

RECENT EXCAVATIONS WITHIN FRAMLINGHAM CASTLE

by J. G. COAD, M.A.

Framlingham Castle is one of the most impressive of the medieval military works in East Anglia, both on account of its overall size and the scale of its surviving stone defences. To anyone approaching the castle from the south and east, the reason for the siting is not immediately apparent. From the south, the land slopes gently up to the castle from the river Alde, and between the river and the castle lies the town of Framlingham. To the east and north the land extends for miles on much the same level as the castle.¹ Only to the north-west are natural features exploited to aid the castle's defences. Here the land drops steeply for some forty feet to the valley of the river Alde, at this point about three hundred yards wide. An earthen dam effectively turned to a mere that part of the valley immediately below the castle.

The castle consists of three large enclosures, the innermost of which is very roughly pear-shaped and is surrounded by a high curtain wall containing thirteen projecting towers. For the sake of clarity, and following historical precedent, this will be referred to as 'the castle' throughout this article. Below it to the west, and some ten feet above the level of the valley floor is a rectangular area known as the lower court. At one stage this had some form of curtain wall around it, traces of which can still be seen. Both the castle and the lower court were surrounded on three sides by a deep dry moat, both ends of which connected with the mere. Surrounding the castle in a crescent-shaped arc from the south west to the north east was a large bailey, which seems to have relied entirely for its defence upon an outer moat and an earthen bank. To the north east of this bailey is a further moat known as the town ditch. The course of this is not now traceable but in all probability it once enclosed the town of Framlingham.

The full history of the castle has already been dealt with adequately.² The important period from the point of view of the excavation turned out to be the 12th and early 13th centuries, and

¹ F. J. E. Raby and P. K. Baillie Reynolds *Framlingham Castle Official Guide* (H.M.S.O. 1969), p. 17.

² Raby and Baillie Reynolds.

it is worth summarising the known history of the castle during this period.³

Until 1306, when the fifth earl died, Framlingham was in the possession of the house of Bigod. This powerful family already owned one hundred and seventeen lordships in Suffolk at the time of the Domesday Survey,⁴ and it was apparently sometime around 1100 when Henry I gave Roger Bigod lands at Framlingham. It seems likely that it was soon after this that Roger began the construction of the first Castle or fortified dwelling here. In 1107, Roger died and was succeeded by his eldest son William, who was drowned in 1120 in the wreck of the White Ship. As a result, Roger's second son, Hugh, succeeded and became the first Earl of Norfolk. Earl Hugh's career can only be described as stormy, particularly in his relations with his sovereigns,⁵ but initially he seems to have increased the power of his house, was created earl of Norfolk in 1140, and in 1166 recognised a total of 160½ knights' fees. In Suffolk he held the three castles of Walton, Bungay and Framlingham, and it appears that it was Framlingham which was the chief of these, mainly on account of the geographical location. Earl Hugh was of sufficient power to be a threat to the King in East Anglia, a fact which Henry II realised and which undoubtedly led to his confiscation of all three castles in 1157 and 1158. The immediate reason for the confiscation is not known. Walton remained in the King's hands until its destruction in 1175, but convincing reasons have been put forward for the return of Framlingham and Bungay to Hugh in 1165.⁶ In 1173-4 Earl Hugh served with Prince Henry during his rebellion against the King. As a result, when Henry triumphed he ordered the destruction of Framlingham Castle, a task he entrusted to Alnoth the Engineer, one of the King's select band of master-builders. In 1177, Earl Hugh died. Henry II refused to confer the earldom upon his son, Roger, and it was not until 1189 and the accession of Richard I that Roger was allowed his title and his father's lands. Earl Roger was apparently a trusted supporter of Richard and it would seem that it was during this time, and in the early years of King John's reign, that he began the construction of the present castle. Although largely outside the scope of this article, it would appear that Framlingham was largely completed by 1216, for in that year it was besieged briefly and captured by King John, not long after his triumphant siege of Rochester Castle.

³ Much of the subsequent detail comes from R. Allen Brown, 'Framlingham Castle and the Bigods, 1154-1216', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.* xxv (1950), pp. 127-148.

