hesitate to call it a hall at all.'[96]

Within the study area, possible halls have been excavated at Carrick, Co. Wexford, and Trim, Co. Meath. At Carrick, the structure was uncovered during the course of Cotter's excavations at the site in 1986-7. The building, which was located at the east of the interior abutting the enclosing bank, was labelled 'Structure A' by the excavator. The south wall and parts of the west wall were excavated while the north and east walls had been mostly robbed out. The construction of this building was dated to the late twelfth century based on pottery, which included Ham Green Ware and Minety Ware. Cotter estimated that the building originally measured up to 5.6m from east to west and at least 5m north-south.[97] A possible hall was also uncovered at Trim (site no. 28), during the course of Sweetman's excavations in the 1970s. The building was stone or stone-footed and had internal measurements of at least 8m east-west and approximately 4m north-south. Sweetman interpreted this structure, which he labelled 'Structure J', as a possible pre-Norman church, believing that it pre-dated the fosse of the ringwork castle, which appeared to truncate the structure.[98] However, Hayden has argued that the truncation of Structure J resulted from erosion of the fosse that took place between the late twelfth century and the late thirteenth century, when the fosse was in-filled. Therefore, the

[93] Davison, 'Excavations at Sulgrave, Northamptonshire, 1960-76', p. 106.
[94] Charlton, Roberts and Vale, *Llantrithyd: a ringwork in South Glamorgan*, p. 8.
[95] Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, pp 109-11.
[96] Ibid., p. 106.
[97] Claire Cotter, pers comm., 25 March 2009.
[98] Sweetman, 'Archaeological excavations at Trim Castle, Co. Meath, 1971-74', pp 132-3.

building can be assigned to the second phase of the ringwork castle.[99] Hayden has argued that Structure J '...is large enough to be viewed as a hall...', although its position, to one side of the entrance may indicate that it had a defensive function.[100] The possible halls excavated at Carrick and Trim are quite small compared to the halls excavated at English and Welsh castles. Kenyon's table of masonry hall dimensions shows that halls generally had internal measurements of at least 5m in width and 10m in length; even the modest halls associated with the partial ringworks of Llantrithydd and Penmaen in Glamorgan had internal measurements of 14.2m by 8.2m and 12.5m by 5m respectively.[101] It seems possible that the buildings excavated at Carrick and Trim fulfilled some other function. In both cases, the actual hall may have been located in an area disturbed by later activity.

The traces of a possible hall were observed at the unexcavated ringwork and bailey at Pigeonpark (Danesfort), Co. Kilkenny (site no. 10). Within the interior of the ringwork enclosure, a rectangular area is defined by low earthen banks, which may represent the foundations of a building (Plate 8a). Internally, this structure seems to measure approximately 21.5m east-west and 8.5m north-south. The documentary evidence attests that there was a hall at Danesfort by the early fourteenth century,[102] and the dimensions of this probable structure are comparable to those of excavated halls in England and Wales.[103]

5.5 Chapels

The documentary evidence shows that many earthwork castles in Ireland incorporated chapels. For example, at Skreen in Co. Meath, the buildings associated with Adam de Feipo's motte castle included a chapel dedicated to St Nicholas.[104] The motte castles at Portnascully and Clonamery in Co. Kilkenny also seem to have had chapels associated with them; a charter issued in 1240 confirmed a grant of property including 'the chapels

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[99] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, pp 33-4.
[100] Ibid., i, p. 51.
[101] Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, pp 109-11.
[102] Paul Dryburgh and Brendan Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland* (Kew, 2007), pp 79-80.
[103] Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, pp 109-11.
[104] J. T. Gilbert, (ed.), *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin, with the register of its house at Dunbrody and Annals of Ireland* (2 vols, Dublin, 1884), i, 86, 92 and 93.

of the castle of Polsculi and of the new castle of Clone' to the Arroasian abbey at Kilculliheen.[105] There is documentary evidence for chapels associated with the partial ringwork at Carrick, Co. Wexford, and the possible ringwork castle at Mallardstown Great, Co. Kilkenny (site no. 9). In 1324, it was recorded that there was an unroofed and ruinous chapel within the castle of Carrick.[106] The possible ringwork castle at Mallardstown Great, which has been removed, may also have had a chapel associated with it. A charter issued by William Maillard in the early thirteenth century records his grant of both the parish church of Kilmacmintan (Mallardstown) and the chapel of the Villa Mallardi to Kells Priory.[107]

Although the documentary evidence attests that chapels were incorporated in many earth and timber castles, these chapels are difficult to identify archaeologically. As chapels associated with earthwork castles would generally have been timber constructions, they tend to leave no surface remains and are usually identified archaeologically on the basis of their east-west orientation and artefactual evidence.[108] No chapels have been identified during the course of excavations carried out at ringwork castles in the study area.

5.6 Other buildings

The evidence from excavated earthwork castles in England and Wales indicates that earthwork castles were filled with buildings, including the structures discussed above in addition to kitchen buildings, storage buildings and houses. The excavations carried out at Hen Domen Montgomery showed that the bailey was packed with buildings. According to the excavators, it '...was a congested place whose interior must have been almost claustrophobic.'[109] The excavations at Hen Domen have brought about a major reconsideration in the way that archaeologists view castle buildings; as Renn has stated, 'The way that these structures were packed together has completely altered the

[105] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.*, i, 370-1; Linda Shine, pers. comm, January 2010.
[106] Dryburgh and Smith, (eds), *Extents and inquisitions of medieval Ireland*, p. 126.
[107] Curtis, (ed.), *Cal. Ormond Deeds*, i, 18; N. B. White, (ed.), Irish monastic and episcopal deeds, AD 1200-1600 (Dublin, 1936), p. 307; E. St J. *Brooks, Knights' fees in counties Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny* (Dublin, 1950), pp 260-1.
[108] Sarah Speight, 'Religion in the bailey: charters, chapels and the clergy', *Château Gaillard*, xxi (2004), p. 275.
[109] Higham and Barker, *Hen Domen, Montgomery: a timber castle on the English-Welsh border: a final report*, p. 178.

traditional picture of the castle bailey as containing two or three widely-spaced buildings.'[110]

The excavations at Trim Castle, Co. Meath, have demonstrated that the interior of a ringwork castle could be equally crowded. The ringwork castle at Trim '...may have been filled with buildings and evidence for structures was uncovered in almost all areas excavated.'[111] It is notable that the buildings were '...aligned on a grid laid out on north-south and east-west lines.'[112] As the excavator has argued, this would have maximised the space available and added a sense of order to the castle's interior. [113]

The construction of the major stone keep at Trim seems to have caused significant disturbance to the interior of the ringwork and, although the traces of many buildings were excavated under and around the keep, it was not possible to assign a function to many of them. However, a probable granary, associated with the first phase of the ringwork castle, was excavated inside the palisade on the northern side of the keep. The evidence for this building consisted of four postholes in addition to smaller subsidiary posts. Three post-holes seem to represent the western wall of the building while the eastern wall seemed to have been destroyed by later activity. The positioning of the fourth post-hole suggests that it held a post which acted as an internal support for the building. Hayden has suggested that the northern and southern walls were set on sill beams. The building measured at least 5m from east to west and 8.5m from north to south and the excavator has stated that the excavated post-holes are, '...consistent with a building which is square in plan, measuring about 10.5 by 10.5m, with an extra central support.'[114]

The documentary evidence indicates that the interiors of some of the unexcavated ringwork castles in the study area may have been equally crowded. The early fourteenth century extents of the manors of Carrick, Co. Wexford, and Pigeonpark (Danesfort), Co.

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[110] D. F. Renn, 'Hen Domen compared: the evidence for timber castle buildings in Britain and Normandy', in Aubrey Burl (ed.), *From Roman town to Norman castle: papers in honour of Philip Barker* (Birmingham, 1988), p. 67.
[111] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, p. 51.
[112] Ibid., i, p. 51.
[113] Ibid., i, p. 51.
[114] Ibid., i, p. 41.

Kilkenny, list some of the buildings associated with these ringwork castles. An extent of the manor of Carrick, Co. Wexford, taken in 1324 following the death of Aymer de Valence, offers a brief description of the castle and its buildings:

> 'There is an empty and broken-down castle without a keeper, which extends at no value as nothing can be received from it. Within the close of the castle there is an unroofed and almost ruinous hall and chapel, which cannot be extended likewise.'[115]

An extent of the manor of 'Dunfert' taken in 1307, following the death of Joan, Countess of Gloucester and Hereford, includes a more detailed description of the castle buildings. The extent states that,

> 'Within the close of this manor there is a hall, a chamber, a dairy, a grange, a brattice (*brittagium*) beyond the gate and other wooden houses'.[116]

It is difficult to reconcile this description of the buildings with the earthworks at Pigeonpark (Danesfort), which can be described as a ringwork with a large detached bailey. The term 'bretasche', from which the term '*brittagium*' is derived, was generally used to refer to a timber tower in this period, although it could also be used to refer to timber hoarding.[117] Orpen has suggested that, '...the "bretage" was built within a small circular fort [the ringwork]... and the other buildings mentioned were in a very large circular enclosure close by [the bailey], surrounded by a deep ditch and inner bank and containing the traces of buildings.'[118] It is notable that the remains of buildings could be seen in the bailey in Orpen's day as no traces of these buildings are now visible. However, there are several problems with Orpen's interpretation of the extent. As discussed in Section 4.5 above, a probable building was identified in the interior of the ringwork enclosure and the dimensions of this building are more consistent with a hall building than a timber tower. O'Conor's suggestion that the '*brittagium*', which is described as being 'beyond the gate', was a timber tower that functioned as a wooden gatehouse or barbican, seems more likely than Orpen's interpretation.[119] The extent of

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[115] Dryburgh and Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland*, p. 126.
[116] Ibid., pp 79-80. Dryburgh and Smith have inaccurately translated the word 'brittagium' as 'brattice'.
[117] King, *The xastle in England and Wales: an interpretive history*, pp 53-4.
[118] G.H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans,* (4 vols, Oxford, 1911-20), iii, 92.
[119] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 376.

the manor of Danesfort also mentions a 'grange' and a 'dairy'; most castles incorporated a fully functioning farm in addition to more military structures.[120]

The buildings excavated at the possible ringwork castle at Ballysimon, Co. Limerick, must also be addressed in this section, as they have caused some debate regarding the nature of ringwork castle buildings and what they 'should' look like. The earthwork at Ballysimon was interpreted as a ringwork castle by the excavators based on its high medieval date, siting on a ridge and its proximity to a medieval church site.[121] The main structures excavated in the interior of the site were two circular buildings (Figure 24). Structure B, the earlier of the two structures, had an internal diameter of approximately 5m. The evidence for this structure consisted of two concentric slot-trenches, 0.8m apart, on its southern side and an arc of post-holes on its northern side.[122] Structure B seems to have been replaced by the second circular building, Structure A, which partially overlay Structure B. The excavated evidence for Structure A consisted of a single circular slot trench enclosing an area that measured approximately 8m in diameter.[123]

The excavators have argued that, '...the circular plans of the Ballysimon structures, while unusual for the medieval period, are not unique.'[124] However, the 'comparable' structures identified by Collins and Cummins are not particularly convincing. For example, the circular structure excavated on the summit of the motte at Castle Hill, Peebles, seems to represent a tower or keep rather than a single storey circular structure like the Ballysimon buildings.[125] The circular structure excavated at Llantrithydd is also quite unlike the structures at Ballysimon as it adjoined a rectangular building. The excavators at Llantrithyd suggested that it may have functioned as a kitchen, a dovecot

[120] Kieran O'Conor, *The archaeology of medieval rural settlement in Ireland* (Dublin, 1998) 26-33.
[121] Collins and Cummins, *Excavation of a medieval ringwork* at *Ballysimon, Co. Limerick*, pp 32-3.
[122] Ibid., pp 24-6.
[123] Ibid., pp 23-4.
[124] Ibid., p. 34.
[125] Ibid., p. 34; Hilary Murray and Gordon Ewart, 'Two early medieval timber buildings from Castle Hill, Peebles' in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, cx (1978-80), pp 522-4; Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, pp 20-21.

or a defensive tower.[126] The most credible parallel for the structures at Ballysimon is the probable circular building excavated on the motte summit at Castlehill, Strachan.[127] However, this motte castle is unusual and Higham and Barker have described as, '...having more in common with the Irish rath than the typical motte.'[128] It may be concluded that the most closely related structures to those excavated at Ballysimon are the buildings associated with early medieval ringforts. It seems probable that the buildings at Ballysimon represent a rare example of continuity of early medieval building styles into the high medieval period. However, this does not necessarily negate the classification of Ballysimon as a ringwork castle. In the present state of knowledge, it is not possible to definitively state whether or not Ballysimon functioned as a ringwork castle as the excavation left many questions unanswered and documentary evidence appears to be lacking.

5.7 Ringwork castles and stone buildings

Although the structures and buildings associated with ringwork castles were generally timber constructions, some ringwork castles incorporated some stone features from the beginning. At Clonmacnoise (site no. 28), the stone buildings, including the hall-keep, appear to be contemporary with the earthwork defences (Plate 8b).[129] The documentary evidence indicates that the construction of the castle commenced *c.* 1213. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* and the *Annals of Loch Cé* record the construction of the castle under the years 1213 and 1214 respectively. According to the *Annals of Loch Cé,* later in 1214, Cormac, son of Art O'Melaghlin, and his followers 'carried off a prey of cows from the castle of Cluain and defeated the Foreigners of the castle.' It seems likely that the castle was still being constructed when it was attacked. In 1216, the justiciar was order to compensate the bishop of Clonmacnoise, '...for his land occupied in fortifying the castle of Clonmacnois, for his fruit trees cut down, his cows, horses, oxen, and

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[126] Collins and Cummins, *Excavation of a medieval ringwork* at *Ballysimon, Co. Limerick*, pp 35; Charlton, Roberts and Vale, *Llantrithyd: a ringwork in South Glamorgan*, pp 5-6; Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, p. 303.

[127] Collins and Cummins, *Excavation of a medieval ringwork* at *Ballysimon, Co. Limerick*, pp 34-5; P.A. Yeoman, ' Excavations at Castlehill of Strachan, 1980-81' in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, cxiv (1984), pp 315-64; Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, pp 107-8.

[128] Higham and Barker, *Timber castles*, p. 313.

[129] Kieran O'Conor and Conleth Manning, 'Clonmacnoise Castle' in King, H. A., *Clonmacnoise Studies Volume Two: seminar papers 1998* (Dublin, 2003), pp 159-62.

household utensils taken away'.[130] This writ suggests that the castle was constructed on lands which had formerly belonged to the monastery.

As O'Conor and Manning have shown that there is nothing in the documentary or archaeological evidence to suggest that the stone castle and the surrounding earthworks are not contemporaneous.[131] Although Clonmacnoise has been interpreted by some as a stone castle constructed within the defences of a pre-existing ringwork castle,[132] it seems more likely that the castle was designed as a ringwork and stone castle from the beginning. As O'Conor and Manning have argued,

> '...there is nothing surprising or unique about Clonmacnoise having had timber and stone used contemporaneously in its defences. Examples of such castles occurred throughout the medieval world. The lesson gained from a site like this is that just because a castle is classified as a masonry castle does not necessarily mean that all of its defences were built in stone.'[133]

In terms of appearance, Clonmacnoise Castle is notably similar to Castle Rising in Norfolk, which also consists of a hall-keep within a massive ringwork (Plate 9a). It seems possible that Castle Rising may have been the inspiration for the castle at Clonmacnoise. Although the principal buildings at Clonmacnoise were stone buildings, this does not mean that the castle should not be classified as a ringwork castle. The earthworks associated with the castle resemble those of a ringwork castle and the fact that the castle incorporated some stone buildings does not negate the classification of the site as a ringwork castle.

At other sites, it is less clear if stone features are original or were added later. At Ballyvolan Lower in Co. Wicklow (site no. 47), the remains of a stone curtain wall encloses the interior of the ringwork castle. This curtain wall seems to have had towers at the angles; according to Price, who visited the site in 1931, the foundations of a square tower were clearly visible at the south-western corner of the site.[134] Price subsequently noted that the possible traces of a round tower or bastion could also be

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[130] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.*, i, 107; Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, ii, 303-5.
[131] O'Conor and Manning, 'Clonmacnoise Castle', pp 159-62.
[132] Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland*, p. 36.
[133] O'Conor and Manning, 'Clonmacnoise Castle', pp 160.
[134] Liam Price, Christiaan Corlett (ed.), and Matthew Weaver (ed.), *The Liam Price notebooks* (2 vols, Dublin, 2002), i, pp 109-10, p. 158 and p. 161.

seen at the north-east angle.[135] No trace of these structures can now be seen at ground level. It has been suggested that the curving line of the curtain wall, which encloses a D-shaped interior, indicates that the wall follows the line of an earlier timber palisade.[136] However, it would be necessary to excavate in order to determine the relationship between the stone wall and the underlying earthworks. The possible ringwork castle at Drumsawry, Co. Meath, is similarly enclosed by the remains of a stone wall. However, there is no documentary evidence for a castle in this location and the position of this site within the archaeological landscape of the Loughcrew Hills suggests that, if this site did indeed function as a ringwork castle, this phase probably represented the re-use of a much older site.

At Carrick in Co. Wexford, the stone curtain wall exposed by the excavations is almost certainly a secondary feature. The excavations at Carrick revealed slight traces for a bank and palisade of probable conquest-period date, as discussed above. This palisade seems to have been later replaced by a stone wall. Bennett's excavations uncovered a 4m long section of wall, which measured 1.15-1.30m in width and approximately 0.40m in height.[137] Bennett speculated that this wall probably continued all the way along the enclosing bank.[138] Cotter's subsequent excavations corroborated this, although it was noted that the wall was missing in places. However, as argued by the excavator, '...a partial curtain [wall] makes no sense and it is possible that the wall has been robbed out elsewhere.'[139] Although the exact date of this wall is unknown, the excavated evidence suggests that it represents a secondary feature.[140]

At many of the unexcavated ringwork castles in the study area, the quantity of stone lying around suggests that they may have incorporated some stone features. For example, at Rathtroane, Co. Meath, the large amounts of stone in the fosse and around the entrance gap suggests that there may have been an enclosing wall around the interior and a stone lined entrance passage, in addition to the possible stone-footed tower

[135] Price, Corlett and Weaver, *The Liam Price Notebooks*, ii, p. 553.
[136] David Johnson, quoted by O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', p. 708.
[137] Bennett, 'Preliminary archaeological excavations at Ferrycarrig ringwork', p. 39.
[138] Ibid., p. 39.
[139] Cotter, pers comm., 29 March 2009.
[140] Ibid.

discussed above (Section 5.5) The documentary evidence also indicates that the site had some stone features. A document dating to 1420 records that James, earl of Ormond, leased 'Great Ratron and Little Ratron in Meath near Bacounestown' to John Roche of Cloncurry for a period of thirty years. According to the terms of this lease, 'John and his heirs or assigns shall make vaults, parapets and battlements (*voltabunt tabellient et batalliabunt*) for the castle of Great Ratron at their own expense within the first seven years of the term and shall rebuild the old walls and parapets'.[141] At Danestown, Co. Meath (site no. 20), the large quantity of loose stone in the fosse suggests that there may have been a stone wall on top of the inner bank. However, in this case, it also seems possible that the stone could have been used to face or revet the bank, particularly as the stones are quite small.

5.8 Conclusion to the chapter

Although only a small proportion of the ringwork castles in the study area have been excavated, the results of these excavations and those carried out at ringwork castle sites in England and Wales show that the timber structures associated with these earthworks were complex and sophisticated. Generally, ringwork castles were defended by timber palisades, which were sometimes replaced with stone curtain walls. The gate-tower, which guarded the vulnerable entrance to the ringwork castle, was an integral part of the ringwork castle's defences. Possible examples of both stone and timber gate-towers have been identified in the study area. The evidence from England and Wales suggests that the principal structure in the interior of the ringwork castle was usually a hall or a timber tower. These structures are similar to those found on motte summits. Excavations from sites like Hen Domen, Montgomery, and Trim Castle have shown that a multitude of smaller buildings, often of unknown function, filled the space enclosed by earthwork castles. The structures excavated in association with ringwork castles show that ringworks were serious fortifications, which had many of the same buildings and features as motte castles and stone castles. Although the morphology of ringwork castles in Ireland may resemble that of early medieval ringforts, the timber structures associated with these sites indicates that they were very different in terms of their defences and military capability.

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[141] Curtis, (ed.), *Cal. Ormond deeds*, iii, 29-30.

Chapter Six: The siting of ringwork castles

6.1 Introduction to the chapter

Many factors contributed towards the selection of a castle site. It is often assumed that all castles were located on sites that had obvious defensive qualities. However, as Creighton has argued in relation to English castle, '...military considerations were only one of the many variables that influenced the decision...'[1] In addition to the defensive qualities of a site, other factors were also clearly taken into consideration. These factors could include including proximity to communication routes, proximity to pre-existing urban settlement and control over strategically important positions in the landscape, such as fording and bridging points and mountain passes. Creighton has argued that the reinforcement of territorial control was usually the principle motive behind a castle's construction.[2] The castle's siting within the associated territory was therefore of vital importance.

This chapter will focus on the siting of ringwork castles in the local landscape and will analyse the differences between typical ringwork castle and ringfort siting. The siting of ringwork castles in relation to pre-existing settlement and communications will also be examined, in addition to the evidence for the re-occupation and adaptation of pre-existing earthworks. Finally, the evidence for distribution of ringwork castles in the study area will be examined, particularly in relation to motte castle distribution.

6.2 The siting of ringwork castles in the landscape

Defensive siting in the landscape is one of the four main identifying characteristics of the ringwork castle as outlined in the methodology for ringwork classification proposed in Chapter Three. As Sweetman has outlined, the sites chosen for ringwork castles tend to have certain characteristics:

> 'When identifying ringworks it is very important to keep in mind their location and siting so that one can isolate them from the more numerous ringforts and other earlier enclosures. It is generally accepted that ringforts are located off the tops of high ground on the slopes of hills and are nearly always isolated. Ringworks seldom, if ever, are sited in the same

[1] O. H. Creighton, *Castles and landscapes: power, community and fortification in medieval England* (London, 2002), p. 35.
[2] Ibid.

> type of location as ringforts and usually occupy the high ground on top of ridges and small hills. They occupy areas where there is often a degree of natural defence such as at the edge of cliffs or the end of natural promontories. Ringworks are also found in low-lying, wet ground but on a slight rise.'[3]

The ringwork castles in the study area are generally located in the types of locations described by Sweetman; on promontories, on ridges or hills, or in low-lying positions beside rivers. In some cases, ringwork castle sites combine two or more of these attributes.

Ringwork castles on promontories are generally described as partial ringworks, as they were defended by earthen banks and ditches only on their landward sides. It is notable that the two earliest documented fortifications constructed by the Anglo-Normans in Ireland, located at Carrick, Co. Wexford (site no. 36), and Baginbun, Co. Wexford (site no. 31), were both partial ringworks that made use of natural promontories.[4] As discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.5), possible partial ringwork castles have also been identified at Dunanore, Co. Wexford (site no. 38), Toberfinnick, Co. Wexford (site no. 46), Ballyhoge, Co. Wexford (site no. 33), and the Black Castle in Wicklow Town (site no. 48).

Partial ringwork castles on promontory sites seem to have been relatively rare in the study area. It is notable that only two (9%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area are partial ringworks. The ratio of complete ringwork castles to partial ringworks in the study area is approximately 9:1. In contrast, King and Alcock's research has shown that partial ringworks outnumber full ringworks in Wales and Monmouthshire, where they identified thirty-four partial ringworks and thirty-one full ringworks.[5] As King and Alcock pointed out, there are many suitable sites for partial ringwork castles in Wales and Monmouthshire,[6] and it seems likely that this is the main reason why such fortifications were favoured in this region, although other factors, including personal preference, may also have played a role. Partial ringwork castles may have been more common in western Ireland than in the study area. As O'Conor has

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[3] David Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland* (Cork, 1999), p. 14.
[4] The historical evidence for the construction of these partial ringwork castles is discussed in Chapter Eight (Section 8.2).
[5] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 94.
[6] Ibid.

pointed out, Graham's descriptions of several of the ringwork castles that he identified in Connacht and Munster imply that they were partial rather than full ringworks,[7] although Graham did not differentiate between the two types.[8] The partial ringworks identified by Graham included Castlemore Barrett, Co. Cork, Castleconnor, Co. Mayo, Lough Mannin, Co. Mayo, Burrishoole, Co. Mayo, and Rindown, Co. Roscommon.[9] Manning has suggested that a partial ringwork castle may have preceded the stone castle of Glanworth Castle, Co. Cork.[10] O'Conor has suggested that the apparent prevalence of partial ringwork castles in Connacht and there scarcity in Leinster may be connected to the contrasting geomorphology of these areas. While the coastline of Leinster is generally quite straight and there are few promontories and inlets, the western coast of Ireland incorporates many promontories, providing a wide selection of naturally well-defended sites for castle-building, and there are also many promontories associated with the large lakes found in Connacht.[11] As O'Conor has argued, geomorphology may go some way towards explaining the prevalence of ringwork castles and the lack of mottes in Connacht and Munster.[12]

Full ringwork castles tend to be located at naturally high points in the landscape. However, as Creighton has argued, military needs '...were certainly not necessarily best served by naturally defensible, inaccessible hilltop positions.'[13] Seven of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area are located on the summit of natural ridges (site nos. 3, 11, 20, 25, 27, 49, 50). At Kilpipe (Plate 9b), Newcastle McKynegan, Danestown and Rathtroane, the ringwork castles were modelled out of one end of the natural ridge in each case. This meant that the ringwork castle was significantly higher than surrounding ground level on three sides and was defensively weakest on the side where it adjoined the remainder of the ridge. The ringwork castles at Moone (site no. 2), Rathealy (site no. 12) and Rodanstown (site no. 26) seem to have been constructed on the summits of natural hillocks. As discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.2), 57% of the

[7] Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster' (3 vols, PhD, Cardiff, 1993), i, 356-7.
[8] B. J. Graham, 'Timber and earthwork fortifications in western Ireland' in *Medieval Archaeology*, xxxii (1988), pp110-29.
[9] Ibid, pp 118-25.
[10] Conleth Manning, *The history and archaeology of Glanworth Castle, Co. Cork: excavations 1982–4* (Bray, 2009), p. 136. See Chapter Four (Section 4.5).
[11] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 356-9.
[12] Ibid., i, 358-9.
[13] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 35.

definite ringwork castles in the study area have interiors that are raised more than 2m above external ground level on at least one side of the site and a further 24% have interiors that are raised between 50cm and 2m above external ground level. In nearly all of these cases, the ringwork castles seem to have been modelled out of natural features, such as hillock or ridges, achieving their height through site selection rather than as a result of artificial heightening. Although these ringwork castles were highly visible and commanded the local landscape, they were not inaccessible as access to communication routes was a major factor in the selection of castle sites. A possible exception to this rule is the possible ringwork castle of Rath Turtle Moat, Co. Wicklow (site no. 51), which stands on a high ridge at an altitude of approximately 900 feet above sea level (Plate 10a). As O'Keeffe has pointed out, this altitude would be 'atypical for an Anglo-Norman monument.'[14]

The positioning of ringwork castles on natural ridges and hills allowed these castles to command extensive views over the surrounding landscape, which would have been advantageous from a military viewpoint. The selection of such prominent sites must also have had a powerful psychological impact on local populations as these ringwork castles would have dominated the local landscape and, in many cases, would have been visible from several kilometres away. As Creighton has argued, castle sites were often selected partly for their natural visibility and the castle would have been '...a prominent landmark and a conspicuous symbol of power with a panoptical viewshed over the surrounding territory.'[15] O'Conor has stated that the motte castle '...dominated the landscape in a way that a ringwork could never achieve',[16] and that the height of the motte castle made it more psychologically intimidating to potential attackers than a ringwork castle.[17] While it is true that motte castles must have been very imposing, particularly as their associated timber structures would have made them seem even higher, ringwork castles could also be intimidating fortifications. In many cases, the positioning of ringwork castles in naturally elevated positions ensured that they were

[14] Tadhg O'Keeffe, 'The fortifications of western Ireland, AD1100-1300, and their interpretation' in *J.G.H.A.S.*, 1 (1998), pp 192-3. The other possible interpretations of this earthwork are discussed below in Section 6.5.
[15] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 35.
[16] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 360.
[17] Ibid.; Kieran O'Conor, 'Irish earthwork castles' in *Fortress*, ix (1992), p. 12.

highly visible in the local landscape and there was simply no need to further heighten the fortification by artificial means.

It is notable that many of the ringwork castles in the study area were located beside major rivers. Seven (33%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area (site nos. 1, 8, 11, 13, 28, 36) are located beside rivers that were navigable in the Anglo-Norman The early ringwork castles at Carrick, Trim, Kilkenny and Carlow were all constructed beside major rivers, which acted would have acted as a defensive barriers on at least one side of the ringwork castles. The partial ringwork castle at Carrick was constructed against the cliff on a promontory high above the River Slaney. The ringwork castle that preceded the stone castle at Kilkenny was located above the River Nore while the ringwork castle at Trim was constructed on a natural rise beside the River Boyne. The earthwork castle at Carlow was the earthwork castle was constructed on a naturally raised knoll at the confluence of the River Barrow and the River Burren. This raised area now stands between 1 and 2m higher than the surrounding area, although its summit area has been reduced as a result of quarrying in the nineteenth century.[18] In the medieval period, the castle was effectively an island, cut off from the town by an area of marsh which was drained in the eighteenth century.[19] The siting of the possible ringwork castle at Lea Castle, Co. Laois (site no. 15) is notably similar. At Lea, the circular inner ward, which may represent a late twelfth-century ringwork castle, is located on a naturally raised area. The raised area on which the castle is situated is located within a bend on the south bank of the River Barrow. Lea was also known as 'Port na hinch' meaning 'the fort of the island' in the medieval period,[20] because the presence of the river and the marshy nature of the low-lying ground around the castle would have made the site being effectively an island. The ringwork castle recently identified at Purcellsinch (site no. 11) is located on a ridge above the River Nore, approximately 2km to the east of Kilkenny City, while the ringwork castle at Dunbrin Lower, Co. Laois (site no. 13) and the possible ringwork castle at Dunrally, Co. Laois

[18] Kieran O'Conor, 'Carlow Castle preliminary excavation report', (unpublished report, excavation no. 96E0105, 2002), p. 2.
[19] Ibid., pp 2-3.
[20] Kieran O'Conor, 'Anglo-Norman Castles in Co. Laois' in P.G. Lane, and William Nolan (eds), *Laois: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1999), p. 197.

(site no. 14). The royal castle at Clonmacnoise (site no. 28), which consists of a massive ringwork enclosing stone buildings, is located on the River Shannon.

It is notable that the rivers on which these ringwork castles were located were all navigable in the medieval period. The documentary evidence attests that the Boyne was navigable as far as Trim in the medieval period; in 1194, Walter de Lacy granted the burgesses of Drogheda the right to sail as far as the bridge at Trim.[21] The River Barrow was navigable at least as far as Athy. It is recorded in the *Justiciary Rolls* that a weir on the River Barrow prevented the passage of ships sailing to Athy in 1298.[22] This indicates that the ringwork castles at Carlow and Dunbrin Lower and the possible ringwork castle at Dunrally were accessible by boat. However, it is unclear if the Barrow was navigable as far as Lea Castle, which is located on the most northerly stretch of the Barrow, beyond Athy. The River Nore was navigable from Waterford Harbour to beyond Kilkenny. The fact that these rivers were navigable would have been an important factor in the selection of these sites for castles. The presence of the river meant that supplies could be brought directly to the castle by boat. The economic potential of these riverside sites must also have been recognised by the Anglo-Normans. The difficulties of transporting goods by road meant that rivers acted as the arteries of inland trade in Ireland with trading goods being shipped up rivers. The development of the major Anglo-Norman towns that grew up around the castles at Kilkenny, Trim and Carlow was largely due to the presence of the rivers.

As discussed above, the location of these ringwork castles on major navigable rivers was important in terms of defence. It is also notable that several of these ringwork castles seem to have overlooked crossing points on these major rivers, giving them a strategic importance in the local landscape. Creighton has noted that many castles in England occupied riverside locations that overlooked crossing points on rivers.[23] The pre-Norman name of Trim, 'Ath Truim', reflects that the settlement was located at a fording point on the Boyne. By 1194, there was a bridge at this crossing point at Trim,

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[21] Gearóid MacNiocaill (ed.), *Na burgéisi, XII-XV aois* (Dublin, 1964), i, p. 172.
[22] James Mills (ed.), *Calendar of Justiciary Rolls of Ireland, 1295-1307,* (2 vols, (London, 1914), i, 202; G. H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans* (4 vols, London, 1911-20), ii, 231.
[23] Creighton, *Castle and landscapes*, pp 41-3.

although the medieval bridge which survives today is probably fourteenth-century in date.[24] Kilkenny Castle overlooks a crossing point on the River Nore, approximately 200m to the north-west,[25] which is marked by the modern bridge known. Clonmacnoise Castle seems to overlooks an important crossing point on the River Shannon. An early ninth-century bridge has been excavated directly to the north-west of the castle. The lifespan of such bridges was relatively short and it seems likely that this bridge went out of use in the mid-ninth century.[26] However, the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* refer to a bridge over the Shannon under the year 1158.[27] It seems probable that there was a bridge in the vicinity of the castle in the Anglo-Norman period and that this bridge had major strategic importance as one of the few crossing points on the River Shannon. The castle at Clonmacnoise also overlooks a crescent-shaped inlet on its western side, which is the best natural harbour on this stretch of the River Shannon.[28]

The ringwork castle at Carrick may have overlooked a fording or bridging point on the Slaney, which would have been of major strategic importance in the medieval period (Plate 10b). This ferry crossing is located approximately 3km to the west of Wexford Town and would have been an important link in the local communication network. The earliest known reference to a ferry at Carrick is contained in an extent taken in 1324, following the death of Aymer de Valence.[29] However, it seems likely that the ferry may have been in operation through out the Anglo-Norman period. The ringwork castle at Barrow Haven, Lincolnshire, occupies a similar position to the ringwork castle of Carrick, overlooking a ferry crossing on the River Humber.[30]

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[24] Michael Potterton, *Medieval Trim; history and archaeology* (Dublin, 2005), p. 196.
[25] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', ii, 737.
[26] Tom Condit and Gabriel Cooney (eds), 'The Clonmacnoise bridge: an early medieval river crossing in County Offaly' in *Archaeology Ireland*, Heritage Guide no. 11 (2000); Linda Doran, 'Medieval communication routes through Longford and Roscommon and their associated settlements' in *P.R.I.A.*, civ, Section C (2004), p. 66.
[27] Denis Murphy, (ed.), *The Annals of Clonmacnoise* (Felinfach, 1993, reprinted from edition published Dublin, 1896), *s.a.* 1158.
[28] Kieran O'Conor, and Conleth Manning, 'Clonmacnoise Castle' in King, H. A., *Clonmacnoise Studies Volume Two: seminar papers 1998* (Dublin, 2003), p. 138.
[29] Paul Dryburgh and Brendan Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland* (Kew, 2007), p. 126.
[30] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 43.

The ringwork castle at Dunbrin Lower also seems to have overlooked a fording point on the River Barrow. The First Edition O.S. map shows that, in the mid-nineteenth century, the lane that leads to the ringwork castle, which now terminates approximately 300m from the site, ran past the southern side of the ringwork castle and terminated on the western bank of the River Barrow. A corresponding track also led up to the eastern bank of the Barrow, suggesting that there may have been a ford or bridge at this point. This would have linked the settlements of Dunbrin and Ardree, which both seem to have been held by Milo de Stanton in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.[31]

The siting of the possible ringwork castle at Dunrally, Co. Laois (Figure 25) is notably similar to that of Dunbrin Lower. Dunrally was identified as a ringwork castle by O'Conor and this classification seems to have been based principally on the earthwork's siting, overlooking a fording point on the River Barrow.[32] The positioning of the earthwork site is notably similar to that of other known earthwork castles.[33] O'Conor also argued that the fording point at Dunrally would have been strategically important in the Anglo-Norman period. The major route-way known as the *Slighe Dala Meic Umhoir*, which seems to have been in use until the early modern period,[34] crossed the River Barrow at Monasterevin. From the late thirteenth century, travel across northern Laois would have been dangerous as the area was heavily forested and those using the road would have been vulnerable to attack by the Gaelic Irish.[35] O'Conor has suggested that the ford at Dunrally, which is approximately 7km from Monasterevin, would have been the next crossing point on the River Barrow and would have been '...a quick and relatively safe alternative route.'[36] The possible ringwork castle may therefore have been constructed to guard this strategically important ford. While O'Conor's argument is persuasive, there is no documentary evidence for an Anglo-Norman fortification or settlement at Dunrally. Also, Kelly and Maas' identification of the outer earthworks at

[31] J. T. Gilbert, (ed.), *Register of the Abbey of St Thomas, Dublin* (London, 1889), pp 160-61 and pp 162-3.
[32] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 362-7.
[33] Ibid., 363.
[34] Colm O'Lochlainn, 'Roadways in ancient Ireland' in John Ryan, (ed.) *Essays and studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeilll on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, May 15th, 1938* (Dublin, 1940), p. 471; A. P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster: towards an historical geography of early Irish civilisation, AD 500-1600* (Dublin, 1982), p. 72; O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 366.
[35] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 366.
[36] Ibid.

Dunrally as a possible Viking *longphort* has further complicated the interpretation of the possible ringwork site (Plate 11a).[37] The evidence for a *longphort* at Dunrally is discussed below in Section 6.5. Future excavation may shed more light on the function and chronology of the earthwork at Dunrally and its relationship with the outer earthwork defences. For the purposes of this study, the site has been classified as a possible ringwork castle, as the lack of historical evidence for Anglo-Norman occupation and the uncertainty regarding its relationship with the possible *longphort* mean that it cannot be categorised as a definite example.

The evidence discussed above demonstrates that many ringwork castles were located close to rivers that played a vital role in communications in the inland areas of medieval Ireland. However, proximity to existing land communication routes was also advantageous. It has been noted that many English castles were positioned close to the Roman roads that formed the backbone of the communications network in the medieval period.[38] For example, Hughes has shown that 80% of the castles in Hampshire were located on or close to a Roman road.[39] In Ireland, proximity to pre-existing early medieval route-ways must have been a factor in the selection of sites for castles. Unfortunately, little research on early communication routes in Ireland has been carried out, with the exception of O'Lochlainn's study, published in 1940,[40] and Doran's more recent research on communication routes in Longford and Roscommon[41] and the Carlow corridor.[42] The siting of some of the ringwork castles in the study area suggests that they were located in close proximity to pre-existing communication routes. Clonmacnoise Castle was located on the River Shannon, as discussed above, and was

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[37] E. P. Kelly and John Maas, 'The Vikings and the kingdom of Laois' in P. G. Lane and William Nolan, (eds), *Laois: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1999), pp 123-60; E. P. Kelly and John Maas, 'Vikings on the Barrow. Dunrally Fort, a possible Viking *longphort* in County Laois' in *Archaeology Ireland*, xxxiii, no. 3 (1995), pp 30-32.

[38] E. S. Armitage, *Early Norman castles of the British Isles* (London, 1912), p. 84; Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 43.

[39] Michael Hughes 'Hampshire castles and the landscape: 1066-1216' in *Landscape History*, ii (1989), p. 34.

[40] O'Lochlainn, 'Roadways in ancient Ireland', pp 465-74.

[41] L. F. Doran, 'Medieval settlement in Longford and Roscommon', (PhD, UCD, 2001); L. F. Doran, 'Medieval communication routes through Longford and Roscommon and their associated settlements' in *P.R.I.A*, civ (2004), Section C, pp 57-80.

[42] Linda Doran, 'Lords of the river valleys: economic and military lordship in the Carlow Corridor, *c.*1200-1350: European model in an Irish context' in Linda Doran and James Lyttleton, (eds), *Lordship in medieval Ireland: image and reality* (Dublin, 2007), pp 99-129.

also located on the *Slighe Mhór*, which was one of the major route-ways of early medieval Ireland. In the case of Rathealy, Co. Kilkenny (site no. 12), a local tradition recorded by Carrigan suggests that an early medieval route-way, known as St Kieran's Road, may have run past the site. According to Carrigan, St Kieran's horse was stolen at Rathealy at Rathealy, as he travelled between the monasteries of Fertagh and Callan.[43] As discussed below (Section 6.5), it seems likely that the ringwork castle at Rathealy was adapted from a pre-existing high-status ringfort.

