

# The Landmark Trust

## STOGURSEY CASTLE

### History Album



**Written by Charlotte Haslam, 1987**

**Updated in 2010 and re-presented in 2015**

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## **BASIC DETAILS**

**Gatehouse built c.1300**

**Converted to cottage c.1600**

**Reroofed 1877**

**Bought by Landmark 1981**

**Architect for restoration: John Schofield with Architecton**

**Builders: Trivetts**

**Foreman: Philip Ford**

**Main restoration completed 1984**

**Mason for repair of castle walls, 1984-1987: Michael Haycraft**

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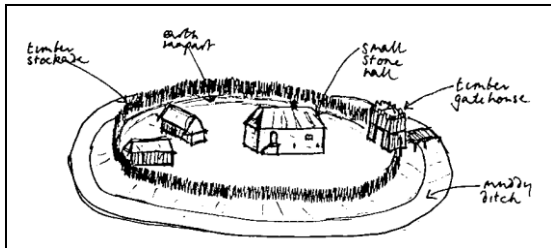


**Stogursey Castle**

## Summary

What remains at Stogursey Castle today are the vestiges of almost a thousand years of use, first military and then more peaceable. The little cottage now used as a Landmark was chiefly built in the 17th century, but it also incorporates mediaeval fabric from the gate towers whose site it colonised. Although extensive archaeology has been carried out in the past, the site is a very complex one and questions remain, particularly about the castle's exact form in its earliest years. Its history falls into six main stages.

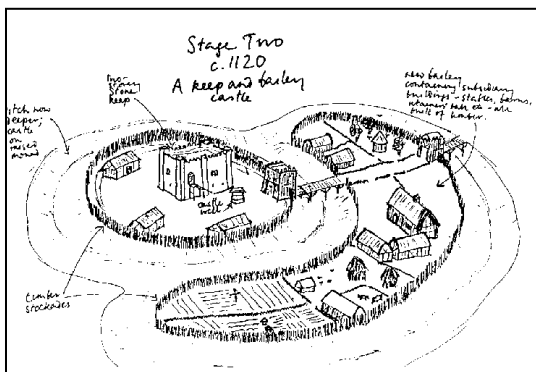
### Stage 1: 1066-1100



Stogursey Castle's origins lie with William the Conqueror's need to consolidate his new kingdom. He granted the manor of Stoke to William de Falaise who built a castle on the site as one of a chain running from Dunster to Montacute, to protect Somerset from invasion from the sea. It seems de Falaise did not build the typical motte (defensive mound) since the

remains of a later, stone building have been found beneath the existing mound. Instead, his defences took the form of the 'castle ringwork', a hall or keep with a timber stockade, on a flat area defended by a strong bank and a ditch.

### Stage 2: 1100-1150



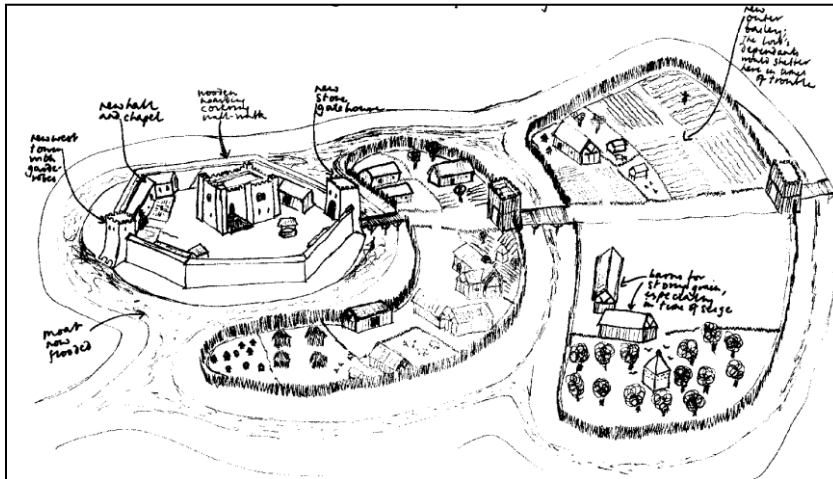
Early in the 12th century, Stoke manor passed by marriage to the de Curci (later Courcy) family. William de Curci did rather well out of his marriage, with the fortified manor of Stoke a particular prize since castles could only be held with permission from the king. Stoke was made the 'caput' or head of the Honour of Curci, lands stretching across several counties but bound by allegiance to the same lord.

Stoke therefore became Stoke-Curci, and eventually Stogursey. It was probably de Curci

who built the castle mound to strengthen his new seat. The mound filled the area of the original ringwork, constructed partly from the earth removed to deepen the ditch.

By now, as castle technology developed and stronger keeps were being built, mottes were less crucial to defences, but Stoke was still marshy in those days, and in flat countryside, so a mound would have offered both defensive observation and drier conditions. De Curci built a rectangular keep on the mound, probably of two or three storeys. It had stone foundations, so may also have had stone walls, the use of stone an indication of its strategic importance to the Normans. A stockade surrounded the mound; to the south east, and partly surrounding the mound, was a bailey (defensive enclosure), also stockaded and with its own deep ditch. Some years later, a second, larger bailey was added to the east, perhaps during the troubled years of the power struggles between Stephen and Matilda.

**Stage Three: 1150-70**



Henry II came to the throne in 1156 and proceeded energetically to consolidate Plantagenet rule across the realm. William de Curci III inherited Stogursey around the same time. He was also one of the king's stewards and may have been authorised to strengthen Stogursey Castle, which now

reached the peak of its strength, protecting the mouth of the River Parrett. Stone curtain walls were built around the mound, patched stretches of which remain today. A rectangular garderobe (or lavatory) tower appeared on the west side. The main entrance, then as now to the east, was probably defended by another tower. Fragments of a timber bridge from this period have been found, suggesting that the moat may by now have been filled with water (the leat system was extended soon after to power a mill, still referred to as 'new' in 1225).

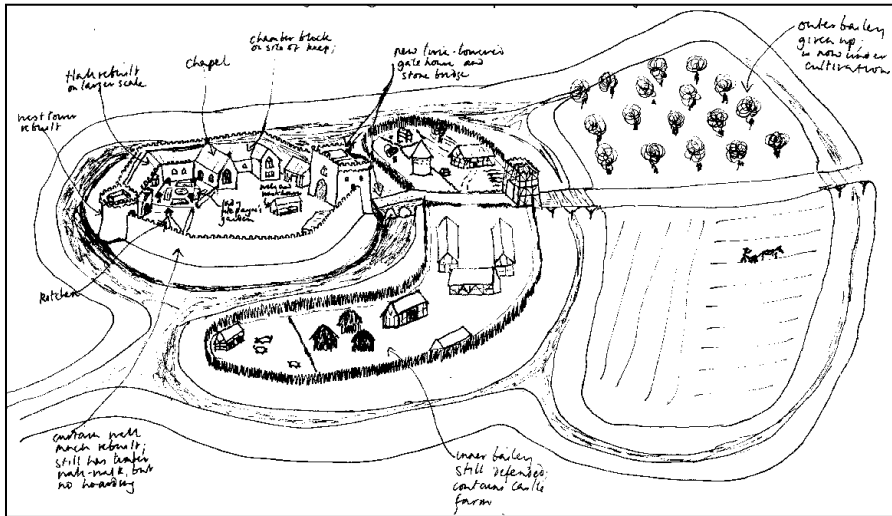
Castles fulfilled domestic as well as military roles and Stogursey would have been permanent home to a constable and his household. Every so often de Curci and his retinue (otherwise in attendance on the king) would arrive to take up residence. The keep would have provided limited, rather uncomfortable accommodation, and evidence suggests that a main hall was also built on the western side of the inner ward, adjoining the garderobe tower. Other service buildings also sprang up as befitted the seat of one of the most influential families in England and a castle which, with Corfe, Sherbourne and Taunton, was one of the four regarded as vital for the defence of the south west.

**Stage 4: 1216-30**

But Stogursey Castle was now to be superseded by a new castle to protect the crossing of the Parrett, built by King John at Bridgwater, as he sought absolute control over the English territories that were all that remained to the English Crown. Stogursey and its owners lost control over the area as a consequence. The de Curci line had petered out, Stogursey passing through Alice de Curci, a wealthy widow, to her second husband Warin FitzGerold, John's chamberlain. In 1210, the king came to stay with FitzGerold at Stogursey; they no doubt enjoyed good hunting on the Quantocks and then, royal accounts record, the king lost 20 shillings gambling. Although FitzGerold was a loyal signatory to the Magna Carta in 1214, two years later his monarch became suspicious of him and ordered the constable of Stogursey to hold the castle directly for the king, with extra men to defend it in case FitzGerold tried to regain it. Fortifications seems to have been strengthened again. In 1224, Stogursey was held for the rebels against the regents of the young Henry III and besieged. It did not fall, but there is evidence of much patching and repair afterwards. Timber was provided for the repair of domestic

buildings and a gatehouse with at least one semi-circular tower was built on the east side of the site.

**Stage Five: 1300-1325**



Passing through the hands of various owners through the troubled 13th century, Stogursey came to rest in 1309 with the Fitzpaynes, a family of rising importance in the west. The castle was to remain in their hands until the late 17th century. Robert Fitzpayne set about 'modernising' his

small castle, whose outer bailey had by now disappeared, possibly becoming the castle garden. Defences to the inner ward were strengthened, including a twin-towered gatehouse, a new bridge and a semi-circular tower built against the western wall. A stronger, more compact castle resulted.

**Stage 6 1450-1550**

According to local tradition, in 1455 or 57 (accounts vary) Stogursey once again became caught up in national events, as the rallying point for the Lancastrian cause in the south-west. It was reputedly besieged, overthrown and destroyed, never to be repaired as a fortified site again. Yet there is no written or archaeological evidence of such cataclysm. Certainly the gatehouse defences were improved around this date and then in the 1490s accounts show the gatehouse and a 'new' tower were extensively repaired. The advent of the Tudors brought more peaceable times, however, and in common with fortified manors across the country, from now on Stogursey was to pass gradually into domestic and agricultural use.

**The later years**

In 1670, a major sale of the Earl of Northumberland's (as the Fitzpaynes had become) lands took place to offset debt. Stogursey Castle and 27 acres were sold as a tenanted farm, known as Mill Farm from its association with the old mill. The castle buildings gradually fell into dereliction as the site became increasingly cultivated. Mr Percy Caple lived in the cottage from 1919 until 1963, a great gardener who produced hundred-weights of potatoes from the former inner ward. In 1963, Mill Farm was sold but the cottage remained empty and was left to decay. Local conservationists got the local Council involved, who were advised on the site by architect John Schofield, who had worked on the Old Hall at Croscombe, another Landmark. When the Council's plans failed, he suggested an approach to Landmark, who acquired the castle site.