⁴ Allen Brown.

⁵ For a fuller account see Allen Brown.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Thus the records tell us that a castle stood at Framlingham, built sometime after 1100; a castle was destroyed in 1175 and the present castle was built sometime between 1190 and 1216.

THE EXCAVATIONS

In 1968 during repairs to the Poor House, which stands on the site of Earl Roger's Great Hall of *c.* 1200, opportunity was taken to see if the early floor levels survived, and if anything could be learnt

FRAMLINGHAM CASTLE

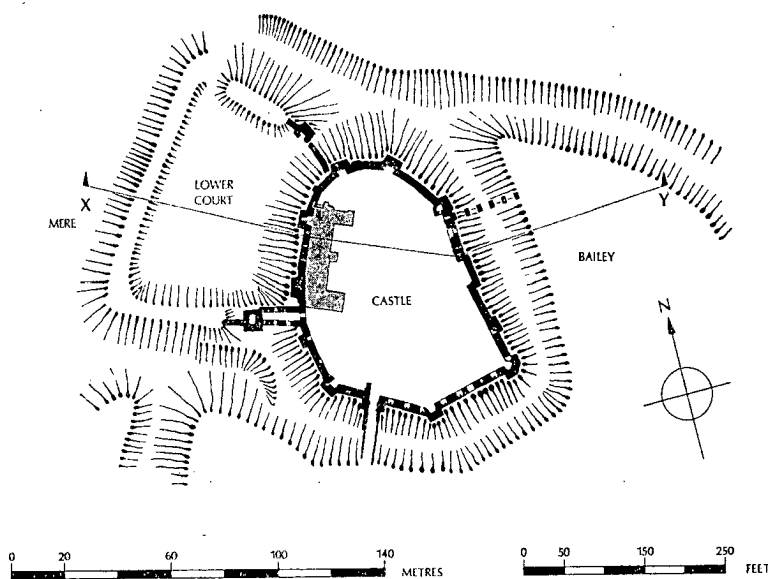
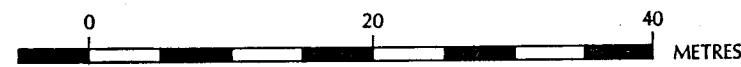
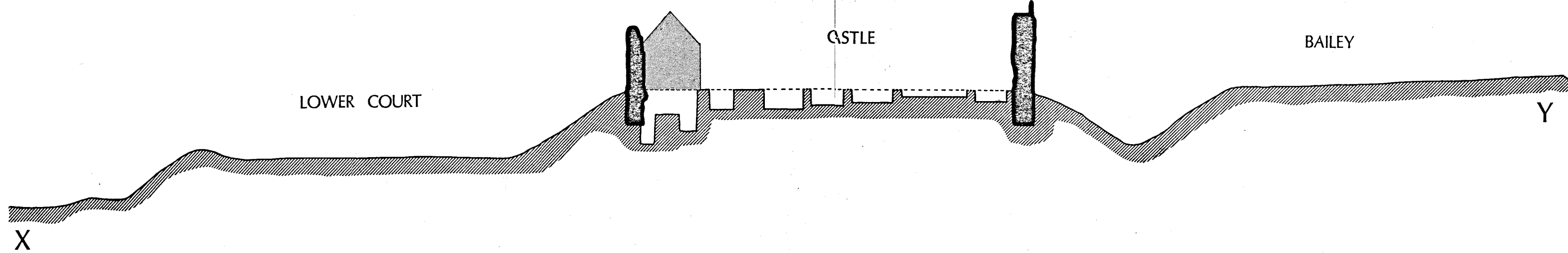


FIG. 42.—Framlingham Castle, showing position of section x-y.

about the early history of the site. In December 1969 a further season within the Poor House was so promising that in August 1970 a series of areas was excavated across the Inner Courtyard in line with the earlier excavation within the Poor House. This excavation in 1970 had two purposes. The first was to see whether or not any buildings belonging to the present castle survived at foundation level. The second aim was to try to obtain a complete cross-section of the castle down to the original ground surface. At the same time, the trench within the Poor House was deepened as part of the latter objective.

