

FIRST CASTLE OF ABERYSTWYTH

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Introduction

A comprehensive description and analysis of the records of the stratification and features is available from the National Monuments Record of Wales. Throughout the descriptions the context (layer/deposit/feature) numbers are referred to in bold within brackets. Of necessity, the descriptions of deposits are those given by the excavators, however incomplete or unsatisfactory they are; no other source of information is available. The term 'Intermediate Period' is used for those periods of time when human activity is thought to have been absent or at most desultory in the vicinity.

Excavations in the Bailey

In 1957 a trench 24.4m long by 0.61m wide was opened east-west across the southern tip of the interior of the bailey. The excavators examined only the uppermost deposits in the western part of the trench, and their records are of no value for understanding the archaeology of the site. Much more attention was paid to the 9m stretch at the east end of the trench. Further excavation of the east end of the trench took place in 1965, when the trench was widened by 0.31m to the north and south for a length of 6.1m. The records for the latter investigation are rudimentary, but describe the exposure of a burnt level, probably context **RB.5** (see below).

Period 1

A timber building (or buildings), whose nature was not ascertained, was constructed in the vicinity of the trench. The building was destroyed by fire, represented by a dark heavy deposit of charcoal and black earth, about 0.1m deep, and an underlying very thin layer of burnt brown earth (**RB.9; RB.10**).

Intermediate Period A

The area seems to have been completely or largely unused for a period during which layers of soil up to 0.1m deep accumulated (**RB.7; RB.8**).

Period 2

A new timber building (or buildings), whose nature was not ascertained, was constructed in the vicinity. The building was destroyed by fire, represented by a deposit of charcoal-rich, very fine, black soil, up to 0.1m deep and associated with iron objects and a tiny piece of bone (**RB.5**). A narrow band of charcoal (**RB.6**) running across the width of the trench was probably also the result of this burning episode.

Period 3

There is no evidence for another 'Intermediate Period'. Instead, a linear concentration, 0.46m to 0.76m wide, of loose, 'not very big' stones (**RB.2**), possibly the base of a wall, lay directly over the earlier burnt deposits. Two spreads of stone rubble seem to have been associated with the 'wall' (**RB.4; RB.4**), but no strong case can be made for identifying them as floors, and the excavators made no such claims. Nevertheless, there is *prima facie* evidence for another period of building in the area, this time making more use of stone.

Topsoil

Pottery, a possible sling shot and an iron nail head was recovered from the topsoil.

Excavations in the Ringwork Ditch

In 1957 a trench 1.22m wide by 8.54m long was cut across the ditch separating the ringwork and the bailey, just west of the causeway connecting them. At this time only the upper deposits in the ditch were examined (**1957.1 – 1957.4**). Further excavations were made in the trench in 1958, and the field notes describe a series of deposits, but their inter-relationships are not always explicitly stated (**1958.201 – 1958.204; 1958.211**). The finds records indicate that work also took place in the trench in 1959, but no further information is available. In 1964 the trench was widened by another 1.22m to the west, and a sequence of deposits was excavated to the bottom of the ditch (**1964.1 – 1964.7**).

Period 1

A ditch was dug into the native rock, about 6.7m wide and 1.37m deep. The upper part of the north edge sloped at about 45 degrees for a depth of 0.6m, but the south edge was almost vertical. The lower half of the ditch profile was gently round-bottomed. There was no evidence of recutting. The ditch was probably reasonably well maintained for some time, and only a sporadic thin deposit of brown soil (**1964.7**), up to 0.08m deep in places, accumulated at the bottom of the ditch. Within this fill were found an arrowhead and two pieces of iron, as well as some unspecified finds. The end of this period of usage and maintenance was marked by a layer of grey stony rubble, filling most of the lowest part of the ditch to a maximum depth of 0.33m (**1964.6=547=539=541=542**). The deposit incorporated some charcoal, pottery, bone, nails and possible sling stones. It is uncertain whether the rubble infill accumulated as a result of the deliberate slighting of structures above the ditch or from the natural weathering of abandoned features above.

Intermediate Period A

No attempt was made to clean out the ditch after the deposition of the rubble fill. Instead the surviving hollow filled up with grey, clayey, fine silt; at its thickest on the north-west it was 0.23m deep (**1964.5**). This reflects a period of time when human activity here was absent or rare.

Period 2

Although the ditch does not seem to have been recommissioned, there was certainly activity at the ringwork above which was terminated when structures were destroyed or demolished. Underlying ditch fills were covered by a layer of burnt rubble (**1964.4=543=544; 1958.202**) up to 0.13m thick; this incorporated some pottery. Above was an even more substantial deposit, up to 0.36m deep, consisting of brown earth and stone rubble, also incorporating pottery as well as charcoal, fragments of bone and two pieces of iron (**1964.3=545; 1957.4, 1958.204 & 1958.211**). It is likely that the two main deposits were associated with the same terminal episode. The distribution of the rubbles suggests that they were deposited from the east, probably as the result of activity in the vicinity of the gate and causeway.

Later

The upper fills belong to the centuries after the castle's occupations (**1964.2; 1957.3; 1958.203**).

Excavations on the Causeway

In 1956 a trench was dug across the causeway between the ringwork and the bailey. Its dimensions and precise location are not recorded.

Structure

Two deposits were recorded under 0.15-0.23m of bracken-infested topsoil. The material making up the roadway was a hard-packed, almost level surface of fragmented shale and a few rounded pebbles (**MCI.2**). The west kerb or revetment of the causeway was composed of larger, flat stones and some rounded boulders, which dipped at an angle of 30 degrees (**MCI.3**).