## Landmark's Restoration

Work began with the clearing of the site of undergrowth and a survey. Only the north wall was in danger of imminent collapse and so repairs here were carried out first, in tandem with those to the cottage. Work to the other walls and the remains of the west tower were carried out over the next few years by mason Michael Haycraft. Repairs were mostly repointing and capping off in lime mortar, to prevent further damage from water penetration.

The cottage itself had already had emergency support put in: the floors were weak, lintels cracked and sagging, windows and doors boarded up against vandals. The walls had deteriorated and the west wall had to be tile-stitched back to the main body of the building. The north gable was largely rebuilt and the north-west corner, which was suffering from subsidence, underpinned. Once the walls had all been repaired, they were rendered (except for the south elevation where the masonry is of higher quality) and lime-washed to distinguish the 17th-century work from the mediaeval walls that contain it.

The 19th-century tiled roof was replaced with thatch – which is how it was roofed originally. The 19th-century roof timbers were kept, but extended to deepen the eaves. New elm gutters were fitted and the chimneys were rebuilt.

Nearly all the 17th-century window oak frames survived and needed only minor repairs and reglazing. 19th-century windows were repaired; the only entirely new window is that which lights the stairs. The 17th-century windows were reglazed with rectangular panes, while those for the mediaeval arrow-loops of the gatehouse tower are diamond-shaped.

Inside a new oak stair was made in the original 17th-century turret, whose brickwork also needed much repair. The ground floor is much as we found it with old doors and paved floor. The walls were all replastered and limewashed. Upstairs, a bathroom was created by blocking a 19th-century door. The ceiling was removed in the south bedroom to show a surviving 17th-century truss, which forms part of the partition with the bathroom. Floorboards were renewed with second-hand timber. Plumbing and wiring were completely renewed and the digging of the septic tank provided archaeologists the opportunity to examine the structure of the mound and establish the ground level beneath it.

The bridge was perhaps the most exciting discovery of all. Trial holes revealed the masonry to be mainly intact and when the mud had all been dug away, an almost-complete bridge from about 1300 was revealed, which was repaired, repaved and repointed. It would have been impossible to put back a true drawbridge so the gap was bridged instead with a new section of oak. The main dredging of the moat happened in 1983 when a number of finds were made including an archer's wrist band, leather shoe soles and sections of chain mail. Once the moat was cleared, the leats bringing water to

the moat from Stogursey Brook could be re-opened and the castle stood guarded once more by water and ready for adventure.

## Stogursey Castle

### **A description of the visible remains**

What you see at Stogursey today is in some ways simply a random slice through the buildings that have stood on the site at one time or another; neither the earliest nor the most recent, but a mixed sample of various - indeed perhaps most - of the building periods.

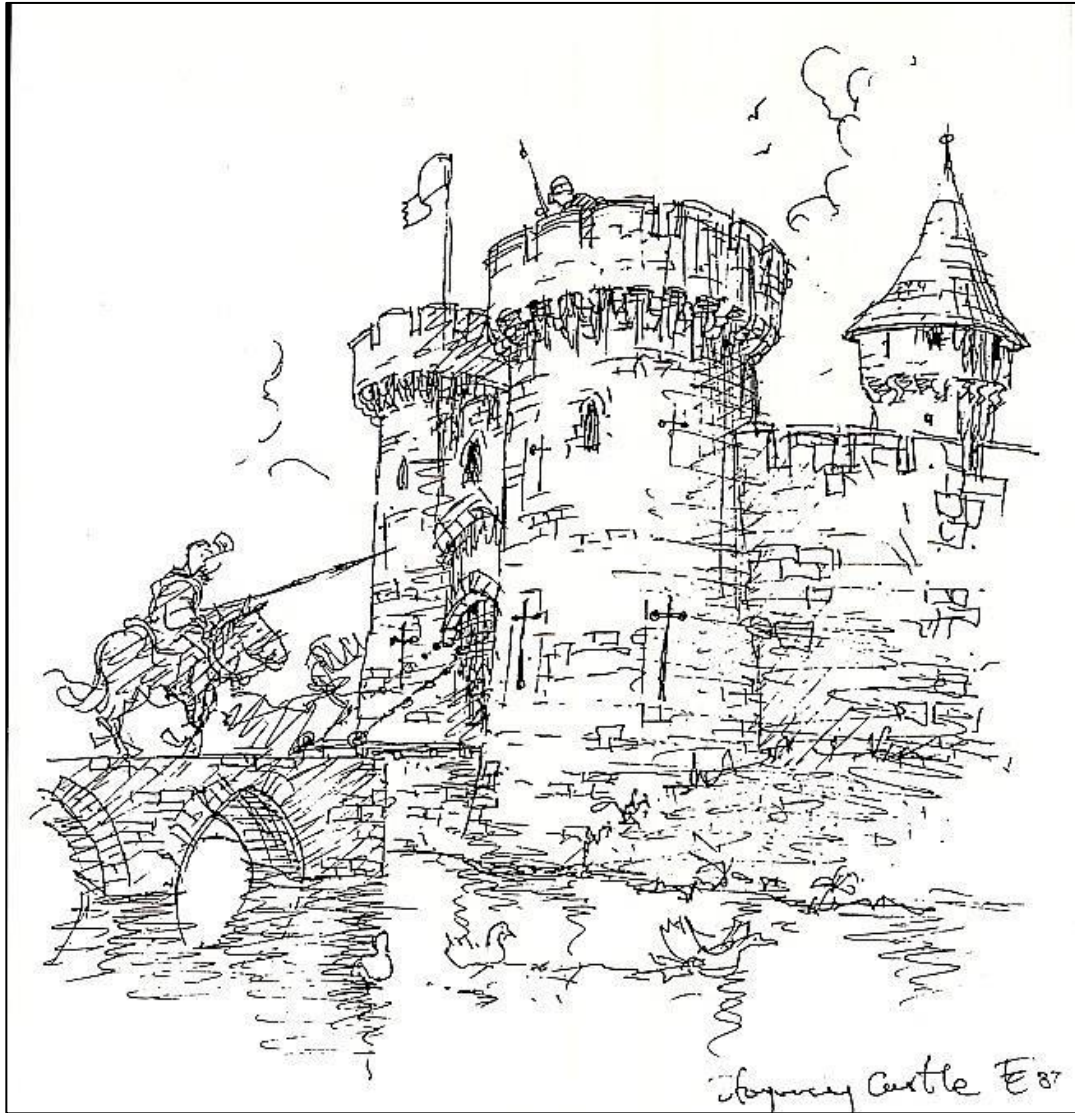
The mound (it is not properly a motte, being too low) on which the castle stands is likely to be the earliest visible feature. It may date from soon after 1100.

The moat, too, dates from the Norman period, since fragments of a timber bridge of the late 12th century were found in it. Whether the elaborate watercourses which fill it with water are contemporary is not known. They feed the mill pond as well, and a mill is mentioned in Domesday, but could have stood on another site. A 'new mill' is mentioned in a deed of 1225-30. A likely date for enlarging and flooding the moat to give added strength to the inner ward would either be the later 12th century, with the earliest walls, or around 1300, with the last gatehouse.

The walls in outline and in some of their masonry, appear to be basically 12th-century, but have been so much patched and rebuilt, that dating is extremely difficult. There is much 13th- and 14th-century stonework, as well as 19th-century, and no doubt some from in between too; and openings of similar variety. The springing of a vault can just be made out on the west side, perhaps belonging to the undercroft of a hall.

The west tower dates from about 1300, although like the walls it was partly rebuilt later. It stands on the rectangular base of a 12th-century tower (visible from the moat side) in which there were garderobes.

The twin-towers of the gatehouse also date from about 1300, and again stand on an earlier tower, though this one is probably 13th-century. The smaller arrow-slit in the northern tower (overlooking the entrance) was renewed in the mid-15th century; the others are Victorian, in medieval embrasures. The cottage was built inside the



**Stogursey in 1320 depicted with some artistic (not to say architectural) licence by Edward Coleridge.**

gatehouse in the early 17th century; it was re-roofed in the late 19th century, and again in 1983.

The bridge originally thought to have been largely built in the 19th century was, when the mud was dug away, found to be almost entirely medieval, again dating from about 1300. It probably stands on the same footings as earlier bridges.

### **How the Castle Developed**

How closely all the different stages of work at Stogursey followed one another, and for how long the buildings of one stage overlapped with those of the next is extremely difficult to tell, since no description of the castle has been found, nor any illustration, before it became a ruin in the 16th century.

Archaeology is of course one way of getting nearer to an answer, so while the Landmark Trust was repairing the castle in 1982-4, archaeologists from the Western Archaeological Trust kept a close watch. They made a number of small exploratory digs round the walls, the gatehouse, and the tower in the wall opposite and, while the moat was being dredged, on either side of the bridge. The castle had never been excavated before, except for digging out the well in the 19th century (when a drinking horn is said to have been found), so theories about its growth and development were hitherto based entirely on the documentary sources, of which there are none before the early 13th century; and on the appearance of the visible remains which, again, are mostly of the 13th or early 14th century.

Limited though they were, from these sample digs two things emerged quite clearly. The first related to Stogursey's early history, and the result of it has been to condense the previously accepted view of the castle's development, and to shift its highest point back by about a century.

It had generally been assumed that the castle had progressed, in the commonly found way, from motte-and-keep to curtain wall-and-gatehouse, from wood to stone, from square to round towers; keeping abreast in fact with the changes in military architecture between the Norman invasion and the peak of castle building in the Edwardian period of 1275-1350.

But it was also assumed, because of the lack of documentary evidence before the 13th century, that it had not been of any great importance until then; and because a lot of work seemed to have been carried out there around 1300, that it was then at its largest and most powerful - which was still not very large or very powerful. In other words, Stogursey was merely a family castle, of local importance, not part of any wider system of national defence.

It now seems that far from this, part of the castle's outer defences had already been given up by about 1250; that it reached the peak of its strength between 1150 and 1200 when, at a time when in general only the more major castles were built in stone, it already consisted of a stone-walled and moated enclosure or 'ringwork', defended, in addition, by two further enclosures, or baileys, each with their own substantial defences. Thereafter the castle was reduced in size and importance, although still much repaired and altered.

The second of the archaeologists' main conclusions concerned the end of Stogursey Castle, and has again cast doubt on the accepted story. This story told how the castle had been besieged in the Wars of the Roses, had fallen to its attackers and then been destroyed, and had 'ever since lain in ruins.' No trace of such destruction could be found, neither by burning nor by undermining the walls. Had the castle in fact continued in use?