FRAMLINGHAM CASTLE



WEST - EAST SECTION X-Y

EXCAVATION DEPTHS - APPROXIMATE

FIG. 44

PLATE XVIII



Foundation of part of the curtain wall, showing the clear difference between the face-built and trench-built parts. The shored-up wall at the top belongs to the later Poor House.

In 1968 an area 12 ft. wide was laid out across the full available width of the Poor House at the north end. Careful stripping of the area failed to find any traces of a floor which could be associated with the Great Hall, so in all probability the beaten earth floor of the Poor House is on much the same level as the floor of *c.* 1200.⁷ The excavations did reveal the footings of a substantial wall some 3 ft. wide running at right angles to the curtain wall, and probably forming the north end wall of the hall. This was comprised of flint and septaria with a few ashlar blocks still in situ on the outside face.

The second phase of the Poor House excavation started when the area of excavation was narrowed to a 6 ft. wide trench running east-west across the Poor House. It was hoped to reach the old ground surface but in spite of the further seasons in 1969 and 1970, this was never achieved. Section A-B (Fig. 43) records the results. The steps in the section are explained by the amount of shoring which was required at this depth. A-B shows a series of tip-lines of mixed composition running down with varying degrees of steepness from the plateau towards the present lower court and the mere. On the west side, resting securely in these tip lines can be seen the foundation of the curtain wall of the castle. The bottom 8 to 9 feet of this is composed of a random fill of flint and stone well mortared together and laid from above. At the point where the excavation trench met the wall there was a fissure in the foundation (see Plate XVIII). This may represent nothing more than the junction between different work gangs, or it could have been caused by instability of the earth. Just above the top of this, a roughly-laid plinth with an offset squares-off the wall, and above this point the character of the wall changes. From the plinth upwards, until hidden by the later Poor House skin wall, the interior of the curtain is composed of reasonably regularly laid courses of septaria with the occasional flint. As Plate XVIII shows this part of the wall has clearly been face-laid, the ground behind being made up later. Section A-B shows this fairly clearly; above a line drawn between 1 and 2 the character of the tip is markedly different from that below. Above were considerable quantities of mortar and the fill was much more irregular in its layering and composition. From this area came two sherds of jugs dateable to the late 13th century (Fig. 45, 2 and 3). This indicates some later re-making of levels in the hall. The better quality of the face work of the curtain wall above

⁷ Beneath the present doorway to the Poor House is a burnt area, cut through when the foundations were repaired. A large quantity of lead is present in the burnt area, which could be associated with demolition works in the 18th century before the erection of the present building. If this is so, it is further proof that the final floor level of Roger Bigod's hall is not so different from the present earth floor level.

the plinth suggests that there might have been some soon-abandoned plan to site the hall over an undercroft.

In the deepest part of the section below the curtain wall, the succession of clay and sand layers were found to be resting on a layer of peat. It was impossible to excavate further because of the physical difficulties of the trench. It is suggested that this peat could mark the beginning of an early moat. This theory gains weight from the apparently artificially-laid mass of chalk and flint forming a kind of revetment on the east, but without a major excavation it is impossible to be certain.

EXCAVATION OUTSIDE THE POOR HOUSE

In 1970, a series of 12 ft. wide areas were laid out across the courtyard on the same axis as the trench within the Poor House. It was hoped that these would reveal traces of domestic buildings belonging to the present castle, and it was thought that provided these did not intrude too much, it would then be possible to narrow the trench to 6 ft. wide in order to continue the cross-section of the castle.

In the event, excavations revealed that the top 3 to 4 ft. of the courtyard at this point is of relatively recent date, and has been heavily disturbed well into the present century. A series of 19th-century pits and small drainage gullies crossed the area, and with the exception of four pieces of foundation, discussed below, no identifiable traces of any buildings were found in the areas C-D to N-O.