Excavations in the Interior of the Ringwork

A grid of 2.44m-square excavation trenches was laid out within a block of land 15.25m square, which covered about half of the interior of the ringwork (fig.). Trench E1 was in the north-west corner of the block; trench E25 in the south-east. Site notebooks and two field plans survive indicating the principal features excavated in the trenches; some intended

trenches were not excavated and some were only partly excavated to bedrock. In the following descriptions the number assigned in the field notes to an individual context has been retained; otherwise, new numbers have been assigned to contexts without numeration.

The principal excavations took place over two seasons. In 1956 the following trenches were opened: E1, E2 (probably the upper part only), E3, E5, E11, E13, E14, E15, E21, E23 and E25. The following trenches were opened or further excavated in 1957: E1, E5, E10, E11, E14 and E19. Some later excavation also seems to have been undertaken, for example in 1059.

In presenting this report, some consideration has been given to showing a plan of those postholes whose positions were certain. However, it has been decided not to do this because such a plan might give a potentially highly misleading impression of the true distribution of postholes in the interior and because the relative chronology of most of the postholes is uncertain. To present a plan in the current state of knowledge would be of little or no value for interpreting the nature and history of the structures they represented.

Trench E1

Part of a timber building or buildings stood on the site. The structure(s) is attested by a posthole dug into clay filling a natural fissure (**E1.1**). The posthole was of oval plan, 0.76m by 0.64m and up to 0.2m deep. A packing stone 0.34m long by 0.13m wide was in situ on the north-west; the hole was otherwise filled with rounded pebbles and pieces of shale. Another possible posthole was found 0.88m south-east of context E1.1. It had a subrectangular plan, about 0.31m square, with a clay fill (**E1.3**). There is no mention in the records of any evidence of an 'occupation layer' or destruction by fire.

Bone, pottery, a lump of clay and iron nails were found in unspecified deposits within the trench.

Trench E2

The area was the site of a floor, path or track, described as a hard surface, 0.05m-0.08m thick, running diagonally across the trench from north-east to south-west (**E2.1**). There is no mention in the records of any evidence of an 'occupation layer' or destruction by fire.

A piece of pottery was found in the topsoil.

Trench E3

There is evidence of a fire in the area in the form of a 'charred area' which lay in the north-east quadrant of the excavated square (**E3.1**). Incorporated in the deposit was a piece of non-native stone, tentatively identified as sandstone.

Pottery, iron nails, a lump of clay, charcoal and a flint were found in unspecified deposits within the trench.

Trench E5

Resting on bedrock was a very dark soil containing small scattered lumps of charcoal, an iron nail and charcoal (**E5.1**). The excavators considered the deposit to be an 'occupation layer' rather than evidence of fire-damage to a building.

Pottery, bone, iron nails, an iron key and charcoal were found in unspecified deposits within the trench.

Trench E10

A timber structure or structures destroyed by fire stood in this area. The lower deposit in the trench (**E10.3**) consisted of a charcoal-rich layer of unrecorded thickness. The records describe a particularly dense concentration of charcoal, 0.31m wide, running across the trench, parallel to its north-east edge and 0.61m from it; an iron nail was incorporated in the deposit. Charcoal fragments were also particularly noticeable in the western corner of the trench.

The bracken-infested topsoil contained pottery and charcoal.

Trench E11

The records are unsatisfactory but would seem to indicate two occupation periods.

Period 1

The deposit from this period included a patch of charcoal and incorporated beans, grain, bone, pottery, nails and a lump of clay.

Period 2

The deposit from this period included non-native sandstone blocks, and pottery, nails and a sandstone whetstone or fragment of a quern.

The records for 1956 record the finding in unspecified contexts of charcoal, beans, grain, bone, pottery, a spindle whorl, nails, a hook, a cross-pendant and a ring.

Trench E13

A timber structure or structures stood in this area. It is represented a posthole, measuring 0.69m by at least 0.24m, partially exposed in the west face of the trench. About 0.7m to the south was another probable posthole of polygonal plan, 0.34m by 0.26m. There is no record of any evidence of destruction by fire.

The following finds were recorded without specifying their context: pottery and a flint nodule, possibly a scraper.

Trench E14

Although the records are to some extent contradictory, there is no doubt that a timber structure or structures stood in this area. At least two postholes were identified. One was in the south-west part of the trench, close to its south side, measuring 0.3m by 0.33m and 0.2m deep (**E14.1**). In plan its north-west corner formed a right angle and its south-east corner an acute angle. Four packing stones were in situ at its south-west corner and along its east edge. The other (**E14.2**) was very close to the south-east corner of the trench and was trapezoidal in plan, 0.28m (south side) by 0.36m (east side) by 0.2m (north side), and 0.15m deep, with its south-east corner forming a right angle. The posthole was cut into rock; loose stones in its fill were interpreted as, possibly, displaced packing stones, but the deposit may have been disturbed by bracken roots. There is no mention in the records of any evidence of an 'occupation layer' or destruction by fire.

Trench E15

A timber structure or structures stood in this area. A posthole (**E15.2**) was identified 1.16m from the north corner of the trench and 0.58m from its north-east edge. It was oval in plan, about 0.46m by 0.49, and charcoal was noted in its upper fill, but no other details were recorded. The posthole was situated at the edge of a shallow rectangular depression occupying most of the east and north quadrants of the trench; the depression may have been part of the interior of the building formed in part by the timber of the posthole. The charcoal deposit may represent the destruction of the building by fire, but this is not necessarily the case.

The following finds were recorded without specifying their context: pottery, a possible, but doubtful, whetstone and possible daub.