Once these new theories had been suggested by archaeology, it turned out to be quite easy to find confirmation from documents. For the earlier period nothing specific has been found, but in the general history of the period and of the area, the importance of Stogursey in the 12th century makes sense - and had in fact already been suggested by one local historian, A.W. Vivian-Neal. For the later period, Dr R. Dunning, working on the Victorian Country History for Somerset, found new papers which show the castle being repaired and lived in until the 1520s, only decaying from 'natural' causes after that.

So we have a framework on which to fit the beginning and end of Stogursey's story. To fill in the rest there is a mass of historical and genealogical material to work from, some

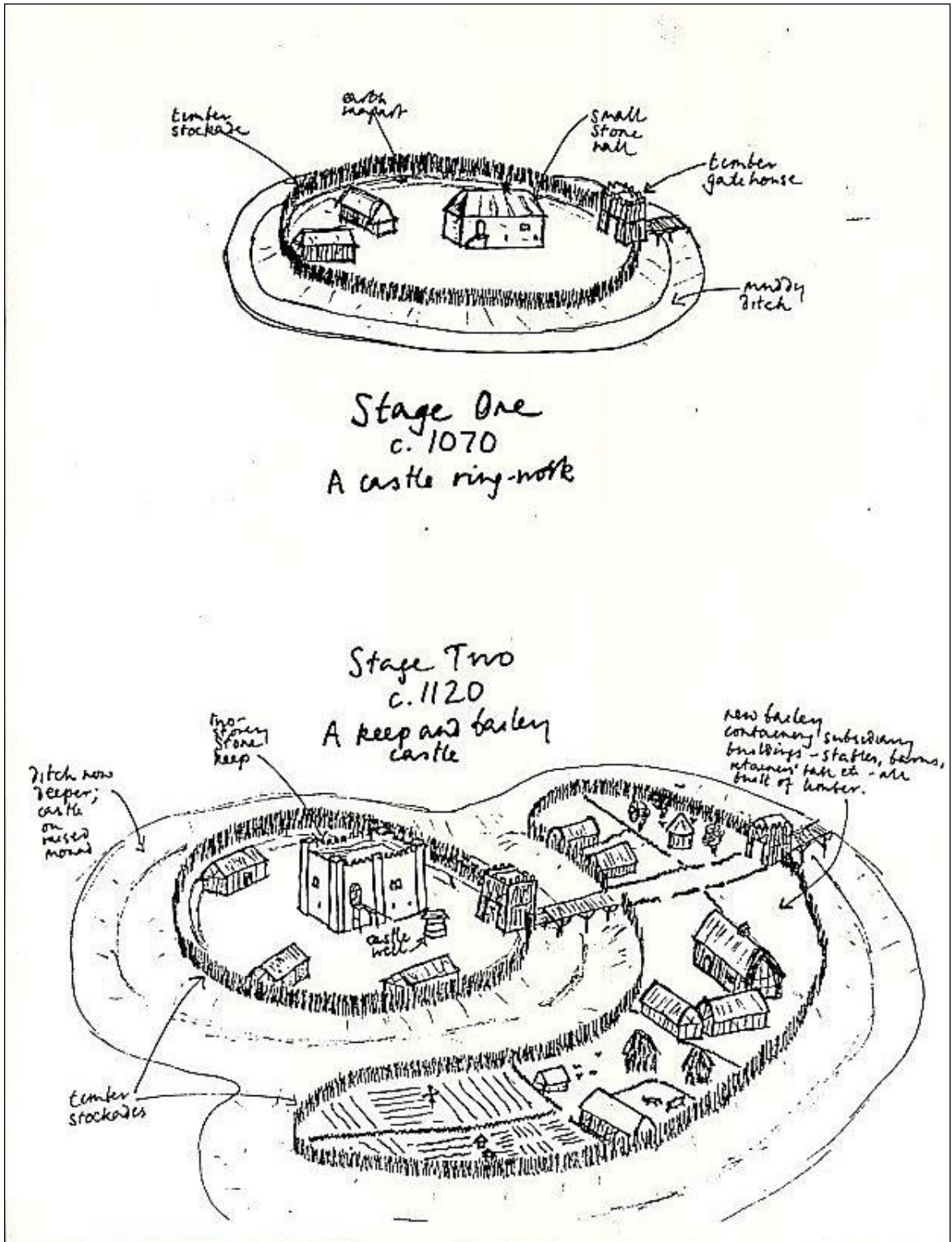
general, some specific. Also, of course, other archaeological finds, and the standing remains themselves.

From all this it is possible to put together an outline of the castle's history, first as a simple table highlighting the main stages, then in a fuller version with historical events and characters, of which there are plenty. It must be remembered, though, that the reality was certainly much more complex, and haphazard, than can be appreciated now, so many centuries later; that buildings such as these underwent a constant process of maintenance and repair, of minor improvement and alteration. The domestic buildings particularly, both those of the inner ward and of the baileys, would have been rebuilt several times over the four centuries of the castle's active life.

Inevitably, revisions to the story will be made as new information comes to light. For example, it is not yet certain whether the mound was first topped only by a keep or stone hall protected by a timber palisade (which we have for the moment assumed); or whether it and the curtain-wall are all of one build, with a keep (it seems that there was some such building in the central area of the mound) coming later. Similarly, as has already been said, there is much uncertainty about the date at which the moat was flooded. A further unanswered question is whether the inner bailey was ever walled in stone.

In the following table, then, the first two stages, for which there is as yet only limited archaeological evidence, are somewhat tentative. Only at Stage Three, with the earliest standing remains, do we arrive on slightly firmer ground.

Some sketches to show how Stogursey could have looked at each of the main stages of its development as a castle.





## The Main Stages of the Castle's Development

### **Stage One 1066-1100**

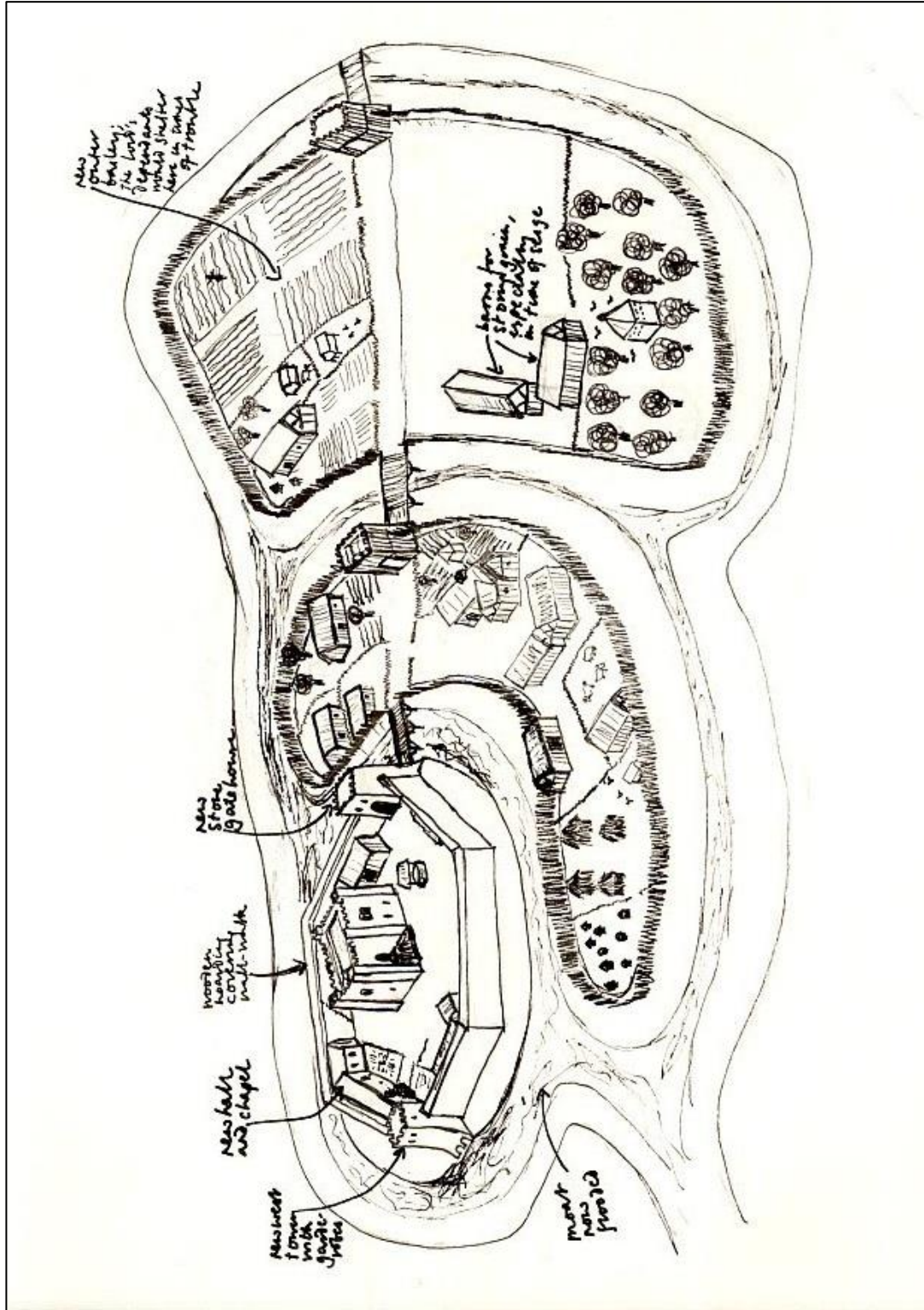
Soon after the Conquest, as part of a co-ordinated plan to hold and defend the south-west, a simple castle was built, of a type that has been found both in Normandy and elsewhere in this country, consisting of a 'ringwork', a flat area enclosed by a high bank, which had a timber stockade on its top and a ditch on its outer side. Within this enclosure there was a stone building, perhaps a small keep.

### **Stage Two 1100-1150**

After it became the chief castle of the de Curci family in the reign of Henry I the castle was more strongly fortified. A shallow mound, or motte, was created and at the same time the surrounding ditch was made deeper. On the mound was a rectangular keep, probably of two or three storeys; it had stone foundations, which would indicate that it had stone walls too, but they may have been timber. Round the perimeter of the mound was a stockade; on its south-eastern side, partly surrounding it, was a bailey, itself defended by a strong stockade and a deep ditch. Some years later a second and much larger bailey was added to the east of this, again with its own defences.