An 1834 guidebook goes far to explaining this somewhat disappointing result.⁸ 'In 1808 several thousand cart loads of stone and other materials were raised and removed from the interior, but neither cellars, dungeons nor subterraneous passages were found, though, on excavation, some such discoveries were expected to have been met with, on the contrary however, all was one mass of material buried in the most chaotic confusion.' This 1808 operation was probably only the coup de grace, for the castle had been a convenient quarry for materials since its sale by Theophilus Howard in 1635. For much of the 19th century, the Poor House was used as a drill hall, and a considerable number of bullets of this period were found in these upper layers. The courtyard was eventually levelled-up to its present height between the wars ('recent build-up' on section key).

In section C-D, a substantial wall footing of coursed flint, with a septaria facing on the east side was discovered, running north-east south west (no. 3 on section) parallel to the surviving west wall of

⁸ R. Green, *The History, Topography and Antiquities of Framlingham and Saxsted* (1834).

Earl Roger's Great Hall. Although it was not possible to excavate further in this area, it seems reasonable to conclude that this foundation is all that remains of the east wall of the Great Hall. Its position indicates that the hall must have had a width of some 45 ft., which suggests that it was of aisled construction.

Immediately to the west of this foundation, running roughly parallel to it, and partly sealed by it, was a much less substantial foundation, of flints in mortar (4 on section C-D). This was set directly onto a dark clay, and although modern disturbance has reached almost down to it, it is nevertheless clearly prior to wall 3. Its possible significance will be discussed later.

In the northern half of area K-J, at a level where the stratigraphy was still upset by modern disturbance, was a mortared flint foundation wall, some 2 ft. wide and 10 ft. long, running east-west. To the north of this was an area of loosely packed flints which can be interpreted as a floor. In an effort to find more of this, a further area 12 ft. square was excavated to the north of E-F, but so effective had the disturbance been that no trace of either a return wall or floor were discovered.

In area N-O, sealed by a modern rubbish pit, and the upper part largely destroyed as a result, was a badly robbed wall (5 on N-O) running parallel to the outside wall of the supposed first hall. Although the robbery had been extensive, enough remained to show that the foundation was some 3 ft. 6 ins. wide, and its base was some 6 ft. 6 ins. below the present ground surface. The position of the robbed wall can leave little doubt that it formed the west wall of the early hall, and that the latter had an internal width of approximately 18 ft.

Once the 12 ft. squares had been checked for later buildings, the excavation area was halved in width, and work was concentrated on obtaining a cross-section. At the same time, E-F was extended 8 ft. to the east. Section A-B shows a series of tip lines of layers of clay and gravel, inter-mixed with heavy dark soil and occasionally lumps of chalk, all sloping down towards the present lower court and mere. This pattern is repeated in section C-D where the upper parts of some of these layers can be seen. It is very clear, especially in the gravel layers underneath the two foundations, that originally these continued to a greater height.

Section E-F, apart from showing a number of late rubbish pits, reveals layers of gravel still sloping down to the west, but in the centre of the section they break and the upper gravel layers start to run down on a more gentle plane towards the east. Some 10 ft. below the present courtyard a layer of black silty soil was discovered, containing fragments of bone, shell and charcoal (6 on Fig. 43). Immediately below this was a very thin but extremely hard layer of compacted brown clay containing a fragment of shell and sherd of

Romano-British pottery. This layer overlay a thick band of grey-brown clayey soil on the surface of which were a few fragments of shell. Below this was an undisturbed layer of sandy gravel with a band of flints on its upper level. It can be assumed that the early ground level is marked by the layer of black silty soil overlying the brown clay. This was the only part of the excavation which reached the old ground surface.

Section G-H shows the continuation of the trend noticeable in the tip-lines in the eastern half of E-F. Below the modern disturbance the layers of clayey gravel can be seen sloping down to the east, and in the bottom west corner of the section they can be seen overlying the sandy gravel which forms the major part of the layers in E-F. In the time available it was not possible to excavate sufficiently deeply in areas J-K and L-M to confirm or deny this trend, but the lowest layer of clayey gravel exposed in J-K would suggest that it was continuing.