6.3 Differences between ringwork castle and ringfort siting

The evidence discussed above shows that ringwork castles tended to be located at high points in landscape and were frequently situated on natural ridges and hills. Many ringwork castles were situated close to navigable rivers and, in some cases, these sites were quite low-lying as a result of their proximity to the river. Ringforts seem to have differed considerably from ringwork castles in terms of siting. The siting of an earthwork in the local landscape can therefore be an important contributing factor in its identification as a possible ringwork castle.

Early medieval ringforts tended to avoid low-lying ground beside rivers and in valley bottoms and exposed positions at the summit of hills or ridges. Westropp noted in the early twentieth century that ringforts tend to be located half-way up slopes rather than at the top of slopes.[44] It is now generally accepted that this trend is replicated throughout Ireland.[45] However, this is a trend rather than a rule and there are obviously many exceptions. The study of ringforts has been hampered by the tendency of Irish archaeologists to assign all circular enclosures to the category of 'ringfort' and to treat this group as a single homogenous class of monument; as Fitzpatrick has argued, 'The reductive processing of enclosed settlement into the 'simple' 'ring-fort' masks a

[43] William Carrigan, *The Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory*, (4 vols, Dublin, 1981, facsimile reprint of edition published in 1905), iii, 497.

[44] T. J. Westropp, 'The ancient forts of Ireland: being a contribution towards our knowledge of their types, affinities and structural features' in *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, xxxi (1902), p. 680.

[45] Matthew Stout, *The Irish ringfort* (Dublin, 1997), p. 106; Eamon Cody, 'A brief look at aspects of ringfort morphology and distribution' in Christiaan Corlett and Tom Condit, (eds), *Above and beyond: essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray, 2005), p. 6.

complex range of site types...'[46] However, research carried out over the past two decades has made some progress towards a more profound understanding of the different types of ringforts and their place within early medieval society. Stout has argued that multivallate ringforts were higher in status than univallate ringforts and that the hierarchy visible within ringfort morphology mirrors the stratification within early medieval society.[47] Lower status ringforts tended to cluster around a higher-status multivallate ringfort.[48] Stout's model, which is now generally accepted, has implications in terms of our understanding of ringfort siting. It seems likely that the higher status multivallate ringfort, which was a focus for settlement in the local area, would have been deliberately positioned in a visible location. It is notable that several of the ringwork castles in the study are seem to have been adapted from pre-existing multivallate ringforts and that they occupy positions that seem more characteristic of ringwork castles than of early medieval ringforts. For example, the ringwork castles at Rathealy, Co. Kilkenny, and Rathtroane, Co. Meath (site no. 25), both of which seem to have been adapted from trivallate ringforts, occupy very prominent positions in the landscape (see Section 6.5 below).

6.4 Ringwork castles and pre-existing settlement

Research in England has shown that the majority of the earthwork castles erected in the few years following the Norman invasion were constructed within the defences pre-existing urban settlements and took the form of ringwork castles.[49] These early urban castles were constructed in order to '...suppress or oversee major centres of population and, perhaps more importantly, to seize control of regional power bases and key nodes on the national communications grid.'[50] These considerations would have been equally valid a century later when the Anglo-Normans invaded Ireland in 1169. On arriving in Ireland, the Anglo-Normans seem to have focused on subduing and controlling the few

[46] Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, 'Native enclosed settlement and the problem of the Irish ring-fort' in *Medieval Archaeology*, liii (2009), p. 274.
[47] Stout, *The Irish ringfort*, p. 18.
[48] Ibid. pp 123-8.
[49] B. K. Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1967), p. 38; Barbara English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest' in Andrew Ayton and J. L. Price (eds), *The medieval military revolution: state, society and military change in medieval and early modern Europe* (London, 1995), pp 45-61.
[50] O. H. Creighton, 'Castles and castle building in town and country' in Kate Giles and Christopher Dyer, (eds), *Town and country in the middle ages: contrast, contacts and interconnections, 1100-1500* (Leeds, 2007), pp 279-80.

urban settlements that existed along the eastern coast of Ireland, including Waterford, Wexford, Wicklow and Dublin. In the case of Waterford, Gerald of Wales' account attests that the city was enclosed by stone walls by this time and that there was a tower known as Reginald's tower already in existence.[51] However, the nature of the early Anglo-Norman fortifications at Wicklow, Wexford and Dublin is unclear. The documentary evidence indicates that there was a castle at Wicklow by 1172.[52] However, the location and form of this early castle have been the matter of some debate.[53] The forms taken by the early castles at Dublin and Wexford are unknown. Orpen suggested that both of these early castles were motte castles.[54] However, in the case of Dublin, this seems to have been based on Orpen's assumption that most early castles were mottes, rather than any actual evidence. At Dublin, assuming that the earliest fortification was on the same site as the stone castle in the angle of the pre-existing city wall, the fortification may have utilised both the city wall and the River Poddle in its defences. As O'Conor has stated, '...the quickest and most effective way of building a castle in this locational scenario is to dig a ditch and build an earthen bank on the two sides facing the town.'[55] Such a fortification would be very similar to the early ringwork castles constructed in England in the period between 1066 and 1068, at towns including Pevensey, Dover, Winchester and London.[56] However, excavations at Dublin castle have failed to uncover any evidence for either a motte or a ringwork castle and the excavated evidence seems to suggest that the castle was a masonry structure from its inception.[57] The castle site at Wexford consists of a slight mound just outside the city wall at the south-east of the town. Orpen considered this low mound to be the remains of a motte.[58] However, recent research has shown that this feature is a natural mound composed of glacial deposits.[59] However, it seems possible that the castle was ringwork type fortification, which was constructed against the outside of the city wall.

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[51] *Expugnatio Hibernica. The Conquest of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis*, edited by A. B. Scott and F. X. and Martin, (eds), (Dublin, 1978), p. 67.
[52] Ibid., p. 44.
[53] See Chapter Four (Section 4.5) above and Site Report no. 48.
[54] Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, ii, 307 and i, 373.

[56] See Chapter Two (Section 2.4) for a full discussion of these sites.
[57] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of Leinster', ii, 766.
[58] Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, i, 373.
[59] Dr Ned Culleton, quoted by Billy Colfer, *Arrogant trespass: Anglo-Norman Wexford, 1169-1400* (Enniscorthy, 2002), p. 65.

With the exception of these few coastal towns, Ireland generally lacked fully urban settlements. However, the settlements that developed around some major monasteries had some urban characteristics. The nature of the settlements associated with early medieval monastic sites has been much debated since the 1970s when Ó Corráin coined the term 'monastic town'.[60] The concept of the 'monastic' town' was developed by Doherty, who argued that these settlements developed into urban settlements by the tenth century.[61] Doherty's ideas have generally been accepted, although the exact nature of these settlements and their role in early medieval trade and society has continued to be debated. Most recently, Valante has questioned the validity of the concept of the monastic town, stating that, '...the time has come to admit that even though monasteries were involved in local trade and manufacturing in a limited way, they were not the 'hub of a redistributive system',' proto-urban', nor any sort of 'town'. While around a bare handful of ecclesiastical centres, mostly those under Anglo-Norman control, towns did develop, there is nothing to suggest that the urban centres were in any way 'monastic'.'[62]

Whether or not these 'monastic towns' can be considered to be true urban centres in the pre-Norman period, it is notable that the Anglo-Normans seem to have followed a deliberate policy of constructing castles in close proximity to major monastic sites. The ringwork castles at Moone (site no. 2), Clonmacnoise (site no. 28), Trim (site no. 27) and Kilkenny (site no. 8) and the possible ringwork at Ferns (site no. 40) were all constructed in close proximity to important early medieval ecclesiastical centres. There were major monasteries at Moone and Clonmacnoise in the early medieval period. The monastic house at Moone was reputedly founded by St Colmcille in the six century. The *Annals of the Four Masters* record that the monastery was plundered in 1040. The monastery seems to have become a parish church in the Anglo-Norman period. The early medieval monastery at Clonmacnoise was an ecclesiastical centre of major importance. Although the monastery continued until the Reformation and many of the building are Anglo-Norman in date, there are also extensive early medieval remains,

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[60] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), p. 87.

[61] Charles Doherty, 'Exchange and trade in early medieval Ireland' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, cx (1980), pp 67-89; Charles Doherty, 'Some aspects of hagiography' in *Peritia,* i (1982), pp 300-28; Charles Doherty, 'The monastic town in early medieval Ireland' in H. B. Clarke and Angret Simms (eds), The *comparative history of urban origins in non-Roman Europe* (Oxford, 1985), pp 45-75.

[62] M. A. Valante, 'Reassessing the Irish 'Monastic Town' in *I.H.S.*, xxxi (1998), pp. 1-18.

including the cathedral,[63] three other early medieval churches and a round tower.[64] The documentary evidence shows that Clonmacnoise functioned as a royal necropolis for several different dynasties, including the kings of the southern and northern Uí Neill, the kings of Connacht and the kings of Breifne.[65] The position of Clonmacnoise, on the River Shannon, on the boundary between several kingdoms, seems to have contributed to its status and importance. The church at Trim was reputedly founded by St Lommán, possibly as early as the fifth century.[66] Although the annals show that Trim had been the seat of a bishop throughout the early medieval period, Clonard rather than Trim was chosen as the episcopal seat at the Synod of Rathbreasail in 1111.[67] It seems likely that the pre-Norman church was located on the same site as the present cathedral.[68] It is notable that the castle at Trim was constructed on lands belonging to the Church, as discussed below. Kilkenny was also major pre-Norman ecclesiastical centre. Although the present Cathedral of St Canice is early thirteenth-century in date, the presence of several Hiberno-Romanesque carved stones indicates that the pre-Norman church was located on the same site.[69] Kilkenny was selected as episcopal seat for the diocese of Ossory at the synod of Rathbreasail. However, Empey has argued that the see was probably not moved from Aghaboe to Kilkenny until the late twelfth century, probably towards the end Bishop Felix O'Dulany's episcopacy (1178-1202).[70] Ferns was also selected as an episcopal seat at Rathbreasail showing that the church was considered to be important in the twelfth century.

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[63] Conleth Manning, Clonmacnoise Cathedral' in H. A. King, *Clonmacnoise Studies Volume One: seminar papers 1994* (Dublin, 1998), pp 57-86.

[64] Conleth Manning, 'Some early masonry churches and the round tower at Clonmacnoise' in H. A. King, *Clonmacnoise Studies Volume Two: seminar papers 1998* (Dublin, 2003), pp 63-95.

[65] Edel Breathnach, 'Learning and literature in early medieval Clonmacnoise' in H. A. King, *Clonmacnoise Studies Volume Two: seminar papers 1998* (Dublin, 2003), pp 100-103.

[66] Eoghan Kieran, 'Burials at St Patrick's Cathedral: new evidence for the early medieval ecclesiastical site at Trim' in Michael Potterton and Matthew Seaver, (eds), *Uncovering medieval Trim: archaeological excavations in and around Trim, Co. Meath* (Dublin, 2009), p. 72.

[67] Aubrey Gwynn and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: Ireland, with an appendix to early sites* (London, 1970), p. 97.

[68] Mark Hennessy, *Irish historic towns atlas. Number 14: Trim* (Dublin, 2004), p. 1; Kieran, 'Burials at St Patrick's Cathedral: new evidence for the early medieval ecclesiastical site at Trim', p. 72.

[69] Peter Harbison, 'Carved stones from the twelfth century predecessor of St Canice's cathedral' in *O.K.R.,* vi (1974), pp 26-9; John Bradley, 'The Early Development of the Medieval Town of Kilkenny' in William Nolan and Kevin Whelan, *Kilkenny: History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1990), p. 66.

[70] C.A. Empey, 'The Anglo-Norman Diocese of Ossory' in C. A. Empey, (ed.), *A worthy foundation: the cathedral church of St Canice, Kilkenny 1285-1985* (Portlaoise, 1985), p. 15.

The evidence suggests that settlements developed around the ecclesiastical centres at Clonmacnoise, Kilkenny, Trim, and Ferns in the pre-Norman period. Clonmacnoise is seen as a classic example of a monastic town. As Bradley had shown, there is documentary evidence in the form of annalistic references for houses, streets and a fair at Clonmacnoise from the ninth century on.[71] The monastery and settlement were also enclosed by a *vallum* or rampart.[72] Documentary references to Kilkenny in the eleventh and twelfth centuries indicate that there was a settlement associated with the cathedral in the pre-Norman period. This settlement was probably located in the area around the cathedral, which later became the Irishtown. The annalistic references are problematic because the name 'Ceall Cainnigh' could also refer to other ecclesiastical sites dedicated to St Canice, such as the monastic house at Aghaboe, Co. Laois. However, it is generally accepted that from the later eleventh century, this place name refers exclusively to Kilkenny.[73] Kilkenny was burnt in 1085,[74] and again in 1114.[75] As Bradley has suggested the Mac Gilla Patraic kings of Osraige may have had a residence at Kilkenny.[76] In 1146, the grandson of the Mac Gilla Patraic king of Osraige was killed 'in the middle of Kilkenny'.[77] Trim may also have been a centre of political power in the pre-Norman period. The documentary evidence suggests that a royal residence of the Ua Caindelbain kings of Loegaire was located at Trim,[78] and there are several annalistic references to Trim in the immediate pre-Norman period. The *Annals of Inisfallen* records the burning of 'Trim, including church, people and cattle' at Trim in 1128,[79] and the *Annals of the Four Masters* records that the church at Trim was burned in 1143,[80] and again in 1155.[81] Although Hayden's excavations uncovered limited

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[71] John Bradley, 'The monastic town of Clonmacnoise' in King, H. A., *Clonmacnoise Studies Volume One: seminar papers 1994* (Dublin, 1998), pp 42-55.
[72] Ibid., p. 47.
[73] Michael O'Clery, *et al.* (eds), *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters; from the earliest times to the year 1616* (8 vols, Dublin, 1990, reprint of edition published Dublin, 1856), footnote, p. 923; Bradley, 'The early development of the medieval town of Kilkenny', p.65.
[74] *Annals of the Four Masters*, s.a. 1085.
[75] Ibid., *s.a.* 1114.
[76] John Bradley, 'The Early Development of the Medieval Town of Kilkenny', p. 66.
[77] *Annals of the Four Masters*, s.a. 1146.
[78] Sean Duffy, 'The key of the Pale": A history of Trim Castle, Co. Meath' in Alan Hayden, Trim Castle Co. Meath, Excavations 1995-8, (unpublished excavation report, 2 vols, excavation no. 95E 077, Archaeological Projects Ltd., 2005), p. 4.
[79] Seán MacAirt, (ed.), *Annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin, 1988, reprint of edition published Dublin, 1944), *s.a.* 1128.
[80] *Annals of the Four Masters*, *s.a.* 1143.
[81] *Annals of the Four Masters,* A.D. 1155.

evidence for an unenclosed farmstead during the course of the excavations at the castle, no obvious evidence for high-status occupation was excavated in the vicinity of the castle.[82] Ferns was also a centre of political power. The documentary evidence shows clearly that the residence Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster, was located at Ferns in the immediate pre-Norman period. The sources imply that Dermot's residence was a stone construction and was fortified. The *Annals of Tigernach* record that Tiernan O'Rourke and his allies destroyed Dermot's stone house and longphort at Ferns in the year 1166.[83] The Annals of Inisfallen also report the burning of Ferns in that year.[84] Dermot MacMurrough's residence may have been on the site now occupied by the stone castle. However, the siting of the early ecclesiastical structures suggests that the focus of the pre-Norman settlement may have been further to the east. In all of these cases, the Anglo-Normans seem to have deliberately constructed castles in close proximity to pre-existing settlement, enabling them to subdue and control centres of population and to control the strategically important communication routes that linked major monasteries and their associated settlements.

Some ringwork castles in the study area seem to have been associated with more modest pre-Norman churches. The evidence suggests that the churches associated with the ringwork castles at Kilpipe, Co Wicklow (site no. 49), Rodanstown, Co. Meath (site no. 26), Kilcarn, Co. Meath (site no. 23), Purcellsinch, Co. Kilkenny (site no. 11), and Ballyvolan Lower, Co. Wicklow (site no. 47), may have been pre-Norman in origin. The 'kill' prefix in the place-names of Kilpipe, Kilcarn, Kilmallog, which seems to have been the medieval name of Purcellsinch, and Kilmartin, which adjoins the townland of Ballyvolan Lower, suggest that there was an early medieval church site in all of these locations. It is notable that the graveyard at Rodanstown, within which a ruined eighteenth-century Church of Ireland church stands, is perfectly circular in shape, while the graveyard at Kilpipe is sub-circular. Circular enclosures associated with church sites

[82] Alan Hayden, Trim Castle Co. Meath, Excavations 1995-8, unpublished excavation report, excavation no. 95E 077, 2 volumes (Archaeological Projects Ltd., 2005), i, 131.
[83] Whitley Stokes (ed), *The Annals of Tigernach* (2 vols, Felinfach, 1993, reprinted from *Revue Celtique*, 1896/7), *s.a.* 1166.
[84] *Annals of Inisfallen, s.a.* 1166.

generally indicate that the church site is early medieval in origin.[85] The first known reference to the church at Kilpipe is contained in a papal bull issued in 1179, which confirmed the possessions of the diocese of Glendalough to Bishop Malchus.[86] In the case of Kilcarn, it is unclear if the pre-Norman church was in the same location as the Anglo-Norman church. The architecture of the present church at Kilcarn suggests that it was constructed in the early twelfth century and its dedication to St Stephen seems typically Anglo-Norman. A charter issued in 1217 records the dedication of the graveyard at Kilcarn and records that, prior to the dedication of the new cemetery, it had been necessary for the people of the parish to travel as far as Skreen in order to bury their dead.[87] It seems possible that the parish church of St Stephen was a Norman foundation and that an earlier church was located in the nearby townland of Oldtown. Cogan, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, recorded that, according to local tradition, there had been another church, known as the Black Church, at Oldtown. This church had an extensive cemetery attached to it and farmers frequently came across human skeletons whilst planting potatoes.[88] Hickey has suggested that this church site rather than the site of St Stephen's may have been the location of the early medieval church.[89]

The Anglo-Normans policy of positioning earthwork castles close to pre-existing ecclesiastical sites inevitably had implications in terms of the siting of these castles and the layout of the associated settlements that subsequently developed around them. Many early medieval churches occupied sites that were prominent in the local landscape. When the Anglo-Normans considered constructing a castle nearby, they may have found that the most suitable site was already occupied by the pre-existing church. This seems to have been the case at Skreen. Adam de Feipo was granted the barony of

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[85] Leo Swan, 'Enclosed ecclesiastical sites and their relevance to settlement patterns of the first millennium AD' in Terence Reeves-Smith and Fred Hammond, (eds), *Landscape archaeology in Ireland* (Oxford, 1983), pp 269-280.

[86] Charles McNeill, (ed.), *Calendar of Archbishop Alen's register, c.1172-1534* (Dublin, 1950), pp 5-6; J. T. Gilbert, *Crede Mihi: the most ancient register book of the archbishops of Dublin before the Reformation,* pp 6-8.

[87] J. T. Gilbert, (ed.), *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin, with the register of its house at Dunbrody and Annals of Ireland* (2 vols, Dublin, 1884), i, 159.

[88] Anthony Cogan, *The diocese of Meath, ancient and modern* (4 vols, Dublin, 1992; reprint of work originally published in Dublin, 1862-70), ii, 240 and 248.

[89] Elizabeth Hickey, *Skryne and the Early Normans: papers concerning the medieval manors of the Feypo family in Ireland in the 12th and early 13th centuries* (Meath, 1994), p. 103.

Skreen by Hugh de Lacy[90] and established his *caput* at the summit of the Hill of Skreen, close to the early medieval church of St Colmcille. As the site occupied the site on the summit of the hill, the large motte castle was constructed halfway down the slope, in a defensively weaker location. Similarly, at Moone, the early medieval monastic house seems to have occupied the prime site in the local area, on a ridge above the River Greese. The ringwork castle occupies the second best site, on the summit of a hill approximately 750m to the west of the ecclesiastical site.

The documentary evidence indicates that the ringwork castles at Clonmacnoise and Trim were constructed on lands owned by the Church. Annalistic references suggests that Clonmacnoise Castle was constructed in either 1213 or 1214,[91] and was attacked by Cormac O'Melaghlin later in 1214,[92] possibly while it was still under construction. King John seems to have paid compensation for having constructed the castle on lands which had belonged to the monastery. A writ issued in 1216 ordered the justiciar to compensate the bishop of Clonmacnoise, '...for his land occupied in fortifying the castle of Clonmacnois, for his fruit trees cut down, his cows, horses, oxen, and household utensils taken away'.[93] At Trim, the castle, bridge and town all seem to have been constructed on church lands and from as early as 1191, the documentary evidence shows that rent for these sites was being paid to the Church.[94] The Anglo-Norman policy of constructing castles close to pre-existing monastic settlements and churches may have led to certain complications in terms of selecting suitable castle sites. In some cases, these complications may have been a factor in producing manorial settlements that were quite dispersed, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

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[90] Evelyn Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland. La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande. A new edition of the chronicle formerly known as 'The Song of Dermot and the Earl'* (Dublin, 2002), Lines 3154-5.

[91] Denis Murphy, (ed.), *The annals of Clonmacnoise* (Felinfach, 1993, reprinted from edition published Dublin, 1896), *s.a.* 1213; W. M. Hennessy, (ed.), *The annals of Lough Cé*, (Dublin, 1939; reprint of edition published in London, 1871), *s.a.* 1214.

[92] Hennessy, (ed.), *The annals of Lough Cé, s.a.*1214

[93] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.*, i, 107; Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, ii, 303-5.

[94] Maurice Sheehy (ed.), *Pontificia Hibernica: medieval papal chancery documents concerning Ireland, 640-1261* (2 vols, Dublin, 1962), i, 86-8; Potterton, *Medieval Trim,* p. 138.

6.5 The evidence for the re-fortification of pre-Norman sites as ringwork castles

The evidence from England shows that many earthwork castles, particularly in the immediate post-conquest period, made use of earlier fortifications. At Sulgrave and Goltho, fortified Anglo-Saxon sites, which had functioned as high-status residences in the immediate pre-Norman period, were taken over by the Normans and adapted into castles. Most of the urban castles erected in the period between 1066 and 1068 were constructed within pre-existing towns and made use of the town walls in their defences, generally by constructing the castle in the angle of the enclosing wall. In other cases, earthwork castles were constructed within the defences of long-abandoned fortifications such as Roman forts and Iron-Age hill-forts.[95]

When the Anglo-Normans arrived in Ireland in 1169, they would have found a multitude of suitable sites available for refortification including, most obviously, thousands of ringforts. Although some ringforts may have been occupied throughout the medieval period, particularly in western Ireland,[96] it seems likely that many ringforts in the study area had been abandoned by the mid twelfth century. This is supported by Gerald of Wales:

> 'And so to this day, as remains of ancient times, you will find here many trenches, very high and round, one outside of the other, as well as walled forts which are still standing, although now empty and abandoned. For the people of Ireland have no use for castles. Woods are their forts and swamps are their trenches.'[97]

The re-use of earlier earthworks would have been logical from a practical point of view as adapting a pre-existing site would generally have involved less time and labour than constructing a castle from scratch on a green-field site. Particularly in the period immediately following the invasion, it seems likely that the Anglo-Normans would have preferred to adapt a pre-existing site which could be fortified quickly and would provide some shelter even while it was in the process of being remodelled. The re-use of pre-existing sites may also have been intended to make a deliberate statement about Anglo-Norman power and dominance over both the landscape and the people. Creighton has

[95] See Chapter Two (Sections 2.4 and 2.5).

[96] G. F. Barrett and B. J. Graham, 'Some considerations concerning the dating and distribution of ringforts in Ireland' in *U.J.A.*, xxxviii (1975), pp 33-45; Kieran O'Conor, *The archaeology of medieval rural settlement in Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), pp 93-4.

[97] Gerald of Wales, *The history and topography of Ireland*, translated with an introduction by J. J. O'Meara (second edition, London, 1982), p. 119.

noted in relation to England that '...castles undoubtedly occupied sites imbued with regal, high-status or religious connotations in contemporary minds.' The refortification of earthwork sites in Ireland, whether or not they had already been abandoned long before, may have had a powerful psychological impact on the local population, as there may have been a collective memory of these sites as centres of power. Some long-abandoned sites, like Knowth which was reoccupied as an Anglo-Norman grange, may have functioned as physical reminders in the landscape of a mythical past.

The documentary sources contain some references to the Anglo-Norman reoccupation of pre-existing sites. The construction of a castle at Downpatrick on the site of an important pre-Norman ringfort is recorded in the *Annals of Ulster*; 'Dun-da-lethglas was destroyed by John De Courcy and by the knights that came with him, and a castle (*caistel*) was made by them there.'[98] [1] Gerald of Wales also refers to a castle or fort constructed by John de Courcy at Downpatrick at the time of the battle there. Gerald describes this site as a '...small fort (*municipio*) which he had flimsily constructed in one corner of the city (*urbis*).'[99] It seems likely that these references relate to the same fortification, which was probably on the site of the motte and bailey known as the Mound of Down, although Flanders has suggested that the site of 'Dun-da-lethglas' may alternatively have been located on Cathedral Hill.[100] The castle known as the Mound of Down consists of a motte located in an off-centre position within a circular bailey. It seems likely that the large circular bailey represents the pre-Norman ringfort. The *Expugnatio Hibernica* explicitly states that the Anglo-Normans made use of an old fortification (*castellario quodam antiquo*) during the course of their campaign in Ossory.[101] However, there are notably few clues regarding the choice of sites for castles and the motivations for re-using pre-existing sites in the contemporary sources.

As discussed in Chapter Three, excavations Ulster have shown that several mottes, including Rathmullan, Lismahon and Ballynarry, were constructed on early medieval

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[98] W. M. Hennessy, (ed.), *Annals of Ulster*, (4 vols, Dublin, 1998, reprint of edition published Dublin, 1887), *s.a.* 1177.
[99] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, pp 176-7.
[100] Steve Flanders, *De Courcy: Anglo-Normans in Ireland, England, and France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries*, (Dublin, 2008), pp 137-9.
[101] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, p 39.

ringforts (Section 3.3). A number of mottes that seem to be have been constructed on early medieval ringforts have also been identified in Leinster, based on their morphology. O'Conor identified of seven mottes in Leinster, located at Donode Big, Co. Kildare, Middlemount, Co. Laois, Raheenamanagh, Co. Laois, Ballinaclogh Lower, Co. Laois, Ballykilleen, Co. Offaly, Drumcooly, Co. Offaly, Killegney, Co. Wexford, and Newcastle, Co. Wexford, which seem to have been constructed on top of pre-existed ringforts.[102] More recently, O'Drisceoil has summarised the evidence for the adaptation of ringforts into mottes, based on excavtions and fieldwork. At Mayne, Co. Louth O'Drisceoill observed a section of a motte that was in the process of being eroded and noted that the section indicated that the motte was constructed on a pre-existing ringfort.[103]

Within the study area, there is evidence to suggest that four of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles may represent refortified ringforts. These sites are Rathangan, Co. Kildare (site no. 4), Rathtroane, Co. Meath, (site no. 25), Rathealy, Co. Kilkenny (site no. 12), and Rodanstown, Co. Meath (site no. 26). The 'rath' element in the place-names of Rathangan, Rathtroane and Rathealy suggests that these ringwork castles were adapted from pre-Norman ringforts. In the case of Rathangan, the documentary evidence suggests that the ringfort, which was known as 'Rath Imgháin', was a pre-Norman site of some importance, which functioned as the base of the Uí Failge from as early as the sixth century.[104] The ringfort and the kings that owned it are described in a poem by Berchán, which was probably composed in the early eighth century; [105]

> 'The fort over against the oakwood,
> It was Bruidge's, it was Cathal's,
> It was Áed's, it was Ailill's,
> It was Conaing's, it Cúilíne's,
> And it was Maél Dúin's.
> The fort remains after each king in turn,

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[102] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 62;

[103] Coilin O'Drisceoil, 'Recycled ringforts: the evidence from archaeological excavation for the conversion of pre-existing monuments to motte castles in medieval Ireland' in *J.C.L.A.H.S.*, xxv (2002), pp 189-201.

[104] A. P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster: towards an historical geography of early Irish civilisation, AD 500-1600* (Dublin, 1982), p. 68.

[105] A. P. Smyth, 'Hui Failgi relations with the Hui Neill in the century after the loss of the plain of Mide', *Etudes Celtique*, XIV, ii (1975), p. 511.

And the hosts sleep in the ground.'[106]

The earthwork site at Rathangan consists of a circular platform enclosed by an inner bank and an exceptionally deep and wide fosse (Figures 2 and 26). The ringwork castles at Rathtroane, Rathealy and Rodanstown are each enclosed by the remains of three concentric banks with intervening fosses. The morphology of these three sites suggests that they originated as high-status, trivallate ringforts. It is also notable that, unlike most early medieval ringforts, these sites occupy prominent positions at high points in the landscape. The documentary evidence suggests that Rathealy may have been on an important early medieval route-way known as St Kieran's Road, which linked the monastic sites at Callan and Fertagh via Adamston, Rathealy and Lisnalea. Carrigan recorded that, according to local tradition, "St. Kieran's horse was robbed one day on Boher-Kierawin, in Rathealy, while carrying messages from Fertagh to Callan, or *vice versa.* This so annoyed the saint that he left his malediction on Rathealy, declaring that for all future time the townland would be the first to sow and the last to reap."[107] The possible ringwork castle a Drumsawry, Co. Meath (site no. 22), also seems to have originated as a trivallate early medieval ringfort. Sweetman has identified this site as a possible ringwork castle, based on its morphology and proximity to a probable church site.[108] He has also suggested that the rectangular structure visible in the interior as a stone-lined depression, measuring 8.7m by 5.2m, may represent a tower.[109] However, in this case, there is little evidence for an Anglo-Norman castle or manor, although the ecclesiastical taxation of 1305-6 does record that there was a chapel at 'Drumsauory', which was worth 'nothing, because waste'.[110]

The possible ringwork castle at Dunrally, Co. Laois (site no. 14) may represent a Viking fortification or a ringwork castle adapted from a Viking site. As discussed above (Section 6.2), O'Conor identified the site at Dunrally as a ringwork castle based on its siting at a strategically important crossing-point on the River Barrow and its

[106] Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Selections from Irish poetry* (London, 1959), p. 93; M. A. O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus Genealogiarium Hiberniae* (2nd edition, Dublin, 2001), p. 58.
[107] William Carrigan, *The Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory*, (4 vols, Dublin, 1981, facsimile reprint of edition published in 1905), iii, 497
[108] P. D. Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath' in Christiaan Corlett and Tom Condit, (eds), *Above and beyond: essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray, 2005), pp 395-7.
[109] Ibid., pp 396-7.
[110] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.*, v, 268.

defensibility. However, Kelly and Maas have since identified Dunrally as a possible Viking *longphort* site.[111] The possible ringwork identified by O'Conor stands within a much larger D-shaped enclosure, which is defined by the Glansha River on its northern and north-western sides, by the River Barrow to the west and by a bank, water-filled ditch and counterscarp bank on its north-eastern, eastern and southern sides. The area enclosed measures approximately 360m in length from northwest to southeast and 150m in width at its widest point.[112] The place-name of Dunrally seems to be derived from 'Dun Rothlaibh' or 'the fort of Rodulf' and Kelly and Maas have identified the site as Longphort-Rothlaibh, a Viking *longphort* mentioned in the annals as the base of the ninth-century Viking leader, Rodulf.[113] Rodulf was active in Ireland in the mid-ninth century and conducted raids along the Barrow and Nore valleys.[114] Rodulf and his followers were driven out of the area and the destruction of 'Longphort Rothlaith' is mentioned in the *Annals of the Four Masters* under the year 862. The *Fragmentary Annals* also record the destruction of Rodulf's fleet but do not mention the *longphort*.[115] Kelly and Maas' identification of the D-shaped outer enclosure as a Viking longphort seems reasonable, as its siting and morphology seem comparable to that of Repton in Derbyshire,[116] and the possible longphort site at Athlunkard in Co. Clare.[117] However, the earthwork located within the D-shaped enclosure is more problematic. Kelly and Haus have suggested that this enclosure is contemporary with the *longphort* and have interpreted it as a 'citadel', although, as Ó Floinn has stated, this feature has '...has no ready morphological parallel among known Viking sites of the ninth century.'[118] It seems possible that O'Conor's interpretation of the earthwork as a ringwork castle may

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[111] E. P. Kelly and John Maas, 'Vikings on the Barrow. Dunrally Fort, a possible Viking *longphort* in County Laois' in *Archaeology Ireland*, xxxiii, no. 3 (1995), pp 30-32; E. P. Kelly and John Maas, 'The Vikings and the kingdom of Laois' in P. G. Lane and William Nolan, (eds), *Laois: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1999), pp 123-60.

[112] Kelly and Maas, 'Vikings on the Barrow. Dunrally Fort, a possible Viking *longphort* in County Laois', p. 31.

[113] Kelly and Maas, 'The Vikings and the kingdom of Laois', pp 123-60; Kelly and Maas, 'Vikings on the Barrow: Dunrally Fort, a possible Viking *longphort* in County Laois', pp 30-32.

[114] Kelly and Maas, 'The Vikings and the kingdom of Laois', pp 132-6.

[115] J. N. Radnor, *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (Dublin, 1978), *s.a.* 862.

[116] Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjolbye-Biddle, 'Repton and the Vikings' in *Antiquity,* lxvi (1992), pp 36-51.

[117] E. P. Kelly and Edmund O'Donovan, 'A Viking longphort near Athlunkard, Co. Clare' in *Archaeology Ireland*, xxxiv (Winter, 1995), pp 13-16.

[118] Raghnall Ó Floinn, 'The archaeology of the Early Viking Age in Ireland' in H. B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Raghnall O'Floinn, (eds), *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age* (Dublin, 1998), p. 163.

be correct, although there is no known documentary evidence for a castle or Anglo-Norman manor in this location.

6.6 The distribution of ringwork castles

Twenty-one ringwork castles and twenty-four possible ringworks were identified in this study area and the distribution map of these sites shows some interesting trends (Figure 11). Ringwork castles seem to occur in clusters in some places and are absent in others. For example, there are five definite ringwork castles in central Kilkenny (site nos. 6, 8, 10, 11, 12), in addition to two possible ringworks (site nos. 7, 9). However, there are no ringwork castles in southern Kilkenny and only one ringwork castle (at Carlow itself) in neighbouring Carlow. The absence of ringwork castles in Carlow was noted by McNeill, who used this absence to support his argument that ringwork castles were not very common in Anglo-Norman Ireland.[119] It is notable that there are five definite ringwork castles in eastern Co. Meath, whereas there are no definite examples in Westmeath.

To some extent, the apparent absence of ringwork castles in some areas and the presence of several ringworks in others may reflect the state of research rather than an actual trend. In the case of Wexford, where there are two definite examples and nine possible ringworks, it may seem at first glance that ringwork castles were relatively common in this county. However, the apparent prevalence of ringwork castles in Wexford is due to the identifications of possible ringworks, many of which are rather dubious, by Colfer. Similarly, the lack of ringwork castles in Westmeath probably reflects that the Anglo-Norman settlement of Westmeath as been rather neglected by archaeologists. For counties like Westmeath and Kildare, ringwork castle identification is more difficult because county inventories have not yet been published.

Despite these problems, the distribution map seems to show some genuine clusters, including most notably, the clusters in central Kilkenny and eastern Co. Meath. It will be argued in Chapter Eight (Section 8.3) that the ringwork castles in Kilkenny may have been linked by the fact that they were all associated with land grants made by the

[119] T. E. McNeill, 'Early castles in Leinster' in *J.I.A.*, v (1989-90), p. 58.

Marshal lords of Leinster in the early thirteenth century. This echoes the findings of King and Alcock in relation to English and Welsh ringwork castles. They observed that ringwork castles tend to occur in clusters and that, in some cases, '...concentrations of ringworks correspond with baronial holdings.'[120]

The distribution of ringwork castles makes more sense when combined with the distribution of motte castles in the study area (Figure 27). This distribution map was based on data from the RMP, which classifies 262 sites in the study area as mottes, motte and baileys and probable mottes. If the ringwork castles at Necastle McKynegan and Kilpipe, which the RMP currently classifies as mottes, were subtracted from this total, this leaves a total of 260 mottes. This figure still seems rather large. O'Conor identified 113 definite motte and 25 possible examples in Leinster[121] and Graham has identified 94 mottes in the lordship of Meath.[122] If these figures are combined this adds up to 232 mottes in the study area of Leinster and Meath as a whole. The discrepancy between these figures and the RMP may be partly due to differences in the way in which mottes were identified. As O'Conor has commented, '...individual fieldworkers have often used different criteria to distinguish mottes from raised raths and other earthwork mounds. Simply, certain mottes that have been identified by some scholars would not be accepted as such by others.'[123] Using the RMP figure of 260 mottes, the ratio of mottes to definite ringwork castles in the study area is approximately 12:1. Taking possible ringworks into account, this ratio changes to 5.5:1 in favour of mottes. However, it seems highly unlikely that all of the possible ringwork castles in the study area will prove to be ringwork castles. These statistics suggest that ringwork castles are rarer in Ireland than in England and Wales, where the ratio of motte to ringworks is approximately 3.7:1.[124]

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[120] D. J. C. King and Leslie Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1969), p.103.
[121] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 42.
[122] B. J. Graham, 'The mottes of the Anglo-Norman liberty of Meath', in Harmon Harmon, (ed.), *Irish Midland Studies: essays in commemoration of N.W. English* (Athlone, 1980), p. 44.
[123] Kieran O'Conor, 'Motte castles in Ireland: permanent fortresses, residences and manorial centres' in *Château Gaillard*, xx (2002), p. 173.
[124] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 98.

6.7 Conclusion to the chapter

This chapter has shown that there were many factors that influenced the siting of a ringwork castle. The evidence from the study area suggests that ringwork castles tended to be situated on the summits of ridges or hills. However, some ringwork castles also occupy low-lying positions beside major rivers. The Anglo-Normans seem to have deliberately positioned their earthwork castles at pre-existing coastal towns and close to proto-urban monastic settlements in inland areas. This may represent an attempt to control centres of population and political power. However, particularly in relation to earthwork castles near monastic sites, control of the communication routes may have been equally if not more important. Some of the ringwork castles in the study area seem to be located close to pre-existing church sites. There is also limited evidence for the adaptation of pre-existing ringforts into ringwork castles. The morphology and siting of these reused ringforts indicates that they were high-status ringforts at prominent positions in the landscape. Finally, the distribution of the ringwork castles in the study area suggest that ringworks tend to occur in localised clusters, echoing the pattern found in England and Wales. However, the distribution map may be skewed because the amount of research on settlement forms carried out is by no means uniform throughout the study area. Numerical analysis shows that the ratio of mottes to definite ringworks in the study area is approximately 12:1. This suggests that ringworks were rarer in eastern and south-eastern Ireland than in England and Wales.

Chapter Seven: Ringwork castles and Anglo-Norman settlement

7.1 Introduction to the chapter

The aim of this chapter is to explore the settlement features and landscapes that surrounded Anglo-Norman ringwork castles in both rural and urban settings. In many cases, earthwork castles and churches formed the nuclei of manorial centres and it is generally accepted that an earthwork site's proximity to a church constitutes evidence in favour of the earthwork being classified as ringwork castle. This chapter will explore the relationship between ringwork castles and medieval church sites and will also discuss less visible elements of the high medieval landscape, including mills, deer parks, fishponds and rabbit warrens.

7.2 Ringwork castles and associated urban settlement

Many of the castles erected in the wake of the Norman conquest of England 1066, were constructed at pre-existing urban centres, in order to control centres of population.[1] As noted the previous chapter, fully developed towns were nonexistent in inland areas of Ireland in the pre-Norman period. However, the Anglo-Normans seem to have pursued a deliberate policy of siting castles in close proximity to early medieval monasteries and associated proto-urban settlements.

Major towns developed around the castles at Kilkenny (site no. 8), Trim (site no. 27), Carlow (site no. 1) and Ferns (site no. 40) in the Anglo-Norman period. However, it is unclear if these Anglo-Norman towns were established during the period when the ringwork castles were in use. In the cases of Kilkenny, Ferns and Trim, there is limited evidence to suggest that there were pre-existing settlements in these locations when the Anglo-Normans arrived, as discussed in the Chapter Six. Carlow, in contrast, seems to have been established on green-field site. All of these four settlements seem to have acquired borough status by the early thirteenth century.

[1] Barbara English, 'Towns, mottes and ring-works of the conquest' in Andrew Ayton and J. L. Prince, *The medieval military revolution: state, society and military change in medieval and early modern Europe* (London, 1995), pp 45-8; O. H. Creighton, *Castles and landscapes: power, community and fortification in medieval England* (London, 2002), pp133-8.