### **Stage Three 1150-1170**

In the later 12th century, possibly as part of Henry II's policy of consolidation, a major rebuilding took place. The stockade around the mound was replaced by stone walls. The keep remained standing, and there were other stone buildings against the curtain wall, and at least one tower, on the west side. A further tower may have defended the entrance, over a bridge on the east side. This bridge was, at least in part, built of timber. It is very possible that the leats to bring water from the Stogursey Brook to fill the moat were dug at this time, and that shortly afterwards the system was extended to provide water for a **mill**, still referred to as 'new' in 1225-30.



Stage Three, c.1170. Stogursey Castle at the peak of its development: the inner ward is now walled in stone; the earlier keep is still standing; two baileys are in full use.

#### **Stage Four 1216-30**

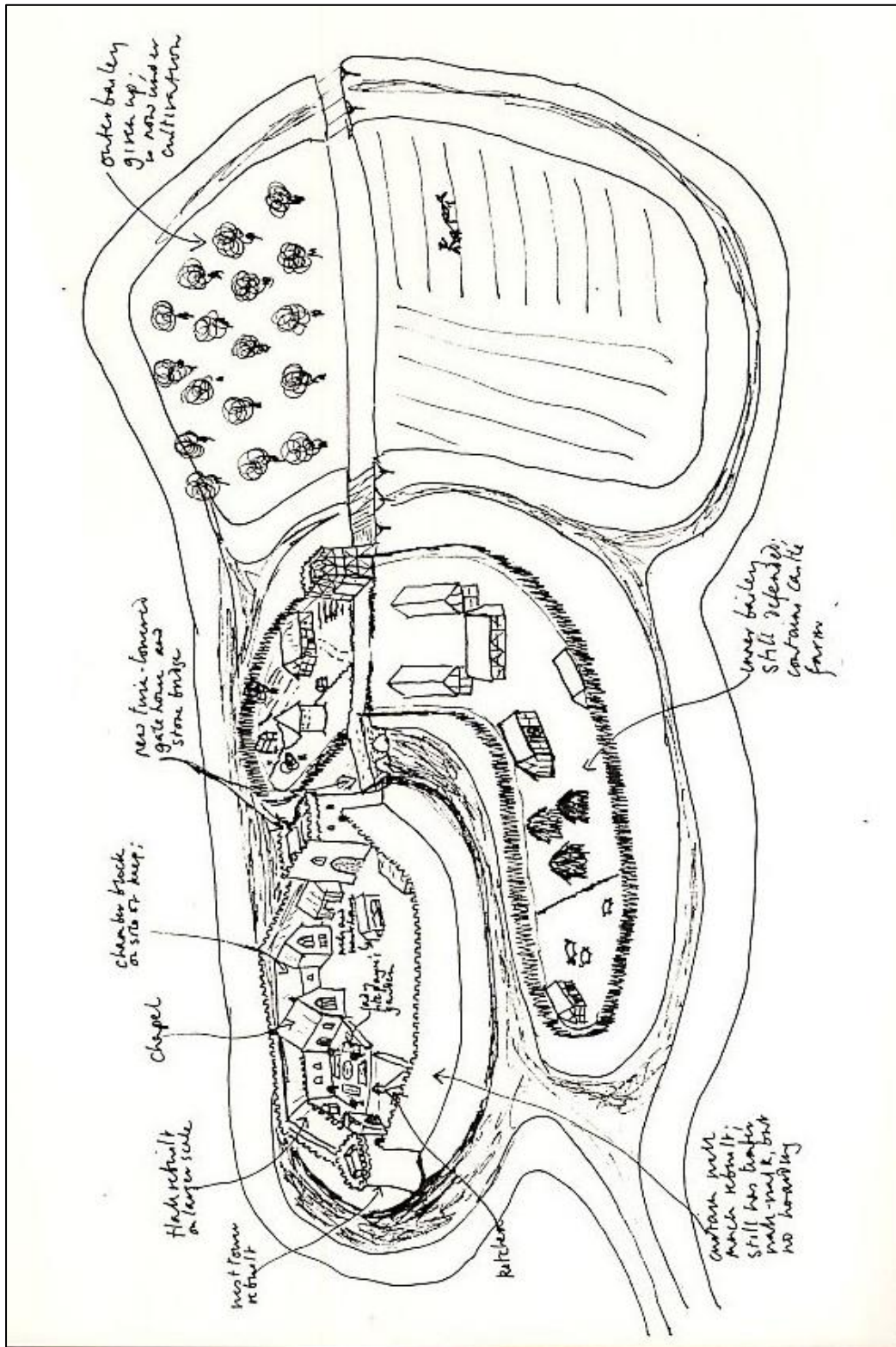
The castle was involved in two rebellions in this period, and during the second, at least, withstood a siege. In preparation for attack, and to repair any damage done after it, much patching and rebuilding was carried out. Timber was provided for repair of the domestic buildings. A gatehouse with at least one semi-circular tower was built on the east side.

#### **Stage Five 1300-1325**

The outer bailey had long fallen out of use, and a reference in a deed of 1258/9 to the castle garden, and land next to it, might indicate that the resultant space had been put under cultivation. New defences were now added, therefore, to strengthen the inner ward, including a twin-towered gatehouse, a new bridge, and a semi-circular mural tower on the western side. A smaller, stronger castle was the result.

#### **Stage Six 1450-1550**

The gatehouse defences were improved, possibly under the threat of siege, by new arrow slits overlooking the bridge. The gatehouse and a 'new' tower, perhaps an enlargement of the west tower which gave it its present irregular shape, were extensively repaired in the 1490s, but the castle fell out of use about thirty years later, and gradually decayed.



**Stage Five, c. 1320. The final phase: after modernisation by Lord Fitzpayne. The strength of the castle is contained within the inner ward, with the bailey ward only for farm buildings. The stone keep has gone, making way for a chamber block. The accommodation inside the castle is generally a lot more spacious and comfortable.**

A History of Stogursey Castle and its owners, with the historical events in which they played a part

**Norman foundations**

William the Conqueror granted the manor of Stoke in Somerset to a baron named William de Falaise. Falaise, in Normandy, was where the Conqueror himself had been born, and where an important castle stood, so we can assume that this William was in the royal circle and that Stoke was a valuable gift. It had a large area of forest on the Quantocks for hunting, and extended to the coast and river estuary of the Parrett as well, with opportunities for shipping and trade. William also held Woodspring in Somerset as well as manors in Dorset and, through his wife Geva de Burci, in Devon.

William de Falaise probably built the first castle at Stogursey in the busy years following the Conquest, as one of a chain of castles running inland from Dunster in the north, along the valley of the Parrett, to Montacute in the south. Their purpose was both to protect Somerset from invasion by sea and to consolidate the Normans' hold on the south-western peninsula.

It seems that he did not, as so many Normans did, build a motte, because the foundations of a stone building occupied in post-Conquest times were found beneath the existing mound in 1984. But a common alternative to the motte was the 'castle ringwork', and it is likely that it was one of these that he built; a hall or keep defended by a strong bank and ditch.

William de Falaise was still alive in the reign of Henry I, for between 1100 and 1107 he and his wife founded the priory of Stoke, giving it as a cell to the Abbey of St Mary of Lonlay in Normandy. Shortly afterwards, however, Stoke and some other manors passed to their daughter Emma and her husband William de Curci, head of the English branch of a family that was to thrive and acquire

extensive property in the 11th and 12th centuries. (The name later became de Courcy,



**Aerial view of Stogursey.**

but in the medieval period the de Curci form was most commonly used and is therefore the one that I have used for this history).

William de Curci was the second son of Richard de Curci who, after the Conquest, was given three manors in Oxfordshire. The family's Normandy property, including the castle of Curcisur-Dives, passed to the elder brother, Robert. (The description of a siege of this Curci Castle in 1090 in the Ecclesiastical History of a monk named Ordericus Vitalis has been attributed in error to the castle which later became Stoke-Curci; in fact no written reference to Stogursey exists at this date).

The property in Somerset and Dorset that William de Curci gained by his marriage was obviously of greater value than his own, and in particular the manor of Stoke with its much-prized bonus of a castle, and it was there that he chose to establish his headquarters. In feudal terminology, it became the head, or 'caput' of the Honor of Curci, which consisted of a great many separate properties, scattered across several counties, but all bound together in allegiance to the one lord, who in turn held them from the king for the service of 25 knights. As a result Stoke became Stoke-Curci, and eventually Stogursey.

The builder of the castle mound then was probably William de Curci, strengthening his newly-chosen chief manor. From the size and shape of the mound (larger and flatter than an ordinary motte) it can be supposed that it fills the area of the original ringwork (D.F. Renn in his classification of Norman castles still calls it a ringwork). It would have been partly constructed from material gained by deepening the ditch. The resulting moat would, at this stage, still have been no more than muddy.

An additional reason for the low height of the mound may have been to form a stable foundation for a keep, one corner of whose foundations was found by the archaeologists and which is thought to have been built of stone. In general, the



true conical motte was only surmounted by a timber keep, and when a new stone one was built it stood in the base-court, or bailey. It may be argued that there was little point then in building a mound at all, but in the 12th century the land around Stogursey was marshy, with little coastal inlets, and there must therefore have been an advantage in gaining extra height, both for observation and for defence against damp.

Few castles were built of stone at this date (although more are being revealed by archaeology all the time) so that if there was indeed a stone keep at Stogursey at this date, it would indicate the degree of importance that the Normans placed on it, and on the part that it could play in their defence.

### **The Reign of Stephen – An Uneasy Interlude**

Strong defences were certainly needed in the next, troubled, reign of Stephen when the Mohun barons of Dunster sided with the rival to the throne, Matilda. An army was sent by the king to capture Dunster and after a longish siege the castle fell. In the same campaign Richmond Castle at Harptree, to the east of the Parrett, and another castle which has been identified as Stogursey's neighbour, Nether Stowey, were captured. No mention is made of Stogursey itself in the contemporary accounts, but de Mohum is said to have ravaged the area around Dunster before his fall, so that it is very unlikely that the de Curcis were not involved in some way. Indeed, it is possible that the second, outer, bailey was created at this time; it would have been intended more for the protection of villagers and livestock in times of trouble than for permanent habitation. The author of the account in the *Victorian Country History* of 1925 also made out a third, less strongly defended bailey to the north of the castle. The existence of this is now questioned, but there may have been some outworks there and, again, these may have been constructed to protect the whole community from attack during the events of 1140.