Trench E19

There is strong evidence for an episode(s) of burning in the area, but no information as to its nature. There was a small area of blackened bedrock in the south-east part of the trench, with which was associated a potsherd (**E19.1**). According to the excavator 'the whole area' contained many fire-affected pieces of stone.

Trench E21

Only topsoil was removed in this trench, down to the stony surface of the material of the ringwork bank.

Trench E23

A building or buildings stood in this area. There are records of several features and artefacts in this trench, but their inter-relationships are not defined and there are some contradictions between the notebooks and drawn plan.

In the south-east corner of the trench was an ill-defined hollow, about 0.61m long, containing soil and flecks of charcoal (**E23.1**). Immediately to the north of the latter was a possible posthole about 0.3m square, from which a potsherd was recovered (**E23.2**). Another deposit was described as a 'trodden floor' with associated potsherds (**E23.3**). In the north-east part of the trench was a hollow filled with dark soil containing a potsherd (**E23.4**). In the north-east corner was a posthole with an associated potsherd (**E23.5**). There is no mention of any evidence for destruction by burning.

The following finds were recorded without specifying their contexts: pottery, iron nail heads, an iron hook, a possible whetstone, charcoal and possible daub.

Trench E24

A timber structure or structures stood in this area. The only stratigraphic information comes from the field plan which shows that the originally intended trench was extended westwards and southwards (fig.), probably because of the discovery of the posthole at the west corner. The posthole had a rectangular plan, 0.43m by 0.46m; a stone, regarded as a packing stone, was encountered near one edge. The plan shows a segment projecting westwards from the side of the main plan; this might indicate two phases to the posthole. About 1.5m to the east was a smaller hole of about 0.3m diameter. Just over 1.5m south of the posthole the drawing shows two 'laid stones'.

Pottery and two pieces of metal were recorded without specifying their contexts.

Trench E25

The presence of a timber structure is attested by a single posthole with a diameter of about 0.3m, roughly in the middle of the trench. Pottery was found in the trench.

Trench F11

The presence of a timber structure is attested by a single possible posthole, about 0.23m in diameter, in the west corner of the trench (**1**). In the east corner of the trench there was a hollow (**2**), 0.76m north to south by at least 0.76m west to east and extending beyond the north-east corner of the trench. It was filled with random small rubble. Much of the south-

east part of the trench was covered by a burnt area (3) between contexts 1 and 2, suggesting destruction by fire. At least 25 potsherds were recovered from the trench.

Trench F12

There is a record of an 'occupation layer' (2) which contained much blackened grain, 66 potsherds, iron fragments, a lead spindle whorl, lead 'petals' and charcoal. There is also a reference to a clay layer (3) in the 'east corner' of the trench, but no further details are given.

Trench F21

Although opened in 1958, the only record is of three potsherds from the topsoil.

The Interior: general

The interior of the ringwork was occupied at one time or another by a series of timber buildings, but we are unable to specify the layout of any of them. Our failure to do so is largely because of the strategy and technique of excavation adopted. Undoubtedly, a re-excavation of the area would go a long way towards remedying this deficiency.

There is sporadic evidence for two periods of construction in the area.

There is evidence that one or more periods of building usage came to an abrupt end through fire. The conflagration(s), whatever its cause, seems to have been confined to the eastern part of the interior.

Excavation of the Rock-cut Pit

This feature was excavated in trenches F1, F2 and E5 in 1957, 1958 and 1959. All context numbers quoted refer to trench F1 unless otherwise stated.

Period 1

A deep rock-cut pit was dug through a thin layer of brown soil (**trench F2: 204**), which was probably the pre-castle topsoil stripped of turf. The pit had a diameter of about 4.27m and a depth of between 3.05m and 3.66m, its bottom sloping down from east to west. The west side was almost vertical, the east very steep but more inclined. Several possible functions have been assigned to the pit [DMB check through files and publications]. Houlder suggested that it might have served as the undercroft of a main building at the rear of the ringwork bank, or as a dungeon.

It is reasonable to assume that a pit of this size was excavated for a specific purpose other than as a refuse receptacle. However, it is possible that, whatever the original reason for initiating it, orders were changed and it was left as an open hole to be filled. If this were the

case the primary fillings probably occurred shortly afterwards given the nature of the subsoil and the prevailing climate, and judging from how the profile remained noticeably sharp.

In this account we assume that for a time the pit formed part of a structure. The period came to an end when the building above was dismantled.

Intermediate Period A

The lower half of the pit was filled fairly soon after the covering was removed, largely by natural processes, though some cultural refuse also found its way into the deposit. The lowest fill, covering the floor of the pit, is described as humus, up to 0.18m deep. Above this, on the east side, was a series of raking deposits designated only by their predominant colour, alternately grey or brown (**309b**). The deposit or deposits with which they merged to the west were drawn in section as a single mass. The combined deposits on the east were about 1.52m deep. The following artefacts and other material were incorporated in context 309b: pottery, charcoal (including some fairly large pieces), a flint fragment, a piece of cut bone, a piece of iron, three pieces of lead, animal bones and teeth, and shells.

Immediately above context 309b and the rock face of the upper part of the east side of the pit lay a deposit of shale (**309a/209**) of the same type as that comprising the pit wall. It raked down steeply to the west and was up to 0.38m thick. Most of the records describe it as brown, although the main section drawing has it as dark grey. Incorporated in the deposit were potsherds, animal bones and teeth, shells, three pieces of iron and a lump that may have been slag. The excavators, reasonably, considered the shale deposit to have accumulated when the site was in a state of disrepair or abandonment and to have been derived from weathering of the wall of the pit and the rear of the adjacent ringwork bank. The presence of cultural materials could be explained by natural re-deposition of material from 'occupation' surfaces peripheral to the pit.