The documentary evidence indicates that Hugh de Lacy established a borough at Trim between 1172 and 1186. The first reference to burgages at Trim is contained in a letter from Pope Clement III to the abbot of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin, written in 1188.[2] This letter refers to two burgages at Trim, which had been granted to St Mary's Abbey by John of Rouen.[3] In 1188, Trim was in the hands of the king because Walter, son of Hugh de Lacy, was a minor when his father died in 1186 and probably did not gain seisin of Meath until 1189.[4] As it is unlikely that Henry II established the borough, as he was only holding Meath on behalf of his ward, the borough at Trim must have been created under Hugh de Lacy.

The documentary evidence suggests that the towns at Kilkenny, Carlow and Ferns acquired borough status under William the Elder. Kilkenny seems to have acquired its first charter from William Marshal the Elder in 1207. Although no original copy of this charter survives, it is reproduced in a fourteenth-century entry in the *Liber Primus Kilkenniensis*, along with a second charter issued by William Marshal the Younger in 1223.[5] However, it has also been suggested that the Anglo-Normans may have attempted to establish a town at Kilkenny in the early 1170s. An entry in the *Annals of Tigernach* records that a castle at Kilkenny was attacked by Domnall Mor Ua Briain in 1173. The inhabitants of the castle fled to Waterford, leaving the castle to be destroyed by the Gaelic Irish, and '...the town was breached after the foreigners had left it.'[6] It seems likely that the castle mentioned is the ringwork castle excavated by Ben Murtagh under Kilkenny Castle.[7] Bradley has argued that this entry suggests that the Anglo-Normans may have attempted to establish a town at Kilkenny in the 1170s.[8] However,

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[2] Maurice Sheehy, (ed.), *Pontificia Hibernica: medieval papal chancery documents concerning Ireland, 640-1261* (2 vols, Dublin, 1962), ii, 5; Michael Potterton, *Medieval Trim: history and archaeology* (Dublin, 2005), p. 130.

[3] J. T. Gilbert, (ed.), *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin, with the register of its house at Dunbrody and Annals of Ireland* (2 vols, Dublin, 1884), i, 231; Potterton, *Medieval Trim*, p. 231.

[4] Colin Veach, 'Nobility and crown: the de Lacy family in Ireland, England and Normandy, 1172-1241' (PhD, Trinity College Dublin, 2010), pp 84-97.

[5] A. J. Otway-Ruthven (ed.), *Liber Primus Kilkenniensis* (Kilkenny, 1961), pp 5-9.

[6] Whitley Stokes, (ed.), *The Annals of Tigernach* (2 vols, Felinfach, 1993, reprinted from *Revue Celtique*, 1896/7), *s.a.* 1173.

[7] Ben Murtagh, 'The Kilkenny Castle archaeological project, 1990-1993: interim report' in *O.K.R.*, xlv (1993), pp 1101-1117.

[8] John Bradley, 'The early development of the medieval town of Kilkenny' in William Nolan and Kevin Whelan, (eds), *Kilkenny: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1990), p. 66.

the town mentioned may have been a continuation of the proto-urban pre-Norman settlement at Kilkenny, rather than a new Anglo-Norman town with borough status. The town of Carlow also received a charter from William Marshal in the early thirteenth century.[9] The manor of Carlow seems to have been held by John de Clahull in the later twelfth century; a charter concerning the institution of a cleric Thurstin to the moiety of several churches in Obargi, shows that John de Clahull held Carlow around the year 1200.[10] However, as argued by O'Conor, William Marshal seems to have acquired Carlow in the first decade of the thirteenth century as internal evidence suggests that the town charter was issued by William Marshal before 1210.[11] No charter survives for the borough at Ferns. However, it seems likely that it was established by William Marshal the Elder in the early thirteenth century, as Ferns was held in demesne by the lords of Leinster. The first references to burgages and burgesses appear in documents from the second half of the thirteenth century.[12]

The documentary evidence therefore suggests that these towns could have been established prior to the construction of the stone castles in each of these locations. However, in the case of Trim, this seems unlikely. The documentary and archaeological evidence suggests that the ringwork castle at Trim was constructed in 1172, destroyed and rebuilt in 1172-3,[13] and went out of use between 1173 and 1186, depending on exactly when the construction of the stone castle began. It seems likely that the borough may have been established and the stone castle begun at the same time. At Kilkenny, the documentary evidence mentioned above suggests that there was a town of some description in the 1170s, which was probably contemporary with the ringwork castle. However, the settlement probably did not acquire the status of a borough until the early twelfth century, possibly around the same time as the construction of the stone castle began. In the case of Ferns, the lack of certainty regarding the nature of the early earthwork castle, the chronology of the stone castle and the establishment of the

[9] Tommy Clarke, 'Medieval Carlow: some documents' in *Carloviana*, xxviii (1980), p. 4.
[10] J. T. Gilbert, (ed.), *"Crede Mihi". The most ancient register book of the archbishops of Dublin before the Reformation* (Dublin, 1897), p. 52; Charles McNeill, (ed.), *Calendar of Archbishop Alen's register, c.1172-1534* (Dublin, 1950), p. 26.
[11] Gearóid MacNiocaill, *Na burgéisi, XII-XV aois,* (2 vols, Dublin, 1964), pp 130-8; Kieran O'Conor, 'Carlow Castle – who built and occupied the first castle here?' in *Carloviana,* iv (1998), p. 39.
[12] P. H. Hore, *The history of the town and county of Wexford* (6 vols, London, 1900-11), vi, 6.
[13] See Chapter Eight (section 8.2).

borough makes it impossible to assess whether or not the possible ringwork castle was associated with a sizeable settlement.

Several other ringwork castles seem to have been associated with Anglo-Norman boroughs. The documentary evidence shows that the ringwork castles at Carrick (site no. 36), Moone (site no. 2), Newcastle McKynegan (site no. 50), Rathangan (site no. 4) and Pigeonpark (Danesfort) (site no. 10) were all associated with settlements that had borough status, although it is unclear when exactly they acquired it. Moone is the only one of these boroughs for which a charter has survived. The charter was issued by William Marshal the Younger and dates to *c.*1223.[14] However, the charter states that the rent to be paid by the burgesses of Moone was set by Geoffrey fitz Robert, seneschal of Leinster, who died in 1211.[15] This indicates that the charter postdates the foundation of the town by at least twelve years and possibly up to thirty years. In the case of Carrick, the documentary evidence suggests that, like Moone, the borough was probably founded in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. The 'burgesses' of Carrick are first mentioned in the deforestation charter issued by Richard Marshal between 1231 and 1234.[16] The partial ringwork castle was constructed in the initial conquest period and it is possible that Strongbow founded the associated borough before his death in 1176. It seems unlikely that the borough was established by the justiciar during the period of Isabella de Clare's wardship, as it would have involved significant outlay and the Crown would not have benefited in the long term. It seems most likely that the borough was founded under William Marshal the Elder or Younger. The borough associated with the demesne manor of Danesfort may also have been established during the period of the Marshals' lordship of Leinster, although much of the surviving documentary evidence for Danesfort relates to the later medieval period. The extent of the manor of Danesfort taken in 1307 refers to the 'burgesses of the town', indicating that the settlement had acquired the status of a borough by the early fourteenth century.[17] It

[14] MacNiocaill, *Na buirgéisí,* pp 246-50; James Mills, (ed.), *Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls or proceedings in Court of the Justiciar of Ireland,* (3 vols, London, 1905-56), i, 369-71.
[15] N. B. White, (ed.), *Irish monastic and episcopal deeds, AD 1200-1600* (Dublin, 1936), p. 313.
[16] Gilbert, (ed.), *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin,* ii, 154; G. H. Orpen and E. St John Brooks, 'Charters of Earl Richard Marshal of the Forests of Ross and Taghmon' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, lxiv (1934), p. 56.
[17] Paul Dryburgh and Brendan Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland*, (Kew, 2007), p. 80.

seems likely that the borough at Newcastle McKynegan was established in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century at the same time as the royal castle. However, the earliest known references to burgesses at Newcastle are contained in late twelfth century documents. It is also unclear when Rathangan acquired borough status. The town was burnt by the Gaelic Irish in 1299 or 1300.[18] By 1331, the town had definitely acquired borough status as an extent taken following the death of John fitz Thomas records that the rent from the burgages in the town of Rathangan amounted to £6 3*s*. 2*d*.[19]

The chronological relationship between these castles and towns is unclear. In the case of Carrick, the documentary evidence shows that the partial ringwork castle was constructed during the initial conquest period and the borough was almost certainly established later. It is unclear in the cases of both Moone and Danesfort whether the ringwork castle or the borough was established first or whether they were planned together as part of a planned settlement. The charter of Moone contains a reference to the 'castle', showing that it was definitely in existence by *c*. 1223.[20]

The documentary evidence contains some references to the number of burgages contained in the settlements of Carrick, Moone, Newcastle McKynegan, Rathangan and Danesfort. The extent of the manor of Moone taken in 1299 records that the rent paid by the burgesses amounted to £8 0*s*. and 4*d*.[21] This indicates that, if the burgesses were paying rent of 1*s*. per burgage as stated in the charter of *c*. 1223,[22] there were 160 burgages in the town.[23] An extent of the manor of Newcastle states that there were 180 burgages in 1304-5.[24] An extent of the manor of Carrick, taken in 1324, records that the town at Carrick had 110 burgage plots of which 3 were waste due to a lack of tenants.[25]

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[18] H. S. Sweetman, (ed.), *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland,* (5 vols, London, 1875-83), v, 20; Mills, (ed.), *Cal. Just. Rolls,* i, 230.
[19] Gearóid MacNiocaill, (ed.), *The Red Book of the earls of Kildare*, (Dublin, 1964), p. 102; John Bradley, Andrew Halpin and H.A. King, 'Urban Archaeological Survey - Kildare', (unpublished, Archaeological Archives, Dublin, undated), p. 414.
[20] MacNiocaill, *Na buirgéisí,* pp 246-50; Mills, (ed.), *Cal. just. rolls,* i, 369-71.
[21] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.,* iv, 309-10.
[22] MacNiocaill, *Na buirgéisí*, pp 246-50; Mills, (ed.), *Cal. just. rolls*, i, 369-71.
[23] Bradley, Halpin and King, 'Urban Archaeological Survey – Kildare', p. 327.
[24] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.*, v, 115.
[25] Dryburgh and Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland,* p. 126.

In 1331, the rent from the burgages in the town of Rathangan amounted to £6 3*s*. 2*d*.[26] This suggests that there were approximately 120 burgages in the town.[27] Although it is unclear how many burgages there were in Danesfort, the documentary evidence suggests that it was a sizeable settlement in the late medieval period. The documentary evidence also indicates that the settlement at Danesfort may have been enclosed by defences of some kind. A charter issued in 1426 records that the messuage that John Keppagh granted to Ralph Archer was located 'outside the south gate of said town in the corner near the highway which leads to Waterford.'[28] The modern road, which leads southwards from Danesfort in the direction of Stonyford, probably follows the same route as the medieval highway mentioned and it can be assumed that the south gate was located somewhere along this road. As no traces of town defences or gates remain at ground level, it seems likely that they were earth and timber constructions. The aerial photographs show a linear crop mark to the north of the ringwork castle, running from east to west (Plate 6a), and a second linear crop-mark, running north-south, at the north-east of the townland.[29] It seems possible that these linear features show the line of the late medieval town defences.

While the documentary evidence discussed above shows that the boroughs of Carrick, Moone and Danesfort were substantial settlements, their exact locations are unknown and no house platforms or associated earthworks are visible at ground level. At Carrick, the parish church of St Nicholas's is located approximately 850m to the south of the ringwork castle, also in the townland of Newtown.[30] It seems likely that the settlement was located in between these two sites, possibly strung out along the old road that seems to have connected them. The townland name of 'Newtown' strongly suggests that the borough was located in this area. Bradley and King's suggestion that the settlement was located on the northern side of the river, in the vicinity of the tower house known as Ferrycarrig Castle, seems highly unlikely.[31]

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[26] MacNiocaill, (ed.), *The Red Book of the earls of Kildare*, p. 102; Bradley, Halpin and. King, 'Urban archaeological survey – Kildare', p. 414.
[27] Bradley, Halpin and. King, 'Urban archaeological survey – Kildare', p. 414.
[28] Edmund Curtis, (ed.), *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 1172-1603* (6 vols, Dublin, 1932-43), iii, 56-7.
[29] KK023-060001 and KK023-060002.
[30] WX037-030.
[31] John Bradley and H. A. King, 'Urban Archaeology Survey - Wexford' (unpublished, Archaeology Archives, Dublin, undated), p. 54.

It seems likely that the settlement at Moone was also located between the parish church, which occupied the site of the early medieval monastic house, and the ringwork castle, which is located approximately 750m to the west. As Bradley and King have argued, the area to the west of the church would be the most likely location for the bulk of the houses and burgage plots in terms of the local topography, as the area closer to the River Greese is quite boggy and low-lying.[32] This settlement may have extended westwards as far as the ringwork castle site, although no traces survive at ground level.

At Danesfort, the settlement was probably located between the ringwork and bailey at the crossroads and the parish church of St Michael's, which lies approximately 700m to the south-south-east of the ringwork and bailey castle. The two sites are linked by the old main road. The linear pattern of the present field system at the north-east of the townland of Danesfort is suggestive of burgage plots. While the present fields are far too large to be interpreted as burgage plots, it seems possible that they were created by joining several plots together.

The plan of the medieval settlement at Rathangan is unclear. The church and ringwork castle are located approximately 60m apart, and are situated to the north-west of the modern town. It seems likely that these sites were the focus of the medieval settlement and that the focus of the town shifted in the early modern period. However, as Bradley, Halpin and King have pointed out, the plots on Main Street seem to preserve a burgage plot pattern.[33] The layout of the town of Newcastle McKynegan is also unknown. It seems probable that it was centered on the church and ringwork castle although no traces of house sites or burgage plots are visible at ground level.

The documentary evidence indicates that there were medieval boroughs associated with the possible ringwork castles at Lea, Co. Laois (site no. 15), Rathdowney, Co. Laois (site no. 16), Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford (site no. 39) and Greatisland (site nos. 42 and 43). The evidence for these settlements and the associated possible ringwork castles is discussed in the site reports in the Gazetteer.

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[32] Bradley, Halpin and King, 'Urban Archaeological Survey - Kildare', pp 326-7.
[33] Ibid., p. 415.

7.3 Ringwork castles and manorial centres

The majority of ringwork castles seem to have been associated with smaller settlements which functioned as manorial centres. The most visible remnant of a manorial settlement in the landscape is generally the church. In Ireland, medieval church sites are often occupied by eighteenth and nineteenth-century Church of Ireland churches. Proximity to a known medieval church site is viewed as one of the main criteria for classifying an earthwork as a possible ringwork site.[34] Sweetman has commented that the link between earthwork castles and ecclesiastical remains '...is not as pronounced' in Ireland as it is in England, although this statement is not supported by any evidence.[35] Association with a medieval church or church site has been identified as one of four main identifying characteristics of the ringwork castle in the methodology for ringwork castle identification proposed in Chapter Three.

Eighteen (86%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area out of seem to be associated with known medieval church sites (sites nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 36, 47, 49, 50). This includes the ringwork castles and churches discussed above, which were associated with urban settlements. As discussed in the previous chapter, ringwork castles appear to have been deliberately constructed close to pre-existing churches; the place-name, documentary and archaeological evidence suggests that nine of the eighteen associated churches may be pre-Norman in origin.[36] Three (14%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area are not associated with any known church site. These sites are the partial ringwork castle at Baginbun, Co. Wexford (site no. 31), where the occupation of the ringwork fortification seems to have been limited to the initial conquest period, the excavated ringwork castle at Castletobin, Co. Kilkenny (site no. 6), which does not seem to have been associated with any known church sites, and Dunbrin Lower, Co. Laois (site no. 13). Although the exact location of the church at Dunbrin is unknown, the documentary evidence shows that there was a parish church at Dunbrin in the early thirteenth century.[37] As the

[34] Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster' (3 vols, PhD, Cardiff, 1993), i, 60.
[35] David Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland* (Cork, 1999), pp 10-13.
[36] See Chapter Six (Section 6.4)
[37] J. T. Gilbert, (ed.), *Register of the Abbey of St Thomas, Dublin* (London, 1889), pp 160-1

adjoining townlands of Dunbrin Lower and Upper are quite small, it seems likely that the church was located within 500m of the ringwork castle.

Ten (56%) of the eighteen ringwork castles associated with medieval church sites are within 300m of the church (site nos. 1, 4, 12, 20, 25, 28, 47, 49, 50). For example, the ringwork castle and church site at Danestown, Co. Meath, are located approximatelt 50m apart and the ringwork entrance is orientated directly towards the church (Plate 11b). However, the remainder are further away; four are within 600m of the associated church site (site nos. 11, 23, 26, 27) and the remaining four are within 900m (2, 3, 10, 36). This shows that, although some manorial settlements consist of a neatly juxtaposed church and castle, many do not, and some ringwork castles are up to 900m away from their associated churches. This is problematic because the siting of an earthwork in close proximity to a church has often been pinpointed as a crucial factor in identifying ringwork castles.

The ringwork castles and churches that are located within 300m of each other are clearly components of the same manorial settlement. However, where the church is further away from the ringwork castle, it can be more difficult to prove association. It is notable that three of the four ringwork castles that are between 600m and 900m away from the nearest church are associated with boroughs; as discussed above, the large medieval settlements at Moone, Carrick and Danesfort were probably located between the castle and the church in each case, which accounts for the large gap in between the two. However, in other cases, the reasons behind the dispersed character of the manorial centres are more difficult to explain. As discussed in Chapter Six, the Anglo-Norman tendency to position their castles close to pre-existing ecclesiastical sites would have had implications in terms of the layout of associated Anglo-Norman settlements. This strategy would have limited the sites available for castle construction to some extent and may have ultimately resulted in settlements that were less nucleated than those established on 'green-field' sites.

This dispersed nature of some manorial settlements seems to be peculiar to Ireland as English manorial villages are typically nucleated around a church and castle, which are

generally quite close to one another. This phenomenon has been noted before by Irish archaeologists. For example, the lack of an obvious church in the excavated Anglo-Norman village of Piperstown, Co. Louth, puzzled the excavator, who suggested that the village was served by the medieval parish church at Drumshallon, approximately 500m to the south.[38]

In order to prove the association between church and castle sites, particularly when distances of more than a few hundred metres are involved, other evidence, including the historical geography of the local area, must be taken into account. Townland and parish boundaries can be extremely useful in this regard, as townlands probably date back to the twelfth century at least, although some may have been sub-divided and boundaries may have changed slightly since the medieval period.[39] It is notable that, within the study area, fourteen (78%) of the eighteen ringwork castles and associated churches are located within the same townland as each other (site nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 12, 20, 23, 25, 26, 28, 36, 49, 50). The four ringwork castles that are not in the same townland as their associated churches are Ballyvolan Lower (site no. 47), Trim (site no. 27), Kilkenny (site no. 8) and Pigeonpark (Danesfort) (site no. 10). In the cases of Trim and Kilkenny, the ringworks and church sites are located within settlements that developed into major Anglo-Norman towns, which means that the process of townland formation would have differed from the process in rural areas. It seems probable that the townland of Pigeonpark is a post-medieval creation and that the ringwork and bailey castle and the church were both originally located in the townland of Danesfort.

Townland boundaries are clearly an important tool in establishing whether or not castle and church sites are likely to be associated. It is also notable that ten (48%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area are located in townlands that share the name of the modern civil parish, emphasising the relationship between medieval manorial settlements, manors and parishes.

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[38] T. B. Barry, Excavations at Piperstown deserted medieval village, Co. Louth, 1987', in *P.R.I.A.*, c, Section C (2000), p. 113.
[39] T. B. Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland* (London, 1987), p. 22.

Other evidence, including the position of the ringwork castles and churches in the medieval road network and the orientation of the entrances to ringwork castles, can also offer clues regarding the relationship between sites. For example, the entrance to the ringwork castle at Rathangan, Co. Kildare (site no. 4), is located at the east of the site and is orientated directly towards the site of the medieval church, which is occupied by a nineteenth-century Church of Ireland church (Plate 4a). Similarly, the entrance to the ringwork castle at Rodanstown, Co. Meath (site no. 26) is positioned at the south-east of the site and is aligned with the modern road which leads directly to the medieval church site, approximately 550m to the south east. It seems probable that the road originally extended all the way up to the entrance.

The evidence for chapels within some earthwork castles adds another dimension to our understanding of the relationship between ringwork castles and associated church sites. Although it has long been recognised that most stone castles incorporated at least one chapel, the possibility that many earth and timber castles may also have had chapels has generally been overlooked. As chapels associated with earthwork castles would generally have been timber constructions, they tend to leave no surface remains and are usually identified archaeologically on the basis of their east-west orientation and artefactual evidence.[40] Although few timber chapels have been identified through excavation, the documentary evidence attests that these chapels existed. For example, the documentary evidence shows that Adam de Feipo's motte castle at Skreen incorporated a chapel dedicated to St Nicholas. The motte castles at Portnascully and Clonamery in Co. Kilkenny also seem to have had chapels associated with them. A charter issued in 1240 confirmed a grant of property including '...the chapels of the castle of Polsculi and of the new castle of Clone' to the Arroasian abbey at Kilculliheen.[41] The motte castles at Skreen, Portnascully and Clonamery all had chapels associated with them despite the presence of medieval parish churches within 400m of all three mottes. As Speight has pointed out, chapels were expensive to run and the costs, which included the clergyman's salary, mass books and vestments, could be

[40] Sarah Speight, 'Religion in the bailey: charters, chapels and the clergy', *Château Gaillard*, xxi (2004), p. 275.
[41] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.*, i, 370-1. Thanks to Linda Shine who pointed out this reference to me.

offset by using the local parish church.[42] Therefore, the provision of a chapel in addition to a parish church would have made a major statement regarding the wealth and power of the lord responsible.

There is documentary evidence for only one chapel within a ringwork castle in the study area, associated with the ringwork and stone castle of Carrick in Co. Wexford. The extent of the manor of Carrick, which was taken in 1324, described the castle as empty, broken down and without a keeper and recorded that, within the close of the castle, there was an 'unroofed and almost ruinous hall and chapel'.[43] Its unclear if the close (*clausum*) mentioned was the area enclosed by the partial ringwork or a bailey located on the landward side of the castle. The area enclosed by the partial ringwork is relatively small, measuring approximately 1000m², and it seems unlikely that all of the buildings mentioned would have fit within it. However, no traces of a bailey survive at ground level and limited excavations carried out by in the area to the south-west of the partial ringwork failed to find any evidence for occupation.[44] The presence of this chapel within the castle complex may explain the distance between the castle and the parish church of St Nicholas's, which lies 850m to the south. The possible ringwork castle at Mallardstown Great in Co. Kilkenny, which has been removed, may also have had a chapel associated with it. A charter issued by William Maillard in the early thirteenth century records the granting of both the parish church of Kilmacmintan (Mallardstown) and the chapel of the Villa Mallardi to Kells Priory.[45] It seems possible that other ringwork castles in the study area also had timber chapels associated with them, which may be identified through excavation in the future.

7.5 Ringwork castles and 'landscapes of lordship'

Castles did not stand in isolation in the landscape; they stood at the centre of complex landscapes, designed to display the wealth and power of their owners. These 'landscapes of lordship', as Liddiard has termed them, are generally associated with

[42] Speight, 'Religion in the bailey: charters, chapels and the clergy', p. 272.
[43] Dryburgh and Smith, (eds), *Extents and inquisitions of medieval Ireland*, p. 126.
[44] Isabel Bennett, 'Preliminary archaeological excavations at Ferrycarrig ringwork, Newtown Td., Co. Wexford' in *J.W.H.S.*, x (1984-5), pp 33.
[45] Curtis, (ed.), *Cal. Ormond Deeds*, i, 18; White, (ed.), *Irish monastic and episcopal deeds*, p. 307; E. St J. Brooks, *Knights' fees in counties Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny* (Dublin, 1950), pp 260-1.

major stone castles.[46] However, even relatively modest earthwork castles could be surrounded by complex manorial landscapes. A late fourteenth-century Welsh poem by Iolo Goch describes Owain Glyn Dwr's ringwork and bailey castle at Sycharth,[47] offering a rare contemporary description of an earthwork castle and the designed landscape around it, which incorporated a vineyard, an orchard, a rabbit warren, a deer park, a mill, a stone dovecote and a fish pond:

> Orchard, vineyard, white fortress;
> The master's rabbit warren;
> Ploughs and strong steeds of great fame:
> Near the court, even finer,
> The deer park within that field;
> Fresh green meadows and hayfields;
> Neatly enclosed rows of grain;
> Fine mill on smooth-flowing stream;
> Dove-cot, a bright stone tower;
> A fish pond, enclosed and deep,
> Where nets are cast when need be,
> Abounding, no argument,
> In pike and splendid whiting;
> His land a board where birds dwell,
> Peacocks, high-stepping herons.[48]

While Goch's poem is sycophantic in tone and should be treated with some scepticism,[49] it was presumably intended to be heard by residents of the castle, including Owain Glyn Dwr himself, so it seems unlikely that it would have contained a description that was completely fictitious, although Sycharth's beauty may have been exaggerated. The excavations carried out at the site have uncovered some of buildings associate with the castle, including a hall on the summit of the mound.[50] Also, some of the features mentioned in the poem have been identified in the surrounding landscape. Hague and Warhurst noted that the fishponds mentioned are still discernable to the east of the site, while the probable site of the medieval mill is located to the north-west of the site, near the bridge over the River Cynllaith.[51] A more recent project involving

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[46] Robert Liddiard, *"Landscapes of lordship": Norman castles and the countryside in medieval Norfolk, 1066-1200* (Oxford, 2000).

[47] The earth and timber castle at Sycharth is described as a motte and bailey in the excavation report (D. B. Hague and Cynthia Warhurst, 'Excavations at Sycharth Castle, Denbighshire, 1962-63', in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, cxv (1966), pp 108-27). However, as the enclosing bank is almost as high as the summit of the mound, it seems more reasonable to classify the site as a ringwork castle.

[48] J. P. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Lyrics* (London, 1965), pp 135-38

[49] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes*, p. 180.

[50] Hague and Warhurst, 'Excavations at Sycharth Castle', pp 108-27.

[51] Ibid., p. 112.

gradiometry and magnetic susceptibility investigated two areas located to the south and west of the motte. This survey identified probable linear features, a hitherto unknown outer bank and ditch enclosing the motte and a possible collapsed building.[52] The designed landscape at Sycharth demonstrates that even modest earth and timber castles could be surrounded by complex manorial landscapes.

The study of the medieval archaeology of Ireland has generally tended to focus on more obvious components of the Anglo-Norman rural landscape, such as castles and churches, while less visible features, including mills, deer parks, rabbit warrens, fishponds and dovecotes, have been somewhat neglected. Consequently, earthwork castles have tended to be viewed as isolated structures in the landscape rather than as the focus of manorial landscapes. However, there is a growing awareness of manorial landscapes amongst Irish archaeologists and some research published in recent years, including Murphy and O'Conor's article on the deer parks of medieval Ireland, has begun to address this previously neglected area of research.[53]

The present study has attempted to identify such landscape features in proximity to ringwork castles. Association with Anglo-Norman landscape features can be an important factor in identifying ringwork castles and these landscape features also add another dimension to our understanding of Anglo-Norman manorial landscapes in general.

7.5 Mills

Medieval mills are found in association with many castle sites. Mills were important symbols of lordship as they were controlled by the lord of the manor, who generally exercised a monopoly over milling in the manor. Tenants were obliged to use the manorial mill and paid a fee for grinding, which was known as multure.

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[52] S. G. Smith, 'Report on the geophysical and historical survey at Sycharth motte and bailey' in *Denbighshire Historical Society,* lii (2003), pp 28-30.

[53] Margaret Murphy and Kieran O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland' in *Eolas: the journal of the American society of Irish medieval studies*, i (2006), pp 53-70.

Both windmills and watermills were used in Anglo-Norman Ireland. Watermills were widely used in pre-Norman Ireland while windmills were probably introduced by the Anglo-Normans. The use of windmills of post-mill type is documented in Normandy from the late eleventh century, and although there are no known documentary references to windmills in Ireland prior to 1281, it seems likely that they were in use before this date.[54] The evidence from England shows that windmills were favoured at sites where the water supply was inadequate for a watermill. However, they did not replace watermills and sometimes both types of mill were found together; as Holt has stated, '...the windmill came to supplement the watermill, not to supplant it.'[55]

Very few medieval windmills or windmill mounds have been identified in Ireland and none were identified in association with ringwork castles within the study area. However, the ringwork castle at Rindoon, which lies outside the study area in Co. Roscommon, is associated with a tower windmill of possible late medieval date.[56]

Within the study area, the earthworks at Rathregan (site no. 24) and Templetown (site no. 45), both of which have been discarded as possible ringwork sites, seem to have been associated with windmills. The low motte at Rathregan, which was erroneously identified as a ringwork castle by Rice,[57] may have been re-used as a platform for a windmill in the post-medieval period. According to O'Donovan, the earthwork was known as Mill Hill in the mid-nineteenth century, '...from a wind-mill that stood there formerly', although '...some say that Mill Hill is a moat'.[58] The earthwork at Templetown on Hook Head, Co. Wexford, was identified by Colfer as a possible ringwork castle site.[59] However, it seems more likely that this earthwork, which has now been removed, represented the windmill mound of a medieval post-mill.[60]

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[54] Colin Rynne, *Technological change in Anglo-Norman Munster* (Carrigtwohill, 1998), p. 79.
[55] Richard Holt, *The mills of medieval England* (Oxford, 1988), p. 34.
[56] J. A. Claffey, 'Rindoon windmill tower' in Murtagh, Harmon, (ed.), *Irish midland studies: essays in commemoration of N. I I. English* (Athlone, 1980), pp 84-8.
[57] Gerard Rice, *Norman Kilcloon, 1171-1700* (Navan, 2001), p. 24.
[58] Michael Herity, (ed.), *Ordnance Survey letters Meath: letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Meath collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1836* (Dublin, 2001), p. 113.
[59] William Colfer, 'Anglo-Norman settlement in medieval Shelburne, 1169-1307' (MLitt, TCD, 1986), p. 77; William Colfer, *Arrogant trespass: Anglo-Norman Wexford, 1169-1400* (Enniscorthy, 2002), p. 57 and p. 196.
[60] See Chapter Three (Section 3.6) for a discussion of both sites.

The documentary evidence shows that there were watermills associated with the ringwork castles at Carrick, Pigeonpark (Danesfort) and Moone. There was definitely a mill at Carrick in the thirteenth century as it was mentioned in the deforestation charter issued by Richard Marshal, earl of Leinster (1231-1234). This charter states that the boundary of the Forest of Taghmon ran from '...the place where the river which flows between the castle of Karrich [and] the park flows [into] the Slaney, and by that river ascending to my mill on that river.'[61] Extents of the manors of Carrick and Danesfort, which were taken following the death of Joan de Valence in 1307, record that there were two watermills at Carrick and one watermill at Danesfort by this time.[62] The documentary evidence shows that there was more than one mill at Moone in the early twelfth century. The charter of Moone, which was issued by William Marshal the Younger *c.*1223, refers to 'corn mills'.[63] The *Civil Survey* also mentions a mill at Moone in the mid-seventeenth century.[64] Although the type of mill is unspecified, it can be assumed that this mill was powered by water and was located somewhere along the River Greese, possibly in the same location as the watermill shown to the north-east of the ringwork castle on the First Edition O.S. map.

Possible mill races have been identified close to the ringwork castles of Rodanstown (site no. 26) and Kilpipe (site no. 49). The First Edition O.S. map shows a linear feature to the north of Rodanstown House which is labelled as the 'old mill race'. Although there are no known medieval references to a mill at Rodanstown, it seems probable that there was a mill associated with the Anglo-Norman manor. No trace of this mill race can be seen at ground level, although the field boundaries seem to respect the line of this feature for a distance of approximately 1km. At Kilpipe, a possible mill-race was identified in the detached bailey of the ringwork castle at Kilpipe. The river, which flows past the ringwork castle site, forms the boundary of the bailey on its eastern side..

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[61] Gilbert, (ed.), *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin,* ii, 154; Orpen and Brooks, 'Charters of Earl Richard Marshal of the Forests of Ross and Taghmon', p. 56.

[62] Dryburgh and Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland*, p. 85 and p. 80.

[63] Bradley, Halpin and King ('Urban archaeological survey – Kildare', p. 324) also stated that there was a 'hospice' at Moone based on this charter. However, the charter seems to refer to people under the earl's hospitality rather than a physical 'hospital' building.

[64] R. C. Simmington, (ed.), *The Civil Survey, AD 1654-1656. Volume 8: County of Kildare* (Dublin, 1952), p. 116.

A small channel, which appears to be man-made, leaves and then rejoins the river at the east of the bailey. It seems possible that this channel represents the remains of a mill-race for a medieval watermill. It seems unlikely that a watermill could have used the river directly for its water supply as the river is quite fast flowing at this point. A possible mill pond and associated mill race was also noted close to the low motte at Rathregan, Co. Meath. The pond is located to the north-east of the motte and seems to have been fed by a mill race which diverts water from the stream into the pond and then back into the stream.

7.6 Deer parks

Deer parks were an important component of the landscape of medieval England. At the height of their popularity, there were approximately 3200 deer parks in England, ranging from vast royal deer parks to the smaller parks of the minor nobility.[65] The deer parks of medieval England were frequently located close to major stone castles but could also be associated with earth and timber castles. For example, the twelfth-century ringwork castle at Devizes was constructed inside the boundary of the deer park, close to the planned Norman settlement of Devizes.[66]

The study of deer parks has been rather neglected by Irish archaeologists although recent research has begun to address this deficiency. As Murphy and O'Conor have shown, the documentary and place name evidence shows clearly that, as in England, deer parks were an important element of the landscape of medieval Ireland, although very few have yet been identified archaeologically.[67]

The documentary and cartographic evidence shows that there was a deer park associated with the ringwork castle and manor of Carrick in the mid-thirteenth century. As discussed above, the ringwork castle at Carrick, which was constructed at the time of the Anglo-Norman conquest, became a demesne castle of the Marshals lords of Leinster and was at the centre of a prosperous manor by the mid-thirteenth century. The park is

[65] Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', p. 58.
[66] Robert Liddiard, *Castles in context: power, symbolism and landscape, 1066-1500* (Macclesfield, 2005), pp 100-102.
[67] Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', pp 53-72.

mentioned in a deforestation charter issued by Richard Marshal between 1231 and 1234, which describes the boundary of the Forest of Taghmon as running from, '...the place where the river which flows between the castle of Karrich [and] the park flows [into] the Slaney, and by that river ascending to my mill on that river'.[68] In 1275, the 'park of Wexford' is mentioned in a document relating to a dispute between Agatha de Mortimer and William and Joan de Valence, regarding property in the forest of Taghmon.[69] The park is also mentioned in the inquisition taken on the death of Aymer de Valence in 1324, which describes it as a park with oak trees containing 10 acres of land which is worth nothing save the pasturing of animals.[70] The *Civil Survey* records that, in the mid-seventeenth century, 'the Parke', which was located within the parish of Carrick, was held by William Synott.[71] It seems likely that 'the park of Wexford' and the park adjoining Carrick were the same park and that this Anglo-Norman deer park is represented by the modern townland of Park, which lies between the castle of Carrick and Wexford Town. This townland, which is an irregular lobe shape, adjoins the townland of Newtown to the east. This location was probably selected because the River Slaney provided a natural boundary on the park's northern and eastern sides, necessitating the construction of park boundaries only on the southern and eastern sides of the park. Unfortunately, no traces of enclosing banks or ditches around the periphery of the park are visible at ground level. In relation to English castles and associated deer parks, Creighton has noted that '...the most common arrangement was for the park to take the form of a lobe and to append directly onto one side of the castle.'[72] The park at Carrick does not quite conform to this pattern as the deforestation charter shows that the western boundary of the park was the stream which lies approximately 400m to the south-east of the ringwork castle.

There were deer parks associated with the Anglo-Norman stone castles at Carlow and Trim, both of which replaced earlier ringwork castles. The deer park of 'Balydonegan'

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[68] Gilbert, (ed.), *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey,* ii, 154; Orpen and Brooks, 'Charters of Earl Richard Marshal of the Forests of Ross and Taghmon', p. 56.
[69] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.*, ii, 194; Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', p. 72.
[70] Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', p. 72.
[71] R. C. Simmington, (ed.), *The Civil Survey, AD 1654-1656. Volume 9: County of Wexford* (Dublin, 1953), p. 107.
[72] Creighton, *Castles and landscapes,* p. 188.

is mentioned several times in the early fourteenth century sources. The townland of Dunganstown, approximately 2km to the north of Carlow Castle has been identified as the location of the medieval manor of 'Balydonegan' and it seems likely that the deer park was located in the townland of Oakpark, which adjoins Dunganstown to the east.[73] Although the earliest known documentary reference to the deer park at Dunganstown dates to 1305,[74] Murphy and O'Conor have argued that the presence of fallow deer bones associated with the ringwork castle phase of Carlow Castle suggests that the deer park may have existed by the early thirteenth century.[75] In the case of the deer park at Trim the documentary evidence is fourteenth century and later in date, [76] and there is no evidence to suggest that the deer park was contemporary with the conquest period ringwork castle.

There are also probable deer parks located close to the ringwork castles of Moone and Pigeonpark (Danesfort) and the possible ringwork castle of Rath Turtle Moat (site no. 51). However, the chronologies of these deer parks are unclear and the apparent lack of Anglo-Norman documentary evidence suggests that they were probably established in the post-medieval period. The possible deer park at Moone is located to the east of the ringwork castle, on the eastern side of the River Greese. This area, which is labelled 'Moone Park' on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map, may represent a deer park established in the medieval period in association with the Anglo-Norman manor of Moone, although it seems more likely that it is post-medieval in origin. The First Edition O.S. map also depicts a 'deer park' at Danesfort, to the south of Danesfort House. It seems more likely that this park was created as part of the designed landscape associated with the seventeenth and eighteenth-century estate around Danesfort House. Similarly, it seems likely that the townland of Deerpark, in which the possible ringwork of Rath Turtle Moat is located, represents a post-medieval deer park associated with the Blessington estate, rather than a medieval park.

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[73] Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, iii, 81-2; Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', p. 61.
[74] Mills, (ed.), *Cal. Just* ,ii, 136.
[75] Patricia Lynch, 'Animal bone report' in Kieran O'Conor, 'Carlow Castle preliminary excavation report' (unpublished excavation report, 2002) pp 14-15; Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', pp 63-4.
[76] Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', p. 63 and p. 70.

7.7 Rabbit warrens, fishponds and dovecotes

Like deer parks, rabbit warrens are a well-known site type in England and Wales, which have been somewhat neglected by Irish archaeology. In England, over two thousand individual pillow mounds have been identified.[77] However, recent research has show that the majority of these pillow mounds are post-medieval in date,[78] possibly explaining the apparent absence of pillow mounds associated with Anglo-Norman manorial settlement in Ireland.

It is generally accepted that rabbits were introduced to Ireland by the Anglo-Normans in the late twelfth century. The first known reference to rabbits in Ireland is contained in a charter dating from 1185.[79] However, this charter, which recorded King John's grant of certain lands, rights and privileges to his chamberlain, Alard, stated only that Alard had the right to hunt '...stag, doe, pig, hare, wolf and rabbit' and does not refer to a specific r warren.[80] A charter issued *c.*1200 shows that rabbits were actually present in Ireland by this time and were being farmed. It records the archbishop of Dublin's grant to the Priory of the Holy Trinity, Dublin, of 100 rabbits a year from his warren at Portrane in north Co. Dublin.[81] Although the documentary sources attest that rabbit warrens were a relatively common feature of the Anglo-Norman manorial landscape in the thirteenth century, very few rabbit warren sites have been identified archaeologically in Ireland. A notable exception is the cruciform rabbit warren, located within a probable ringfort of pre-Norman origin, which has been identified at Shanid Upper in Co. Limerick.[82] The earthwork at Shanid is morphologically similar to the cruciform rabbit warren at Minchinhampton Common in Gloucestershire.[83] The identification of the site at Shanid as a rabbit warren is particularly relevant to this study because the site in question,

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[77] Tom Williamson, *The archaeology of rabbit warrens* (Princes Risborough, 2006), p. 16.
[78] Ibid., p. 28.
[79] Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish farming: a study based mainly on the law tracts of the seventh and eighth centuries AD* (Dublin, 1997), p. 131; Kieran O'Conor, 'Medieval rural settlement in Munster' in John Ludlow and Noel James, (eds), *Medieval Ireland: the Barryscourt lectures I-X*, (Carrigtwohill, 2004), pp 237; Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and Deer Parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', p. 57.
[80] Curtis, (ed.), *Cal. Ormond deeds*, i, 3-4.
[81] Charles McNeill, (ed.), *Calendar of Archbishop Alen's register, c.1172-1534* (Dublin, 1950), p. 30; Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and Deer Parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', p. 57.
[82] O'Conor, 'Medieval rural settlement in Munster', p. 238.
[83] Williamson, *The archaeology of rabbit warrens*, p. 41.

which is adjacent to the motte castle of Shanid, had previously been identified as a possible ringwork castle.[84]

Although no rabbit warrens were identified in association with ringwork castles in the study area, the documentary and place name evidence suggests that they existed. An extent of the manor of Danesfort, taken following the death of Joan de Valence, countess of Gloucester and Hereford, in 1307, records that the manor included a rabbit warren worth 6*s*. 8*d*.[85] Unfortunately, the location of this rabbit warren is unknown; the remains of the warren may have removed as a result of the development of the eighteenth and nineteenth century estate landscape associated with Danesfort House.