One reason why Stogursey was not mentioned at this time may be that the owner was a minor. William de Curci I was succeeded by a son, William II. Genealogists differ as to when this William died (there were other Williams alive at the same time, both from junior branches and the senior branch of the family in Normandy, which leads to some confusion), but W.H. Farrer in *Honours and Knights' Fees* suggests that he was dead by 1130 or soon after. He had only married in c.1125 so that his son, William III, was only a child at the time of his father's death and unable to take sides in a civil war.

William II's wife, Avice de Meschin (another heiress who added lands in Northampton and Yorkshire to the Honor of Curci), married again after his death. It is thought that her new husband, William Paynal of Drax, became guardian of her son and managed his estates during his minority. Another possibility is that Stogursey remained temporarily in the king's hands, because whenever a great lord, or 'tenant-in-chief', died, his estates reverted automatically to the Crown, to be granted again to the heir. If the heir was a minor this would not happen until he had come of age, and it was entirely at the king's discretion whether a guardian was appointed to look after the boy and his estates meanwhile - sometimes it suited him better not to do so.

William III was certainly in possession of his lands by 1156, and if the period between 1130 and the beginning of Henry II's reign in 1154 (a period during which much castle building went on, for both sound and suspicious reasons) was for Stogursey an uneventful one, this was not to remain so for long.

### **Stogursey Reaches the Peak of its Strength**

William de Curci III came into his property at about the time that the energetic Henry Plantagenet was establishing his rule over England, demolishing unwanted castles, building new ones under his own licence, formulating new laws, ceaselessly touring the country and in general shaking out his kingdom after a period of weak government. William was, as his grandfather and his father had been, one of the king's stewards, and he could well have been told to further strengthen his castle, to act as a warning to any barons in North Somerset who thought of challenging the royal authority.

In any case, the second half of the 12th century is the likeliest time for the next main stage of Stogursey's development. At this time, around the perimeter of the mound, where there was formerly a timber stockade, stone walls were built. They did not form a continuous curve but were 'faceted', that is, formed of straight sections meeting at an angle, at which point larger blocks of stone formed quoins. And it is basically these walls that still stand, much patched and rebuilt and with openings of many different periods in them.

In the circuit of the walls, on the west side, was a rectangular tower in which were the garderobes, or lavatories. The main entrance seems to have been, as now, on the east, and was probably defended by another tower. The bridge, of which a fragment was found in 1983, may have been entirely constructed of timber, or else had a timber section next to the entrance to the inner ward, in place of a moveable drawbridge.

A castle served other purposes besides the obvious military one, and for a large part of its existence it was, basically, a rather inconvenient house. Stogursey would have been the permanent home of a constable, with his family and household, and a small number of men at arms. The lord himself, when he was not in attendance on the king, spent much of his time touring his estates and staying in his different manors. But at certain times of the year he would take up

residence at his castle. The de Curcis would have had a large household, and there would have to be space to accommodate them all, and the permanent garrison as well. The keep would have provided much of this, but such buildings were never very agreeable to live in, and it is likely that other buildings, including a main hall, with chambers opening off it, would have been built against the curtain wall, and from the evidence that survives it seems that this was on the western side of the inner ward, adjoining the garderobe tower.

Only the lord himself, and in his absence the constable, with their immediate households, would have lived in the inner ward of the castle. Accommodation for the majority of the household would have been provided in the bailey, mainly in timber buildings.

A further function of the castle was as an administrative centre, from which the large and scattered estates of the lord were controlled. And above all, perhaps, they were symbols of a lord's power, both locally - his ability to provide stability in the surrounding area - and nationally, illustrating his standing with the king and in political affairs generally.

So at this time, in the later 12th century, the strength of Stogursey Castle and the power of the de Curci family, each reflecting the other, were at their peak. After three generations of Williams, each one holding royal office and married to an heiress, the English branch of the family was among the most influential in the kingdom. Other branches of the family were equally successful. The Somerset historian, A.W.Vivian-Neal, goes so far as to say that 'few families provided the Norman and early Plantagenet kings with more councillors and warrior-statesmen.'

Stogursey had an importance in its own right, too, quite independent of its de Curci owners. No castle existed at random and an equal reason for its pre-eminence at this time was the continued significance of its geographical

location. Its original siting and early development sprang from the first two Norman kings' identification of the North Somerset coast, and in particular the great inlet of the Parrett estuary, as especially vulnerable to invasion, either from Wales or Ireland. In addition to this Stogursey stood near to an important and ancient road, a Saxon 'herepath', which crossed the river at Comwich and linked North Devon to Somerset and other routes to the east.

The mouth of the river Parrett still needed guarding in the later 12th century, but no king was able to have a castle of his own in every strategically vulnerable position. The most that they could do was to make sure that the lord of a castle in such a position was friendly to them, and kept it in good condition, ready for the defence of the realm - and an attack could as easily come from within its boundaries as without. Somerset and Dorset, bridging the south-western peninsular, were treated very much as one unit, but neither county was thickly scattered with castles. According to A.W.Vivian-Neal there were in fact just four that the Plantagenet kings regarded as vital for the protection of the west: Corfe, Sherborne, Taunton and Stogursey.

### **The Decline of Stogursey's Power**

In the early 13th century the unlikeable but thorough King John, in his campaign to gain absolute control of his kingdom (the French territories had gone, so England was all he had left), caused a new castle to be built right on a new crossing of the river Parrett at Bridgwater. This action successfully deprived Stogursey and its owners of most of their control over the area. For the next hundred years, although the history of the castle is certainly more turbulent, and therefore perhaps a more amusing illustration of medieval life at the top, it is only played on the sidelines, part of a wider territorial - and political - game of rivalry between barons and their monarchs. The direct male line of the de Curcis having died out at about the same time, Stogursey was never again to be head of an Honor, but only one property, albeit a valuable one, in an estate whose centre was elsewhere.

This shrinkage in status was soon reflected in the material size of the castle itself. By about 1225 the large outer bailey had been given up. The castle village had grown, with the encouragement of its overlords no doubt, and the borough of Stogursey had come into existence in its own right. It was not taxed as a borough until 1306, but it had its own jury in 1225 and would have been able to organise its own defence if necessary, as well as that of the Priory. There was no longer any need to take shelter in the castle.

### **The Last de Curci**

The first quarter of the 13th century also saw some sudden changes in ownership for Stogursey, and at least one siege, to follow which we have to go back a bit. William de Curci III died in 1176 leaving only an infant son, William IV, who according to the usual custom became a ward of the king, with all his property. The guardianship of wealthy minors was a profitable business, and the Crown obtained quite a substantial revenue from selling them to other barons who, if unscrupulous, would make what they could from their temporary ownership. In William de Curci's case the guardian appointed was his own chief tenant, Robert le Poher. Then in 1189 William had come of age and paid, again according to the usual custom, a fine 'for having his land.'

In about 1194, however, William died, leaving no children; once again the Honor of Curci passed automatically into the hands of the king. Equally profitable to the sale of minors was the sale of heiresses, either in guardianship or marriage (or both, since the two usually went together). William de Curci's heir was his sister Alice. She had already been married to one wealthy baron, Henry de Cornhill (his family owned property in London), but had recently been widowed, and so with her newly inherited estates in addition to her already existing dowry and any land settled on her by her first husband, she was fantastically valuable. This was reflected in the price that was paid for her hand: in 1197 Warin FitzGerold, a

Royal officer who already owned a considerable property, paid 1,000 marks to the King to marry her.<sup>1</sup>

It is during the lifetime of Alice de Curci (she retained her maiden name all her life) that the first mentions of Stogursey Castle occur in documents. In 1204 the prior of Stogursey was confirmed in his property by Papal Bull; this included, besides a piece of the castle lands, the right of providing a chaplain for 'the castle of Stoke.' There would have been a chapel or oratory for services somewhere among the castle buildings, probably in the inner ward itself.

Then in 1210 King John, whose travels about his country were as much in search of sport as on royal business, stayed at Stogursey with his friend and chamberlain. No doubt they spent the day hunting on the Quantocks, and later they gambled. The amount that the king lost, 20 shillings, is recorded in the royal accounts.

When Magna Carta was being drawn up, Warin FitzGerold remained loyal to John, and was one of his supporting signatories. But soon afterwards relations between them worsened and John became suspicious of FitzGerold's loyalty, presumably thinking him too sympathetic to the rebels. His first response was to order the constable at Stogursey, John Marshal, to hold the castle for the king, thereby withdrawing his allegiance from his lord. At the same time the prior of Stogursey was ordered to provide three or four extra men-at-arms to help hold the castle should Fitzgerold try to regain it, and the administration of the manor was put in the prior's hands.

This was only a warning. The income of the manor was still to go to FitzGerold, and it was specifically stated that these commands did not affect his longterm

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<sup>1</sup> A mark was two-thirds of a pound. It has been calculated that to arrive at any idea of the value of money before 1800 you must multiply by 60; for the medieval period – there were times of high inflation then too, the reign of King John being one – it would be more realistic to multiply by, say, 150. In today's values then, Warin FitzGerold was paying about £100,000 for his wife.

rights over the property. Perhaps John still hoped to retain his service. Any such wish had vanished by June in the following year, 1216, when FitzGerold openly joined the rebellion. This time his estates were confiscated completely. (Though a curious grant was made towards the end of that year: John granted the manor of Down Ampney in Gloucestershire, together with all Warin Fitzgerold's chattels there, to Alice de Curci 'for her better maintenance.' The historian Hamilton Hall, tracing a 'third John de Courcy' in *Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society Proceedings* Vol 58, read something scandalous into this, not believing any good of the king, but it is possible that he wished to save an old and valued friend from penury in her old age, whatever her husband's politics). John's next move was to give John Marshal the choice either to destroy the castle, or to make it secure against hostile attack - in other words not to let FitzGerold or any of the rebels enter it. It appears that he obeyed neither command since shortly afterwards the prior and the sheriff of Somerset were sharply ordered 'to cause the castle to be destroyed and entirely overthrown, without delay.' The manor was put into the hands of William Briwere, the constable of Bridgwater Castle.

We have no way of knowing what happened next. Presumably the castle was handed over to the royal officials, but if any 'destruction' took place it must have been more symbolic than real, since Stogursey was in use again very soon.

King John died at the end of 1216 and Hubert de Burgh, regent during Henry III's minority, did his best to make peace with the barons. He did not go so far as to reinstate Warin FitzGerold entirely; instead his estates, both those of his own family and those of de Curcis, were granted to his son-in-law, Fawkes de Breauté.

### **A Ferocious Ruffian**

Fawkes de Breauté, was a notorious character. He was a soldier of fortune who had served under John, and commanded his armies; in return he was given, or



took for himself, vast estates. It seems that he was unscrupulous and something of a rascal; he was certainly no respecter of monastic property: he once attacked and plundered St Alban's Abbey. He later did penance for this, but did not return what he had taken.