The records further show a deposit up to 0.74m deep, filling the hollow between the upper surface of context 309a/209 and the west wall of the pit; unfortunately, it was not assigned a context number and no description is given. Above the latter deposit, against the west wall of the pit, was a layer of fine brown silt (**106**), up to 0.3m thick, in which was found a fragment of bone and six potsherds. Context 106 and the unnumbered one are best interpreted as natural accumulations.

The angle of rest of the upper surfaces of context 309a/209, the unnumbered layer and context 106 formed a concave 'hollow' in the upper half of the pit. Along the east face and in the bottom of this 'hollow' was an unnumbered fill of black soil, about 0.3m thick. Above it was a fine, black gritty soil (**308c**), up to 0.36m thick. The latter and the black, unnumbered soil merged on the west with a dark, grey-brown soil layer, 0.3m thick, containing bone and charcoal. The records are ambiguous, but this may have been designated **210**, from which a sherd of pottery was recovered along with a piece of animal jawbone and teeth. Houlder

included the black soil below context 308c as part of his 'Period of abandonment' between his Period I and Period II.

Period 2

The excavators believed that the deposits filling the upper part of the 'hollow' in the pit (**104, 205, 208, 308a and 308b**) represented a deliberate levelling of the site with pre-existing refuse, preliminary to a reoccupation of the area.

The upper fill of the hollow was a black soil containing noticeable amounts of burnt material, including large lumps of charcoal near the west face of the pit and large stones towards its east side; it was up to 0.66m deep. A notable inclusion was the skeleton of a horse, and bones of another horse were also present. While the excavators may be justified in interpreting much of the layer as redeposited material, it seems more probable that the horse burial was a contemporary episode. Other artefacts and material in the fill included at least 160 potsherds, two spindle whorls, a flint chip, iron fragments, four pieces of lead, a whetstone, and animal bones and teeth, some of which were burnt.

The uppermost fillings (**105 and 207**) below the bracken-infested topsoil represented deposits accumulated during the principal 'activity phase' of period 2. Context 105 raking gently down from the west face was up to 0.18m thick and contained potsherds and a nail. Context 207, on the east, contained potsherds, nails, two hooks, a metal bowl rim, a flint fragment and a few animal bones and teeth. The contemporary occupation layer in trench F2 (immediately east of F1) was described as black and contained potsherds, part of a horseshoe, and pieces of iron implements (**F2: 203/206**).

Excavations at the rear of the east bank of the ringwork

A series of contiguous trenches was excavated at the rear of the ringwork bank south of trench F2 and east of trench F11 (fig.). Trench MBI was cut in 1956, 6.1m south of trenches F1 and F2. Although apparently originally intended to be over 12.2m long, it was only excavated to bedrock between 3.51m and 7.32m from its western end, i.e. it was confined to the rear face of the ringwork bank. The trench was 1.07m wide. Incomplete records show that further work took place in the trench in 1959, 1961 and 1962.

In 1961 trench MBI was extended to the north by a width of 0.76m; this new strip was designated MBII. Also in 1961 trench MBII was extended to the north to trench F2 (fig.) and designated trench MBIII. Trench MBIII appears to have been extended in July 1961 and May 1962 as trench MBIV.

The various records of the trenches contain several ambiguities. The interpretation presented here is an attempt to resolve most of them, but the site would undoubtedly benefit from careful re-excavation.

Period 1

At the bases of trenches MBII and MBIII soils were encountered which were regarded as belonging to the pre-castle or at least pre-ringwork bank periods (**MBII: 7; MBII: 501; MBIII: 9**).

The critical context for defining this period is **MBI: context 5**. It underlay and was therefore **earlier** than the first phase of the ringwork bank.

Some kind of timber structure stood in this area before the present ringwork bank was constructed. The records show a posthole (**MBI: 22**) in the centre of the trench, just over 6.4m from its west end. The posthole had a round plan on three sides but was straight on the west, 0.3m in diameter, vertical-sided, flat-bottomed and 0.23m deep. A soil deposit (**MBI: 5**) overlaid or was associated with the posthole, and this soil underlay the ringwork bank. The deposit contained abundant carbonised grain and also incorporated charcoal, including pieces from what looked like shaped timber, much pottery, nails, and probably bone, lead and slag. The excavators were of the view that context 5 represented the refuse of a period of occupation. One record records a 'Dark soil right on rock in S.W. corner ? within building' (**MBI: 531**) which may have been part of the same deposition as context 5.

The records are ambiguous and it is not clear whether contexts 5 and 22 were contemporary or whether the structure represented by context 22 had gone out of use before the occupation represented by context 5.

The field plan seems to indicate another post pit (**MBI: 23**), 1.83m west of context 22, but its stratigraphic position is uncertain. The feature had a sub-rectangular plan, measuring 0.61m north-west to south-east by 0.43m and was 0.18m deep.

Period 2

The ringwork bank was constructed. The west tail of the bank was built of clean, coarse, heavy rubble (**MBI: 21; MBII: 6**). Otherwise little information was gained as to the composition of the bank. The limited excavation of the crest showed it there to be built of rubble of small stones and the occasionally larger one, and lower down parts of the bank were composed of layers of flat stones; to which period this information refers is not known. The body of the bank had a rear revetment of timber uprights. The records state that the 'Period I revetment' could be traced for a length of at least 7.32m to the south of the large pit in trench F1. A posthole in trench MBII (**MBII: 31**) formed part of the revetment. It was of oval plan, 0.3m north to south by 0.28m and 0.15m deep, with near-vertical sides and a slightly concave bottom.