The place name evidence suggests that there may have been rabbit warrens close to the possible ringwork castle at Rathdowney and the ringwork castle at Dunbrin Lower. A bridge approximately 1km to the east of Rathdowney is labelled 'Coneyburrow Bridge' on the First Edition O.S. map, possibly indicating that there was a rabbit warren associated with the Anglo-Norman manor. Similarly, the name of the townland of 'Coneyburrow' to the north of Ardree, close to the ringwork castle at Dunbrin Lower, suggests that there may have been a rabbit warren, although the nature of the relationship between the medieval settlements of Ardree and Dunbrin is unclear.

The *Civil Survey* records that there was a castle, watermill and rabbit burrow at Kayer in the mid-seventeenth century.[86] However, as is argued in the site report on Dunanore, the medieval and post-medieval settlement of Kayer was almost certainly located in the townland of Wilton and was probably unrelated to the possible partial ringwork at Dunanore.

A rabbit warren is located close to the possible ringwork castle of Rath Turtle Moat in Co. Wicklow. This 'rabbit warren' is marked on a late eighteenth century map of the

[84] Barry, *The archaeology of medieval Ireland*, p. 53.
[85] Dryburgh and Smith (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland*, pp 79-80
[86] *Inventory*, no. 1615, p. 187; WX025-026.

Blessington Estate by John Langfield.[87] However, it seems likely that this rabbit warren was post-medieval rather than Anglo-Norman in date and was part of the demesne landscape associated with Blessington House.

Fishponds were also an important component of the landscapes that surrounded both castles and monastic houses. Fishponds had a practical purpose as they provided a supply of freshwater fish for the table of the aristocratic household or monastery. They also served as status symbols; fishponds were expensive to construct and maintain and the ownership of fishponds was only possible for a wealthy minority of Anglo-Norman society. Dyer has argued that fishponds not only served as a reminder of the power and wealth of the local lord but could also act as a physical boundary between the rich and poor. They were often constructed behind park boundaries or attached to moats so that they '...were associated with the physical barriers that helped to separate the aristocracy from the rest of society.'[88] Fishponds were generally located quite close to the aristocratic residence or monastery for security reasons as fishponds tended to attract thieves.[89]

As Murphy and O'Conor have noted, very few fishponds of any date are known in Ireland and a definite fishpond of Anglo-Norman date has yet to be identified.[90] However, the references to fishponds and fisheries contained in the Anglo-Norman documentary sources show that they were not unknown in medieval Ireland. While fishponds may have been generally scarcer in Ireland due to comparatively heavier reliance on river, lake and sea fish, it seems likely that there are many fishponds present in the Irish landscape, awaiting identification, although perhaps in smaller numbers than in England.

The documentary evidence shows that fish were kept at Danesfort in the early fourteenth century. An extent taken on the death of Joan de Valence, countess of

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[87] Eileen Reilly, 'Brief History of Blessington Demesne' (2000), http://www.mglarc.com/index.php/leinster/106-brief-history-of-blessington-demesne-co-wicklow-.html, accessed 23 July 2009.
[88] Christopher Dyer, 'The consumption of fresh-water fish in medieval England', in Michael Aston, (ed.), *Medieval fish, fisheries and fishponds*,(2 vols, Oxford 1988), i, 27.
[89] Oliver Rackham, *The illustrated history of the countryside* (London, 2003), p. 166.
[90] Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', p. 55.

Gloucester and Hereford, in 1307 records that there was '...a weir, whose fishery with the fishery of the River Nore, extends at 5*s*.'[91] The First Edition O.S. map shows three rectangular pools at the south-west corner of the townland of Danestown, which are supplied with water by a small stream. A small building, labeled 'bathing house' is also depicted, indicating that these pools may have been used for bathing in the nineteenth century. However, it seems possible that these pools, which are almost certainly man-made, represent the fishing weir mentioned in the extent. It is also possible that the fosse of the ringwork castle itself was used as a fishpond; a section of the fosse on the south-western side of the site is deeper than elsewhere and is filled with water. The edges of this rectangular pond seem to have been deliberately lined with stones. While this pond may be a post-medieval feature associated with the estate around Danesfort House, it is also possible that it represents a medieval fishpond. As mentioned above, the archaeological evidence from castles and manor houses in England shows that moats often functioned as fishponds or had fishponds attached to them.

The early fourteenth century extent of the manor of Danesfort also records that there was a dovecote there in the early fourteenth century.[92] Very few medieval dovecotes have survived in Ireland, probably because the vast majority of medieval dovecotes were constructed using timber or clay.[93] A ruined dovecote stands between the ringwork and its detached bailey at Pigeonpark (Danesfort) and it is tempting to interpret this structure as the dovecote mentioned in the medieval sources. However, the construction technique indicates that the structure is post-medieval in date, possibly dating to the sixteenth or seventeenth century.[94] It seems possible that this dovecote stands on the site of the medieval dovecote. An extent of the manor of Moone, taken following the death of William de Mohun, records that there was a dovecote and garden at Moone in 1282.[95]

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[91] Dryburgh and Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland*, p. 80.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Murphy and O'Conor, 'Castles and deer parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland', p. 56.
[94] Conleth Manning, 'Field report' in S.M.R. file KK023-059 (19 May 1997).
[95] Dryburgh and Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland*, p. 26.

7.8 Ringwork castles and tower houses

O'Conor has observed that 23% of motte castles in Leinster are found in close proximity to late medieval tower houses,[96] and has suggested that '...the juxtaposition of some mottes with tower houses must surely be taken as an indication that the former were in use until they were replaced by the latter at some stage in the fifteenth century.[97] This argument can also be applied to ringwork castles, which are also frequently associated with tower houses. Two (9.5%) of the twenty-one definite ringwork castles in the study area are located close to tower houses while a further four ringwork castles (19%) are located in close proximity to probable tower house sites.

There are tower houses close to the ringwork castles at Carrick, Co. Wexford, and Moone, Co. Kildare. At Carrick, the tower house is located on the opposite side of the River Slaney to the Anglo-Norman ringwork castle of Carrick. The tower house, which can be dated to the fifteenth century on architectural grounds,[98] was probably constructed to guard the ferry at Carrick, which was an important link in the local communications network. The ferry at Carrick existed from the Anglo-Norman period onwards. Although an extent taken in 1324 records that the ferry across the Slaney, which had been worth 2 marks was now worth nothing as 'all of the tenants have been destroyed by the war',[99] the ferry still seems to have been in operation in the early modern period. The construction of the tower house is generally attributed to the Roche family,[100] and the documentary evidence seems to support this tradition. An inquisition post mortem taken on the death of Nicholas Roche of Newbawn (Newbay townland in the parish of Carrick), in 1582, records that Nicholas had held a burgage in Carrick in addition to the castle of Carrick. In the mid-seventeenth century, the Civil Survey recorded that Walter Roche of Clonlogh held 'the ferry and parish of Carrigge',[101] although the castle is not mentioned. It seems unlikely that the occupation of the partial ringwork castle at Carrick overlapped with that of the tower house as the extent of the

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[96] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', pp 332-3; Kieran O'Conor, *The archaeology of medieval rural settlement in Ireland*,(Dublin, 1998), p. 35; Kieran O'Conor, 'Motte castles in Ireland: permanent fortresses, residences and manorial centres' in *Château Gaillard*, xx (2002), p. 174.

[97] O'Conor, *The archaeology of medieval rural settlement in Ireland*, p. 38.

[98] *Inventory*, no. 1523, p. 172.

[99] Dryburgh and Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland* (Kew, 2007), p. 126.

[100] Richard Roche, 'The Roches of Wexford' in *J.W.H.S.*, ii (1969), pp 39-48.

[101] Simmington, (ed.), *The Civil Survey, AD 1654-1656. Volume 9: County of Wexford*, p. 112.

manor of Carrick taken in 1324 indicates that the ringwork castle had been abandoned by this date.[102]

At Moone, Co. Kildare, a small tower house to the south of the church, in the grounds of Moone Abbey House. In 1580, there was a garrison stationed at 'the Moone',[103] and it seems likely that the garrison was based in a castle.[104] The Civil Survey records that there were two 'castles' at Moone in the mid-seventeenth century.[105] It seems likely that one of the castles mentioned was the tower house.

There are also probable tower sites located close to the ringwork castles at Pigeonpark (Danesfort), Rathealy, and Purcellsinch, all in Co. Kilkenny. These sites are somewhat problematic because it is unclear if the 'castle sites' represent tower houses or other types of castle. The prevalence of tower houses has led some scholars to assume that any 'castle' mentioned in the late medieval or early modern sources must be a tower house. For example, McCarthy's research on tower houses in Kilkenny was based on the premise that all known castle sites represent tower houses unless there is evidence to the contrary.[106] This assumption may have led to an overestimation of tower houses numbers.

At Danesfort, a castle is believed to have been located in the 'castle field',[107] close to the site of the seventeenth-century mansion of Danesfort House, which is also no longer extant. A depiction of a castellated building on the Down Survey barony map confirms that the castle was located on the west side of the Stoneyford Road in the vicinity of Danesfort House. According to Carrigan, James, third earl of Ormond, constructed this castle between 1382 and 1405.[108] Carrigan may have meant 1392 as Danesfort was not purchased by the earl of Ormond until 1391. Unfortunately, Carrigan failed to reference

[102] Dryburgh and Smith, (eds), *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland* (Kew, 2007), p. 126.
[103] H. C. Hamilton, (ed.), *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland of the reign of Elizabeth 1574-85 preserved in her Majesty's Public Record Office* (London, 1867), p. 266.
[104] Bradley, Halpin and King, 'Urban archaeological survey – Kildare', p. 328.
[105] Simmington, (ed.), *The Civil Survey, AD 1654-1656. Volume 8: County of Kildare*, pp 116-7.
[106] S. K. McCarthy, 'Castles in space: an exploration of the space in and around the tower houses south-east Kilkenny', (unpublished MPhil thesis, Dept. of Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Q.U.B., 2007), p. 18.
[107] Owen O'Kelly, *The place names of County Kilkenny* (Kilkenny, 1985), p. 180.
[108] William Carrigan, *The Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory*, (4 vols, Dublin, 1981, facsimile reprint of edition published in 1905), iii, 371

his source information. It seems possible that it was derived from a source that no longer survives. The 'castle site' at Rathealy is also described by Carrigan, who recorded that in the field to the east of the ringwork castle, there were '...many traces of buildings; also a square enclosure within which, no doubt, the castle of Rathealy stood.'[109] Unfortunately, all traces of these buildings and the enclosure have since been ploughed out and nothing is visible at ground level. At Purcellsinch in Co. Kilkenny, a fortified residence of some kind seems to have been constructed close to the ringwork castle in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, possibly suggesting continuity of high-status occupation. Unfortunately, Purcellsinch House, which probably incorporated the fortified house, was demolished prior to the construction of the Purcellsinch Industrial Park in the 1980s.

The ringwork castles and tower houses mentioned above may be associated and may indicate that there was continuity of high-status occupation in these locations. However, some other tower house sites seem to have contributed to incorrect identifications of ringwork castles as association between a tower house and an earlier circular earthwork has frequently been interpreted as evidence that the earlier earthwork represents the remains of a ringwork castle. For example, the large earthwork at Redcastle, Co. Laois (site no. 18),is classified as a ringwork castle by both the RMP and the *Inventory*, based on the fact that a known 'castle site' is located within it. The documentary evidence suggests that this castle a late medieval tower house and the earthwork probably represents an early medieval ringfort rather than a ringwork castle. Similarly, the earthworks at Boley and Rathnageeragh have been interpreted as ringwork castles because probable tower house sites are located in their interiors. As argued in Chapter Three (Section 3.6), these earthworks seem to represent circular moated sites which functioned as monastic granges belonging to nearby Tintern Abbey. These examples demonstrate that the association between a circular earthwork and a tower house does not necessarily indicate that the earthwork is a ringwork castle or that there was a 'castle' of any kind in that location in the Anglo-Norman period.

[109] Ibid., iii, 497.

In the case of Rathasker, Co. Kildare, the chronology and function of the castle site, and of the earthwork within which it was located, is unclear. O'Conor identified the earthwork at Rathasker as a possible ringwork castle, based on cartographic evidence.[110] Sweetman visited the site prior to its destruction in the 1970, and his description of the earthwork's siting and morphology suggests that it was probably a ringwork castle rather than a ringfort.[111] The documentary evidence shows that Philip Kerdyfe held half of a knight's fee at 'Rahoskyr' of William de London in the fourteenth century, providing a possible historical context for the site's occupation.[112] The First Edition O.S. map depicts a rectangular building within the earthwork and Sweetman's description records that there was a stone-lined depression, measuring 16m by 16m at the centre of the enclosed area.[113] This led O'Keeffe to suggest that the site represents nothing more than a tower house constructed inside a pre-existing ringfort.[114] However, even if the stone castle was a late medieval tower-house, this does not mean that the associated earthwork is not a ringwork castle.

As O'Conor has argued, the proximity of some earthwork castles to late medieval tower houses may suggest that there was continuous high-status occupation in these locations into the early modern period. This has implications in terms of the chronology of earthwork castles as it suggests that the earthwork castles may have been occupied up to a relatively late date, before being abandoned in favour of tower houses. The evidence for the occupation of ringwork castles into the late medieval period will be discussed in Chapter Eight. The continuity of high-status settlement in the same location into the post-medieval and modern periods can make the interpretation of earthworks somewhat difficult, particularly when a ringwork castle has become a feature within an estate landscape. For example, at Pigeonpark (Danesfort), the ringwork castle seems to have been superseded by a late fourteenth century stone castle which, in turn, was replaced

[110] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', ii, 744.
[111] David Sweetman, Field Report, 1971, contained in SMR File KD024-001.
[112] *James* Mills and M. J. McEnery, (eds), *Calendar of the Gormanston Register* (Dublin, 1916), p. 1; A. J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Knight's fees in Kildare, Leix and Offaly' in *J.R.S.A.I.,* ix, no. 2 (1961), p. 166.
[113] P. D. Sweetman, Field Report, 1971, SMR File KD024-001001.
[114] Tadhg O'Keeffe, 'The archaeology of Norman castles in Ireland' in *Archaeology Ireland,* iv (1990), p. 17.

by a late seventeenth century house.[115] The landscaping of the countryside around Danesfort House has resulted in significant problems in relation to the identification and interpretation of possible medieval features in the landscape. For example, the function and relationship between the possible ringwork at Danesfort (site no. 7) and the ringwork and bailey site at Pigeonpark (site no. 10) is unclear. Both of these sites may have become features in the estate landscape surrounding Danesfort House. The nineteenth-century documentary evidence suggests that the folly on the summit of the possible ringwork was used a summer house.[116] The location of Rath Turtle Moat within the estate landscape surrounding Blessington House has similarly resulted in difficulties in interpreting the earthwork. Blessington House was constructed in the late seventeenth century by Michael Boyle, archbishop of Dublin and Lord Chancellor of Ireland, who had received a grant of the lands around Blessington from Charles II in 1668-69. Blessington House was burnt down in 1799 by local rebels. While the area surrounding Blessington House is an important example of an elaborate late seventeenth and early eighteenth century manicured demesne landscape,[117] its creation has unfortunately obscured the medieval landscape that preceded it.

7.9 Conclusion to the chapter

The archaeological and historical evidence suggests that ringwork castles were associated with a large range of settlement types, including major urban centres, rural boroughs and manorial centres. Although ringwork castles generally seem to have been associated with a church, within manors and parishes that were usually co-terminous, the relationship between the ringwork castle and associated church is complex. Some ringwork castles and churches are juxtaposed, forming the foci of neat manorial centres, possibly indicating that they were planned settlements on 'green-field' sites. In other cases, the ringwork castle is relatively far away from the church, suggesting that the settlement was rather dispersed. The variable distance between earthwork castles and churches can make it difficult to prove that the two sites are associated. The names of the townland and parish names can play an important role in earthwork castle

[115] Francis McAvoy, 'The Wemyss family of Danesfort, County Kilkenny' in *O.K.R.*, lviii (2006), pp 135-136.
[116] James Graves, untitled account, in *J.R.S.A.I.* iii (1860), p. 169.
[117] E. Reilly, 'Brief history of Blessington Demense', http://www.mglarc.com/projects/blessington.htm, accessed 29 April 2008.

identification, as analysis of these names has shown that associated ringwork castles and churches tend to be in the same townland and that this townland often shares the name of the parish in which it is located. In addition to churches, less visible settlement features can be identified within the manorial landscape surrounding ringwork castles. Possible examples of mill races, fish ponds, rabbit warrens and deer parks were identified in association with ringwork castles in the study area. These features were components of the manicured landscapes of lordship that surrounded medieval castles, which served practical purposes but also highlighted the power and status of the local lord.

Chapter Eight: The chronology, ownership and function of ringwork castles

8.1 Introduction to the chapter

The aim of this chapter is to examine the evidence for the chronology of the ringwork castles in the study area and the role they played by in the Anglo-Norman invasion and subsequent settlement of eastern Ireland. In many cases, the ringwork castles themselves are not mentioned in the primary sources. However, the documentary evidence for an Anglo-Norman manor in a particular location can constitute circumstantial evidence for the establishment of the ringwork castle and its manorial context. Even when the sources contain direct references to particular castles, this evidence must be treated with caution as it cannot be assumed that the present appearance of a castle represents the original morphology as castles could change and develop over time. This chapter will also analyse the evidence for the functions and use of ringwork castles in the medieval period and will discuss the relationship between motte and ringwork castles and the factors that influenced the castle builder when choosing between the two earthwork castle types.

8.2 Ringwork castles in the conquest period (1169-76)

It was established in the early twentieth century that motte castles were associated with Norman settlement in both England and Ireland,[1] and it has traditionally been assumed that the motte castle was used as a tool of conquest in the context of both the Norman invasion of England in 1066 and the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169. It will be shown in this section that the earliest documented castles were ringwork castles and, as O'Conor has argued, there appears to be little evidence for motte castles in Ireland before the death of Strongbow in 1176.

The two earliest documented castles in Ireland are the partial ringwork castles located at Carrick (site no. 36) and Baginbun (site no. 31), both in Co. Wexford. The partial ringwork at Carrick was constructed shortly after the arrival of the first contingent of

[1] G. H. Orpen, 'Mote and Bretasche Building in Ireland' in *E.H.R.*, xxi (1906), pp 417-44; G. H. Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ireland' in *E.H.R.*, xx (1907), pp 228-254; G. H. Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ireland. Part II' in *E.H.R.*, xxii (1907), pp 440-67; G. H. Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ireland' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, xxxvii (1907), pp 123-52; E. S. Armitage, *Early Norman castles of the British Isles* (London, 1912);

Anglo-Normans in Ireland, in 1169 or early 1170. Carrick is one of the few castles described in detail in the contemporary sources. It is recorded Gerald of Wales's *Expugnatio Hibernica* that;

> '...Fitz Stephen built a fortress on a steep crag, about two miles from Wexford, called Carrick in the vernacular, and improved by artificial means a place naturally well protected.'[2]

The Song of Dermot and the Earl also records the construction of the castle at Ferrycarrig. However, the anonymous author of the *Song* attributes its construction to Maurice fitz Gerald rather than Robert FitzStephen.[3]

In May 1170, a second contingent of Anglo-Normans, consisting of ten knights and seventy archers under the leadership of Raymond le Gros, arrived in Ireland. *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* records that the Anglo-Normans landed at a spot known as Dundonnell and immediately began to construct a castle.[4] Gerald of Wales also records that,

> 'Putting in to a rock which is called Dundunnolf, about four miles from Waterford and to the south of Wexford, they constructed a somewhat flimsy fortification (*castrum*) of branches and sods.'[5]

Orpen identified the headland of Baginbun, on the Hook Peninsula, as the location of 'Dundonnell',[6] and this identification is generally accepted. Baginbun roughly fits Gerald of Wales' description of the site's location, although nowhere within a four mile radius of Waterford City can really be described as 'south of Wexford.'

The castles at Carrick and Baginbun are both partial ringworks. At Carrick, the ringwork was constructed on a headland above the River Slaney, approximately 3km west of Wexford Town. The partial ringwork was defined by steep cliffs on its northern

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[2] *Expugnatio Hibernica. The Conquest of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis*, edited by A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin, (eds), (Dublin, 1978), pp 52-3.
[3] Evelyn Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland. La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande. A new edition of the chronicle formerly known as 'The Song of Dermot and the Earl'* (Dublin, 2002), Lines 1396-8.
[4] Ibid., Lines 1400-09.
[5] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, p. 57.
[6] G.H. Orpen, 'Site of Raymond's fort, Dundonnulf, Baginbun' in *J.R.S.A.I.* xxviii (1898), p. 155-60; G. H. Orpen, 'The battle of Dundonnell (Baginbun), A.D. 1170' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, xxxi (1904), pp 354-60;

and eastern sides and by a bank and external fosse on its western and southern sides. As discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.5), there has been some confusion regarding the morphology and chronology of the earthworks at Baginbun. O'Conor has re-interpreted the earthworks at Baginbun and has argued convincingly that the earthworks cutting off the long narrow promontory at the extreme north-east of Baginbun Head, which he has labelled 'Site 2', represent the 'castle' described in the documentary sources (Figure 19).[7] It seems reasonable to classify this promontory site as a partial ringwork castle, on the grounds that it is morphologically similar to sites like Carrick.[8] It is notable that both the anonymous author of the *Song* and Gerald of Wales clearly perceived the site as a 'castle', despite its temporary nature.[9]

In 1170, an Irish army, comprised of the Déisi and the men of Waterford, attacked the castle at Baginbun but were repelled and suffered a heavy defeat. In 1171, the Gaelic Irish successfully besieged and captured the partial ringwork castle at Carrick. The accounts of these events given in the *Expugnatio Hibernica* and the *Song* contain some interesting details regarding the castles. The two accounts of the battle of Baginbun agree on the main points. According to Gerald of Wales, the Anglo-Normans were outnumbered and retreated towards the castle, allowing the Irish to follow them in. However, they were stopped by Raymond le Gros, who turned to face the enemy and '...transfixed with his sword the first to enter.'[10] The Anglo-Normans troops then rallied and overcame the Irish army.[11] The *Song* relates that Anglo-Normans were outnumbered by the Irish but were ordered by Raymond to sally forth and attack the Irish, which led to a significant victory over the Irish.[12] The *Song* also records that cattle played a major role in the Anglo-Norman victory; Raymond had ordered that some cattle be brought into the fortification and, when the Anglo-Normans charged out of the castle, the cattle also charged, trampling the Irish.[13] The castle was Carrick besieged by the Gaelic Irish the following year. According to Gerald of Wales' account, the castle

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[7] Kieran O'Conor, 'A reinterpretation of the earthworks at Baginbun, Co. Wexford' in Kieran O'Conor and J. R. Kenyon, (eds), *The medieval castle in Ireland and Wales* (Dublin, 2003), pp 24-5.
[8] Leslie Alcock, *Dinas Powys: an Iron Age, Dark Age and early medieval settlement in Glamorgan* (Cardiff, 1963).
[9] Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland,* Lines 1400-09; *Expugnatio Hibernica*, p. 57.
[10] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, pp 56-7
[11] Ibid., pp 56-9.
[12] Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, Lines 1417-1492.
[13] Ibid., Lines 1428-55.

had been left under the command of Robert fitz Stephen when Strongbow and the main body of the Anglo-Norman army marched towards Dublin. Gerald records that Robert had only five knights and a few archers with him at Carrick.[14] However, the castle was taken through treachery rather than through force. The Irish bishops of Wexford and Kildare approached the castle ditch to speak with fitz Stephen and convinced him that the other Anglo-Norman leaders and their men had been killed and that the bishops could ensure his safe passage to Wales, as an army of men from Connaught and Leinster forces was fast approaching.[15] Fitz Stephen and the other knights were taken prisoner and, according to the *Song*, they were taken to Begerrin Island.[16]

It is notable that Gerald of Wales described the castles of Baginbun and Carrick in almost identical terms; Baginbun was described as '...a somewhat flimsy fortification (*castrum*) of branches and sods,'[17] while Carrick was '...a most ill-fortified castle (*municipium*), which was enclosed by a flimsy wall of branches and sods.'[18] The excavations carried out at Carrick have shown that Gerald's description of the defences matches up well with the archaeological evidence. The partial ringwork was enclosed by a bank that originally supported a timber palisade[19] and later supported a stone wall,[20] and an external rock-cut ditch. The castle's ditch (*fossata*) is mentioned in Gerald's account of the siege,[21] and the 'flimsy wall of branches and sods' probably represents the bank and palisade.

Gerald's descriptions of both Baginbun and Carrick seem to deliberately downplay the defensive capabilities of the castles. The excavations at Carrick and the present morphology of the partial ringwork at Baginbun indicate that the defences of these castles were not insignificant. As O'Conor has argued, it seems likely that Gerald's

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[14] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, pp 84-5. The *Song* (Mullally, (ed.), *The deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, Lines 1766-69) records that Robert had sent thirty-six of his men to Dublin to assist Strongbow.
[15] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, pp 84-5.
[16] Mullally, (ed.), *The deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, Lines 1776-81.
[17] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, pp 56-7.
[18] Ibid., pp 80-1.
[19] Isabel Bennett, 'Preliminary archaeological excavations at Ferrycarrig ringwork, Newtown Td., Co. Wexford' in *J.W.H.S.*, x (1984-5), p. 40; Claire Cotter, *Excavations Bulletin 1987,* http://www.excavations.ie/Pages/Details.php?Year=&County=Wexford&id=3635.
[20] Bennett, 'Preliminary archaeological excavations at Ferrycarrig ringwork', p. 39.
[21] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, pp 84-5.

descriptions were motivated by his desire to portray his Geraldine relatives and their actions in the best possible light.[22]

Excavations at Trim Castle and Kilkenny Castle have shown that the earthwork castles that preceded the stone castles in these locations were both of ringwork type. The construction of the castle at Trim is recorded in *The Song of Dermot and the Earl:*

'E cil de Laci, pus, Hagun,	'Then Hugh de Lacy
A Trym ferma une meisun	fortified a dwelling at Trim
E fossé jeta environ,	and threw a ditch around it
E pus la enclost de hireson.	and then enclosed it with a spiked stockade.
Dedens la meysun ad pus mis	He then placed excellent knights and barons
Chavalers, baruns de grant pris;	inside the dwelling.
Pus commandast le castel	Then he placed his fortress
En la gard Huge Tyrel.'	in the charge of Hugh Tyrell.'[23]

Based on the sequence of events in the poem, the construction of the castle at Trim can be dated to the summer of 1172.[24] The poem subsequently relates that Rory O'Connor of Connacht gathered an army and set out to destroy the castle (*chastel)* at Trim.[25] Hugh Tyrell then dispatched a messenger to inform Strongbow that O'Connor had gathered an army and intended to '...destroy the keep, the castle and the stockade'[26] Hugh Tyrell and his men then abandoned the castle, as they did not have the resources to fight the Irish without support. When O'Conor's army arrived at Trim they destroyed the castle:

Quant les Engleis erent partiz,	'When the English had left
E lur meysun urent guerpiz,	and abandoned their dwelling (*meysun*),
A Trym vindrent les Yrreis.	the Irish arrived at Trim.
La somme [ne] dirrai de meis	I would sooner not say what their numbers were
Cumben erent ne quant miller,	how many they were, or how many thousands
Kar tenu sarrai mensonjer.	for I should be thought a liar.
La mot firent tut degeter,	They completely demolished the motte
Desque a la tere tut verser,	and razed it all to the ground,
E la meysun tut premer	but first they set fire
De fu ardant estenceler.'	to the dwelling.'[27]

[22] Kieran O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster' (3 vols, PhD, Cardiff, 1993), i, 95-6; O'Conor, 'A reinterpretation of the earthworks at Baginbun, Co. Wexford', pp 29-30.
[23] Mullally, (ed.), *The deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, Lines 3220-27.
[24] Seán Duffy, 'The key of the Pale": A history of Trim Castle, Co. Meath' in Alan Hayden, *Trim Castle Co. Meath, Excavations 1995-8*, (unpublished excavation report, 2 vols, excavation no. 95E 077, Archaeological Projects Ltd., 2005), p. 5
[25] Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, Lines 3260-61.
[26] Ibid., 3270-71.
[27] Ibid., Lines 3282-3301.

The description of the castle's constructioncorresponds well with the excavated ringwork and its associated timber structures. The ditch and spiked stockade mentioned seem to match up with the fosse and complex palisade excavated by Hayden.[28] However, the second description, which describes the destruction of the castle, refers to a '*mot*'. It is the presence of this word, generally translated as 'motte' in a twelfth-century context, which led McNeill to continue to argue that the original fortification was of motte type,[29] even after Sweetman's excavations in the 1970s found evidence for a ringwork castle.[30] However, Hayden's excavations in the 1990s proved conclusively that the early castle at Trim was definitely a ringwork castle.[31] This suggests that either the author of the *Song* was unfamiliar with the castle at Trim and mistakenly assumed that it was of motte type or, alternatively, that the word '*mot*' was sometimes used in a more general sense to convey the idea of a castle rather than an actual raised motte, as understood by modern archaeologists.

The destruction of the first phase of the ringwork castle seems to have taken place in the winter of 1172-3.[32] Rory O'Connor's campaign and the destruction of 'the castles of Meath' are briefly mentioned by Gerald of Wales.[33] The rebuilding of the castle at Trim in 1173 is recorded by both the *Expugnatio Hibernica* and the *Song*.[34] The documentary evidence is corroborated by the excavated evidence, which shows that there were two distinct phases of the ringwork castle at Trim; the first phase appears to have ended in an episode of destruction and burning,[35] after which the ringwork was rebuilt to roughly the same plan.[36]

Excavations at Kilkenny Castle have revealed that the stone castle at Kilkenny was constructed on the site of an earlier fortification, which the excavator has described as a

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[28] Alan Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8' (unpublished excavation report, 2 vols, licence no: 95E077, Archaeological Projects Ltd., 2005), i, 40 and 44.
[29] T. E. McNeill, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath; the first three generations' in *Archaeology Journal*, cxlvii (1990), p. 308-36.
[30] P. D. Sweetman, 'Archaeological excavations at Trim Castle, Co. Meath, 1971-74' in *P.R.I.A.*, lxxviii (1978), Section C, pp 227-98.
[31] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, 40-54.
[32] Duffy, 'The key of the Pale": A history of Trim Castle, Co. Meath', p. 5.
[33] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, p. 139.
[34] Ibid., p. 141; Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, Lines 3336-39.
[35] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, 40-43.
[36] Ibid., i, 44-5. The structures excavated at Trim are fully discussed in Chapter Five.

'great ringwork'.[37] The excavations uncovered evidence for an earthen rampart and external fosse.[38] The walls of the later stone castle seem to have been constructed on top of the rampart, possibly suggesting that the two fortifications were roughly the same trapezoidal shape.[39] Although this early castle is not mentioned in the Anglo-Norman sources, an annalistic reference suggests that it was constructed within a few years of the Anglo-Norman conquest; under the year 1173, the *Annals of Tigernach* give the following account of the castle's destruction at the hands of the Gaelic Irish:

> 'A hosting by Domnall Hua Briain to attack the castle (caislen) of Kilkenny and the Foreigners who dwelt therein. Along with him was a battalion from the west of Connaught, sent by Ruaidri, king of Ireland, with Conchobar, Ruaidri's son. These tidings were heard by the Foreigners. They evacuated the castle (*caislen*) and came to Waterford. The town was breached after the Foreigners (had left it), and the whole district was plundered. That reduction was a grief to the Foreigners of Ireland.'[40]

The occupation of this ringwork castle was probably short-lived as the Anglo-Normans appear to have withdrawn from central Kilkenny after 1173. It was only from the 1190s that William Marshal began to complete the process of sub-infeudation in this area.[41] It seems possible that the earthwork castle was reoccupied in the 1190s, before the construction of the major stone castle commenced.

As O'Conor has shown, there is little evidence for mottes being constructed in Leinster before the death of Strongbow in 1176.[42] In Meath, the only castles mentioned in the sources as existing before 1176 are the ringwork castle at Trim, as discussed above, and Duleek, which was destroyed and rebuilt at the same time as Trim.[43] There was a motte at Duleek in the eighteenth century, which was described by the antiquarian, Austin

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[37] Ben Murtagh, 'William Marshal's castle at Kilkenny', conference paper given in Kilkenny, 26 July 2008.
[38] Ben Murtagh, 'The Kilkenny Castle Archaeological Project 1990-1993: interim report' in *Old Kilkenny Review*, xlv (1993), pp 1108-10.
[39] Ibid., p. 1111.
[40] Whitley Stokes, (ed), *The Annals of Tigernach* (2 vols, Felinfach, 1993, reprinted from *Revue Celtique*, 1896/7), *s.a.*1173.
[41] C. A. Empey, 'County Kilkenny in the Anglo-Norman period' in William Nolan and Kevin Whelan, (eds), *Kilkenny: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1990), p. 77.
[42] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 75-124.
[43] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, p. 141.

Cooper, and drawn by his brother, Samuel Cooper,[44] shortly before its destruction as a result of quarrying activity (Plate 12).[45] It seems possible that this motte represented the 'castle' destroyed in 1172. However, it is also possible that the motte at Duleek was erected when the castle was 'rebuilt' in 1173 or, indeed, later in the twelfth or early thirteenth century. As O'Conor has pointed out, it cannot be assumed that the present morphology of a site corresponds with the first phase of its occupation.[46] The excavation of motte castles in England has shown that some conquest period ringwork castles were subsequently raised to form mottes. For example, the first phases of the castles at Goltho[47] and Castle Neroche,[48] which are discussed in Chapter Two, were ringwork castles. Future excavation in Ireland may show that some of the motte castles in Ireland similarly originated as ringwork castles erected in the period immediately after the Anglo-Norman invasion.

The documentary and archaeological evidence indicates that the early castles at Carrick, Baginbun, Trim and Kilkenny were all constructed between 1169 and 1173 and took the form of ringworks rather than motte castles. As O'Conor has commented, '...there is remarkably little evidence for the erection of motte castles in Leinster before Strongbow's death in 1176.'[49]As O'Conor has argued, the documentary and archaeological evidence indicates that ringwork castles rather than mottes were the preferred form of earthwork castle used in the period between the invasion of 1169 and Strongbow's death in 1176.[50] This echoes the evidence from England, where it has been shown that the castles constructed in the two years following the Norman invasion of England seem to have been ringwork castles rather than mottes.[51] The reasons why

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[44] Peter Harbison, *Cooper's Ireland: drawings and notes from an eighteenth-century gentleman* (Dublin, 2000), pp 118-19.
[45] *Inventory*, no. 1616, p. 157; ME027-038017.
[46] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 146.
[4747] Guy Beresford, *Goltho: the development of an early medieval manor, c.850-1150* (London, 1987); O. H. Creighton, *Castles and landscapes: power, community and fortification in medieval England* (London, 2002), pp 21-4.
[48] B. K. Davison, 'Castle Neroche: an abandoned Norman fortress in South Somerset' in *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society,* cxiv (1972), pp 16-58.
[49] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 146.
[50] Ibid., i, 65-124.
[51] B. K. Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1967), pp 37-47; Barbara English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest' in Andrew Ayton and J. L. Price, (eds), *The medieval military revolution: state, society and military change in medieval and early modern Europe* (London, 1995), pp 45-61 For a full discussion, see Chapter Two (Section 2.4).

ringwork castles seem to have been preferred to mottes as campaign castles are discussed below (Section 8.5).

8.3 Ringwork castles and the sub-infeudation process

While the documentary and archaeological evidence shows that ringwork castles played a major role in the military campaigns of the Anglo-Norman conquest, their importance in the sub-infeudation period which followed is more difficult to assess, largely due to the relative paucity of documentary sources for this phase of Anglo-Norman settlement. However, the documentary evidence seems to indicate that many of the ringwork castles in the study area were constructed in the last quarter of the twelfth century, as lands were parcelled out to Anglo-Norman settlers in the sub-infeudation process.

The finds recovered during the course of Fanning's excavations at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare (site no. 3), suggested that the ringwork castle was occupied from the late twelfth century until the fourteenth or early fifteenth century.[52] Unfortunately, the historical context in which the castle was built is unknown. By the late thirteenth century, the manor of Pollardstown was held by the de Wellesley family.[53] The documentary and archaeological evidence suggests that the earthwork castles that preceded the stone castles at Carlow (site no. 1), Ferns (site no. 40) and Lea (site no. 15) were also constructed in the late twelfth century. The first castle at Carlow was probably a ringwork castle, which was constructed in the 1180s. O'Conor's excavations showed that the earthwork castle was located on a raised natural knoll and its interior was bisected by a fosse and palisade, which divided it into two parts.[54] The site was very disturbed and no dating evidence for the ringwork castle was recovered.[55] However,. O'Conor has suggested that the earthwork castle excavated at Carlow may represent the castle constructed for John de Clahull in the 1180s. *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* records that Strongbow granted the barony of Obargi, 'between Oboy and Leighlin', to

[52] Thomas Fanning, 'Excavation of a ringfort at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare' in *J.K.A.S.*, 15 (1973-4), p. 259.
[53] H. S. Sweetman, (ed.), *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland,* (5 vols, London, 1875-83), iv, 225-6.
[54] Kieran O'Conor, 'Carlow Castle preliminary excavation report', (unpublished report, excavation no. 96E0105, 2002), p. 2.
[55] Ibid.

John De Clahull in the early 1170s.'[56] O'Conor has shown that the John de Clahull's lands were more extensive than Orpen believed,[57] and that they included Carlow. [58]A charter issued c.1200 supports this argument, as it records that John de Clahull appointed a cleric called Thurstin to the moiety of several churches in Obargi, including Killeshin and Carlow.[59] O'Conor has argued that the castle constructed by Hugh de Lacy for John de Clahull in the 1180s, which was '...on the River Barrow, not far from Leighlin' may have been Carlow,[60] rather than Killeshin as suggested by Orpen.[61] This makes more sense as Carlow is on the Barrow whereas Killeshin is more than 3km away from the river. The manor of Carlow must have passed into the hands of William Marshal in the first decade of the twelfth century as the town's charter, which was issued before 1210, was issued by William Marshal.[62]

The earthwork castles that preceded the stone castles at Ferns and Lea may also have been ringworks. There seems to have been a castle at Lea by the end of the twelfth century. Lea lay within the territory of 'Offaly to the west of Offelan', which was granted to Robert de Bermingham before 1176.[63] Robert died before the end of the twelfth century and Gerald fitz Maurice inherited his lands in Offaly, including the manor of Lea, through his wife, Eva de Bermingham.[64] Gerald fitz Maurice held Lea and Geashill at the time of his death in 1201 and the justiciar, Meilyr fitz Henry, was ordered to deliver the castles and lands of 'Lega and Geisil' into the hands of William Marshal, who was to hold the castles and lands, in addition to the wardship of Gerald's heir, Maurice fitz Gerald, for the period of Maurice's minority.[65]As the stone castle at Lea can be dated to the mid-twelfth century on architectural and historical grounds (see

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[56] Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland,* Lines 3100-03.
[57] G. H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans* (4 vols, Oxford, 1911-20), i, 374.
[58] Kieran O'Conor, 'The town and castle of Carlow', unpublished conference paper entitled given at Western Michigan University (May 2001), p. 5.
[59] Charles McNeill, (ed.), *Calendar of Archbishop Alen's Register, c. 1172-1534* (Dublin, 1950), p. 26.
[60] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, p. 195.
[61] Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, i, 386.
[62] Gearóid MacNiocaill, *Na burgéisi, XII-XV aois,* (2 vols, Dublin, 1964), pp 130-8; Tommy Clarke, 'Medieval Carlow: some documents' in *Carloviana*, xxviii (1980), p. 4; O'Conor 'Carlow Castle – who built and occupied the first castle here?', p. 39.
[63] Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, Lines 3104-5.
[64] G.H. Orpen, 'The Fitzgeralds: barons of Offaly' in *J.R.S.A.I.* xliv (1914), p. 99; Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, iii, 113; Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, 'Knights' fees in Kildare, Leix and Offaly' in *J.R.S.A.I*, xci (1961), p. 178.
[65] H. S. Sweetman, (ed.), *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland,* (5 vols, London, 1875-83), i, 30.

site report no. 15), this indicates that there was an earthwork predecessor at Lea in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. It has been suggested that the earth and timber castle was a motte, which was levelled to make way for the stone castle.[66] However, as O'Conor has argued, there is no evidence for a motte at Lea and the morphology of the stone castle strongly suggests that it was constructed on the site of an earlier ringwork castle.[67] The inner ward of the stone castle is circular in shape and is located on a natural raised knoll. It seems likely that this inner ward represents the area enclosed by an early ringwork castle, although the castle has not yet been excavated.