This was a bad mistake, because not only did it give him an evil reputation at the time, but for posterity as well, since Matthew Paris, an historian whose work has remained a principal source for the period, was a monk of St Alban's. Matthew Paris describes Fawkes as 'a ferocious and sanguinary ruffian', a judgement which stuck, so that Collinson, writing his *History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* in the 18th century, had him devastating the country around Stogursey, so that the castle 'by reason of violence and depredation committed therefrom, became a great grievance to the country'; a statement for which there is no evidence at all.

There are in fact things to be said in Fawkes de Breauté's favour. It cannot be denied that he was an able and efficient commander, carrying out what was asked of him by the king - and he was not the first to take advantage of royal favour to enrich himself. He also remained entirely loyal to John, where many didn't, and was appointed one of the executors of his will. After John's death he helped to establish his son, the young Henry III, on the throne.

At the beginning of the barons' revolt in 1215, Fawkes had captured the eastern counties for the king. In return, the following year he was given the hand of Margaret, daughter and heiress of Warin FitzGerold and Alice de Curci, and recently widowed wife of Baldwin de Rivière, son and heir of the Earl of Devon. The old Earl soon died, and his grandson, Margaret's son, succeeded him; predictably Fawkes, now stepfather of the boy, immediately acquired his wardship, and so all of his property as well until he came of age. In addition to these estates he had charge of the castles of Windsor, Oxford, Northampton,

Cambridge and Bedford, and was sheriff of six counties. It was, with some truth, said of him that he was 'something more than the king in England'.

Such power was dangerous, however, and sure enough the young king's regents, the justiciar Hubert de Burgh and the Archbishop of Canterbury, set about curbing it as soon as they felt strong enough to do so. A policy of taking back into royal hands castles that John had granted to followers such as Fawkes was announced in 1223, and instantly opposed by their custodians. It was Fawkes who was chosen as an example. First he was ordered to surrender the castles; he refused, and was threatened with excommunication, upon which he complied. Then in 1224 a trial was held in which he was found guilty of thirty cases of 'unlawful disseisin' (grabbing other peoples' property), and sentenced with a huge fine.

Fawkes retaliated by holding one of the royal justices captive in his castle at Bedford. This amounted to a declaration of rebellion; he and his followers were excommunicated and an army was sent to sort him out. It was a fatal mistake for any rebelling baron to be stuck in a castle under siege and so be unable to rally his forces elsewhere, so Fawkes left Bedford in the care of his brother, and his wife Margaret, and retreated to Wales.

The battle was on, and Bedford soon surrounded. Fawkes, who had virtually rebuilt it, had estimated that it could hold out for a year, but in fact it fell within two months. William de Breauté and all of the garrison were hanged. Margaret was taken into the custody of the king. Soon afterwards Fawkes gave himself up as well, his estates and all his other belongings were confiscated and he himself was sent into exile.

### **Stogursey Under Siege**

Although Stogursey was not a major castle by then, it could not escape involvement in this contest between the king and his most powerful subject.

According to Collinson he had already fortified and garrisoned it, presumably making good any damage inflicted by the sheriff and the prior in 1216, and no doubt at the same time improving and updating its defences. In any case, soon after the defiance at Bedford, Stogursey found itself facing its first serious siege. As on the previous occasion the constable, Hugh de Vernay, was first of all ordered to give up the castle to the sheriff, as king's representative, on pain of personal punishment. He was at the same time offered a safe conduct for himself and the knights of his garrison to go to the Archbishop to seek absolution - with the rest of Fawkes followers they had been excommunicated at the start of the rebellion. The constable replied that he was only entitled to give up the castle to the king himself, or to Fawkes de Breauté. So the sheriff set about taking it by force. It seems that the castle acquitted itself quite well, and held out until the collapse of the rebellion forced its surrender at the end of August, when Fawkes himself undertook to hand over the castles of Plympton (which he held by right of his stepson) and Stogursey within fifteen days.

### **A Second Heiress**

At this point the elder daughter of Alice de Curci, by her first marriage to Henry de Cornhill, steps into the story. Joan de Cornhill, who was her father's heir, had been granted as a ward, and later married to Hugh de Neville, the chief forester of England. Hugh de Neville was another Magna Carta baron who remained loyal to the king at that time but, like Warin FitzGerold, later turned against him. He, too, lost his estates as a result, both those he had inherited in Cumberland and Essex, and those he had been granted by John, such as Marlborough Castle, which housed part of the king's treasury.

He was restored to favour under Henry III and from 1220 on he and his wife had been trying to obtain a share of her mother's inheritance, which had all gone to Margaret, and was therefore in the hands of Fawkes de Breauté. Hugh de Neville was in the army that besieged Bedford, and as soon as it fell he saw his opportunity. For a payment of 100 marks he persuaded the king, and the sheriff

of Somerset, to give up to him, on behalf of his wife, the manor and castle of Stogursey.

The younger sister was not to be so easily displaced. Faced with the prospect of exile with Fawkes she declared that she had never consented to marry him, that she had been taken in time of war and against her will, and she wanted a divorce. The king agreed, on the condition that she paid her husband's debts. She then demanded that the king restore her property.

A satisfactory settlement between the two sisters took several years to work out. Finally in 1228 it was resolved that the de Nevilles should keep Stogursey and some other manors in the west country; while Margaret, who does not seem to have married again, obtained the other principal manors of Nuneham in Oxfordshire and Harewood in Yorkshire.

To what extent these negotiations were carried out at the instigation of husbands or guardians, and to what extent by the women themselves we cannot of course now tell, but one suspects that Joan de Neville and Margaret de Rivière (she never called herself de Breauté) had quite as much say over the partition of their inheritance as their husbands. Indeed, it is surprising how often in the history of Stogursey an impression emerges that the women of the medieval period, whether heiresses, widows or wives, were not the mere pawns in a property game which it is sometimes thought they were. On the contrary, strong-minded and probably experienced in the management of men and estates (many day-to-day decisions must have fallen to them when their husbands were absent for long periods on court or state affairs), they seem entirely formidable, and to have made good use of what power they had.

Another of these strong-minded women was Gundreda de Warenne, widow of William de Curci III and grandmother of Margaret and Joan. She probably had quite a lot to say about the division of the de Curci inheritance since she lived at

Nuneham until her death in 1224. She came from a distinguished family - like her daughter Alice she retained her maiden name all her life - and acquired property from three marriages (William de Curci was her second husband). After the death of her third husband in 1199, she did not remarry, probably from choice since it was recorded in 1219 that her marriage was still in the king's gift, should he choose to exercise it. But it would seem that by then she had won her freedom from political match-making and could be left in peace. It is interesting to note, too, that after the death of her third husband, Geoffrey Huse, she applied for and obtained the wardship and marriage (subject to the advice of relatives and friends) of her son Henry Huse, something that was not common for a mother to do. (Soon after the birth of this same Henry, in 1190, his elder half-brother, William de Curci IV, granted him some land, in gratitude for which Henry's father, Geoffrey Huse, presented his stepson with 'a great Spanish horse.')

### **A trip to Ireland**

Another member of the de Curci family who should be brought in at this point is John de Curci, or de Courcy, Conqueror of Ulster. Many legends attach to him, and he is claimed as the founder of Ireland's Premier Barony, of Kinsale. It is likely that he was either a younger brother of William de Curci III or his first cousin; he certainly had close links with the Stogursey family, since he appears on documents connected with the Priory and when, in 1205, a manor that he held in England was forfeited, it was put in the hands of Warin FitzGerold. It is very likely, too, that he sailed to Ireland for the first time in 1176 from the harbour at the mouth of the river Parrett, and he was accompanied by one of the Le Pohers, tenants of the de Curcis.

He was a great warrior and won many battles against the Irish, becoming for a time Earl of Ulster, although this title was subsequently given to his rival, de Lacy. He was described as 'a man full white and rode upon a white horse'; stories were told of his smiting a man's head from his shoulders but 'sturdy and

strong in weapons, out of weapon nathless he was meak and sober and much worshipped God's Holy Church.'

John de Courcy died in about 1219; he had no children however, so the de Courcy from whom the Kinsales descend must have been another member of his family. Another legend is also apocryphal: a tradition has survived that the de Courcys have the right of keeping their hat on in the presence of the sovereign. This was supposed to have been granted because one of the de Courcys (usually given as Miles, reputed son of John de Courcy) stood as champion to the king in a dispute over a castle in France. Such was his reputation that the opposing champion refused to meet him, but a call was made for a test of his strength. In reply de Courcy with a single blow 'cleft in twain a great oak tree.' The story has survived and been embroidered, but *the Dictionary of National Biography* refutes it entirely. The story of the champion was made up in the 15th century, and the distinction that was its reward was added even later, in the 18th century at the earliest. In fact in 1821 George IV when visiting Ireland was surprised to see a member of the de Courcy family standing behatted in his presence, and was given the story in response to a reprimand: it would not be altogether surprising for the story to have been made up on the spot, to escape from a sticky situation!

### **The de Nevilles at Stogursey**

To return to the main story, in 1225 Hugh de Neville, no doubt as a perk of his office of Chief Forester, was granted six oaks from the Forest of Dean to repair his 'domos' or houses at Stogursey. Good timber was hard to come by in North Somerset, and these were probably intended for the roof of a hall, and perhaps for other timber buildings in the bailey, which would tend to be the ones that suffered in a siege.

At around the same time he confirmed the prior of Stoke in all his property - a precaution against a new owner taking what did not belong to him. Among the

rights listed was, once again, 'the chaplaincy of my house when I am in town' and also, which was new, the use of the 'new mill', and every tenth young pigeon from his pigeon house.

So what did the castle look like now? Among so much activity major alterations would almost certainly have been made, but whether Warin FitzGerold, Fawkes de Breauté, or Hugh de Neville was responsible is now impossible to say. A round tower of about this date lies under the present gatehouse, so that there is likely to have been some strengthening of that area, possibly with a new bridge as well. As has already been said, much of the curtain wall is of around this date too, built now without quoins. We can't say whether the original Norman keep still stood inside the inner ward, except that very often such buildings were retained while more modern structures grew up around them. The mention of a new mill would indicate that the watercourses, which fill the moat as well as the mill pond, were already in existence, but whether dating from before or after 1200 is unclear. The large outer bailey was no longer needed, and its defences were probably allowed to fall into disrepair. How the inner bailey was defended or entered is not known, but this had probably changed little from the original stockade and ditch, and timber gatehouse.