A timber building stood close to the rampart revetment. Part of the building was represented by a posthole (**MBII: 5; probably the same as MBII: 515, MBII: 533 and possibly MBII: 518**) of sub-rectangular plan with near vertical sides and a slightly concave bottom, situated 0.91m from the west end of trench MBII. The records are incomplete but

they indicate that the posthole measured at least 0.61m north to south by 0.53m and was 0.38m deep. The site plan depicts a possible stakehole 0.41m west of context MBII: 5, but no further details are given.

Part of the same building or group of buildings was represented by a posthole (**MBIII: 8; possibly the same as MBIII: 537**) in trench MBIII, to the north. The posthole had a rectangular plan, 0.28m north-east to south-west by 0.3m and was up to 0.61m deep. An undefined 'floor' (**MBIII: 6**) can be assigned to this period, as can some poorly described deposits or features (**MBIII: 507; MBIII: 523; MBIII: 525; MBIV: 505 'black filling'; MBIV: 516 = 529 'black rubbish'; MBIV: 521 = 528 = 536 'rubbish with charcoal'; MBIV: 530**).

There is some evidence to suggest that either the rear timber revetment was poorly maintained and allowed to disintegrate or that it was deliberately uprooted as part of a process of slighting the defences (or less likely, both). In trench MBI a layer of stone rubble (**MBI: 20; possibly related to MBI: 532**) accumulated over the rear face and at the foot of the bank. Houlder speculated that this layer could represent rubble displaced during the slighting of the bank.

The excavators identified deposits in this area (and equated them with ones in the large pit) which they ascribed to destruction by fire. For example, context **MBIII: 502** is described as 'Burnt destruction layer Per I'. The balance of evidence suggests that at the end of this period the ringwork was slighted and its associated buildings, in part at least, put to the torch.

Period 3

The ringwork bank was refurbished after an ill-defined, but not too long, period, and the adjacent interior levelled. The rear of the bank was revetted with a stone wall and new buildings erected behind it.

The refurbishment of the rear of the bank was represented by a deposit of light, fine rubble (**MBII: 4; also MBIII: 3**), which covered the tail of the bank to a depth of 0.38m and spread across the adjacent interior to a depth of 0.08m. The material filled the vacated posthole of Period 2, MBII: 5, suggesting that not too many years elapsed between the end of Period 2 and the recommissioning of the ringwork.

The rear of the bank was revetted by a stone wall of uncertain height, but between 0.53m and 0.61m wide (**MBIII: 4a; MBIII: 519 was possibly material forming the core of the wall**). There may have been timber elements to the revetment, evidenced by a posthole associated with or cut through the south end of the exposed length of wall (**MBIII: 7**). The feature had an oval plan, 0.56m north to south by 0.48m, with sloping sides, a flat bottom and was 0.3m deep.

The bank revetment probably formed the lower part of the east wall of a building whose outer north and west wall at least also had a stone foundation. In trench MBIII (see fig.) a

stone rubble wall, about 0.6m wide, (**MBIII: 4b**) projected west almost at right angles to the revetment wall for 1.52m before turning south-west for 0.61m and then disappearing. The records suggest that the interior of the building on the north-west had a rounded corner; they also hint that the wall continued further south and had been disturbed (**MBII: 508**). There is little doubt that the revetment and building were coeval, but the records are not clear enough to establish if there was bonding or a joint between them. Context **MBIII: 4b** had been laid in a foundation trench, the south side of which ran roughly parallel and 0.15m south of the wall face; the foundation gully was described as being ‘filled with grain’.

A ‘stone platform’, built after the tail of the bank had been refurbished, had been constructed in the area between the large pit in trench F1, the rear of the revetment wall and a point just short of the north wall of the aforementioned building (fig). The stones were laid up to 0.38m deep and covered an area 1.83m north-south by 2.13m. Occupation material is recorded to have been associated with the platform.

Several of the contexts described in the records cannot be securely located stratigraphically, but their descriptions are evidence of occupation, probably of this period, at the rear of the rampart (**MBII: 504; MBII: 510; MBII: 513; MBII: 522 & 526; MBII: 534**).

There is abundant evidence from deposits overlying structures and features of Period 3 that this period of occupation was brought to an end by widespread destruction by fire. **Context MBI: 4** (and probably **MBI: 535**) was a layer of burnt material, up to 0.13m thick, which included a great deal of charcoal. Among the material was a charred length of timber that might have come from the revetment of the bank or building. A field note, probably describing part of this deposit, refers to charred brushwood thought to have come from the bank revetment. The layer became less burnt and more stony and earthy to the west. It incorporated potsherds, glass and bone, and probably nails and slag. The equivalent deposit immediately north was **MBII: 2** (and probably also **MBII: 509 & 538**), a black, burnt earth covering the lower rear slope of the bank, up to 0.3m thick in places. In trench **MBIII** areas of burning are described associated with grain. In the same trench and trench **MBIV** several contexts seem to refer to this burning episode (**MBIII: 2; MBIII: 506; MBIII: 527; MBIII: 517; MBIV: 511/524**).

Excavations at the Ringwork Gateway

A series of trenches was opened across the eastern half of the presumed gateway passage and at the rear of the adjacent ringwork bank (fig). Trench **MGI**, 6.1m by 1.22m, was begun on May 26 1956 and cut across the apparent site of the entrance to the ringwork, with its long axis in a west-east direction; work continued in this cutting in 1957. After the initial removal of turf and topsoil excavation was confined to the west of what proved to be the revetment wall to the gate-passage. Trench **MGII** was also opened in 1956 and dug parallel to and north

of MGI, separated by a baulk 0.61m wide; the trench was 1.2m wide and 3.1m long. In the same year trench MGII was extended to the north as MGIIb at right angles to its long axis; this extension was 0.91m wide by 1.68m long, its south-west corner being 1.07m from the north-west corner of trench MGII. Work continued in trench MGII in 1957, and in the same year the baulk between it and trench MGI was removed. In 1957 trench MGIIc extended the excavations to the salient west of trench MGIIb and north of the north-west end of trench MGII. In the same season trench MGIIb was extended to the east as trench MGIIId; the precise dimensions of the cutting are not given, but its purpose was to trace eastwards any further timber revetment of what was described in the records as the 'period II' bank.