The documentary evidence suggests that there was both a pre-Norman fortification and an early Norman castle at Ferns. *The Annals of Tigernach* record that Tiernan O'Rourke and his allies destroyed Dermot's stone house and longphort at Ferns in the year 1166. According to Gerald of Wales, Maurice fitz Gerald's sons built a castle at Ferns, despite being 'surrounded by enemies'. Shortly later, this castle was 'destroyed and razed to the ground' by Walter 'the German', nephew of William fitz Adelin, who had been bribed by Murtough MacMurrough.[68] Gerald's account suggests that the castle at Ferns was constructed and destroyed between 1176 and 1179. It seems likely that this early Norman castle at Ferns may have been an earth and timber construction and it seems probable that this castle was in the same location as the later stone castle ad possibly on the site of the pre-Norman fortification. Sweetman's excavations revealed possible evidence for a ringwork castle under the stone castle. At the south-eastern side of the interior, the castle seemed to be built onto boulder clay rather than the bedrock,[69] and Sweetman now believes that this boulder clay may represent a rampart associated with a ringwork castle, although the boulder clay was not identified as such at the time of the excavation.[70]

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[66] Orpen, 'Motes and Norman castles in Ireland', p. 253; Armitage, *Early Norman castles of the British Isles*, p. 34.

[67] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 175-6; Kieran O'Conor, 'Anglo-Norman castles in Co. Laois' in P. G. Lane and William Nolan, (eds.), *Laois: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1999), p. 197.

[68] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, p. 173.

[69] P. D. Sweetman, 'Archaeological excavations at Ferns Castle, Co. Wexford' in *P.R.I.A.* lxxix (1979), Section C, p. 218.

[70] David Sweetman, pers. comm., April, 2006.

The ringwork castle at Newcastle McKynegan (site no. 50), which was associated with a royal manor, may also have been constructed in the late twelfth century. The earliest known reference to Newcastle occurs in a contained in a charter issued by John Comyn, archbishop of Dublin, which records the grant of 'the church of New Castle, towards Wykinglo' to the abbey of Grace Dieu.[71] McNeill dated this charter to between 1181 and 1212, based on the dates of John Comyn's episcopacy.[72] This shows that a castle was in existence at Newcastle by 1212 at the latest. However, the castle may not have been fully developed at this stage; the documentary evidence suggests that major works were carried out at the castle in the late thirteenth century as Newcastle McKynegan became strategically important in the warfare against the Gaelic Irish of Wicklow. It seems likely that the gatehouse was constructed at this time.[73]

The documentary evidence suggests that the ringwork castles at Kilcarn (site no. 23) and Danestown (site no. 20) were also constructed in the late twelfth century or early thirteenth century. Both of these ringwork castles are located within the barony of Skreen, which was granted to Adam de Feipo,[74] probably as early as 1172 or 1173.[75] Adam held the barony of Skreen, in addition to some lands in western Meath, until his death in 1190 or 1191.[76] Kilcarn seems to have been held by a younger son of Adam de Feipo called Geoffrey, who also held the manor of Santry in Dublin. In a charter dating to c.1185, 'Geoffrey' and 'John', the two younger sons of Adam de Feipo, are named in a list of Adam feudatories, although the lands that they held are not named.[77] The ringwork castle at Kilcarn is described in a charter issued by Geoffrey de Feipo, which records his grant of the property to St Mary's Abbey, Dublin. The property at Kilcarn consisted of; *'..unum mesuagium, cum domo que ibi est et curia sicut fossato vallata est in terra mea que in tenemento de Tyrcarn quod Thomas, capellanus, de me tenuit.'*[78] This can be translated as '...one messuage, with the house which is there and the

[71] Charles McNeill, (ed.), *Calendar of Archbishop Alen's register, c.1172-1534* (Dublin, 1950), p. 31.
[72] Ibid.
[73] See Chapter Five (Section 5.2).
[74] Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland,* Lines 3156-7.
[75] Elizabeth Hickey, *Skryne and the early Normans: papers concerning the medieval manors of the Feypo family in Ireland in the 12th and early 13th centuries* (Meath, 1994), p. 34.
[76] Ibid., p. 52 and p. 201.
[77] J. T. Gilbert, (ed.), *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin, with the register of its house at Dunbrody and Annals of Ireland* (2 vols, Dublin, 1884), i, 156.
[78] Ibid., i, 94.

courtyard which is ditched and palisaded on my land, which is in tenement of Tyrcarn and which Thomas the chaplain holds from me.' It seems certain that this reference relates to the ringwork at Kilcarn as no other earthworks survive in the townland, and the ringwork castle is located close to the church, suggesting that it was associated with a manorial centre. Although it is not possible to date this charter precisely, it must have been issued before 1212 as a charter issued by John Comyn, who was archbishop of Dublin until 1212, refers to Geoffrey de Feipo's death.[79] As Hickey has argued, it seems probable that Geoffrey lived at Santry, which was a larger manor than Kilcarn.[80] Geoffrey's grant of the ringwork castle to the abbey suggests that it was going to be used as a residence for the clergy of the church at Kilcarn. This fact, combined with the description of the property as a *messuage* and a house makes the classification of the site problematic. The term *messuage* is generally used to describe a house with some land attached rather than castle. It seems possible that the site resembled a moated site more than a castle in terms of function. However, the morphology of the earthwork, which is enclosed by a substantial bank and external fosse, is unlike a moated site and the fosse is dry rather than wet. The siting of the earthwork, on high ground close to the parish church, is also more reminiscent of an earthwork castle than a moated site. It seems probable that the earthwork was constructed as the *caput* of a very small manor, but the charter suggests that its function may have changed by the early thirteenth century.

In the case of nearby Danestown, the documentary evidence suggests that the castle was constructed in the late twelfth century, although there are no known references to the castle itself in the sources. The name of the manor of 'Danestown' is derived from 'De Aveni's town'. Robert de Aveni seems to have been closely linked to the de Feipo family of whom he held the small manor of Danestown. In a charter dating to *c.*1185, confirming Adam de Feipo's grant of the ecclesiastical benefices of the churches of Skreen to St Mary's Abbey, the church of Robert de Aveni is mentioned, although the manor he held is not named.[81] Unfortunately, the charter lists the names of the men who held the lands on which the churches were located but fails to give the names of the

[79] Ibid., i, 177
[80] Hickey, *Skryne and the Early Normans*, p. 103.
[81] Gilbert, (ed.), *Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin,* i, 156-7.

churches or manors themselves. A single charter issued by Robert himself has survived. This charter was issued c.1190 and records a grant of lands in Cruiceregan and Rascunin to the Hospital of St John the Baptist in Dublin, on the occasion of his relative, Emmeline, entering the hospital, having been called by God to serve there. Robert's name also appears in the witness lists of several other charters.[82] It seems probable that Robert's manor is represented by the small civil parish of Danestown and that Robert was responsible for the construction of the very impressive ringwork castle there.

The historical and archaeological evidence suggests that several ringwork castles in Co. Kilkenny may have been constructed in the early thirteenth century, during the period of the William Marshal the Elder's lordship of Leinster. Although the Anglo-Normans made an initial foray into central Ossory in the 1170s, possibly constructing the ringwork castle that underlies Kilkenny Castle at this time, this area seems to have been held Donal Mac Gillapatrick until his death in 1185.[83] As Empey has argued, this area of Kilkenny was probably not intensively settled by the Anglo-Normans until after William Marshal the Elder had gained seisin of Leinster in 1192.[84] William Marshal seems to have begun parcelling out lands in central Ossory to his followers either in the late twelfth century or early thirteenth century. Marshal's grants of lands in Co. Kilkenny made sense in practical terms; unlike other areas of Leinster, which had already been intensively settled by the previous generation of Anglo-Norman settlers, central Ossory was available and could be used to reward loyal followers. Marshal also seems to have made a deliberate effort to grant lands to his closest followers close to Kilkenny, where he had established his castle and administrative base. Although the charters recording these land grants have generally not survived, it is possible to reconstruct some of these grants through based on the documentary and place name evidence. For, example, John d'Earley seems to have been granted the lands which became the manor of Earlstown. Although the evidence suggests that an Anglo-Norman called Baldwin de Hamptonsford may have been the original grantee, it seems likely

[82] E. St J. Brooks, (ed.), *Register of the Hospital of St John the Baptist without the New Gate, Dublin* (Dublin, 1936), pp 172-3.
[83] Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, ii, 223-4.
[84] Empey, 'County Kilkenny in the Anglo-Norman period', p. 77.

that John received these lands from William Marshal in the early thirteenth century. [85] However, in the case of Earlstown, there is no evidence for an earthwork castle of any kind.

The circumstantial evidence suggests that both the possible ringwork castle site at Mallardstown (site no. 9) and the ringwork castle at Rathealy (site no. 12) may have been associated with manors that were also established in the early thirteenth century as a result of Marshal's land grants. As with Earlstown, the lands which were to become the manor of Mallardstown seem to have been granted to one of William Marshal's followers. William Maillard is named in the *History of William Marshal* as Marshal's standard bearer,[86] and he was one of the men that Marshal behind in Leinster he was summoned back to England by King John in 1207.[87] The exact date of Marshal's grant to William Maillard is unclear. William must have been in possession of Mallardstown by 1218 at the latest, as a charter that can be dated to before 1218 based on the witness list, records William's grant of the church of Kilmacmintan (Mallardstown) and the chapel of the Villa Mallardi to St Mary's Priory, Kells.[88] It is notable that William stated in this charter that he had received the lands directly from William Marshal himself. Painter has interpreted the grants to both John d'Earley and William Maillard as rewards for their loyalty in 1207-8.[89] Unfortunately, the earthwork at Mallardstown has been removed. However, the depiction of the large circular earthwork on the First Edition O.S. map suggests that it may have been an earthwork castle of ringwork type.

In the case of Rathealy, there is no known evidence for Anglo-Norman settlement in the early thirteenth century. However, by the time of the partition of Leinster in 1247,

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[85] William Carrigan, *The history and antiquities of the diocese of Ossory* (4 vols, Dublin, 1905), iii, 244; C. A. Empey, 'The sacred and the secular: the Augustinian priory of Kells in Ossory, 1193-1541' in *I.H.S.* xxiv (1984), p. 141; Linda Shine, 'The manor of Earlstown, county Kilkenny: an interdisciplinary approach' in *The manor in medieval and early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), pp 42-3.

[86] A. J. Holden, Stewart Gregory and David Crouch, (eds), *Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal or The history of William Marshal* (2 vols, London, 2002-06), Lines 13511-2.

[87] Ibid., Lines 13511-2; David Crouch, *William Marshal: knighthood, war and chivalry, 1147-1219* (2nd edition, London, 2002), p. 107.

[88] Edmund Curtis, (ed.), *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 1172-1603* (6 vols, Dublin, 1932-43), i, 18; N. B. White, (ed.), *Irish monastic and episcopal deeds, AD 1200-1600* (Dublin, 1936), p. 307.

[89] Sidney Painter, *William Marshal: knight errant, baron and regent of England* (Baltimore, 1933), p. 161.

Roland Bloet held ¼ of a knight's fee at Rathealy,[90] and it seems likely that the ringwork castle, church and deserted medieval settlement at Rathealy represent the manorial centre of Roland's manor. Roland Bloet's lineage is unclear but it seems probable that he was descended from one of the four sons of Ralph Bloet III of Silchester, who was a prominent vassal of both Strongbow and William Marshal. Ralph died in 1198 or 1199 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Ralph Bloet IV. Two of Ralph IV's younger brothers, Thomas and Roland, served as knights of the royal household and seem to have been used by King John as trusted messengers.[91] William Bloet the youngest of the Bloet brothers, was a member of William Marshal the Younger's *mesnie* and served as his standard bearer at Battle of Lincoln in 1217,[92] although he later went into royal service. The relationship between the Bloets of Silchester and Roland Bloet of Rathealy is unclear. Brooks suggested that Roland may have been the son of the Roland Bloet who died in 1217.[93] However, this seems unlikely as Roland's brother, William, was named as his heir, suggesting that Roland died without issue.[94] It seems more likely that Roland Bloet of Rathealy was a nephew or cousin of the original Roland who inherited lands at Rathealy, which had been granted to a member of the Bloet family by one of the Marshal lords of Leinster in the first half of the thirteenth century.

The ringwork castle at Purcellsinch (site no. 11) may also have been constructed during the period of the Marshal lordship of Leinster. Unfortunately, the documentary evidence does not shed much light on the early history of the lands of Kilmallog, which later came to be known as Purcellsinch. The Purcell family seem to have been associated with Purcellsinch from the early fourteenth century but it is unclear who was originally granted these lands. An extent of the barony of Gowran, taken in 1306, records that Walter, son of Hamundi Purcell, held a fee in 'Kylmelag', which had formerly been held by J. Keting by royal service.[95] The siting of the ringwork castle, which is located on the River Nore approximately 2km to the west of Kilkenny City, suggests that it may

[90] Brooks, *Knight's fees*, p. 238.
[91] Holden, Gregory and Crouch, (eds), *The history of William Marshal,* Lines 13661-2; 13700-3; 13757-60; Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I*, i, 377.
[92] Holden, Gregory and Crouch, (eds), *The history of William Marshal,* Lines 16913-26.
[93] Brooks, *Knights fees*, p. 238.
[94] Ebden, (ed.), *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the second year of the reign of King Henry III*, p. 39.
[95] N. B. White, (ed.), *The Red Book of Ormond* (Dublin, 1932), p. 38.

have had strategic importance and may have been constructed at the time when William Marshal was establishing Kilkenny as his administrative centre.

The circumstantial evidence therefore hints that several of the ringwork castles in Co. Kilkenny may have been associated with land grants made by the Marshals in the early thirteenth century. William Marshal the Elder may also have been directly responsible for the construction of several ringwork castles, including the possible ringwork castle at Rathdowney, Co. Laois (site no. 16), which was removed in the nineteenth century. William Marshal the Elder granted the district of 'Mamocle', which probably represents the pre-Norman territory of Magh-lacha,[96] including the castle of Rathdowney, to Adam de Hereford around 1207.[97] In the charter recording this grant, Marshal refers to the castle as 'his castle of Raduoeny', possibly indicating that he himself was responsible for its construction. The ringwork and bailey castle at Pigeonpark (Danesfort), Co. Kilkanny (site no. 10), may also have been constructed at this time. Danesfort was held as a demesne manor of Marshal lords of Leinster before 1247 and the early thirteenth century seems the most obvious context for the ringwork's construction. The ringwork castle of Carrick in Co. Wexford, which originated as a conquest-period fortification, was also held as a demesne manor of the Marshals lords of Leinster in the first half of the thirteenth century. As discussed in Chapter Seven, Carrick was at the centre of a complex Anglo-Norman landscape. The deforestation charter issued by Richard Marshal in the early 1230s refers to the castle of Carrick, the deer park, the town and the mill.[98] The ringwork castle at Moone, Co. Kildare (site no. 2), was also associated with a demesne manor of the lords of Leinster. It seems likely that the castle was constructed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century although the first direct reference to the castle is contained in the town's charter, which was issued by William Marshal the Younger *c.*1223.[99]

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[96] Carrigan, *The history and antiquities of the diocese of Ossory*, i, pp 5-9.
[97] Curtis, (ed.), *Cal. Ormond Deeds,* i, 19; Brooks, *Knights' fees*, p. 202.
[98] G. H. Orpen and E. St John Brooks, 'Charters of Earl Richard Marshal of the Forests of Ross and Taghmon' in *J.R.S.A.I.*, lxiv (1934), p. 61.
[99] MacNiocaill, *Na buirgéisi: XII-XV aois*, pp 246-50; James Mills, (ed.), *Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls or proceedings in Court of the Justiciar of Ireland, 1295-1314,* (3 vols, London, 1905-56), i, 369-71.

The documentary evidence suggests that Clonmacnoise is the last ringwork castle for which there is direct documentary evidence. The castle, which consists of a sub-rectangular area, enclosed by two massive earthen banks and an intervening fosse, was constructed in the second decade of the thirteenth century. The construction of the castle is recorded by the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* and the *Annals of Loch Cé* under the years 1213 and 1214 respectively. Later in 1214, Cormac, son of Art O'Melaghlin, and his followers 'carried off a prey of cows from the castle of Cluain and defeated the Foreigners of the castle.'[100] If the castle was begun in 1213 or 1214, it seems likely that it was still under construction when it was attacked. O'Conor and Manning have shown that the architecture of the stone structures indicates that they are early thirteenth century in date. As there is no evidence for a twelfth-century castle at Clonmacnoise, it seems probable that the stone and earthwork elements of the castle are contemporaneous.[101] The castle is morphologically similar to the ringwork castle at Castle Rising, Co. Norfolk, which consists of stone hall-keep within a massive ringwork castle. The documentary evidence discussed above indicates that most of the ringwork castles in the study were constructed in the period between 1175 and 1225.

8.4 The late occupation of ringwork castles

It has traditionally been believed that the construction and occupation of earth and timber castles in Ireland was confined to a relatively short period between the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169 and the early thirteenth century. For example, Leask argued that earth and timber castles were unsuitable as permanent residences and suggested that they were abandoned in favour of stone castles by the end of the twelfth century.[102] More recently, Graham has stated that 'the majority of mottes were probably constructed by the early thirteenth century.'[103] The earth and timber castle erected at Roscrea between 1212 and 1215 seems to be the last documented castle constructed in Ireland. The construction of this castle is recorded in a charter dating to 1245, which

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[100] W. M. Hennessy, (ed.), *The annals of Lough Cé*, (Dublin, 1939; reprint of edition published in London, 1871), *s.a.* 1214.

[101] Kieran O'Conor and Conleth Manning, 'Clonmacnoise Castle' in H. A. King, *Clonmacnoise Studies Volume Two: seminar papers 1998* (Dublin, 2003), pp 137-65.

[102] H. G. Leask, *Irish castles and castellated houses* (Dundalk, 1999; reprint of second edition published in 1951), p. 25.

[103] B. J. Graham, 'The mottes of the Norman liberty of Meath' in Harmon Murtagh, (ed.), *Irish Midland Studies: essays in commemoration of N.W. English* (Athlone, 1980), p. 41.

states that a *mote* and *britagium* were fortified at Roscrea.[104] The exact morphology of this castle is unknown. Prior to the excavations conducted at the castle in the 1990s, it had been assumed that the term *mote* referred to a motte, which was removed when the stone castle was constructed in the later thirteenth century. However, the excavations found no trace of a motte and revealed that the construction of the later stone castle had removed virtually all traces of the earlier structures. Despite the lack of clear archaeological evidence, the terminology used to describe this site in the charter suggests that it was an earth and timber site, presumably of motte or ringwork type, rather than a stone castle. While Roscrea may be the last *documented* earth and timber castle to be constructed, it must be noted that there are relatively few direct references to castle construction in Ireland. More recent research has shown that the construction and occupation of earth and timber castles may have continued throughout the thirteenth century and into the fourteenth century.

O'Conor has shown that the use of motte castles may have continued well into the fourteenth century in Ireland. Many pre-existing motte castles seem to have been occupied into the fourteenth century and some may even have been constructed in the later thirteenth and fourteenth century. O'Conor has argued that a series of mottes in Leinster, including Aghaboe in Co. Laois, Castlekevin in Co. Wicklow, Ballymore Demense in Co. Wexford and Ballykilleen, Ballymooney and Ballyshannon Demesne in Co. Kildare, were constructed in the late medieval period, based on their morphology, distribution and historical context. These mottes tend to be lower and more angular than earlier mottes, and are generally square or rectangular in plan with large summit areas.[105]

While there is no known evidence for ringwork castles being constructed in the study area in the later medieval period, the documentary evidence indicates that some ringwork castles continued to be occupied into the fourteenth century and beyond. The finds from the excavated ringwork castle at Pollardstown in Co. Kildare showed that the castle was occupied from the late twelfth century until the late fourteenth century or

[104] Sweetman, (ed.), *C.D.I.*, i, pp 411-12;
[105] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 321-8.

possibly the early fifteenth century.[106] As the majority of ringwork castles in the study area have not been excavated, it is necessary to rely on historical evidence to determine the date at which sites may have been abandoned. This is problematic due to the relative scarcity of documentary evidence relating to castles in the later medieval period.

The extents of the manors of Danesfort in Co. Kilkenny and Carrick in Co. Wexford, taken in 1307, following on the death of Joan de Valence, countess of Gloucester and Hereford, indicate that both ringwork castles were still in use in the early fourteenth century. The extent of Danesfort shows that there was a substantial complex of buildings at the manorial centre, although the document does not refer to it as a 'castle';

> 'Within the close of this manor there is a hall, a chamber , a dairy, a grange, a *brittagium* beyond the gate and other wooden houses, all of which cannot be extended as nothing can be received from them.'

The difficulties involved in reconciling this description of the site with the existing earthworks at Pigeonpark (Danesfort) are discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.7). The extent of the castle and manor of Carrick, also taken in 1307, indicates that the castle there was still occupied, although the description is very brief, stating that;

> 'In Carrik there is a castle with 2 carucates and 20 acres of appurtenant land in demesne worth 60*s*. a year, but which were formerly worth 66*s*. 8*d*. Burgage rents there come to 111*s*. 9*d*. a year, while the rent of one [free tenant] is worth 2*s*. Two watermills are worth 30*s*. The issues of pasture and underwood at *Colynat* are worth 10*s*. a year. The perquisites of the hundred court are worth 2*s*. and the ferry 10*s*. a year'

These extents are important because they also show that some ringwork castles were still very much in use in the early fourteenth. A further extent of the manor of Carrick, taken in 1324, offers a more detailed description of the castle and its associated buildings and clearly shows that Carrick was in decline, possibly as a result of the combined effects of the Bruce Invasions and the Great European Famine, which had struck in the intervening period. The castle of Carrick seems to have been abandoned between 1307 and 1324;

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[106] Fanning, 'Excavation of a ringfort at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare', p. 259.

> 'There is an empty and broken-down castle without a keeper, which extends at no value as nothing can be received from it. Within the close of the castle there is an unroofed and almost ruinous hall and chapel, which cannot be extended likewise.'

The extent also records that 110 of the burgage plots in the town of Carrick were occupied in 1324 but 3 were waste, 'due to a lack of tenants'. The eponymous ferry of Ferrycarrig, had formerly been worth 2 marks but 'now produces nothing as all of the tenants have been destroyed due to the war.' Similarly, a patch of pasture beneath the castle 'used to be worth 40*d*., but now no profit can be made from it due to the war and a lack of tenants.' However, the two watermills were still in operation. It can be concluded from these tow extents that the ringwork castle at Carrick was abandoned sometime between 1307 and 1324.

While some ringwork castles were being abandoned in the fourteenth century, some may also have been constructed or refortified at this time in response to the resurgence of the Gaelic Irish. For example, the documentary evidence shows that the castles of Newcastle Middle and Ballyvolan Lower castle played a major role in the military campaigns against the O'Byrnes in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Some ringwork castles may have been occupied into the fifteenth century. The ringwork and bailey castle at Sycharth in Wales seems to have functioned as the main residence of Owain Glyndwr until its destruction by English forces in 1403.[107] There is limited evidence for the occupation of ringwork castles into the fifteenth century in Ireland. The site at Rathtroane in Meath may have been refortified in the fifteenth century. In a document dating to1420, John Roche of Cloncurry agreed to lease 'Great Ratron and Little Ratron' from James, earl of Ormond for thirty years for a rent of five marks of silver per year. John and his heirs undertook to,

> '...make vaults, parapets and battlements (*voltabunt tabellient et batalliabunt*) for the castle of Great Ratron at their own expense within the first seven years of the term and shall rebuild the old walls and parapets. And if it happen that the said castle is not entirely built within seven years as above then the said Earl may distrain John or his heirs in their goods and chattels and retain them until the said castle shall be built'.[108]

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[107] R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dwr* (Oxford, 1995), p. 133. See Chapter Two (Section 2.8).
[108] Curtis, (ed.), *Cal. Ormond Deeds*, iii, pp 29-30.

This reference is notable because it is so late; it is usually assumed that by 1420, earthwork castles were no longer occupied or maintained. This indenture implies that there was a castle already in existence at Rathtroane as it had 'old walls and parapets'. The site at Rathtroane consists of a platform defined by a low bank around its perimeter and two external banks with intervening fosses. The presence of large amounts of stone in the banks and at the bases of the fosses suggests that the banks may have been faced with stone or had stone walls on top of them. At the centre of the site, there is a circular depression lined with stone. As Sweetman has suggested, it seems likely that this feature represents the basement level of a stone or stone-footed tower.[109] Unfortunately, the site at Rathtroane is not in a good enough state of preservation to determine its chronology without excavation. There do not appear to be any further references to the castle in the sources so it is unclear whether or not the improvements ordered in the document were carried out.

The documentary evidence for the late occupation of these sites is important because it shows that, even as late as the fifteenth century, castles that were essentially earthworks with some stone features were still perceived as being militarily useful and worthy of maintenance. Even after castles had been abandoned as permanent residences, they may have been reoccupied from time to time. In the sixteenth century, Silken Thomas occupied an earthwork site outside the town of Rathangan. The site was located in '...the woode in the marises beside Rathangan' and was described as, '...a Stronge house, made all of erthe, and so deched, watered, and of soche force, as men of experience said, that being manned, ordenaunced, and vitteld, it had not be pregnable.'[110] It seems possible that the fort mentioned may be the ringwork castle at Rathangan, which, in the sixteenth century, would have been outside the main settlement.

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[109] P. D. Sweetman, 'Some ringwork castles in County Meath' in Christiaan Corlett and Tom Condit, (eds), *Above and beyond: essays in memory of Leo Swan* (Bray, 2005), p. 396.
[110] *State Papers of Henry VIII*, ii, p. 266; Walter Fitzgerald, 'Rathangan' in *J.C.K.A.S.*, v, (1907), p. 146.

8.5 The chronology and functions of ringwork castles and the relationship between mottes and ringworks

It seems clear that ringwork castles were preferred to motte castles in the initial conquest period. The archaeological and documentary evidence indicates that the four ringwork castles at Baginbun, Carrick, Trim and Kilkenny were constructed between 1169 and 1173. In contrast, O'Conor has shown that there is no evidence for the construction of motte castles before Strongbow's death in 1176.[111] It has been shown that the castles constructed in the period immediately after the Norman Invasion of England in 1066 took the form of full or partial ringwork castles.[112] Also, the siege-castles and counter-castles constructed in England during the 'Anarchy' of Stephen's reign tended to be ringwork castles rather than motte castles. As King and Alcock have pointed out, '...almost all siege-works, or suspected siege-works, are ringworks.'[113] The evidence therefore suggests that ringwork rather than motte castles tended to be constructed in the context of military campaigns.

There are several reasons why ringwork castles may have been suitable campaign fortifications than mottes. Ringwork castles would have been much quicker to construct than motte castles.[114] While it was traditionally believed that a motte could be thrown up in a matter of weeks, research in the 1960 and 1970s showed that it probably took several months to build an average sized motte.[115] As O'Conor has pointed out, the calculations made by Barton and Holden in relation to the motte at Bramber and Davison's calculations regarding Castle Neroche were based on the construction of the mound itself and did not take into account the time it would take to add a bailey and the necessary timber structures.[116] Whereas large amounts of earth had to be moved in order to construct a motte, ringwork castles could be erected relatively quickly as their defences tended to consist of a simple bank and fosse. This is particularly true of partial

[111] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 75-124.
[112] Davison, 'Early earthwork castles: a new model', pp 37-47; English, 'Towns, mottes and ringworks of the conquest', pp 45-61.
[113] D. J. C. King and Leslie Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales' in *Château Gaillard*, iii (1969), p. 100.
[114] J. R. Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications* (London, 1990), p. 29 and p. 38; O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 122.
[115] K. J. Barton and E. W. Holden, 'Excavations at Bramber Castle, Sussex, 1966-7' in *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxiv (1977), pp 11-79; Davison, 'Castle Neroche: an abandoned Norman fortress in South Somerset', pp 16-58.
[116] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', pp 66-8.

ringwork castles like Carrick and Baginbun, where it was only necessary to construct a short section of bank and ditch in order to cut off the promontory.

Another advantage of the ringwork castle in the context of a military campaign was that the average ringwork interior was far larger than the average motte summit. As discussed in Chapter Four, 66% of the ringwork castles measured in the study area enclosed areas measuring between 1000m² and 2000m². In contrast, Graham found that all of the mottes summits measured in the liberty of Meath measured less than 300m², with the exception of the mottes at Galtrim and Slane.[117] Unlike the average motte summit, the interior of a ringwork castle would have been large enough to house some troops. O'Conor has noted that many of the sites occupied by the Anglo-Normans in the immediate post-invasion period, including the walled towns of Dublin, Waterford and Wexford, and the natural island at Bannow, were large enough to house and protect a whole body of troops, which could be used both as bases for attack and to provide shelter for an army in retreat.[118] While ringwork castles could never have housed whole armies, it is notable that they had enclosed much larger areas than motte summits and could have accommodated smaller bodies of troops.

Ringwork castles would also have been more accessible for supplies and animals than motte summits and may have functioned as an important link in the supply chain for provisions for Anglo-Norman armies on campaign. The morphology of ringwork castle entrances, which are discussed in Chapter Four, suggests that the entrance ways were generally quite wide and would have been accessible for horses, livestock and carts bringing supplies. In this regard, ringwork castles had a clear advantage over mottes without baileys, which were generally inaccessible for animals and vehicles. The war-horses used by Anglo-Norman knights could have been kept in the interior of the ringwork castle, as could livestock. It is notable that the *Song of Dermot and the Earl* attests that some cattle, which the Anglo-Normans had acquired through raiding,[119] were herded into the partial ringwork of Baginbun before the battle.[120] The secure

[117] B. J. Graham, 'The mottes of the Anglo-Norman liberty of Meath', in Murtagh, Harmon, (ed.), *Irish Midland Studies: essays in commemoration of N.W. English* (Athlone, 1980), p. 55.
[118] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 91-121.
[119] Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland*, Lines 1412-13.
[120] Ibid., Lines 1428-9.

storage of supplies would have been a priority for the Anglo-Normans during the course of military campaigns and evidence of this role, in the form of a probable granary, has been excavated at the ringwork castle at Trim. This timber building, which was raised off the ground and supported by posts, was interpreted as a probable granary by Hayden because it was covered in a thick layer of burnt grain. [121] The structure was destroyed in the fire that ended the first phase of the ringwork castle's occupation. The presence of this granary suggests that the storage of supplies was one of the functions fulfilled by the ringwork castle at Trim in the early 1170s.

The ringwork castles constructed in the context of the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland were primarily military fortifications. However, Gerald of Wales' account implies that the ringwork castle of Carrick also functioned as a residence for the family of Robert fitz Stephen as it is clearly stated that fitz Stephen's wife and children were in residence at the time of the siege in 1171.[122] It seems likely that the account is accurate in this regard as Gerald was the nephew of Robert fitz Stephen and would surely have had the opportunity to discuss the siege with those involved. This is notable because it implies that the castle at Carrick incorporated suitable accommodation for a high-status Anglo-Norman family, even at this early date.

While the advantages of the ringwork castle over the motte as a campaign castle seem quite obvious, the factors that influenced the choice between the two types of castle in the sub-infeudation period are less clear. The documentary evidence discussed above clearly shows that ringwork castles were constructed in the study area into the early thirteenth century and possibly later, and were occupied into the fourteenth century. This shows that ringwork castles did not go out of fashion after the invasion period. However, the evidence from England and Wales shows that mottes outnumbered ringwork castles by approximately 3.7 to 1,[123] while, in the study area, mottes seem to outnumber definite ringwork castles by 12.5 to 1.[124] Castellologists have tended to agree that mottes and ringworks at manorial centres generally fulfilled the same functions.

[121] Hayden, 'Trim Castle, Co. Meath: excavations, 1995-8', i, 41 and 51.
[122] *Expugnatio Hibernica*, pp 80-1.
[123] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 98.
[124] Taking the possible ringwork castles in the study area into account, this figure rises to 5.8:1. However, it seems highly unlikely that all of these sites will prove to be definite ringwork castles.

Why then did some castle builders choose to construct mottes rather than ringwork castles and *vice versa*? King and Alcock suggested that the choice between motte and ringwork castles reflected '...little more than the accident of personal preference.'[125] However, the evidence from the study area and elsewhere indicates that the situation was far more complex than this and that many different factors and influences may have been at play.

In some cases, the owner may have acquired a castle that originated as a conquest-period ringwork castle and may have lacked the resources or inclination to adapt it into a motte. The conquest period partial ringwork castle at Carrick continued to be occupied as a ringwork castle until its abandonment in the early fourteenth century, although some stone features were added over time. The evidence from England indicates that some conquest-period ringwork castles, including Goltho, Sulgrave and Castle Neroche, were subsequently raised to form mottes.[126] The development of these sites indicates that, for some reason, the ringwork castles were deemed inadequate. From a military viewpoint, the motte castle was probably perceived as a superior form of fortification. As Kenyon has stated, 'The advantage of the motte is obvious, towering as it did in most cases over the surrounding terrain.'[127] The height of most mottes made them difficult to capture by force and the small size of their summits made them easier to defend by a small group of men than ringwork castles, which generally had much longer perimeters than motte summits. O'Conor has also suggested that the height of motte castles would have made them more intimidating to attack from a psychological point of view.[128]

While motte castles may have been viewed as militarily superior to ringworks castles, they may also have been perceived as higher-status fortifications than ringwork castles. There are some obvious exceptions as some ringwork castles were constructed by the men from the upper stratum of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy and clearly functioned as high-status residences. For example, it is doubtful that either the enormous ringwork

[125] King and Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', p. 106.
[126] See Chapter Two (Section 2.6).
[127] Kenyon, *Medieval fortifications*, p. 4.
[128] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 360; Kieran O'Conor, 'Irish earthwork castles' in *Fortress*, ix (1992), p. 12.

castle at Castle Rising, Norfolk, which was constructed by the D'Albini family, or the royal ringwork castle at Old Sarum Wiltshire, was seen as a low-status fortification by contemporaries. The documentary evidence discussed above (Section 8.3) clearly shows that some of the ringwork castles in the study area were constructed by men from the top tier of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy in Ireland. Both the ringwork and stone castle at Clonmacnoise and the ringwork castle at Newcastle McKynegan were royal castles while the ringwork castles of Carrick, Moone and Danesfort were held as demesne manors of the Marshal lords of Leinster.

In the barony of Meath, the highest status castles seem to have almost invariably been mottes. The liberty of Meath was granted to the Hugh de Lacy by Henry II in 1172,[129] and the *Song of Dermot and the Earl* describes the sub-infeudation of Meath in some detail.[130] As Graham has outlined, Hugh de Lacy made seven major land grants in eastern Meath, which became the baronies of Skreen, Morgallion, Slane, Deece, Lune, Demi-Fore and Dunboyne, in addition to some smaller grants.[131] It is notable that there are mottes at the *caput*s of the baronies of Skreen, Morgallion, Slane, Deece and Demi-Fore, which are located at Skreen, Nobber, Slane, Galtrim and Castlecor. Graham has suggested that the *caput* castles at Athboy in Lune and at Dunboyne, which have not survived, also took the form of mottes. As Graham has argued, '...the link between both the principal land grants of the sub-infeudation and seigniorial manors with large motte and baileys can be clearly established.'[132] It is notable that these mottes seem to have been constructed as a part of castle building scheme co-ordinated by Hugh de Lacy. As Graham has argued, this suggests that '...there was some defensive concept or plan for the barony as a whole.'[133]

As a result of Hugh de Lacy's castle-building scheme, the highest status earthwork castles, which were located at the *caputs* of baronies, took the form of mottes. The

[129] James Mills and M.J. McEnery (eds), *Calendar of the Gormanston register* (Dublin, 1916), p. 177; Colin Veach, 'Henry II's grant of Meath to Hugh de Lacy in 1172: a reassessment' in *Ríocht na Mídhe*, xviii (2007), 67–94.
[130] Mullally, (ed.), *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland,* Lines 3127-75; Orpen, Ireland under the Normans, ii, 75-90; Graham, 'The mottes of the Anglo-Norman liberty of Meath', pp 44-5.
[131] Graham, 'The mottes of the Anglo-Norman liberty of Meath', p. 44.
[132] Ibid., p. 47.
[133] Ibid., p. 45.

ringwork castles found in eastern Meath seem to have been associated with manors that were established on lands that were parcelled out in secondary grants. For example, the ringwork castles at Danestown and Kilcarn seem to have been associated with manors that were geographically quite small, judging by the small size of the modern civil parishes, and which were held of the de Feipo lords of Skreen. In this case, the discovery of these two ringwork castles has filled some of the gaps in the earthwork castle distribution map at a local level. Within the de Feipo barony of Skreen, there were two mottes, located at Skreen and Athlumney and two ringwork castles, at Danestown and Kilcarn. As the civil parish of Monkstown represents the lands of a monastic grange, it seems unlikely that there was ever a castle there. There may have been earthwork castles associated with the manors of Killeen and Dowdstown. However, they would probably have been in the grounds associated with Killeen House and Dowdstown House and no trace of a castle has survived in either location.

Perceptions of the superiority and status of one type of earthwork castle over another may have varied from place to place. As King has suggested, castle builders were probably influenced in their choice of castle type '...by emulation or by the expert advice available in their own district.'[134] It seems likely that prospective castle-builders asked the advice of their feudal lords before making a final decision and it is also likely that the form of the castles held by their social superiors in the local area was a powerful influencing factor. These influences may go some way towards explaining why ringwork castles tend to appear in clusters, both in England and Wales, and in the study area. It is notable that ringwork castles seem to have been popular in the south-east midlands of Ireland. As argued above (Section 8.3), there is evidence to suggest that the ringwork castle of Danesfort, Rathealy and Purcellsinch, and the possible ringwork castles of Mallardstown and Rathdowney, were constructed by William Marshal and his household knights and followers. It is notable that Marshal grew up in Hampshire and Wiltshire, in an area where ringwork castles were more common than elsewhere. The earthwork castles that William Marshal would have familiar with as a child included both mottes and ringwork castles. The castles held by William's father, John, included the royal motte castle of Marlborough, of which he was castellan, and the ringwork and

[134] D. J. C. King, *The Castle in England and Wales: an interpretive history* (London, 1988), pp 42-3.

bailey castle of Ludgershall. William would also have been familiar with the ringwork castle at nearby Old Sarum. It seems possible that Marshal's familiarity with these castles may have made him more open to the idea of constructing ringwork castles in his later life.

In relation to Ireland, Graham has suggested that the ringwork castle was a later form of earthwork castle than the motte and has used this theory to explain the prevalence of ringworks in western Ireland in comparison to eastern Ireland, which was settled by the Anglo-Norman at an earlier date.[135] Graham's suggestion that '...the ringwork may have been the chronological successor to the motte'[136] has generally been discounted.[137] Analysis of the documentary and archaeological evidence shows that, although ringwork castles were favoured in the initial conquest period, both types of castle were constructed through the period of sub-infeudation in the late twelfth century and into the thirteenth century. The relationship between motte and the ringwork distribution cannot therefore be explained in terms of chronology. As discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.2), the apparent prevalence of ringwork castles in the west of Ireland may be partly due to geomorphology, as there are more suitable promontories for partial ringworks on the western coastline of Ireland than on the eastern coast. [138]

8.6 Conclusion to the chapter

It has been shown in this chapter that some of the earliest documented castles constructed by the Anglo-Normans in Ireland took the form of ringwork castles. The documentary and archaeological evidence suggests that the ringwork castles at Baginbun, Carrick, Trim and Kilkenny were all constructed between 1169 and 1173. Although mottes have traditionally been viewed as tools of conquest used in the initial post-Conquest period, O'Conor has shown that there is little evidence mottes being constructed in Ireland before the late 1170s. The evidence suggests, therefore, that the ringwork castle was the Anglo-Normans' preferred type of fortification in the few years following the invasion, although other fortifications, including pre-exisiting walled

[135] B. J. Graham, 'Timber and earthwork fortifications in western Ireland' in *Medieval Archaeology*, xxxii (1988), pp110-29.
[136] Ibid., p. 126.
[137] O'Conor, 'The earthwork castles of medieval Leinster', i, 353-4.
[138] Ibid., i, 356-9.

towns and natural islands, were also utilised. Ringwork castles seem to have been preferred over mottes in campaign situations because they were quicker to construct, particularly in the case of partial ringworks on promontories, and could accommodate large groups of soldiers, animals and supplies.