Stogursey may have lost some of its power, but it was by no means redundant, as events were soon to show. In 1233 the old threat of invasion from Wales arose again, with a rebellion of the Earl of Pembroke, which was supported by the Welsh. Hugh de Neville was ordered to fortify the castle 'sufficiently for the protection of those parts and of the seaport, he himself to remain in charge, and to arrest any stranger who might ply thither.' Since he died the same year, it is possible that he was living at Stogursey at the time.

He was succeeded by his son John, the king's valet and, in succession to his father, a royal forester, having charge of all the forests in the counties of Northampton, Oxford, Buckingham and Huntingdon. He abused his powers, however, and in 1244, according to Matthew Paris, was accused of malpractices,

found guilty and deprived of his office, with a fine of 2000 marks. The 17th-century historian Dugdale relates how this 'with his father's debts, lay so heavy upon him, being also with great disgrace put out of employment, that it broke his heart; so that with grief he languished and died ... at his manor of Wethersfield' (in Essex) in 1246.

The king granted the wardship of his son Hugh (another minor) and his future marriage (which was usually to the daughter of the guardian) to John de Courtenay for 2,500 marks. The latter was only to take charge of the land, with the 'enjoyment of his castle of Stoke', not of the boy himself; a separate order was made ordering Hugh to be taken from Essex to stay at Windsor with 'other infants then in the King's custody.' His mother, meanwhile, was granted permission to live on in the manor house at Wethersfield.

Hugh had taken possession of his land by 1254. Ten years later saw the final conflict between Simon de Montfort and Prince Edward in the Barons' War, which culminated in the Battle of Evesham in 1265. Hugh de Neville took the barons' side and his land was duly confiscated and granted to a friend and follower of Prince Edward's, Robert de Walerand. After the defeat of his party at Evesham, at which Simon de Montfort himself was killed, Hugh de Neville followed the remaining rebels into hiding, but in 1266 he gave himself up and was pardoned by the king. Two thirds of his estates were restored to him, but the remaining third, which included Stogursey (the king pursuing the usual policy of not leaving any castle in the hands of someone of whose loyalty he was doubtful), was confirmed in the ownership of Robert de Walerand (who Collinson says was related to the Nevilles by marriage).

There is no reason to suppose that Stogursey played any part in these conflicts, being well away from the centre of activity. The only mention that we have of the castle while in the ownership of Hugh de Neville is entirely peaceful. In 1258 the Prior of Stogursey gave up to him 14 acres of land which lay next to 'the



garden of the castle of Stoke.' Perhaps this garden was the outer bailey, now fallen out of use and under cultivation instead. Some of it may have been orchards, in which case you would then, as now, approach Stogursey through apple trees.

### **Robert de Walerand**

The gift of Stogursey to Robert de Walerand marks the end of its association with the de Curci family: he was the first owner not to be descended from William de Falaise. But Stogursey was once again in the hands of one of the county's leading men. De Walerand was a faithful royal servant and a favourite of both the king and his son; offices (including in 1250 the governorship of Lundy) and property were heaped on him, particularly after he had helped to defeat Simon de Montfort at the Battle of Evesham. At this time he acted as a quartermaster general to Prince Edward; on another occasion, when the king went abroad, de Walerand was one of four guardians appointed to care for his lands in his absence.

Stogursey Castle would have been of only minor importance to him; he also held, among others, Salisbury, Bristol, Rochester, Canterbury and Carmarthen Castles. It was a financial rather than a military acquisition, and although it has been suggested by some authors that almost all the visible work at Stogursey - the gatehouse, the west tower and much of the curtain wall - was built by him, a later date for the rebuilding seems more likely and de Walerand probably did no more than keep the castle in repair - work now indistinguishable among masonry of which all that can be said is that it might be of 13th-century date.

On Robert de Walerand's death in 1273 Stogursey fades out of history, hardly ever to appear again. He was succeeded by his nephew, Robert, who was not only a minor but half-witted ('fatuus') to boot. Because of this he never actually took formal possession ('livery') of his lands from the king, so that technically they remained in royal hands during his lifetime. In practice they would have

been managed on his behalf by his cousin, Alan Plukenet or Plugenet, who was his guardian.

Nor did the situation improve on Robert's death; he was succeeded by his brother John, who was another half-wit. All continued as before, with a second Alan Plukenet succeeding his father as guardian. Eventually, on John de Walerand's death in 1309, and after a Court of Enquiry had been set up to sift through the claims of a great many cousins who had suddenly materialised with an eye on the property, Alan Plukenet was declared to be the heir. (He was later excommunicated for assaulting a rural dean).

Only the minimum of maintenance is likely to have been carried out at Stogursey, which had no very obvious role to serve and was not required as a residence. Indeed it is quite possible that the castle was allowed to decay, though only to a certain point: in 1304 repairs were ordered to bridges over the moat, and in 1301 certain tenants in the borough of Stogursey still held their land in return for castle duty - 'defending it as need' - so that should need arise it would not be found useless.

The position in which the de Walerands found themselves being essentially a weak one, it was perhaps inevitable that someone would exploit it. And sure enough, in 1308, Stogursey Castle and the manors that went with it had been 'seized' by Robert, 1st Lord Fitzpayne. There is no record of how this came about, whether he bought the property quite legitimately, or whether he had some claim through kinship or marriage, or whether he quite simply took it. If the latter was the case it was still, under medieval law, very difficult to evict someone once they were in possession. And in possession he was, duly confirmed and acknowledged by the king in 1309.

### **A secure future**

With the advent of the Fitzpaynes, a family of rising importance in the west country and especially in Somerset, Stogursey entered a second long period of ownership by a single family. It was not to change hands again, other than by marriage, until the late 17th century.

The acquisition of a castle must always have carried with it a certain prestige, and what is more likely than that Robert Fitzpayne immediately set out to 'modernise' his new status symbol? With the disappearance of the outer defences Stogursey had become something of a toy castle, but with the work carried out at this time it was still a strong one, and perhaps had an added advantage in being more compact.

A most important part of this rebuilding was the 'Edwardian' gatehouse. A twin-towered gatehouse had long been an important element in military architecture, but it was only perfected as a defensive weapon in the great castles of the Edwardian period. That at Stogursey is small, and is too incomplete for us to be sure of its original arrangement, but it must have added greatly to the strength of the inner ward with its new stone bridge and, possibly, a draw-bridge over the final section. Allied to this was the semi-circular tower in the wall opposite, which gave the defenders better coverage of the west side of the castle.

The inner bailey would still have remained in existence, containing all the buildings and activities that were not suitable for, or could not be fitted into the inner ward. Outside this again lay the garden and orchards, surrounded by the grassy banks of the former outer bailey, and the millpond and the mill, with the borough of Stogursey beyond.

### **The Castle and the Priory**

In the time of the second Lord Fitzpayne, who succeeded his father in 1315 and was confirmed in his ownership of Stogursey in 1322, we catch a glimpse of the relationship between castle and priory. A certain amount of rivalry must always have existed between the two, so close to one another and with overlapping rights and land. Occasionally this boiled over into overt irritation. So, in 1326, Robert Fitzpayne, as patron of the priory, had complained about it to the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and the Bishop subsequently wrote to the Abbot of Lonlay, the mother house:

Having found on visitation your Priory impoverished and neglected, containing the Prior and one monk (the witness of his own innocence), some servants and useless folk sojourning there by your leave, the other monks living lecherously abroad, and being moved by Sir Robert Fitzpayne, patron, we decree that the sinning monks be sent to Lonlay for correction, and that no more be sent to the Priory until it be reinstated through the Patron and our help.

The prior was recalled to Lonlay, and another sent in his place. But that was not the end of the trouble, and the next time it does not seem to be the prior who was at fault. In 1332 the prior made a formal complaint against his neighbour, Robert Fitzpayne, Ela his wife and two others who had:

broke his houses, chest and goods; took away a horse, a colt and a boar worth £10, felled his trees, dug in his quarry and carried away the stone and the trees, that they unyoked ten oxen from the plough, drove them to the castle, and that the said Robert Fitzpayne impounded them and kept them in pound against the law and custom of the realm, impounded eight oxen, hundred and twenty sheep, sixty lambs, and thirty swine of his and detained them until he made fine with the said Robert and Ela his wife at diverse times.

It is easy to imagine that such squabbles had been going on between the two landowners from the beginning of their joint existence. In the report of this one it is interesting to note the mention of stone and trees being taken from the quarry; most of the materials for building work on the castle would have been obtained locally, and this would confirm that work was going on there during this period, begun perhaps by the first Robert and carried on by his son.

For the next century, Stogursey followed a somewhat erratic course through the Fitzpayne and then the Poynings families, passing by cousins and marriages and finally coming to rest on Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland, who married Eleanor, Baroness Poynings in her own right from 1446. All these families had their main residence elsewhere, in Dorset or Sussex or Northumberland, so that Stogursey probably saw its owners only seldom.

Then in 1455 (or 1457, accounts vary) we reach the traditional end of Stogursey's history as a castle. According to this tradition it became the rallying point for the Lancastrian cause in the south-west, and as such was besieged by Lord Bonville. The castle failed to withstand its attackers and after its fall was destroyed, never to be repaired.

There is some evidence that the castle was fortified at about this time, with new arrow slits made in the gatehouse towers for example, but the archaeologists, as has already been said, could find no evidence of extensive destruction by either of the usual methods of fire or undermining of the walls. The new work could easily be accounted for as general preparation in a time of unrest, rather than for a particular attack, but it is difficult to explain the lack of evidence for destruction except by saying that the castle was not in fact destroyed.

It turns out that there is no good written evidence, either, for the castle having been besieged at this time. Lord Bonville and the Earl of Devon were certainly carrying out a private war in the area, which had little, or nothing, to do with the greater conflict, and Stogursey could have been involved in that. However, William of Worcester, the historian who gives most information about the dispute, makes no mention of Stogursey, although he does record a siege of Taunton Castle by the Earl of Devon. It may be that whatever attack was made on Stogursey was too minor to pass into the history books, but grew, like a fishing story, in the immediate locality, and thus into later histories.

Whatever happened in those years, the castle was certainly not given up as a result, as the following account by Dr R. Dunning shows:

The Percies had land in many parts of the country and Stogursey Castle seems not to have been used by them as a residence, but as a home for the constable, who oversaw the Stogursey and other local estates. Accounts for 1473-4 record minor repairs to the kitchen chimney, to roofs of hall and chamber, to gutterings; and note a store of table linen kept there. Repairs seem to have been carried out regularly, but major work was done in 1490-92 on building and fitting out a tower, with a nursery, pantry, several chambers, a hall and stable. Flooring and other work was done in a tower over the gate. A chequerboard was set up ready for the annual estate audit, and something was done to the prison house. Fuel and hay were normally supplied to the castle in the late 15th century, but by the 1520s the rooms were probably only occupied during the audit. By 1538 the building was said to be in decay. It was let to a tenant by 1545; and in 1584 the then tenant, John Walford, kept rabbits there. By 1614 the house within the walls was built, and it was still inhabited in 1684.