A polygonal trench, G1 (fig.), is recorded as being opened in 1958 to the north of MGIIb, MGIIc and MGIIId. The available plan suggests that the east edge of the trench was extended, probably in 1961, a short distance eastwards and to the south.

Also in 1958 a new trench, MGIII, was dug to extend southwards, at right angles, the south edge of trench MGI, west of the gateway revetment wall; it was extended further south in the same season, designated trench MGIIIa. As work proceeded to lower levels the designation MGIII was extended to include the area of the former trench MGI west of the revetment wall; however, the designation MGI was used to label finds from MGI, MGII and MGIII, somewhat unhelpfully.

The records also indicate that excavations took place in 'the northern half of M. G. I at the end of the wall, and to the east'. This would have been the area of the former trenches MGIIb and MGIIId. Only three days appear to have been spent on excavating the gateway in 1960, at the rear of the rampart immediately to the east of the gate passage.

The most difficult evidence to interpret in this area is that of the postholes, particularly assigning certain ones to a particular period, Primacy is given to the excavators' assertions when they appear quite definite, even if the presented evidence is ambiguous. The entrance at both main periods had a substantial timber gate, but its construction details are unclear.

Period 0

A pre-castle brown soil up to 0.1m deep survived in several areas of the gateway and behind the adjacent rampart (**MGI: 16; MGI: 15, probably upper part of 16; MGIII: 158 = 208; MGIIb: 173; MGIIId: 173; 195; 196; G1:207; G1: 9**).

The field plan of trench G1 shows an irregular 'slot' (**G1: 10**) (fig.) cut into rock, 0.45m wide, with possibly a southern arm. The slot finished short of the section face, but in the drawing of the section is shown 'projected' onto it, possibly to indicate that it pre-dated the 'topsoil', G1: 9. The slot is shown with a subrectangular section, 0.38m wide by 0.38m deep. If the 'slot' did pre-date the castle, it may have done so by some considerable time. The reader should be cautioned that this may be a mistaken interpretation of the excavators' record.

Period 1

The ringwork bank was constructed with an associated gate structure.

Context 195 was a turf-line over subsoil and ended at the rear edge of the bank immediately east of the gate passage, and this relationship with the toe of the bank suggests that turf was stripped from the site of the bank prior to its erection. **Context 196** was a patch of thicker brown soil in the original ground surface, containing many small fragments of charcoal; the deposit might have been generated during site clearance.

The raking bank was constructed of coarse rubble at least 1.83m high (**G1: 8; G1: 204**).

At the gap in the ringwork left for an entrance, rubble was dumped to form the basis for the gate passage (**MGIII: 157 = 209**). Above this was a series of deposits (**MGI: 14 = 207; MGIII: 153; MGIII: 154; MGIII: 155; MGIIb/MGIId: 172; MGIIb/MGIId: 192**) which Houlder refers to variously as his Period I occupation material or the 'Norman road level' (**207**); he also describes context 207 as a 'dark brown layer'. It would seem reasonable to interpret these deposits as refuse accumulating during the first phase of the defences

Context **MGI: 14 = 207** was a soft brown soil containing evidence of burning, including a large piece of charcoal and a piece of metal; at the base of the layer were patches of clay. **MGIII: 153** was a layer of dark earth overlying context **MGIII: 154**, an iron-stained soil to the south of the posthole **MGIII: 151**. Context **MGIII: 155**, a 'pocket' of charcoal and carbonised wheat, may have been associated with this group of deposits. Also part of this group was context **MGIIb/MGIId: 172**, a dark brown soil just over one centimetre thick which ran up to the base of the revetment wall (below). Context **192**, dug in the 1960 season, lay over context **195** and consisted of an area of burnt material including charcoal, on and in a layer of small stones. The excavators were not consistent in their view as to whether these stones comprised a 'paving' or not. It is not certain, but probable, that this was part of the excavators' layer **207**.

There is no clear evidence for the nature of the revetment of the ringwork bank's terminals at this period. Houlder regarded it as having some form of timber revetment and assigned posthole **MGIIb: 66** to it, but a good case can be made for this being part of the Period 2 structure.

Only a part of the gate structure was identified, towards the front of the entrance gap. Houlder is positive in assigning posthole **MGIIIa: 156** to his Period I (Period 1). In an interpretative sketch he describes it as 'sealed at foundation level of Period II revetment'. The feature comprised a posthole within a post-pit; a substantial upright timber is implied. The post-pit was 1.6m deep, with a diameter of about 1.07m. The packing was tiers of larger stones set about the timber in a matrix of finer rubble. The posthole was about 0.53m square in plan and a void for an upper depth of 1.14m, with a lower fill of 0.46m of dark soil. Houlder believed that rabbits had been responsible for emptying the posthole of most of its

fill; there were rabbit burrows to the south. No other excavated posthole need belong to this period.

A hollow excavated in trench G1 may have been dug at this period (fig.). It was cut into the local subsoil (G1: 9) and was 1.09m wide by 0.18m deep; it was traced for a length of 1.22m in the trench. Its lower fill (G1: 12) was clay and stones. Its upper fill of brown soil and fine silt (G1: 11) may have accumulated in Period 2; indeed it is possible that the hollow originated at that time.