In the period of sub-infeudation that followed the initial invasion period, ringwork castles continued to be constructed alongside mottes in the context of manorial settlement. The documentary evidence suggests that most of the ringwork castles in the study area were constructed between 1175 and 1215. Although there is no evidence for new ringwork castles being constructed after the second decade of the thirteenth century, many ringwork castles seem to have been occupied into fourteenth century. Although mottes and ringwork castles constructed at manorial centres seem to have fulfilled the same functions, motte castles seem to have been the preferred option after the initial conquest phase. There are several reasons why mottes were the preferred form of castle. They may have been seen as militarily superior as their height and small summit area meant that they could be defended by relatively few men, were psychologically intimidating and were difficult to attack. Also, motte castles would generally have been more visible than ringwork castles, although both types of castles would have served as highly conspicuous symbols of Anglo-Norman lordship in the landscape.

Chapter Nine – Conclusions

The aims of this thesis were to re-evaluate the evidence for ringwork castles and the role that they played in the Anglo-Norman invasion and subsequent settlement of Ireland, focusing particularly on the study area of Leinster and Meath. Ringwork castles have been a somewhat controversial issue in Irish archaeology over the past few decades. A new examination of the both the evidence and the problems involved in identifying and classifying ringwork castles seemed overdue, particularly in light of the evidence for ringwork castles uncovered by excavations at Kilkenny, Trim and Ballysimon in the 1990s. An interdisciplinary approach was adopted for this research, which utilised both the historical and archaeological sources. Through the examination and analysis of the new evidence from excavations, data acquired through fieldwork and the documentary sources, it has been possible to make some progress in answering the major questions regarding the use of ringworks castles in Ireland.

The sites selected for investigation included those that had been identified as possible ringwork castles by previous studies, ringwork castles uncovered by excavation and sites that have been classified as ringwork castles by the RMP. Fifty-one sites were selected for examination and the case for each site's classification as a ringwork castle was examined fully. A methodology for identifying ringwork castles in an Irish context was formulated. This methodology was based on identifying characteristics including ringwork morphology, defensive siting in the landscape, proximity to Anglo-Norman settlement and documentary evidence for a castle or Anglo-Norman activity in a particular location. Twenty-one (41%) of the fifty-one sites investigated were found to be definite ringwork castles, twenty-four (47%) were classified as possible ringwork castles and six sites (12%) were discarded because they seemed to represent other site-types.

Analysis of the definite ringwork castles in the study area showed that ringwork castles tend to vary considerably in terms of morphology. However, it is possible to make some general comments with regard to their appearance. Ringwork castles can be divided into to main group; full ringwork castles and partial ringworks. In the study area, there were two partial ringworks and nineteen full ringworks. However, it seems likely that this is

partly due to the lack of suitable promontory sites in eastern Ireland. In terms of size, 66% of the ringwork castles in the study area enclosed areas measuring between 1000 and 2000m², while 66% of the circular ringworks had diameters between 36m and 50m. This is much larger than the average motte summit and may explain why only 9% of the ringwork castles in the study area seem to have had associated baileys. Many ringwork castles in the study area (57%) enclose interiors that are raised significantly above ground level, although in many cases, this was due to site selection rather than deliberate raising of the interior. This is in marked contrast to the ringwork castles to the ringwork castles of England and Wales, where very few ringworks were raised significantly above ground level. The evidence form excavations of ringwork castles like Trim has shown that the timber structures associated with ringwork castles were quite sophisticated. Most ringwork castles would have been defended by a palisade around the perimeter of the interior and a gate-tower and the principal building in the interior was generally a hall or tower. Evidence of a possible gate-tower has been noted at Rathealy and it seems possible that the circular depression at Rathtroane represents a collapsed timber tower.

In terms of siting, ringwork castles tend to be quite predictable. They are generally located on the summits of hills and ridges, although some ringwork castles occupy low-lying positions beside rivers. It is notable that ringwork castles are generally not located half-way up slopes, in typical ringfort locations. However, the morphological and place-name evidence suggests that the ringwork castles at Rathealy, Rathtroane and Rodanstown represent re-fortified ringforts and it is notable that these sites are located in positions that would usually be considered typical ringwork rather than ringfort sites. The association between some ringwork castles and early medieval ecclesiastical sites and settlements indicates that the Anglo-Normans followed a deliberate policy of constructing ringwork castles close to pre-existing urban and proto-urban settlements, in order to control both population centres and pre-existing communication routes.

Chapter Seven explored the relationship between ringwork castles and Anglo-Norman associated settlement. It is notable that several ringwork castles, including those at Moone, Danesfort and Rathangan, were associated with Anglo-Norman boroughs. In

most cases, ringwork castles seem to have been associated with small manorial centres, which are usually represented in the landscape by medieval church sites. It was observed that, although some ringwork and church sites are directly juxtaposed, some church and castle sites are up to 900m apart and it can be difficult to prove that the two sites are associated. The distance between some ringwork castles and their associated churches makes it difficult to use this criterion as an identifying characteristic in the field. However, it was also observed that, in the majority of cases, associated ringwork castle and church sites are located in the same townland, which often shares the name of the civil parish. Some ringwork castles seem to have been associated with extensive high-status landscapes, which included features like mills, deer parks and fishponds. For example, the archaeological and documentary evidence shows that partial ringwork castle at Carrick, which was held as a demesne manor of the Marshal lords of Leinster, was associated with a landscape that included two mills, a deer park and a major ferry crossing. Similarly, the Marshal manor of Danesfort incorporated a dovecote and fishponds.

The evidence for the chronology of ringwork castles in the study area was examined in Chapter Eight. It was found that ringwork castles were the preferred form of castle in the conquest period. The ringwork castles at Carrick, Baginbun, Trim and Kilkenny were all constructed between 1169 and 1173. O'Conor has shown that there is little evidence for the construction of mottes before the death of Strongbow in 1176. This echoes the evidence from England, where ringworks were the preferred form of castle in the period between1066 and 1068. Ringwork castles continued to be constructed alongside mottes in the period of subinfeudation. However, the ratio of mottes to definite ringwork castles in the study area is approximately 12:1, indicating that, in this phase of settlement, mottes were by far the preferred form of fortification. The documentary evidence indicates that most of the ringwork castles in the study area were constructed in the period between 1169 and 1215. This corresponds with the generally accepted chronology for motte castles in eastern Ireland, although O'Conor has identified some possible later examples.

While ringwork castles seem to have been preferred in the context of military campaigns, as they were quicker to construct, less labour-intensive and provided more space for men, animals and supplies, it is unclear why mottes were preferred in the sub-infeudation period. Multiple factors seem to have influenced the choice, including geomorphology, local trend and the influence of the castle-builder's social superiors. The evidence from the study area suggests that the castles constructed by Hugh de Lacy for his chief vassals in Meath tended to be mottes. Conversely, several ringwork castles in Leinster seem to have been constructed by followers of William Marshal. It seems possible that mottes were seen as superior fortifications because they were more impressive in the landscape, more intimidating to attack and may have been perceived as of high status than ringwork castles. However, perceptions of castle types may have varied from place to place.

To conclude, the evidence from the study are demonstrates that ringwork castles played a significant role in the Anglo-Norman conquest and continued to be constructed as manorial castles in the period of sub-infeudation that followed, although they seem to have been less popular than mottes. It is clear that, through careful examination of the documentary and archaeological evidence it is possible to identify ringwork castles in the landscape, despite the inherent problems involved in dealing with circular earthworks in Ireland.

Future Horizons

The excavation of more earthwork castle sites in the future may help to untangle the relationship between ringforts, ringwork castles and mottes. The evidence form England indicates that earthwork castles developed and evolved over time and it seems possible that ringwork castle lie under some of the known motte castles. The morphology of some stone castles in Ireland, including Lea Castle, Adore Castle and Glanworth Castle, Co. Cork, suggest that they may have been constructed on the sites of early ringwork castles. Similarly, it seems likely that many motte and ringwork castles in Ireland are located on top of early medieval ringforts. Future research on earthworks should perhaps focus on the multi-period nature of earthwork occupation and reuse rather than on differentiation between site-types.

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Site No	Site Name	Townland	X	Y	Parish	County	Revised Classification
1	Carlow Castle	Carlow	271769	176632	Carlow	Carlow	ringwork
2	Moone	Moone	278324	192278	Moone	Kildare	ringwork
3	Pollardstown	Pollardstown	277481	215108	Pollardstown	Kildare	ringwork
4	Rathangan	Rathangan	266963	219619	Rathangan	Kildare	ringwork
5	Rathasker	Rathasker	287783	217115	Naas	Kildare	possible ringwork
6	Castletobin	Castletobin	242482	145105	Callan	Kilkenny	ringwork
7	Danesfort	Danesfort	252138	146465	Danesfort	Kilkenny	possible ringwork
8	Kilkenny Castle	Dukesmeadows	250863	155688	St Patrick's	Kilkenny	ringwork
9	Mallardstown Great	Mallardstown Great	244942	141722	Mallardstown	Kilkenny	possible ringwork
10	Pigeonpark (Danesfort)	Pigeonpark	251810	148288	Danesfort	Kilkenny	ringwork
11	Purcellsinch	Purcellsinch	253551	154868	St John's	Kilkenny	ringwork
12	Rathealy	Rathealy	238410	160510	Tullaroan	Kilkenny	ringwork
13	Dunbrin Lower	Dunbrin Lower	268850	191800	Ballyadams	Laois	ringwork
14	Dunrally	Vicarstown (Dodd)	263300	202310	Moyanna	Laois	possible ringwork
15	Lea Castle	Lea	257065	212018	Lea	Laois	possible ringwork
16	Rathdowney	Rathdowney	228290	178330	Rathdowney	Laois	possible ringwork
17	Rathpiper	Rathpiper South	229623	177192	Rathdowney	Laois	possible ringwork
18	Redcastle	Redcastle	237275	195947	Clonenagh	Laois	possible ringwork
19	Clonard	Mulpheddar	265641	244986	Clonard	Meath	possible ringwork
20	Danestown	Danestown	297759	264799	Danestown	Meath	ringwork
21	Dollardstown	Dollardstown	293031	271136	Painestown	Meath	possible ringwork
22	Drumsawry	Drumsawry	257567	278270	Loughcrew	Meath	possible ringwork
23	Kilcarn	Kilcarn	290354	264837	Kilcarn	Meath	ringwork
24	Rathregan	Rathregan	297352	248197	Rathregan	Meath	discarded
25	Rathtroane	Rathtroane	280208	243331	Rathcore	Meath	ringwork
26	Rodanstown	Rodanstown	290165	241707	Rodanstown	Meath	ringwork
27	Trim Castle	Manorland (1st division)	280282	256710	Trim	Meath	ringwork
28	Clonmacnoise Castle	Clonmacnoise	200760	230550	Clonmacnoise	Offaly	ringwork
29	Bellanalack	Bellanalack / Knockdomny	215759	239798	Ballyloughloe	Westmeath	possible ringwork
30	Duneel	Duneel	224902	250253	Killare	Westmeath	possible ringwork
31	Baginbun	Ramstown	280000	103160	Fethard	Wexford	ringwork
32	Ballygarvan	Ballygarvan	278272	119312	Owenduff	Wexford	discarded
33	Ballyhoge	Ballyhoge	297640	128480	Ballyhoge	Wexford	possible ringwork
34	Ballyorley Upper	Ballyorley Upper	307110	145164	Kilcormick	Wexford	possible ringwork
35	Boley	Boley	279860	279860	Owenduff	Wexford	discarded

Table 1. Sites investigated in the study area

Site No	Site Name	Townland	X	Y	Parish	County	Revised Classification
36	Carrick	Newtown	301387	123131	Carrick	Wexford	ringwork
37	Castlesow	Castlesow	302875	128723	Tikillin	Wexford	discarded
38	Dunanore	Dunanore	296372	136545	Clonmore	Wexford	possible ringwork
39	Enniscorthy Castle	Enniscorthy	297320	139820	St Mary's	Wexford	possible ringwork
40	Ferns Castle	Castleland	301770	149850	Ferns	Wexford	possible ringwork
41	Finshoge	Finshoge	274512	124866	Oldross	Wexford	possible ringwork
42	Greatisland 1	Greatisland	268430	115420	Kilmokea	Wexford	possible ringwork
43	Greatisland 2	Greatisland	268560	115200	Kilmokea	Wexford	possible ringwork
44	Rathnageeragh	Rathnageeragh	279049	120733	Owenduff	Wexford	discarded
45	Templetown	Templetown	275559	103633	Templetown	Wexford	discarded
46	Toberfinnick	Toberfinnick	302903	128840	Artraman	Wexford	possible ringwork
47	Ballyvolan Lower	Ballyvolan Lower	328784	201730	Killiskey	Wicklow	ringwork
48	Black Castle	Corporation Lands	332309	194042	Rathnew	Wicklow	possible ringwork
49	Kilpipe	Kilpipe	311121	177166	Kilpipe	Wicklow	ringwork
50	Newcastle McKynegan	Newcastle Middle	329274	204221	Newcastle Lower	Wicklow	ringwork
51	Rath Turtle Moat	Deerpark	296464	215265	Blessington	Wicklow	possible ringwork

Table 1. Sites investigated in the study area

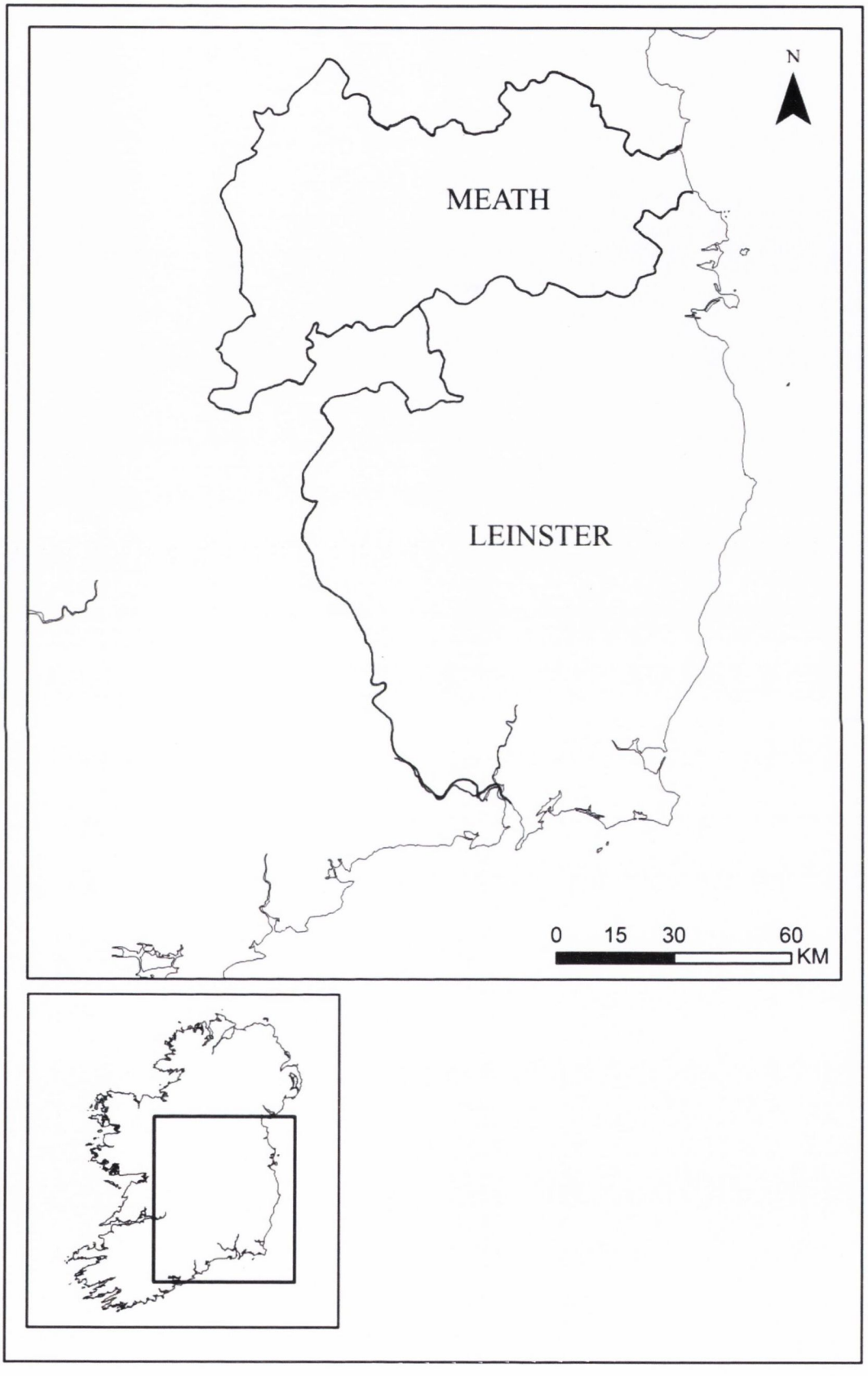

Figure 1. Map showing the study area of medieval Leinster and Meath

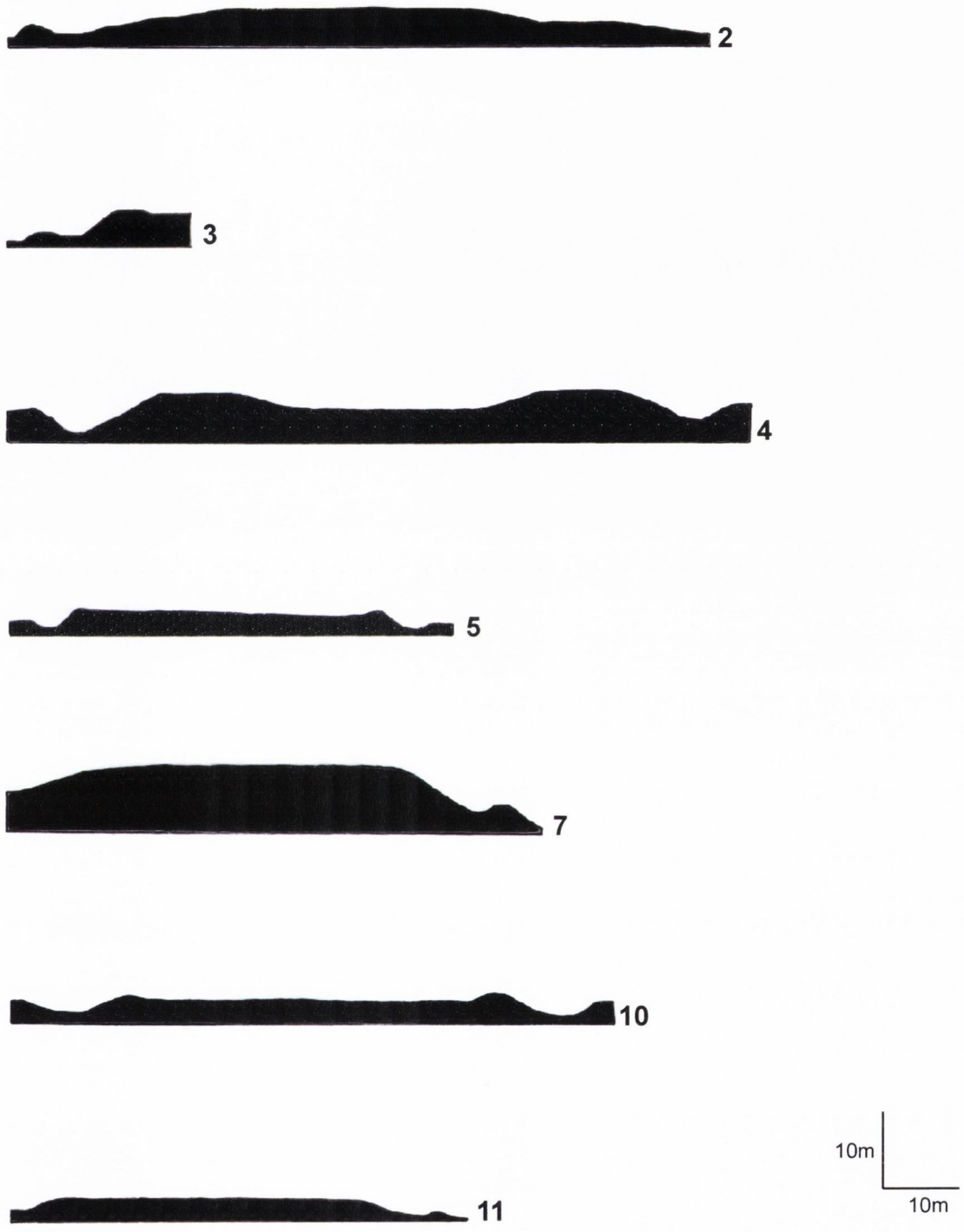

Figure 2. (2) Moone, (3) Pollardstown, *based on drawing by Fanning, 1973-4,* (4) Rathangan, (5) Rathasker, *based on measurements taken by Sweetman, 1971,* (7) Danesfort, (10) Pigeonpark, (11) Purcellsinch

Sections not preserved for (1) Carlow, (6) Castletobin, (8) Kilkenny Castle, (9) Mallardstown

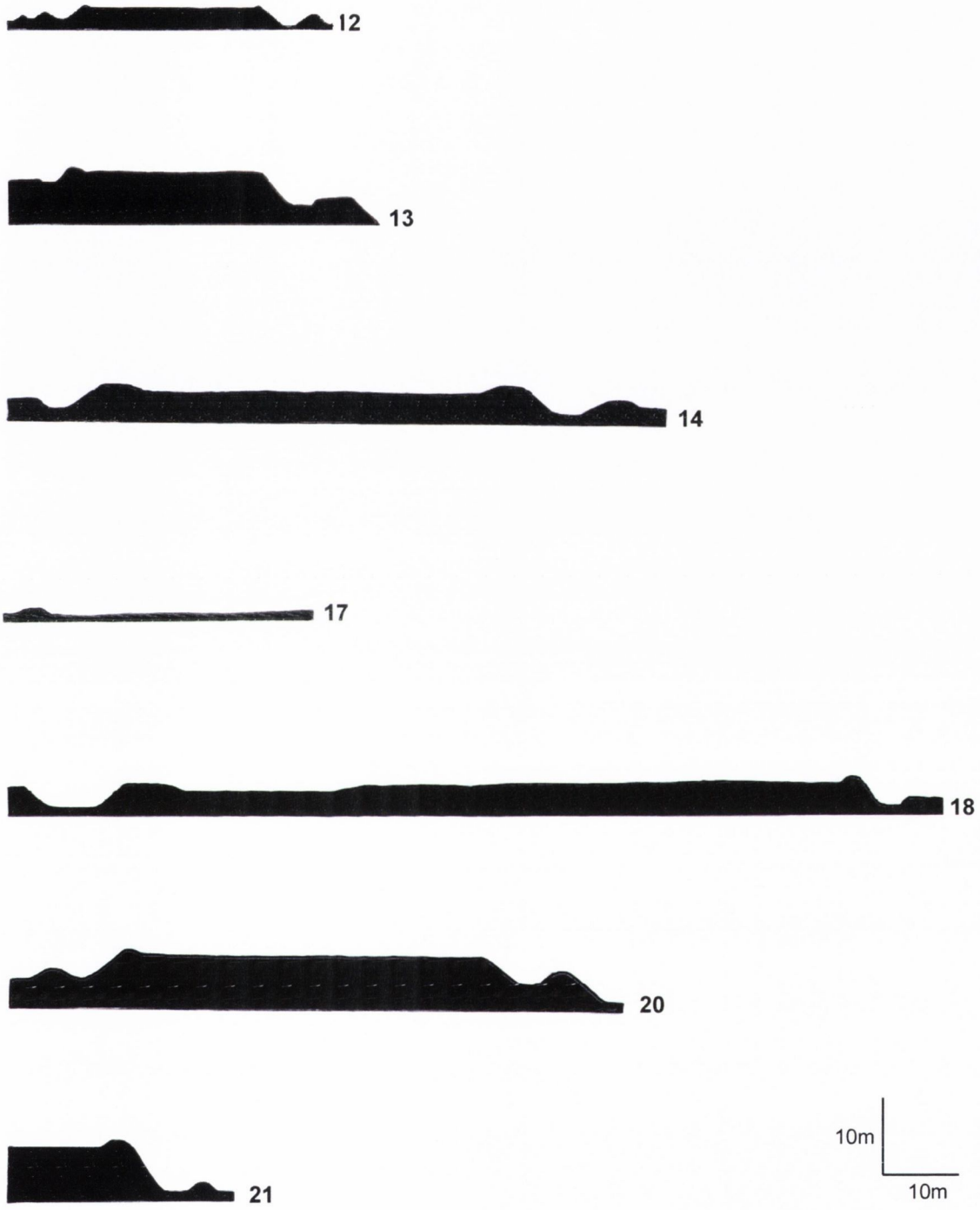

Figure 3. (12) Rathealy, (13) Dunbrin Lower, *based on measurements taken by O'Conor,* (14) Dunrally, (17) Rathpiper, (18) Redcastle, (20) Danestown, (21) Dollardstown

Sections not preserved for (15) Lea, (16) Rathdowney, (19) Clonard

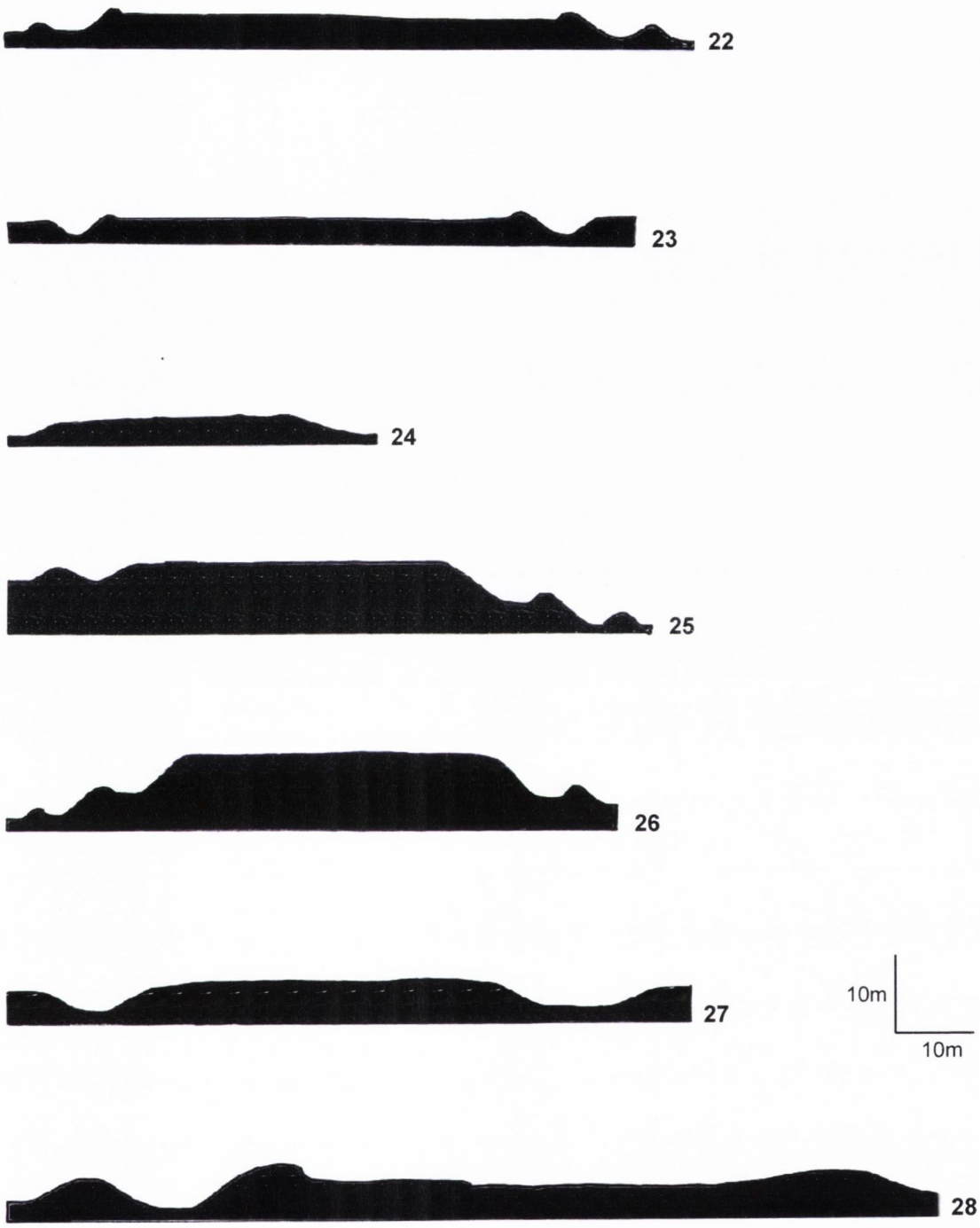

Figure 4. (22) Drumsawry, (23) Kilcarn, (24) Rathregan, (25) Rathtroane, (26) Rodanstown, (27) Trim Castle, (28) Clonmacnoise Castle

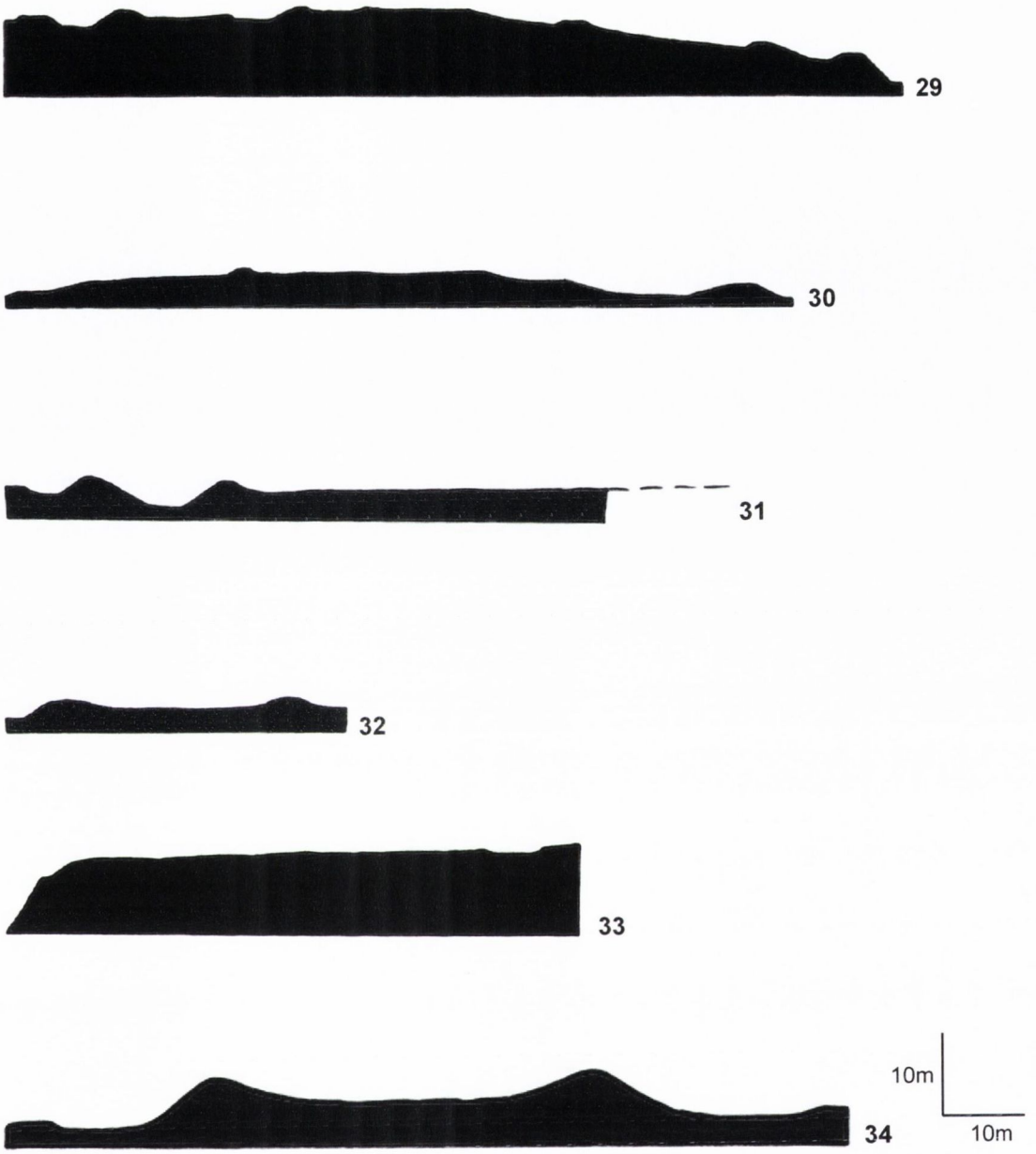

Figure 5. (29) Bellanalack/Knockdomny, (30) Duneel, (31) Baginbun - Site 2, (32) Ballygarvan, (33) Ballyhoge, (34) Ballyorley Upper

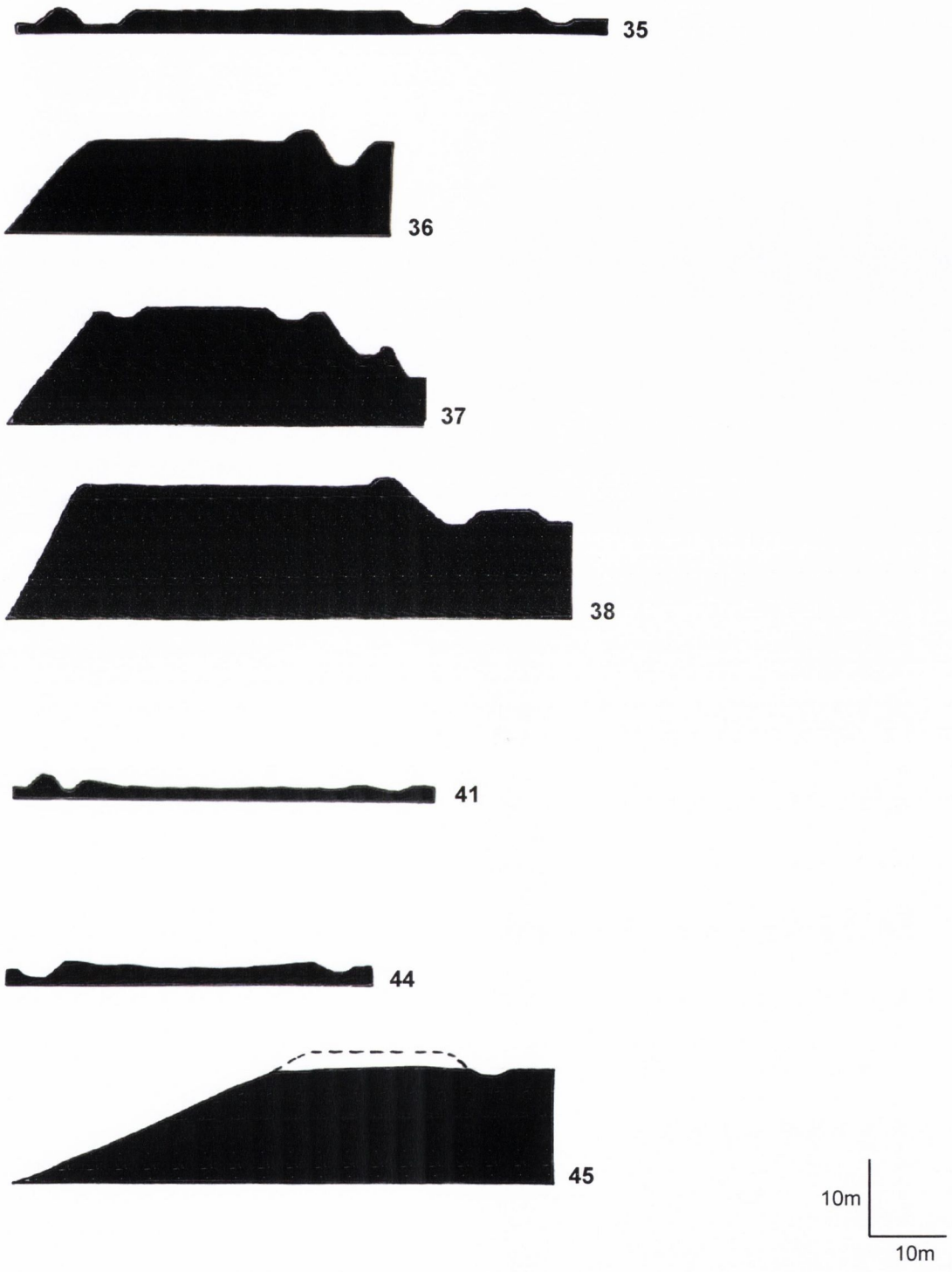

Figure 6. (35) Boley, (36) Carrick, (37) Castlesow, (38) Dunanore, (41) Finshoge,(44) Rathnageeragh, (45) Templetown *based on a section of the site drawn by Colfer*

Sections not preserved for (39) Enniscorthy, (40) Ferns, (42) Greatisland 1, (43) Greatisland 2

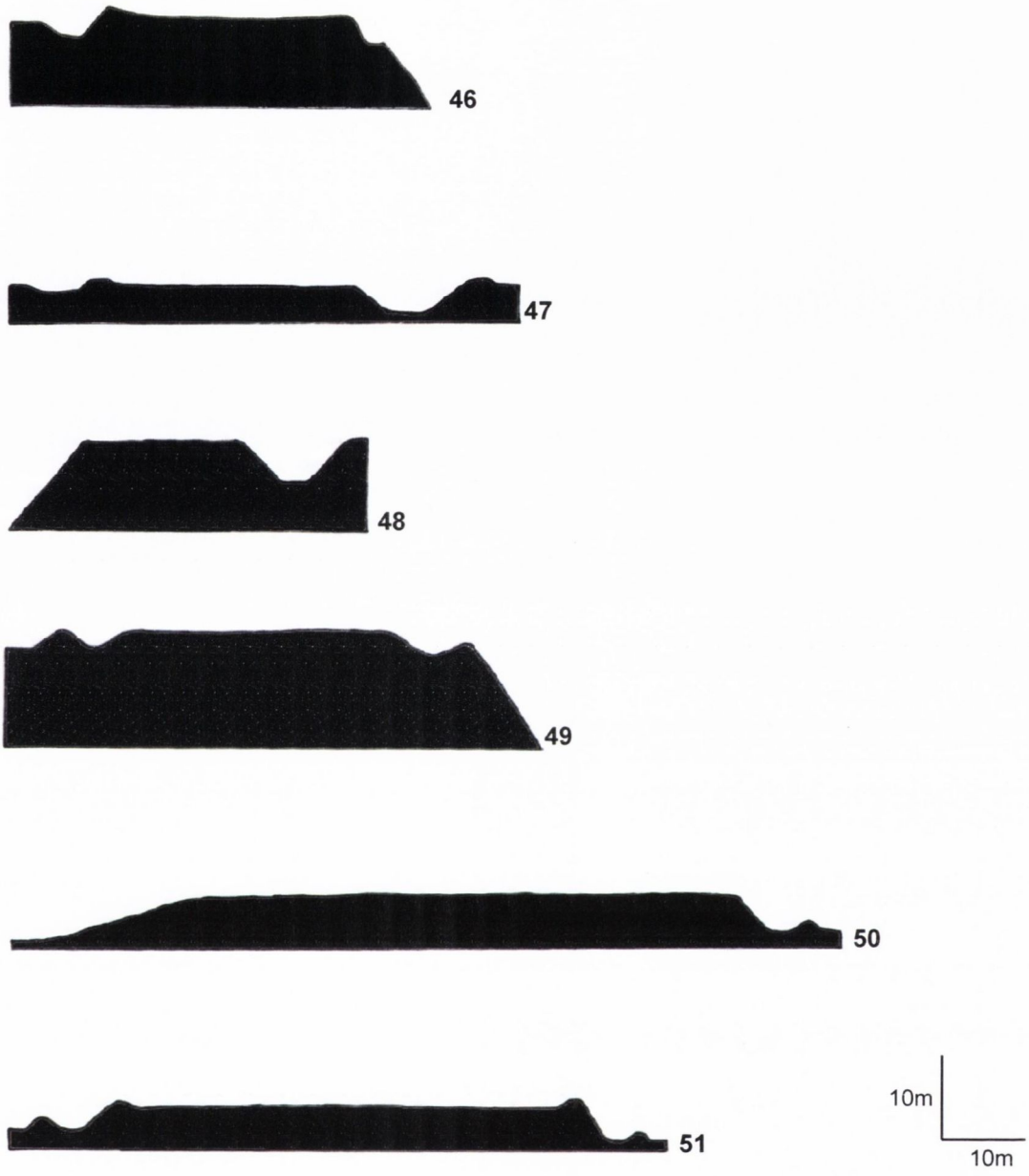

Figure 7. (46) Toberfinnick, (47) Ballyvolan Lower, (48) Black Castle, (49) Kilpipe, (50) Newcastle McKynegan, (51) Rath Turtle Moat