In area N-O the remains of the robbed-out west wall of the early hall were found. The foundations were in a very thick layer of stiff blue-grey clay. In the eastern end of the trench this overlay a series of tip-lines of sand, gravel and clay sloping down steeply to the west. At this point, the lip of the castle moat on the north east side is only some 15 ft. away, and these tip-lines are undoubtedly the spoil being thrown up from the construction of this.

Apart from several sherds of Romano-British pottery, which occurred at the intervals throughout the make-up, the very small amount of medieval pottery from sealed layers came from the western half of section C-D below the four foot level and in the upper 12 ft. of section A-B. These latter layers were markedly different from the others; their composition was more irregular, and the tip-lines were confused.

The very considerable depth of make-up within the courtyard was largely unexpected, and in an attempt to see if this was true for the southern half of the courtyard, a 12 ft. by 6 ft. area was excavated at a point approximately 100 ft. to the west of tower 6 (the chapel tower). Again, the trench had to be abandoned at a depth of 11 ft. and before a ground surface had been reached. The most noticeable difference between this area and the main excavation to the north was the fair quantity of mortar which was apparent in all the layers excavated. This trench was re-excavated and deepened to 13 ft. in February 1972. No ground surface was reached, although the mortar in the layers died out at the lowest parts.

DISCUSSION

The unexpected amount of made-up ground within the courtyard meant that in the time available it was not possible to achieve a

complete cross-section down to the old ground surface. Nevertheless, the results obtained are sufficient for some conclusions to be drawn and some theories to be put forward concerning the 12th century building-history of the castle.

The very great depth of made-up ground, especially noticeable in the western half of the cross-section, indicates the presence of a motte or platform on the site. The destruction of this would account for the difference in composition and general confusion of the layers in the western half of section C-D and in most of section A-B. All the stratified medieval pottery came from these layers. The trial area excavated to a depth of 13 ft. in the southern half of the courtyard reinforces this theory. At the point where these excavations had to be abandoned there was still no indication of the original ground surface. Although it is dangerous to draw conclusions from a small area such as this, taken in conjunction with the main cross section it does point to a small motte having occupied the northern half of the present courtyard. A ditch around the base of this could account for the depth of make-up in the trial area. Whether it was a motte or simply a substantial raised platform cannot now be determined because of the destruction of the upper layers, but in all probability it was the former. It is worth mentioning that of the eleven 12th-century castles known in Suffolk, six of the surviving ones, excluding Framlingham, are of the motte and bailey type. Ipswich Castle has vanished completely, and Orford is a late foundation.⁹ The cross section suggests that the method of constructing the motte was to throw up spoil from the moat to form a bank. Once this bank had been created—in the excavated section this was largely of gravel—the central area was filled in. This means of building could only have been used near to ground level where there was sufficient area in which to work. Presumably in the upper stages of the motte, soil was tipped from a number of points.

The presence of this hitherto-unproven feature means that the dating of the first hall and chapel must be reconsidered. The east wall of this hall survives, together with its two chimneys, encased on its outer side by the present curtain wall of c. 1200. The adjacent chapel is largely known because of the impression of its east wall visible on the inner side of the chapel tower.¹⁰ Neither of these buildings can have been in existence when the raised platform or motte was complete. Such pottery as came from the destruction layers of the motte is best dated to the latter half of the 12th century. The architectural evidence upon which the first hall and chapel are dated to the period 1150-1160 is limited to the two cylindrical stone chimneys, the moulded rear-arch of a round-headed window in the

⁹ List compiled from D. Renn, *Norman Castles in Britain* (John Baker, 1968).

¹⁰ Tower six. Raby and Baillie Reynolds.

hall and a plain round-headed window in the chapel. These features could equally well belong to any period during the last half of the 12th century. It is also worth bearing in mind that the Crown and not Earl Hugh probably held the castle during the period 1157 to 1165, and the Crown was unlikely to be spending money erecting such buildings at a castle which it was intending to return to its baronial owner.