How this period of occupation came to an end is unclear.

Period 2

The ringwork bank was refurbished with the addition of further rubble on its rear slope, and its tail and the terminal at the entrance passage were revetted by a stone wall with some timber elements. A new wooden gateway was constructed in the raised entrance passage-way.

In the area of trench G1 the rear of the bank was raised by the addition of a 0.3m-thick layer of rubble, variously described as fine or earthy, containing a formless piece of lead (G1: 203; G1: 5; rubble contexts 194 and 193 immediately east of the gate-passage may belong to this period).

In the entrance gap the level of the gate-passage was raised (MGI: 13 = 206; MGII: 37; MGIIb: 65; MGIIc: 95; MGIIId: 123; MGIII: 152; MGIII: 171 = 206) and a new gate constructed. The posts for the gateway were placed in pits dug through the foundation rubble.

Context MGI: 13 = 206 was deposited upon contexts MGI: 14 and MGI: 15. It consisted of fine rubble and soft, chocolate-brown soil containing charcoal; its depth varied between 0.51 and 0.13m east to west. Within the layer were found potsherds, iron fragments, formless pieces of lead and a bone. An iron horseshoe nail was found in the surface of the deposit. Context MGII: 37 was part of the same depositional process as context MGI: 13 and consisted of a layer of greyish soil and shale. Three spindle whorls were found on the surface of the deposit and under the paving MGII: 35 (see below); a horseshoe was also found on its surface, below context MGII: 34. Context MGIIb: 65 was the continuation of context MGII: 37 and consisted of loose stone rubble, incorporating a large sherd of very coarse pottery; a piece of metal was found at the interface with MGIIc: 93. It is described in the site notebook as having been found beneath the 'make up of period II Rampart revetment'. This would seem to indicate that the surface of the passageway was raised before the terminal was revetted. Context MGIIc: 95 was the further extension of context MGIIb: 65 and comprised stone rubble in a loose matrix of white, clayey soil at least 0.15m deep; the layer became looser and stonier in its lower part. Context MGIIId: 123 was also part of the same depositional episode, comprising very loose rubble associated with a large long stone exposed along the south edge of the trench. In trench MGIII the equivalent layer was context MGIII: 152 (same

as MGIII: 171 = 206), a light-coloured stony rubble, 1.17m deep, which included red, burnt stone, charcoal and some potsherds.

Because only half of the gate-passage was exposed and some features were only partly excavated, and because there are ambiguities in the records, it is not possible to give precise details about the plan or construction of the Period 2 gate, which was at least in part raised before the terminal was revetted by a stone wall.

Of the postholes or possible postholes identified two might have belonged to the revetment of the rear of the bank. **Context MGIIB: 66** was at the north end of the stone revetment wall on the east of the passageway. It consisted of a round hole containing dark-brown soil and a few stones and was probably a posthole, but whether belonging to the gate or the rear revetment of the ringwork bank is uncertain. **Context MGIIB: 67** was 0.3m east of MGIIB: 66; there are no other details than it was a posthole, and its function is uncertain.

Context MGII: 36 was a posthole, 0.69m in diameter and 1.07m deep, which formed part of the gate structure. The east side of the posthole was vertical and in line with the revetment wall, but the west side was sloping and 'filled with packing stones'. The rest of the hole was filled with chocolate-brown earth containing very small stones and the occasional larger one. The fill also contained large pieces of charcoal and there was a greater density of charcoal at the edge of the hole; a large piece of timber seems to have survived towards the bottom of the posthole against its side at a depth of 0.74m. A potsherd was discovered at a depth of 0.97m and a very small sherd was found at the bottom of the hole. Houlder suggested that the carbonised timber from context MGII: 34 (see below) represented part of the post from this posthole. He also noted the absence of facing stones in the revetment adjacent to the empty posthole and suggested that they had been dislodged when the post had been withdrawn. Houlder was in no doubt that this posthole belonged to his Period II.

The site notebook has a sketch indicating that there was a large posthole in the centre of the gate-passage, west of context MGII: 36.

Context MGIIc: 94 in the north-west corner of the trench was a round hole with an upper fill of earth and a lower fill of loose stones. No dimensions are given in the records, but the feature was probably a posthole. The stone surface, MGIIc: 93, was disturbed in this area, obscuring the relationship between it and context MGIIc: 94.

Context MGIII: 151 in the north-east of the trench was a posthole whose upper plan had straight north and east sides, with a chamfered north-east corner; the other sides and corners were less distinct. A large stone at the upper, south-west corner may have been the remains of packing in the post-pit. The depth of the hole is not stated, but it was probably between 0.91m and 1.22m; the fill was a very dark soil.

Context MGIII: 159 was a posthole in the area between contexts MGIII: 151 and MGIIIa: 156. There are no further details other than it was square-sectioned.

The terminal of the rampart on the east side of the entrance passage was revetted by a stone wall (**MGI: 6**), traced for just over 5m. The north-east corner stone of the passage seems to have been located, but the wall at the rear of the rampart to the east of this had been robbed (the 'made rubble', 0.74m wide by about 0.2m deep, identified in trench G1 (**G1: 6**) may refer to the robbed wall).

In trench MGI four courses of masonry survived to a height of 0.36m, above a footings course 0.1m high. The wall was also four courses high in trench MGIII. The revetment was found to continue across trench MGII, but not to its north face; some of the stones of the wall-face in the centre of the cutting had slipped forward of the original line. The north-east corner stone lay in trench MGIb.