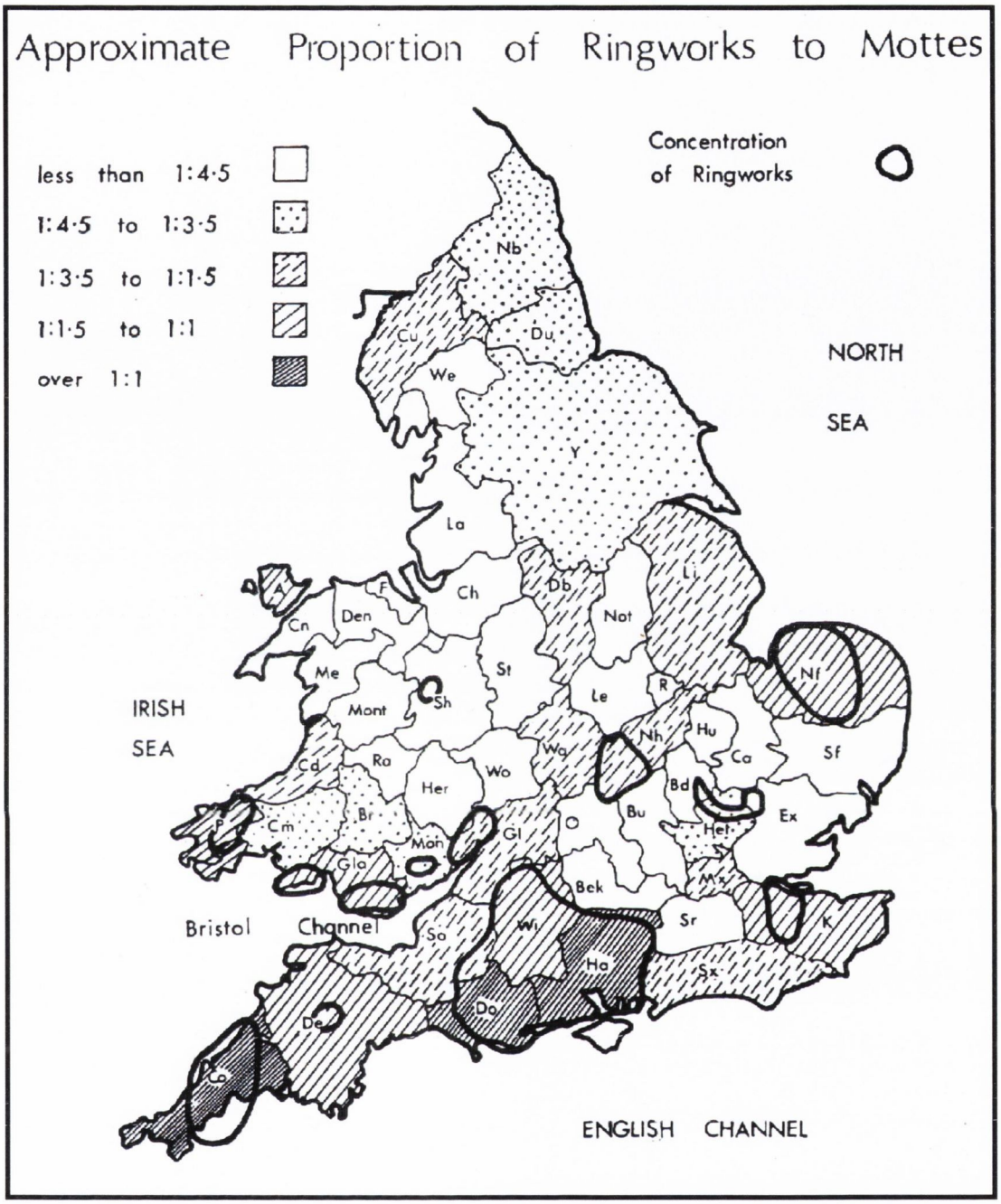

Figure 8. Map showing the ratio between motte and ringwork castles in England and Wales in addition to clusters of ringwork castles (King and Alcock, 1969)

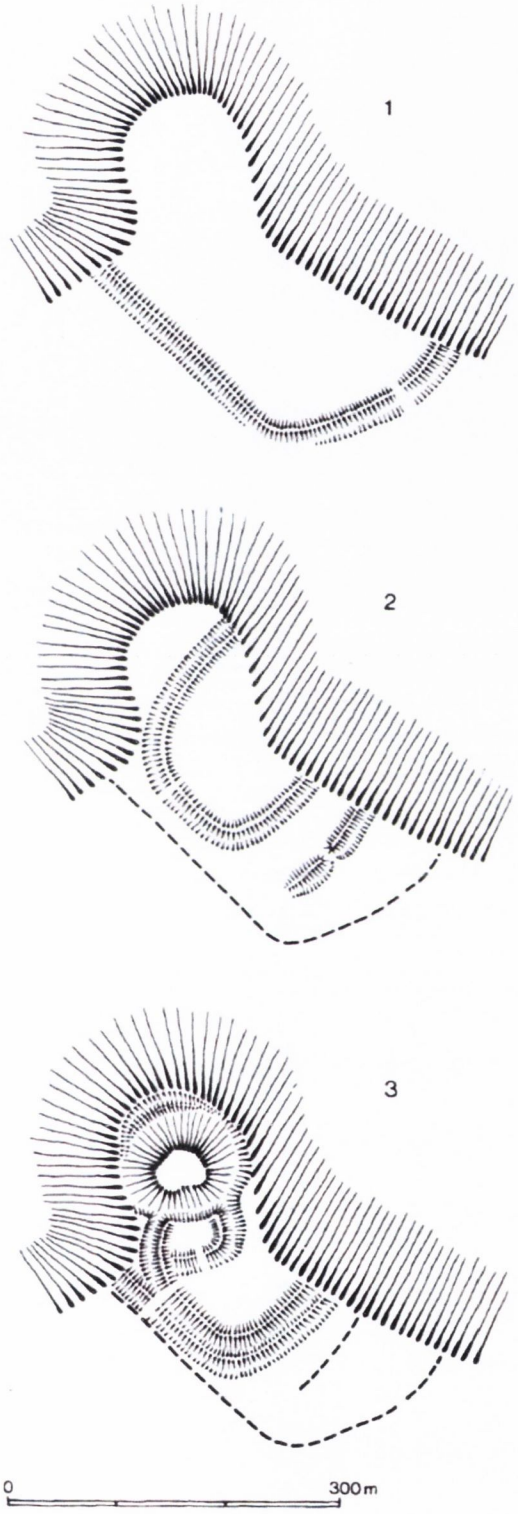

Figure 9. The first three phases of development of Castle Neroche (Period 1 - pre-Norman, Period 2 - early Norman, Period 3 - twelfth century) (Davison, 1967)

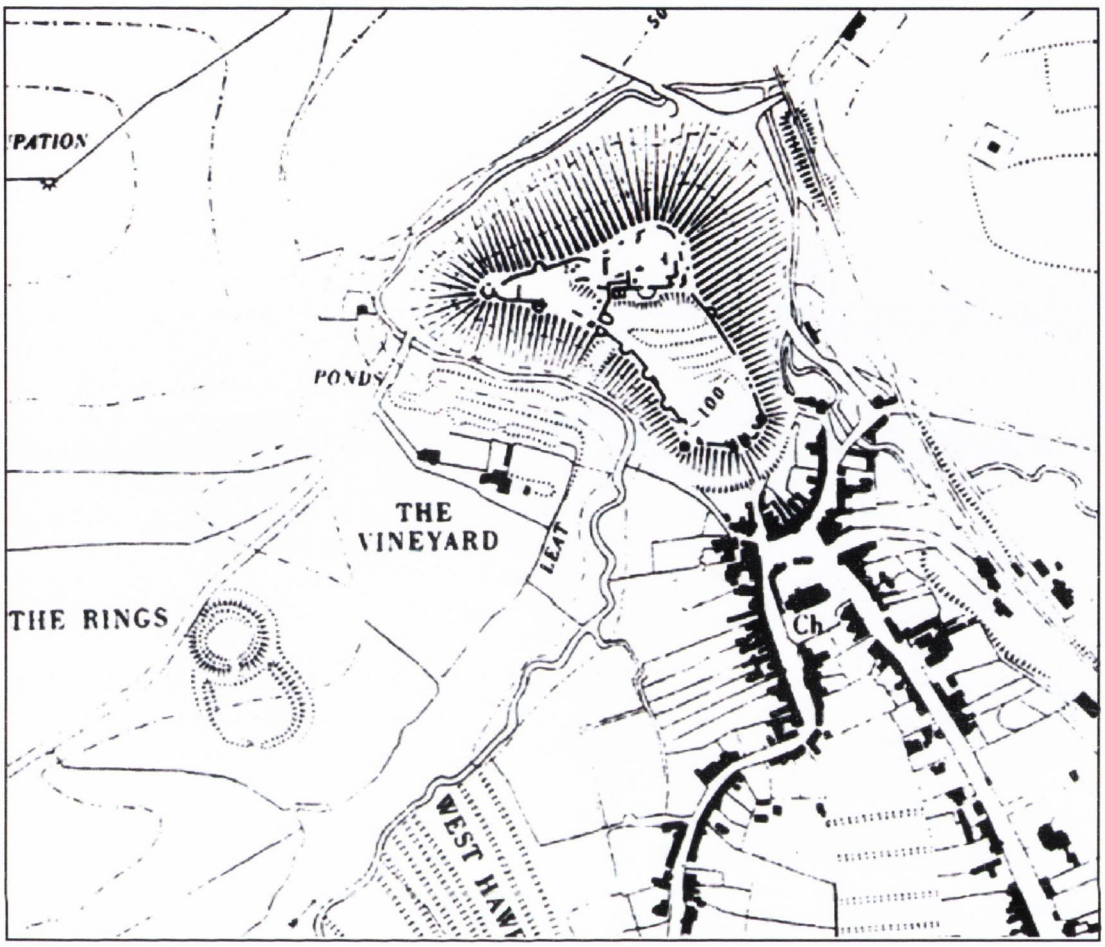

Figure 10. Map showing the siege castle known as The Rings in relation to Corfe Castle (RCHM England)

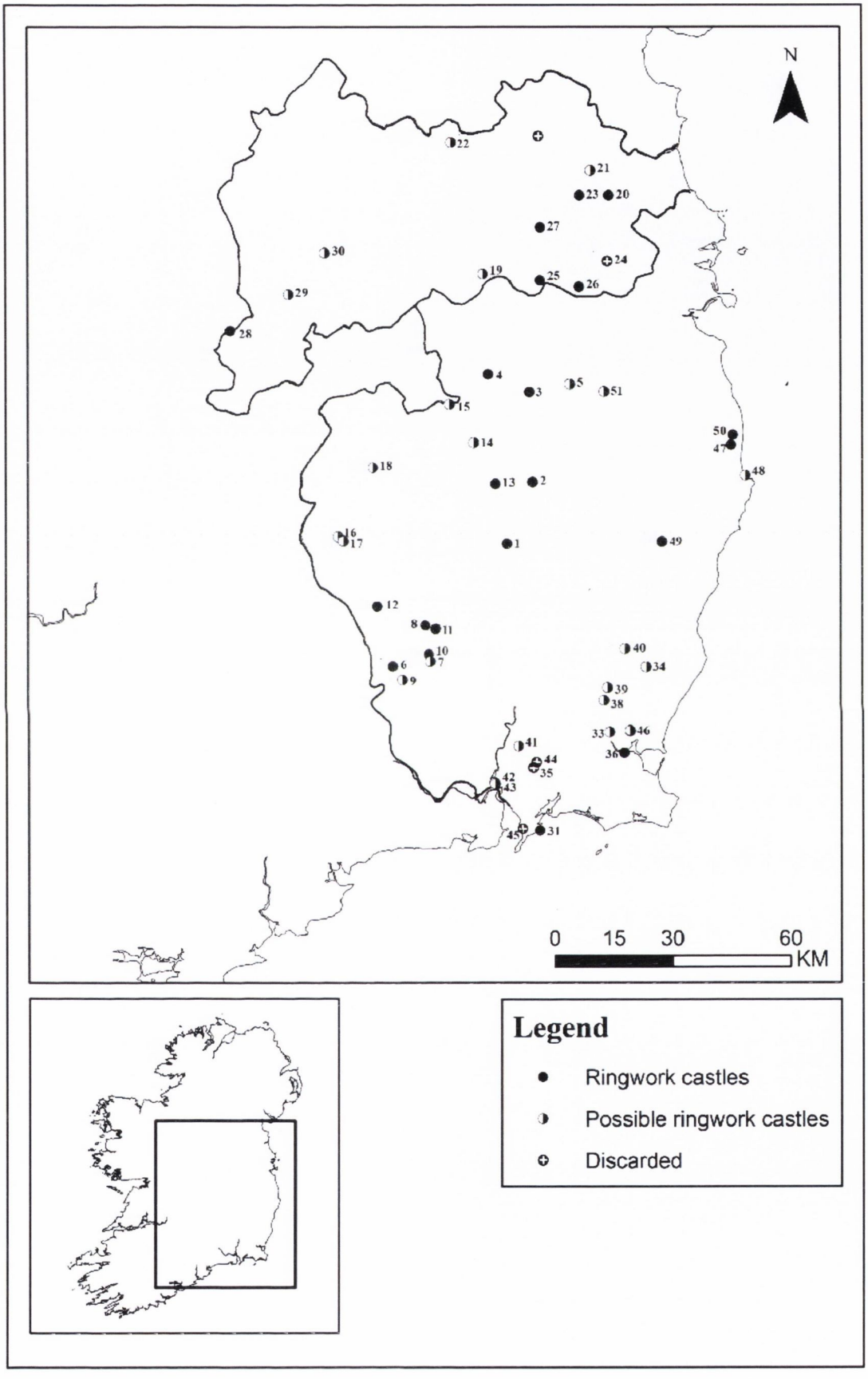

Figure 11. Ringwork castles, possible ringwork castles and discarded sites in the study area. Key on next page

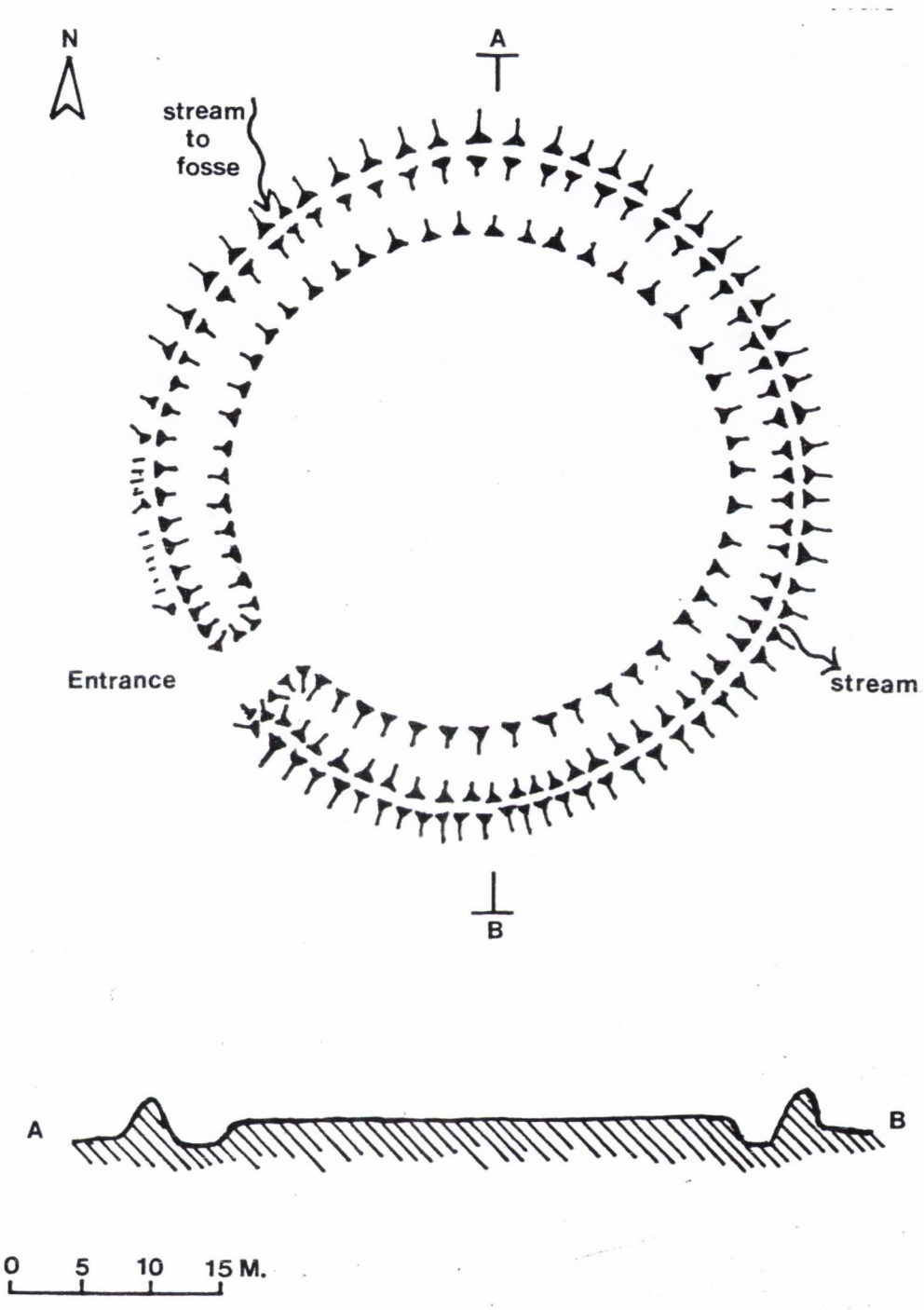

Figure 12. Plan of the circular moated site at Boley, Co. Wexford (Colfer, 1986)

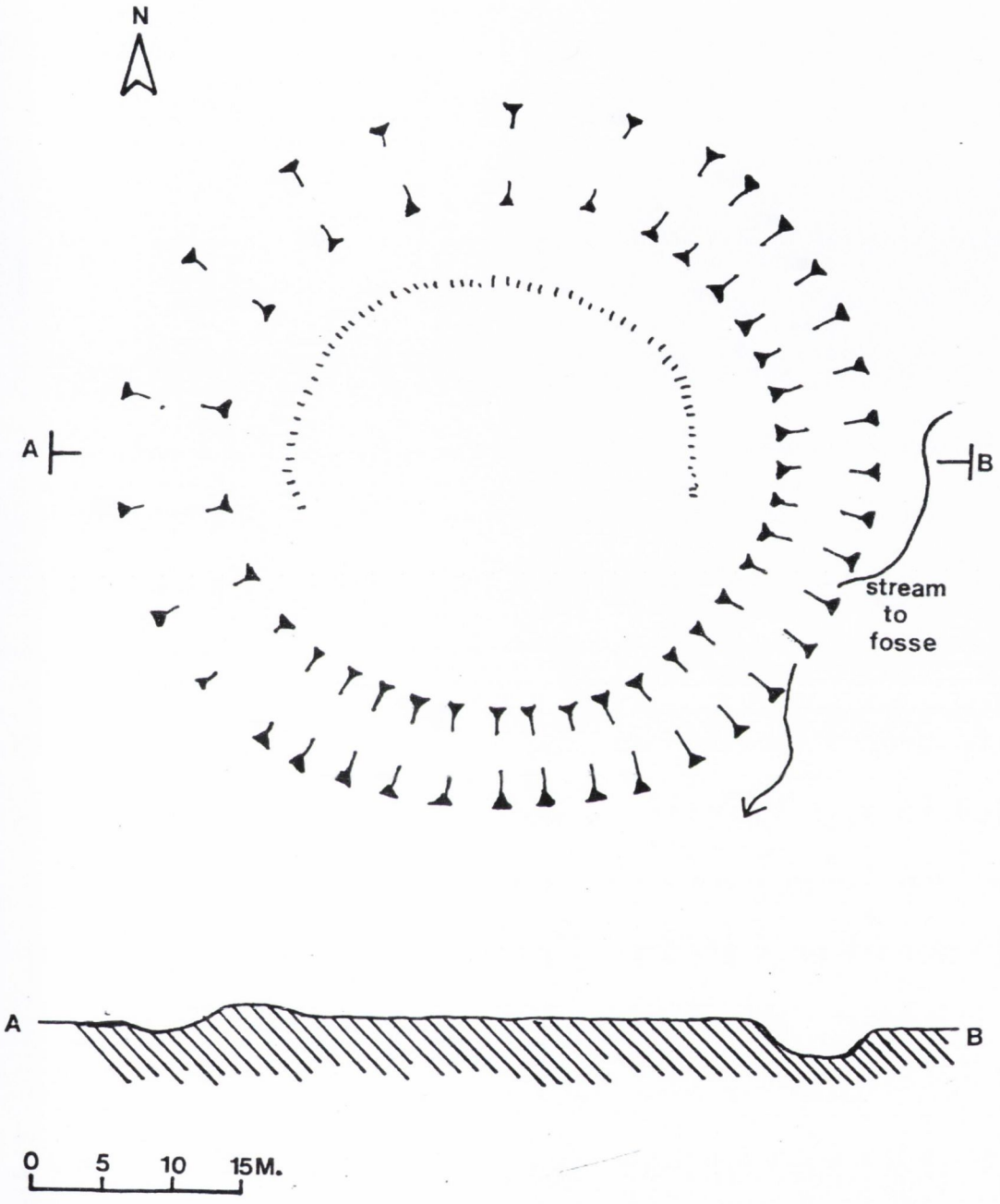

Figure 13. Plan of the circular moated site at Rathnageeragh, Co. Wexford (Colfer, 1986)

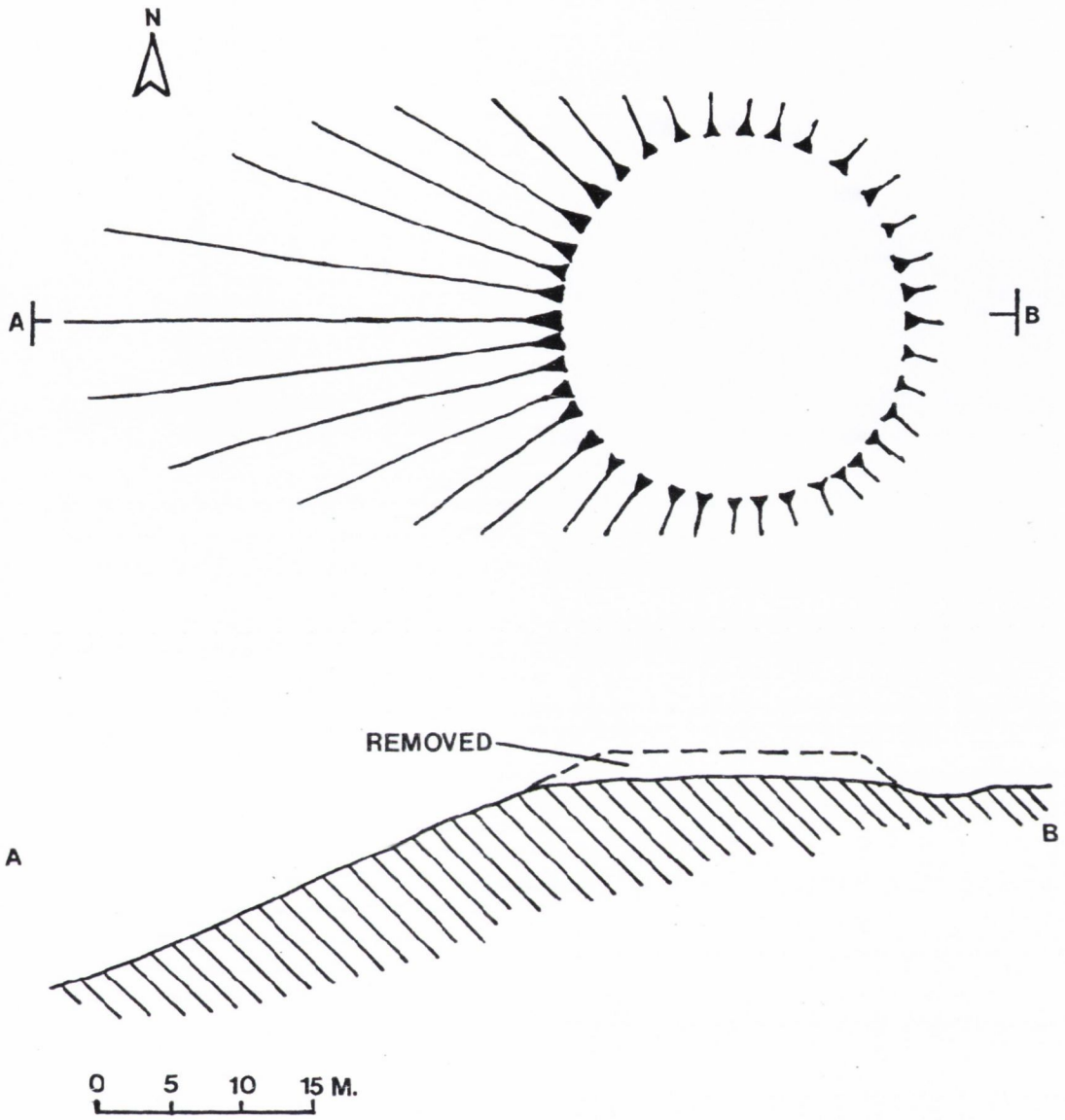

Figure 14. The earthwork behind the church at Templetown, which is no longer extant (Colfer, 1986)

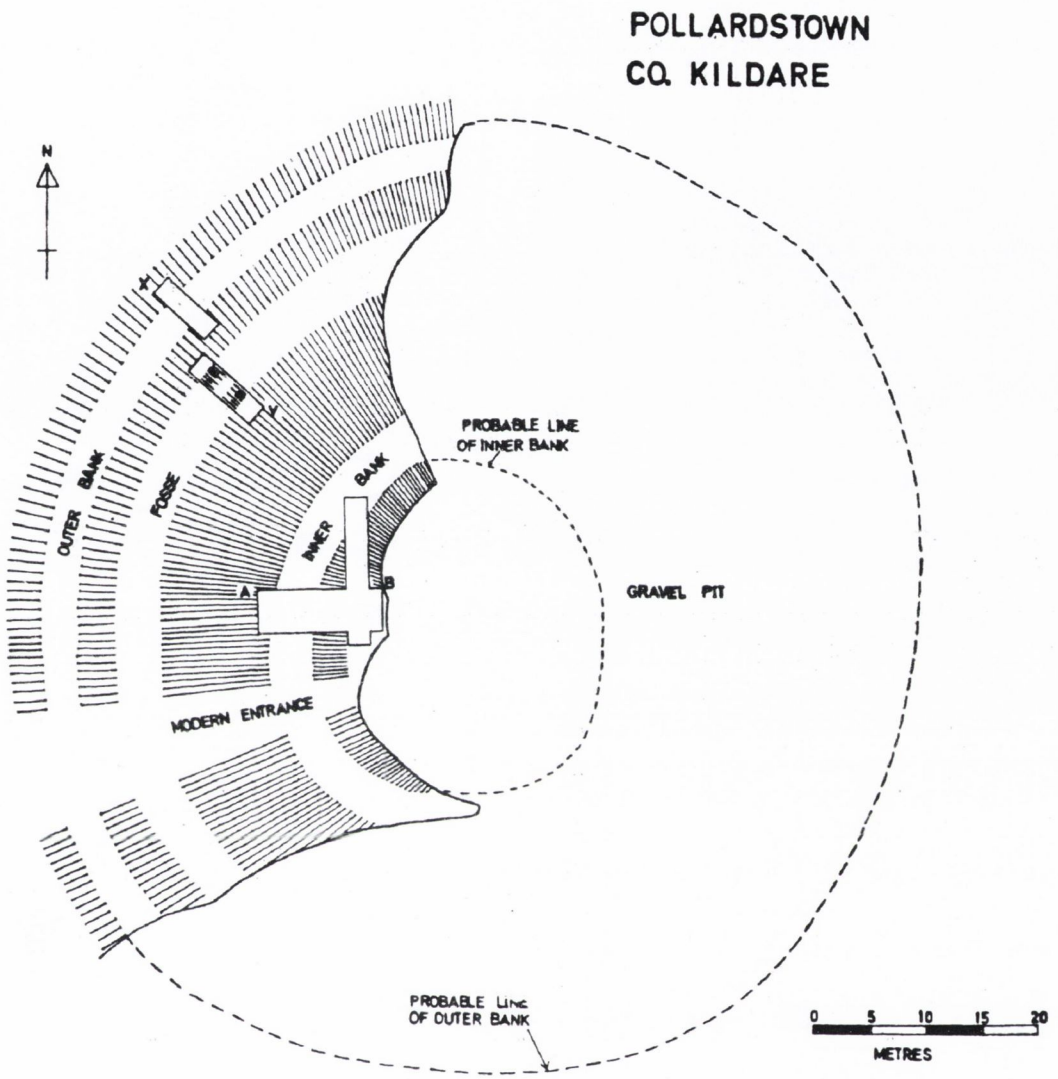

Figure 15. Plan of the ringwork castle excavated at Pollardstown, Co. Kildare (Fanning, 1973-4)

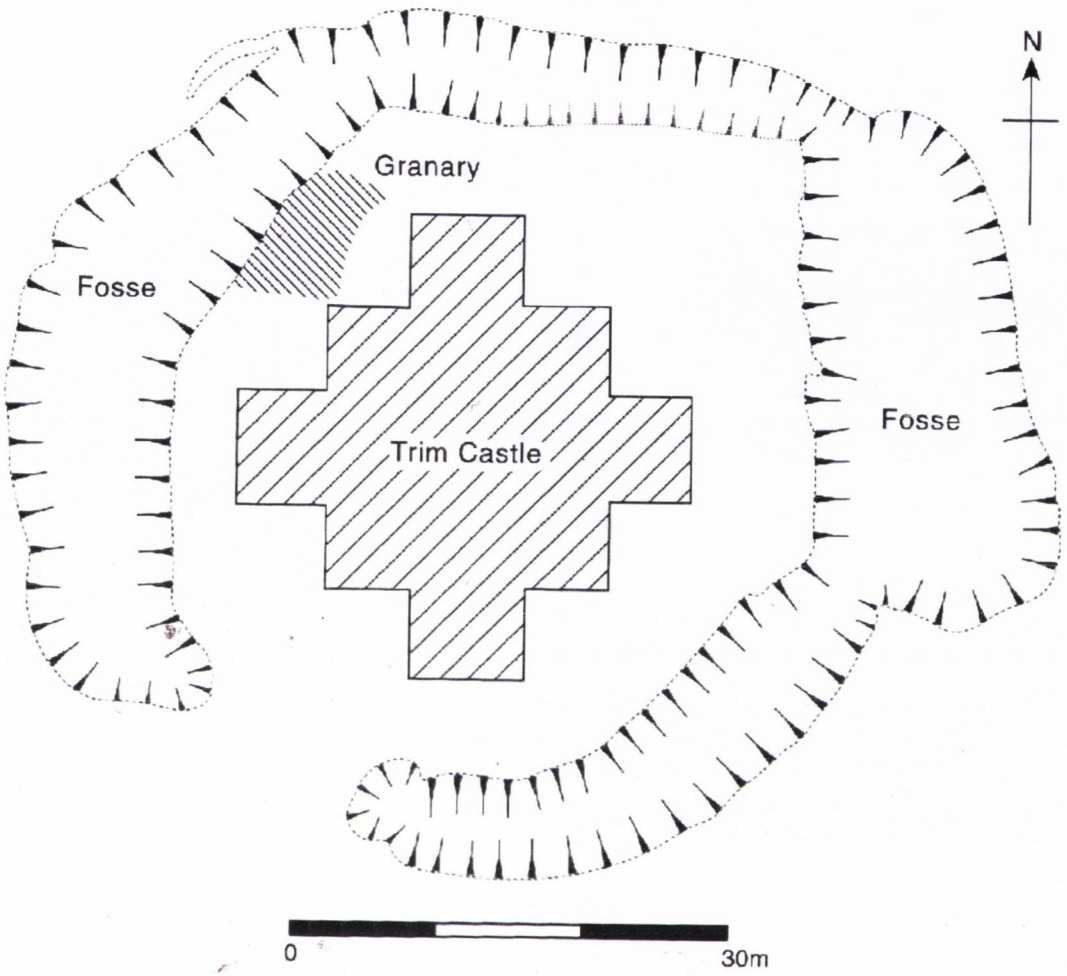

Figure 16. Plan showing the ringwork fosse excavated at Trim Castle (Hayden, 2005).

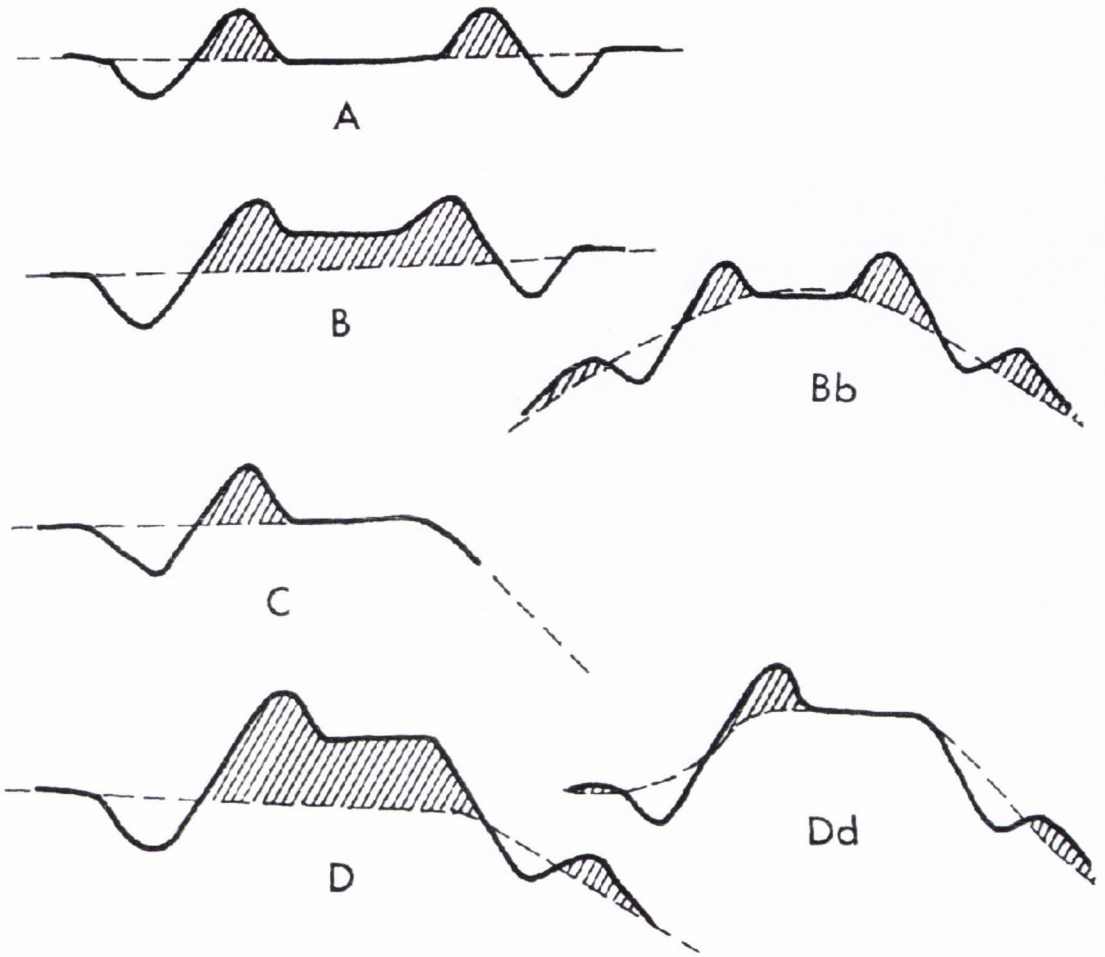

Figure 17. King and Alcock's (1969) classification scheme for ringwork castles

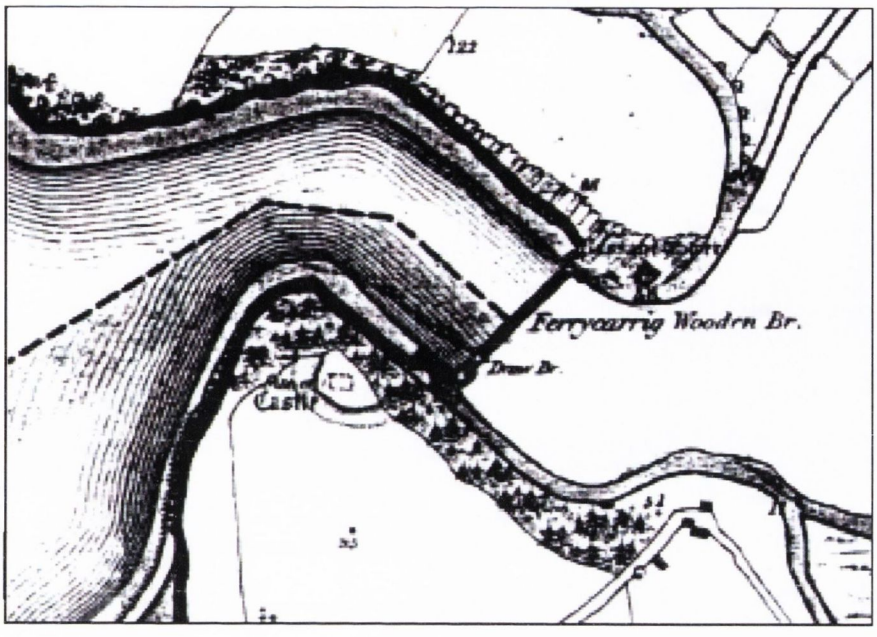

Figure 18. Depiction of the partial ringwork castle of Carrick on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (OSI)

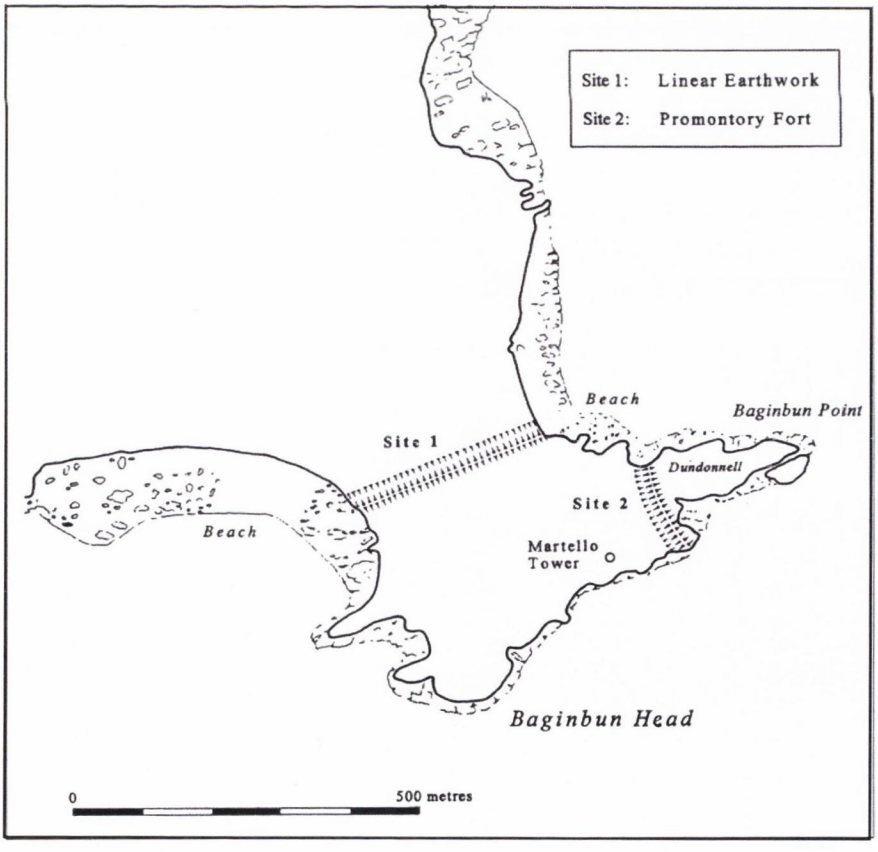

Figure 19. Plan of the partial ringwork castle (Site 2) and linear earthwork (Site 1) at Baginbun (O'Conor, 2003)