It is unfortunate that both the surviving architectural remains and such pottery as was recovered are not capable of really close dating, but taken in conjunction with the documentary evidence they do allow for two theories to be put forward with regard to events at Framlingham during the period 1150 to *c.* 1180. These two theories depend on whether it is considered that the hall and chapel ante-date or post-date the destruction of the castle in 1175.

If it is assumed that the hall and chapel post-date Henry's destruction, it is logical to suppose that Alnoth the Engineer was employed in destroying the motte and its associated defences. The hall and chapel would then fit into the sequence as being purely domestic buildings erected on the site in the years following the destruction, before Earl Roger regained favour sufficiently under Richard I to be allowed to construct the present curtain walls and thus refortify the site.¹¹ Possibly the slight foundation (4 in section C-D) belongs to this domestic period. It is much too inadequate to be the base of a curtain wall, and it was largely destroyed by the second great hall of *c.* 1200.

If however the hall and chapel ante-date the 1175 destruction, a new building sequence must be presumed, for neither could have been built before the destruction of the motte. As with the architectural fragments, such pottery as came from the destruction layers is strongly suggestive of a date in the second half of the 12th century. Only two reasons can be put forward to account for a pre-1175 destruction. The first is that Henry II destroyed the defences of Framlingham when he held the Castle in the years following 1157; but there is no evidence for this. The second reason is to suppose that Earl Hugh levelled the site himself during a rebuilding programme designed to bring Framlingham's defences up to date. Although concrete evidence is lacking for such a theory, there are three factors which could point to this. During the 1160's, Earl Hugh was apparently busy rebuilding his castle of Bungay, providing it with a massive square keep and forebuilding.¹² Between 1165 and 1173, King Henry II was also building his powerful new castle at

¹¹ Allen Brown, p. 139.

¹² H. Braun, 'Bungay Castle. Report on the excavations', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xxii (1935), pp. 201-223.

Orford.¹³ It seems improbable that Henry would have spent so much money at Orford, for all its importance as a port, if Framlingham's defences were still of the simple motte and bailey variety. Possibly it was simply a prudent precaution on the part of the King, but even so, it is improbable that Earl Hugh should devote all his time to updating Bungay, and neglect the threat posed to Framlingham and his surrounding lands by the King's works at Orford. The third factor concerns the employment of Alnoth the Engineer together with his 'cementarii et carpentarii' for the 1174-5 demolitions at Framlingham. Alnoth was one of Henry's most important master-builders, and at that time was 'at the height of his career.' 'He first appears on the Pipe Roll of 1156-57 on the London account, and is thereafter continuously employed for the rest of Henry's reign, almost invariably in London, and usually on the Tower or the Palace of Westminster. Apart from various commissions at Windsor, his demolition of Framlingham was one of his rare excursions outside the Metropolis'.¹⁴ It seems unlikely that a man of Alnoth's stature would have been employed for the comparatively straightforward task of slighting a motte and its attendant earth and timber defences. The excavations of 1969 and 1970 were only on the northern part of the castle. The southern half of the castle courtyard may yield some of the answers to these various questions, and it is probably not without significance that the small trial excavation south of the main cross section contained extensive traces of mortar. This mortar could well point to there being a major and hitherto unknown phase in the development of Framlingham Castle, post-dating the motte and ante-dating the present curtain wall. What is certain is that had Framlingham remained in its original state until 1175 it would have been extremely old-fashioned and an uncomfortable and undignified castle for someone of Earl Hugh's status.

THE POTTERY

An interim report by Stephen Moorhouse.

A quantity of pottery was recovered from the excavations, but unfortunately the majority of it came from either unstratified or re-deposited contexts. However one small deposit can be regarded as homogenous. The group is unfortunately small but it contains sufficient internal dating evidence in the form of two small sherds of fine smooth white fabric covered externally in rich copper green glaze, coming from a monochrome jug from south-west France,

¹³ *History of the Kings' Works*, ed. H. M. Colvin (H.M.S.O.), Vol. 2, p. 769. Henry apparently spent more money on Orford than on any castles save Dover and Nottingham. Allen Brown, p. 133. n. 32.

¹⁴ Allen Brown p. 137, and n. 48.