In trench MGI, adjacent to the base of the wall, was a small pit which might have been associated with the construction of the wall. The pit was oval, 0.23m by 0.18m but of unstated depth, and its lower part was filled with a firm, stony soil and its upper part with 0.15m of soft, brown soil (**MGI: 12**). Above the pit fill was **context MGI: 10**, a thin spread of chocolate-brown, soft, fine soil lying against the revetment wall on the north side of cutting MGI.

A metalled roadway surface was constructed through the gate and refuse accumulated upon it. **Context MGI: 11 = 204** (the excavators used the designation 204 for both the roadway and the 'occupation' upon it) was a consistent layer up to 0.08m thick across much of trench MGI between its west end and the revetment wall. It consisted of a chocolate-brown, compact stony deposit; it was particularly stony halfway between the end of the trench and the revetment wall. In the surface of the deposit were found an iron nail, bones and a seed, an on its surface near the wall, charcoal and a potsherd. **Context MGI: 7** filled a small round pit, 0.1m in diameter and perhaps as much as 0.13m deep, and consisted of chocolate-coloured soft earth containing charcoal and carbonised cereal grains; whether the pit was associated with context MGI: 11 or was dug through it is unclear from the records. **Context MGII: 35** was the continuation of context MGI: 11. It is described as a layer of rough paving, with a group of stones on edge amongst the paving, possibly a repair. Four potsherds were associated with context MGII: 35, and an iron bolt was found on its surface. The deposit spread into trench MGIc as **context MGIc: 93**, a stone surface comprised of small, flat fragments of stone, much dark, reddish soil and appreciable quantities of charcoal; a few large flat stones survived in places. The earth above and on the stone surface contained much charcoal, and a large piece of charcoal was found immediately above the surface at its east edge. The surface did not run up to the revetment wall, and at the south end of the trench it was laid on sloping ground. It is probable that the evidence of burning on this surface relates to the destruction of the gateway (below). The compact, very hard, light-brown stony surface in trench MGIId (**MGIId: 122**) was probably also part of the roadway. A large piece of metal was found lying on the surface, and closely adjacent were potsherds.

An 'occupation layer' is referred to in trench G1 (**G1: 205**) which was a dark soil containing potsherds, nails and unspecified lumps of iron.

The gateway was demolished and destroyed by fire. The ringwork bank was probably also slighted.

Above the roadway in trench MGI, at its north-west corner, there was marked evidence of burning in the form of brownish-red soil and stones, charcoal and what appeared to be a carbonised bean; large pieces of carbonised wood seem also to have been part of this deposit (**MGI: 8**). The equivalent deposit in trench MGII was **context MGII: 34**, which was a thin, roughly oval, 0.69m by 0.56m, layer of dark earth containing much charcoal and a large piece of carbonised wood. The deposit had accumulated against the base of the revetment wall on the edge of the roadway. The excavators suggested that the carbonised wood of context MGII: 34 was the remains of the post from context MGII: 36 that had been extracted and burned. If this were the case, the gate would seem to have been pulled down before being burned, rather than having been torched in situ.

A probably burnt deposit on the rear of the ringwork bank (**G1: 2**) may be evidence for the firing of the rampart.

The gate-passage wall was slighted or collapsed. The roadway and its associated deposits were immediately overlain by rubble in trench MGI (**MGI: 9 = 202**), described variously as loose or compact. Context MGI: 9 sloped down from the surviving top of the revetment wall, where it reached a depth of 0.41m. The equivalent deposit in trench MGII (**MGII: 33**) was randomly aligned stone rubble in a matrix of very compact, yellowish, stone soil, at least 0.3m deep; larger stones were found lower in the deposit. **Context MGIIc: 92**, a stony surface with a few flat stones, and **context MGIIId: 121**, dark loose earth, were probably part of the same horizon. Similar rubble seems to have been excavated in 1960 at the rear of the rampart immediately to the east of the gate-passage (**191**). In trench G1 slighting or collapse of the banks was probably represented by rubbles **G1: 3** and **G1: 4**.

Summary Interpretation of the Occupations

Although in many respects the techniques and records of the excavations leave much to be desired, and also because it cannot be assumed that each part of the site went through similar sequences of utilisation, there is repetitive evidence for two major episodes of occupation (**B** and **C**). There are also tantalising hints of activity both before and after these periods.

Period A

The evidence for a pre-castle period(s) of occupation, or pre-'Period 1' castle occupation(s) is equivocal.

There is evidence of a timber structure pre-dating the Period B bank in the east part the ringwork (Period 1 in MB trenches).

There is less satisfactory evidence for activity in trench G1 (Period 0 in Gateway area).

Period B

Construction of the ringwork and bailey with a timber gate between the two. Timber buildings were erected in both areas, including one associated with a subterranean room of some kind in the east of the ringwork. The buildings of this period were apparently destroyed by fire (Bailey Period 1; Ditch Period 1; Rock-cut Pit Period 1; East ringwork Period 2; Gateway Period 1).

Intermediate Period 1

The site was unoccupied or infrequently used for an undefined, but probably short, period (Bailey Intermediate Period A; Ditch Intermediate Period A; Rock-cut Pit Intermediate period A).

Period C

Refurbishment of the ringwork and bailey with a new timber gate between them and stone and timber revetment to the bank. Timber buildings were erected in both areas, including some with stone footings. The buildings of this period were demolished and destroyed by fire (Bailey Period 2; Ditch Period 2; Rock-cut Pit Period 2; East ringwork Period 3; Gateway Period 2).

Period D

There is possible evidence for reuse of the bailey, where a building with stone footing was erected. This may not have been related to the use of the site as a castle.

FIRST CASTLE OF ABERYSTWYTH: E