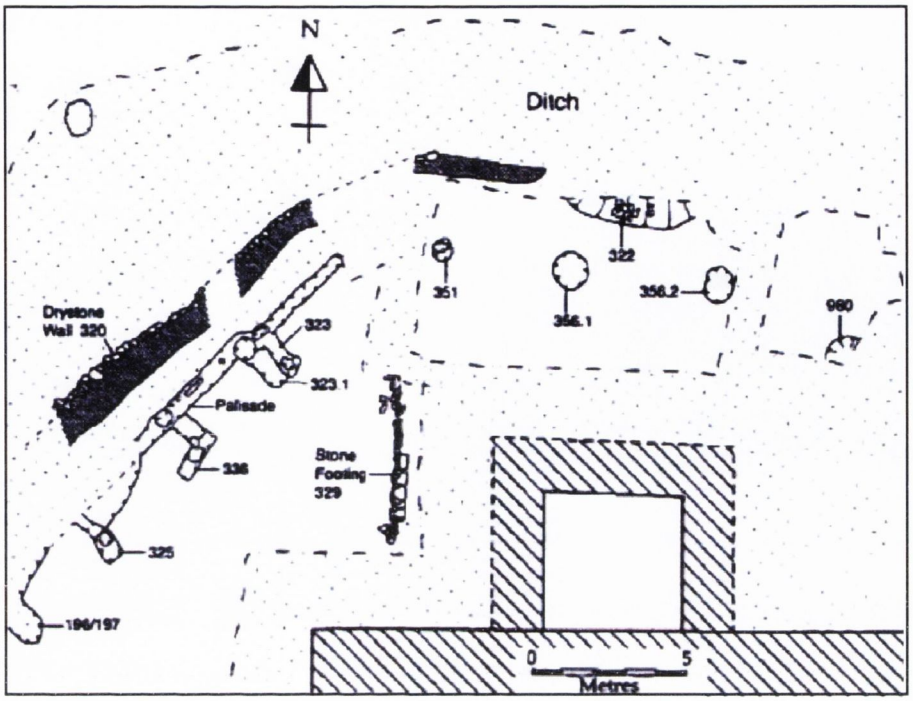

Figure 20. The palisade associated with the first phase of the ringwork castle at Trim (Hayden, 2005)

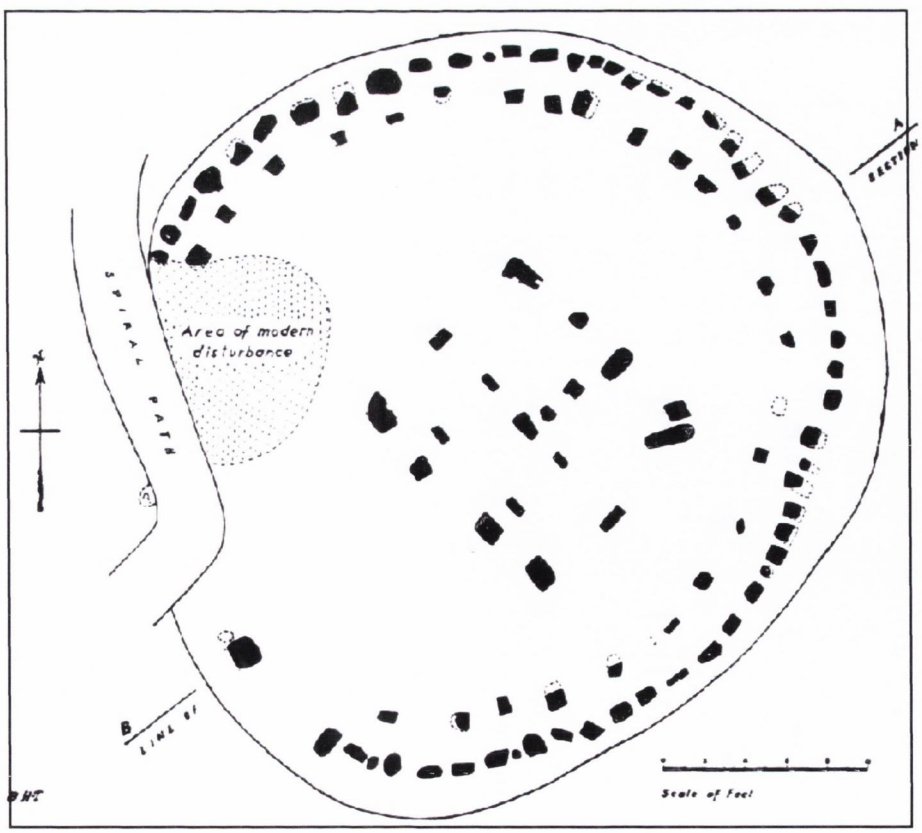

Figure 21. Structures excavated on the motte summit at Abinger, Surrey (Hope-Taylor, 1956)

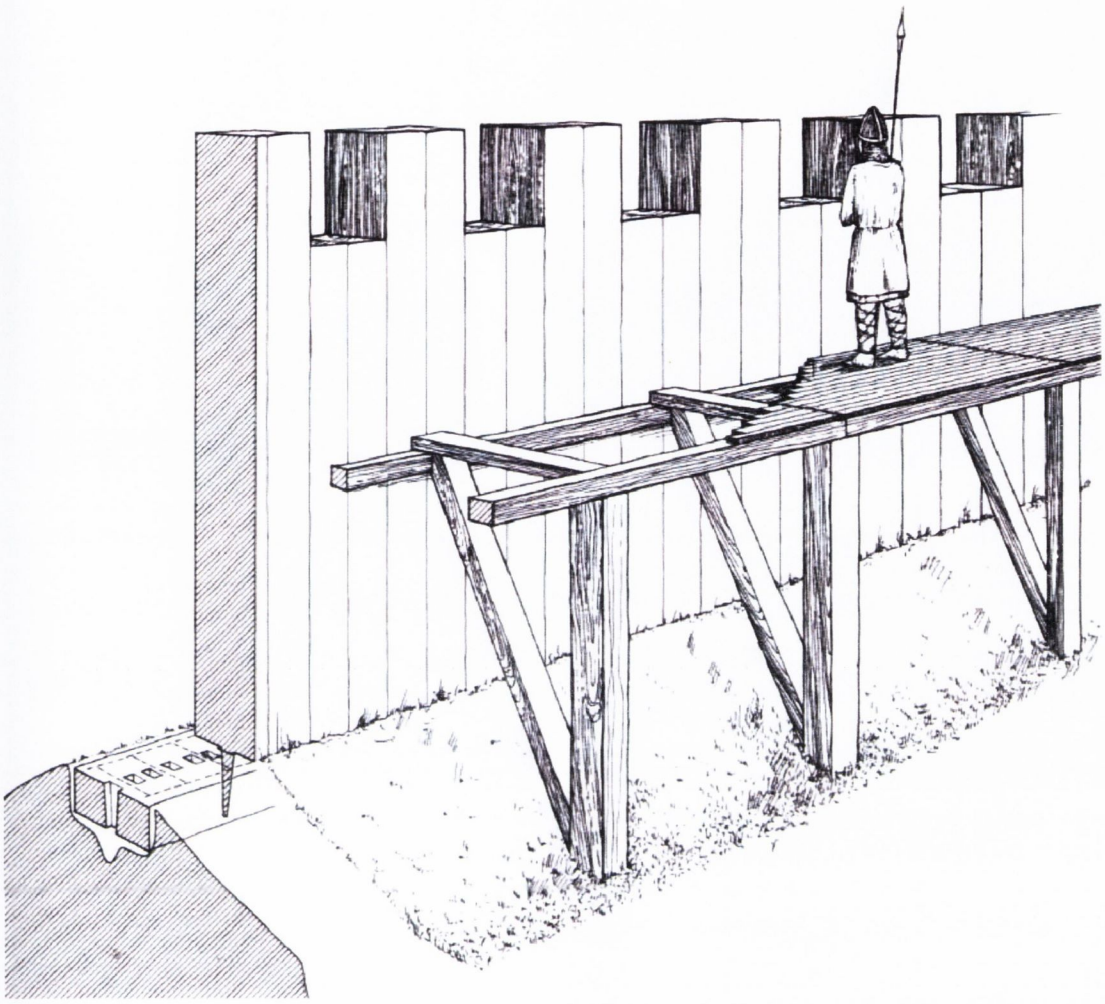

Figure 22. A reconstruction of the palisade that enclosed the bailey at Launceston Castle, Cornwall, based on the excavated evidence (Saunders, 2006)

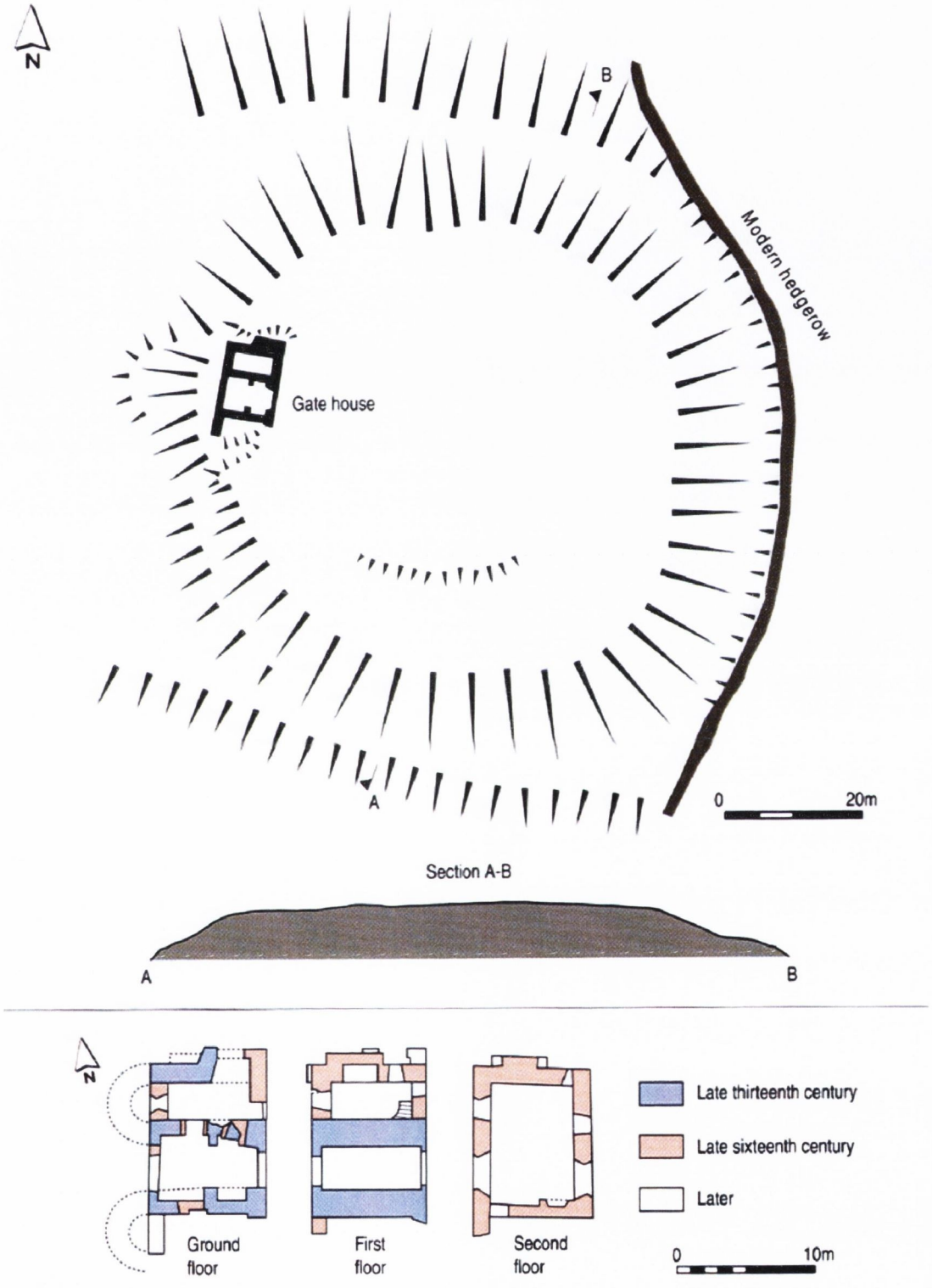

Figure 23. Plans of the ringwork castle and gatehouse at Newcastle McKynegan (McNeill, 1997)

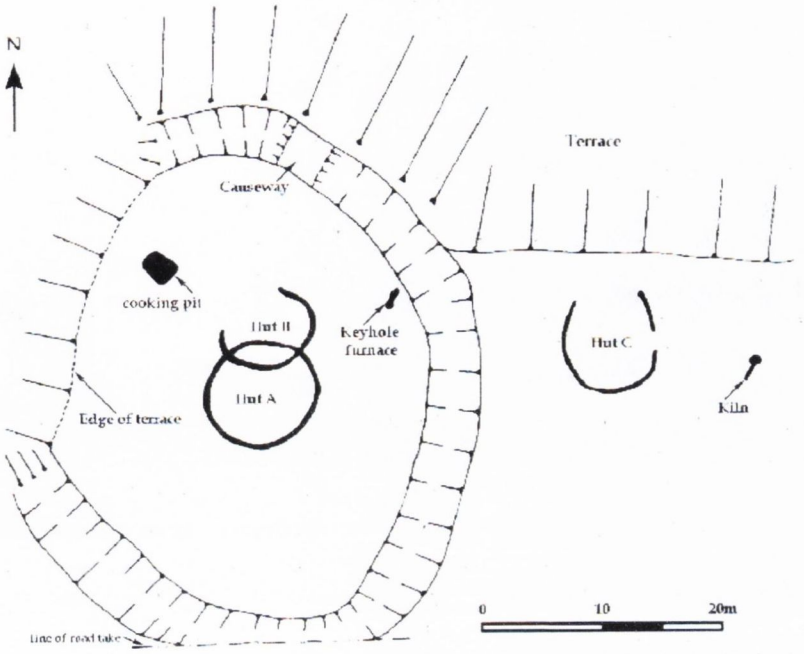

Figure 24. Plan of the structures excavated at the possible ringwork castle of Ballysimon, Co. Limerick (Collins and Cummins, 2002)

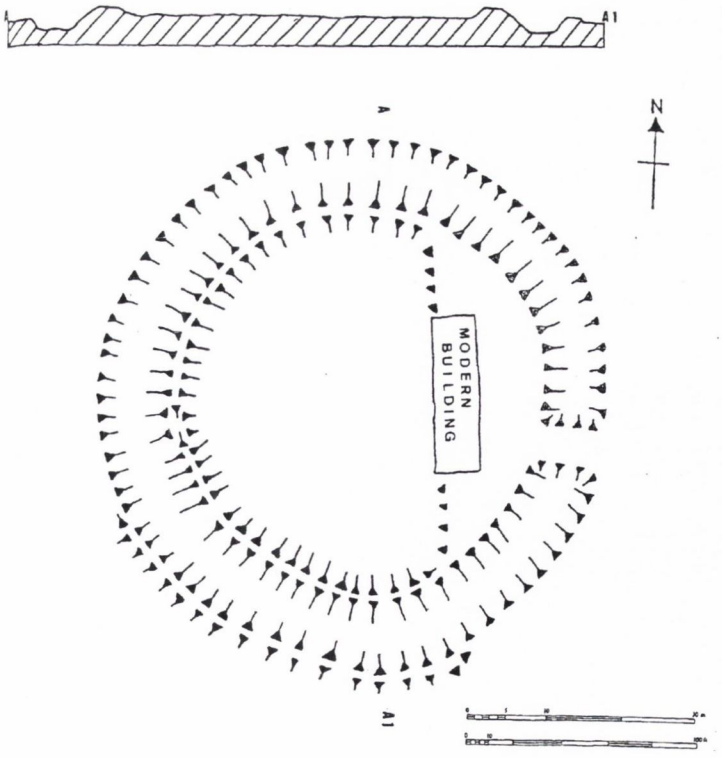

Figure 25. Sketch plan of the possible ringwork castle at Dunrally (O'Conor, 1997)

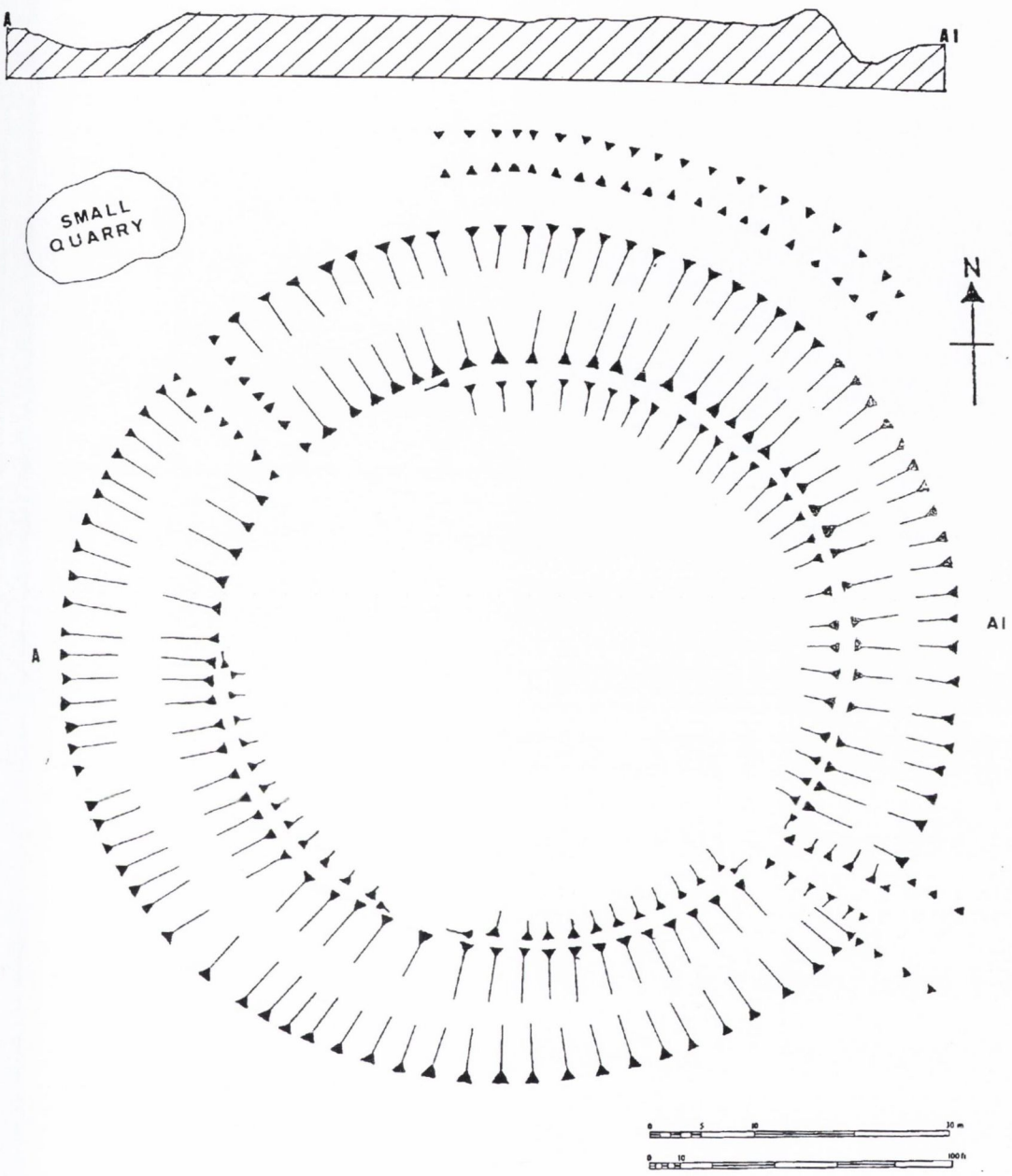

Figure 26. Sketch plan of the ringwork castle at Rathangan (O'Conor, 1997)

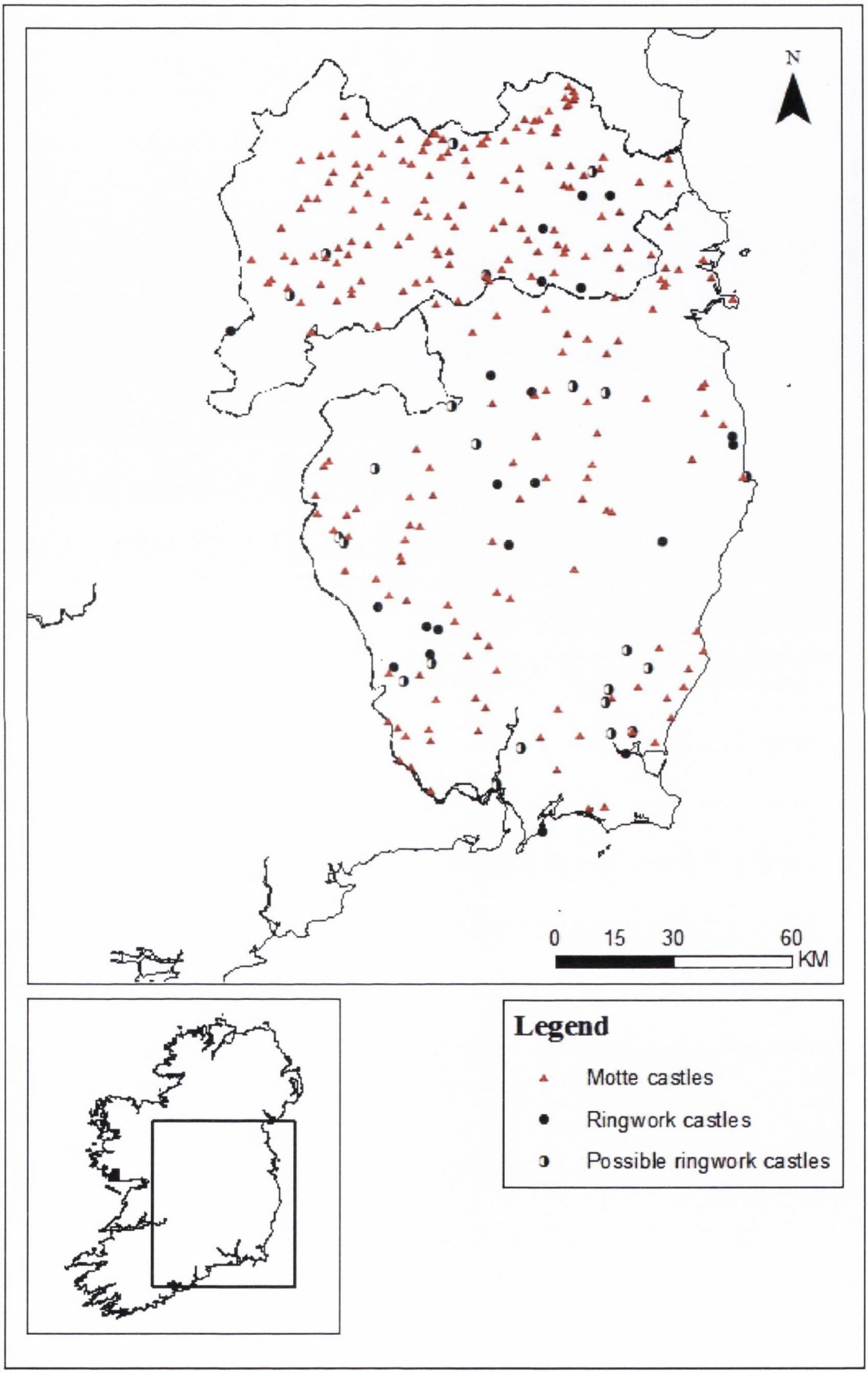

Figure 27. Map showing the distribution of ringworks, possible ringworks and mottes.

Plate 1a. Aerial photograph of the ringwork castle of Old Sarum, which was constructed within an Iron Age hillfort (English Heritage)

Plate 1b. Aerial view of the siege castle known as Dane's Castle, which may have been used in the siege of Exeter Castle in 1136 (Exeter Archaeology)

Plate 2a. Aerial view of the ringwork castle of Newcastle McKynegan (Cambridge University collection of aerial photographs)

Plate 2b. The low motte at Rathregan, Co. Meath

Plate 3a. The fosse at Danestown at the north-west of the site

Plate 3b. Aerial view of the Black Castle, Wicklow Town (DoEHLG)

Plate 4a. View of the ringwork entrance and the Church of Ireland church from the interior of the ringwork castle at Rathangan

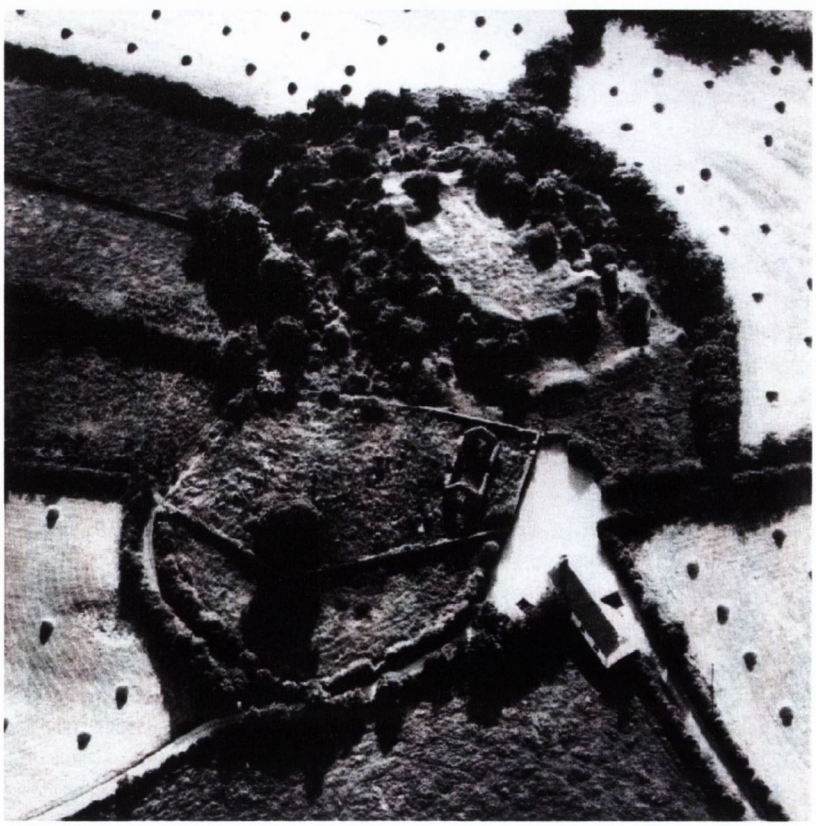

Plate 4b. Aerial photograph of the ringwork castle at Castlerahan from the south-east, showing the D-shaped bailey in the foreground and a possible wedge-shaped bailey to the east (right of photo) (DoEHLG)

Plate 5a. View of the bailey at Kilpipe from the ringwork castle

Plate 5b. The bank and external fosse enclosing the bailey at Kilpipe

Plate 6a. Aerial view of the ringwork castle (foreground) and associated bailey at Pigeonpark (Danesfort) (DoEHLG)

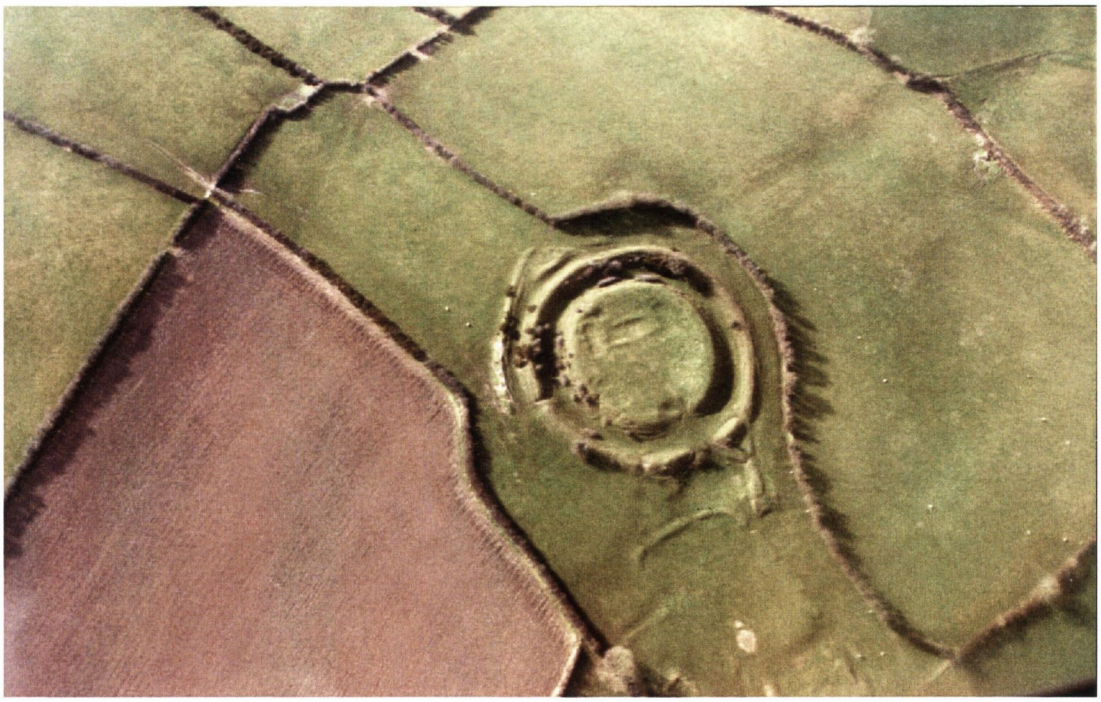

Plate 6b. Aerial photograph of the ringwork castle at Rathealy, showing possible bailey at the south-east (DoEHLG)

Plate 7a. LIDAR survey of the possible ringwork castle at Drumsawry, showing lunate annexe and associated field system (Shell and Roughley, 2004)

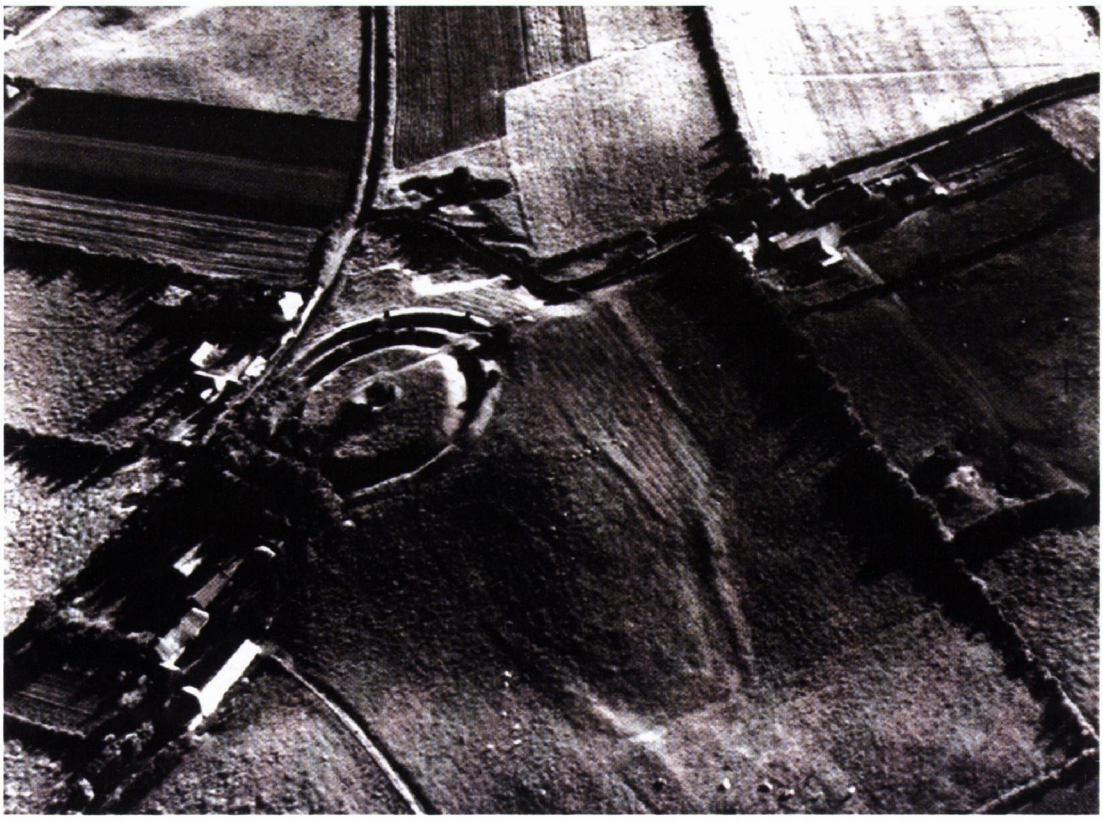

Plate 7b. Aerial photograph of the ringwork castle at Rathtroane (DoEHLG)

Plate 8a. View of the possible hall in the interior of the ringwork castle at Danesfort, Co. Kilkenny

Plate 8b. Aerial view of Clonmacnoise (DoEHLG)

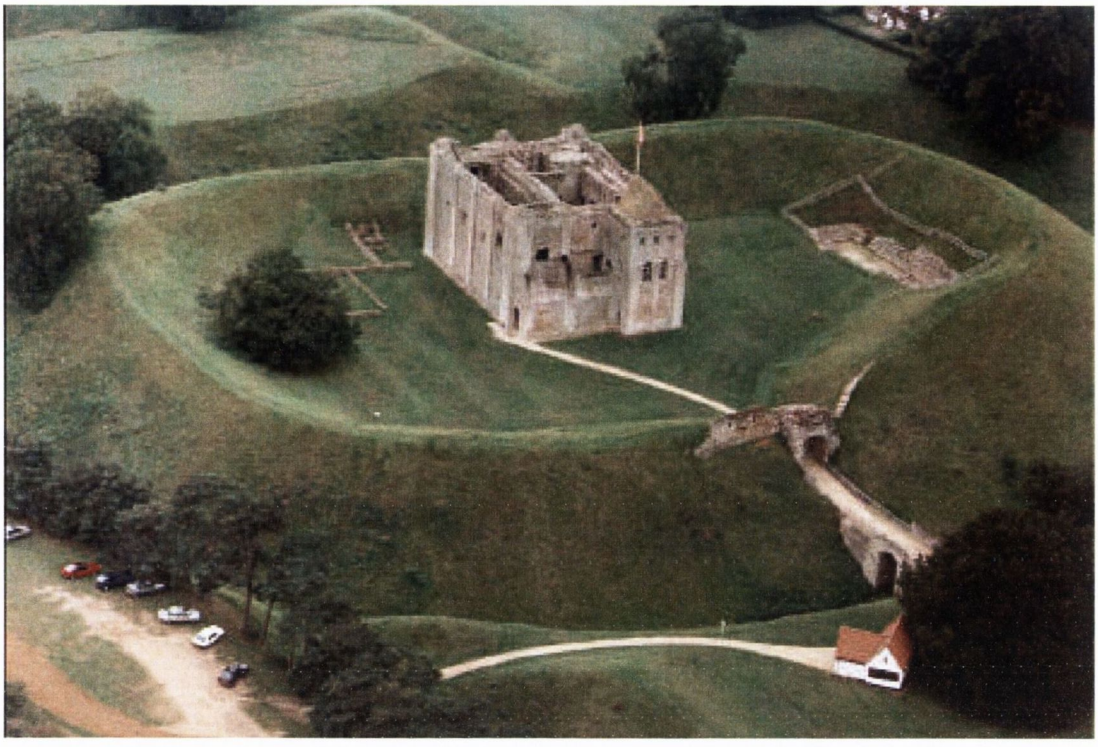

Plate 9a. Aerial photograph of the ringwork and stone castle at Castle Rising, Norfolk (English Heritage)

Plate 9b. Aerial photograph of the ringwork castle at Kilpipe, showing its siting on the end of a ridge (DoEHLG)

Plate 10a. Aerial photograph of the possible ringwork castle of Rath Turtle Moat near Blessington (DoEHLG)

Plate 10b. View from the partial ringwork at Carrick

Plate 11a. Aerial photogrpah of the the possible ringwork at Dunrally, which is located within a possible D-shaped *longphort* (Cambridge Universiry collection of aerial photographs)

Plate 11b. Aerial view of the ringwork castle and associated church site at Danestown (Potterton and Murphy, 2010)

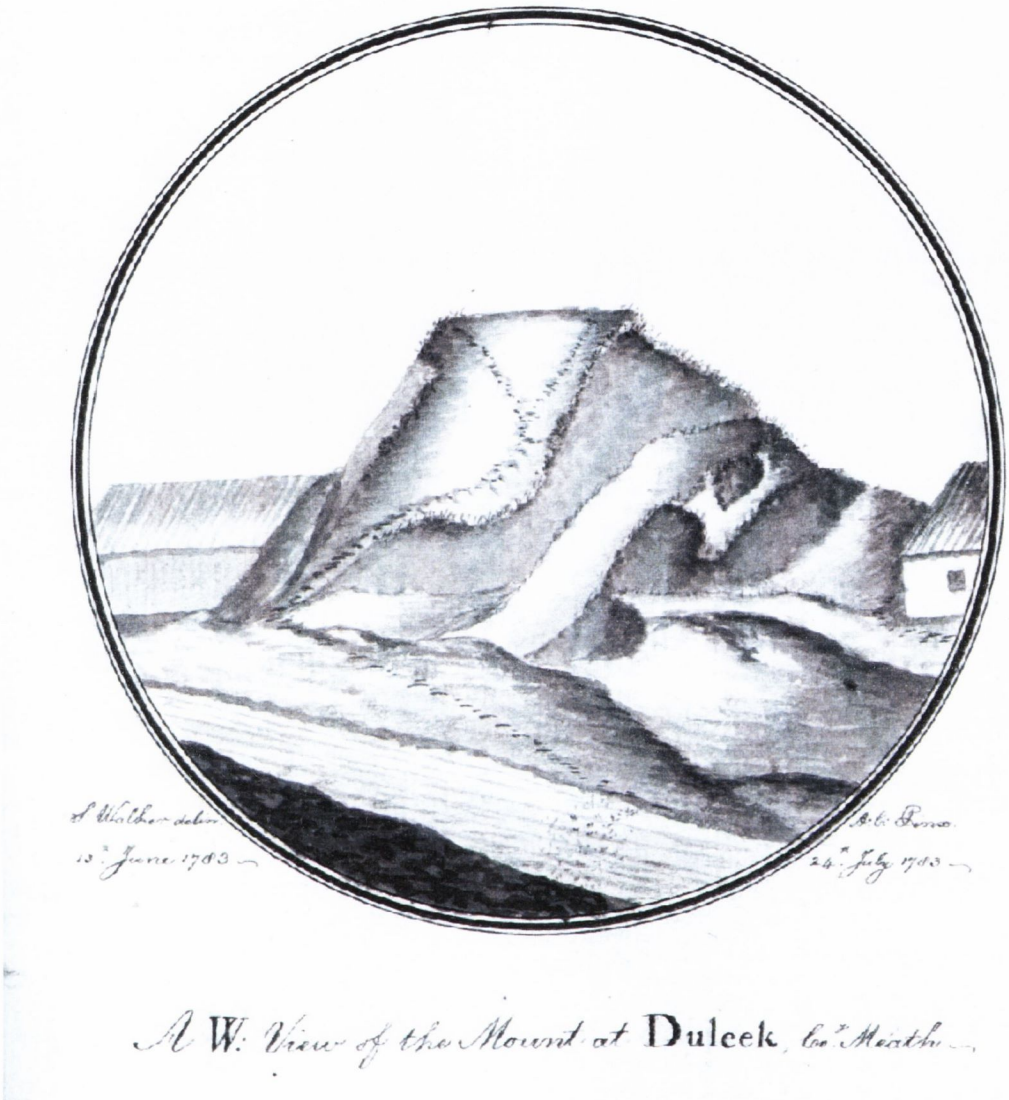

Plate 12. Late eighteenth-century drawing of the motte at Duleek by Samuel Cooper (Harbison, 2000)