And so Stogursey gently decayed, its buildings, except for the gatehouse, put to agricultural use, and the inner ward being used as a warren, a place for breeding rabbits. The 'new' tower of 1492 (one imagines it must have been a rebuilding of an existing one, perhaps an enlargement of the west tower, so that it ceased to be purely semi-circular and became the half-square- half-round shape that it is now) was no doubt used as a quarry for building materials. The castle, instead of being destroyed, had merely been tamed, and in its old age became a farm.



### **The end of the story**

Stogursey remained a part of the Northumberland estate until after the death of the 11th Earl in 1670, when a great sale of lands took place to pay off his debts. The manor of Stogursey was sold to the Earls of Egremont, but it seems that the castle itself (the manorial history is complicated since there are also the manors of Wyke and Windiates, all within Stogursey, and the castle is variously attached to one of these) was sold separately, with 27 acres, to a Mr Willis of Goathurst. It subsequently passed to his nephew George Davis and on to his son William, who in 1820 sold it to Sir John Palmer Acland of Fairfield, who already owned much land in the area. He was a descendant of Thomas Palmer of Fairfield, an antiquarian and local historian, for whom Thomas Buck had made an engraving of the west side of Stogursey Castle in 1733, the only view of the castle known to exist before the 19th century.

The castle was all this time a tenanted farm, and round it grew up all the accoutrements of its new status, listed laboriously in the deeds: 'barns, stables, dovehouses, yards, gardens, orchards, paths, passages, waters, land covered with water, watercourses.' (It is interesting to note that the land around the castle was still marshy even at this date.) The names of the fields recall their former use: 'Old Orchard, Castle Bailey (pasture), Castle Orchard, Barn and Bartons at Castle, Barn Close.' The pollarded willows by the mill pond were probably planted in the 19th century. At one time a Mr Rawlins was the tenant, later a Mr Tucker. By 1872 the house in the gatetower had decayed. The farm was attached to the mill, let to William Leversham.





1845, by W.W. Wheatley (from Brackenridge's Collinson).



STOGURSEY CASTLE, SHOWING  
MOAT, MOUNT AND BASECOURT.

From Ancient Earthworks of Somerset by Edward Burrow 1924.

In 1877 however the visiting Somerset Archaeological Society noted that 'It is to be regretted that a house is being built exactly between the two towers.' 19th century roof timbers confirm that the cottage was rebuilt at about this date. Shortly after this, in 1883, Thomas Pearce became miller, and was succeeded in 1922 by his son, Ben. He kept the mill going until 1948. His grandson, David, still lives in Castle Street, and looks after the castle grounds.

The last person to live in the cottage was Mr Percy Caple, who moved there in 1919. He worked on the Fairfield estate, and was a great gardener, obtaining hundred-weights of potatoes and other vegetables from the inner ward of the castle. He planted fruit trees too, but only one apple now survives. When Lord St Audries sold the Mill Farm, with the castle, to Miss Clara Pearce in 1952, Mr Caple stayed on, but after the terrible winter of 1962-3, when his wife had been unable to leave the castle for several weeks, they decided to buy a house in Castle Street, where they still live.

In the same year, 1963, Miss Pearce sold Mill Farm to Miss Betty Harris. Miss Harris's father was Mr Clarence Harris, who bought a great many historic buildings in Somerset in the years after the War, turning most of them into flats. After the Caples moved out, no else replaced them, and the castle was simply left to decay. Before long vandals got in and did what they could to destroy the cottage. Mr Caple's carefully tended garden was left to run riot and before long the curtain walls disappeared amid the undergrowth; some sections fell, and others were in imminent danger of collapse. In 1974 Mr James Frere FSA took a lease of the castle, intending to repair it, but his plans came to nothing. The history of Stogursey Castle seemed to be coming to a sad and inglorious end.



**These photographs were taken in the 1920s, when Mr Percy Caple was living in the castle.**



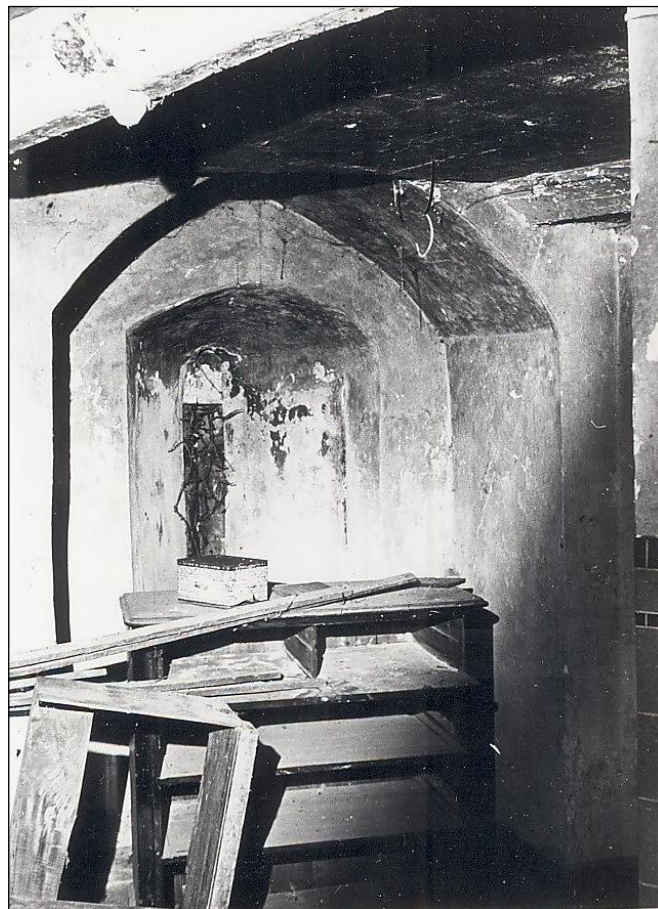


1974





**Bedroom, 1974 and sitting room, below.**





**By 1981 the Castle had nearly disappeared...**

## Restoration - Last-minute rescue by the Landmark Trust

Stogursey had not been entirely forgotten, however; local historians and conservationists, who had long been concerned about the state of buildings owned by Mr Harris or his family, were making plans. Together with people from Stogursey itself, they aimed to set up a trust to buy and repair the castle. Then Somerset County Council became involved. A scheme was drawn up for the Council to acquire the site, and develop it for educational purposes; but before the negotiations had progressed very far, government cutbacks put an end to this project, and an alternative had to be looked for. It seemed to some people that, for such a secret place, a less public use than the Council had planned would anyway be more suitable.

When drawing up their scheme the Council had consulted the architect John Schofield, who had worked with the Landmark Trust at the Old Hall in Croscombe. So when the Council's plan failed, he suggested that the Trust might be interested in taking on Stogursey - which, of course, it was.

The task remained to actually acquire the site; but in the event Miss Harris proved quite willing to sell, and the castle passed to the Landmark Trust in 1981.

There are few castles, especially ones with so much left standing, that have not on the one hand been swallowed up by later houses built within them; or on the other, been thoroughly restored in this century or the last by an enthusiastic individual or the Ministry of Works. Stogursey is a Landmark-sized castle too, not too big, and with a house already there, unobtrusive and a little odd. It was a remarkable opportunity.





**Doing the survey...**



### **Plans and preparations**

The main task, before any work could begin, or indeed any decisions be made of any sort, was to make a full survey of the ruin. And this was not easy, since inside the castle, and around the sides of the mound was a tangle of almost impenetrable undergrowth. Clearing this (most of the work was done by David Pearce) took some time, but gradually the walls emerged, and something like a total view became possible. At this stage, the fact that the moat was mostly silted up was an advantage, since it made it easier to reach the outside of the curtain wall.

The restoration was clearly going to fall into two distinct parts: the repair of the cottage, and the repair of the medieval castle remains - the walls and towers, the bridge and the moat. It was all going to have to be done in stages too, since some jobs were clearly more urgent than others - some sections of wall, for instance, were in real danger of collapse, while others could be left for the future. But each stage inter-related: while repair of the cottage, to make it habitable, was obviously a priority, it could not be occupied unless the bridge had been repaired, so that had to be fitted in quite early on as well - but the extent of the work needed there would not be clear until the moat had been dredged, and so on.

### **The curtain wall and the west tower**

The only section of wall that was definitely dangerous was on the north, where 19th-century underpinning appeared to have failed, causing it to lean inwards; an engineer was called in to give an opinion on this and other sections, and a system of buttressing worked out to support it. This work, with the securing of other very unstable sections, was to be carried out alongside the work on the cottage itself in 1982; and resumed after that as and when a length of wall seemed to be in danger of falling.



**Michael Haycraft at work on the curtain wall, in all weathers..**



The bulk of the work to the curtain wall, and the west tower, involved repointing and 'capping off' or repairing the wall-head, to prevent water seeping in from the top and weakening the wall further down. To do this loose stones would be removed and then rebedded in mortar. All the mortar used for repointing was to be mixed with lime and sand only; but for the capping of the wall-head some cement was included in the mix, to give it extra strength. Nearly all of this was work that could wait, and it has been carried on gradually over the last three or four years by Michael Haycraft, the mason who restored the castle on Lundy, and is also working at Woodspring Priory.

The repair of the gatehouse towers was to be phased in with that of the cottage. They were in a very unstable condition, with a good deal of loose masonry, all needing to be taken out and rebedded, and new mortar grouted in. The arrow loops in the northern tower had also worked loose, and had to be taken out and refixed.

### **The cottage - outside**

The cottage itself had needed some emergency support in 1981, before detailed proposals were drawn up, since some of the floors were very weak, and the fireplace lintel in the kitchen was cracked and sagging. Windows and doors had to be boarded up and secured, to prevent vandals from doing any more damage.

The walls of the cottage were in a similar condition to that of the tower into which it is wedged, like an egg in an egg cup. In particular, the west wall was coming away from the main body of the building, and needed to be tied back in. This was done with a 'tile-stitch', rather than a concrete ringbeam, which runs at first floor level along the south elevation, round the west gable, as far as the sitting room window.

The north gable of the cottage was also in need of strengthening - especially where it joins the east wall at first floor level, cutting across one of the medieval



**The east window-frame had been thrown into the moat, from where it was recovered, and put back after repair.**



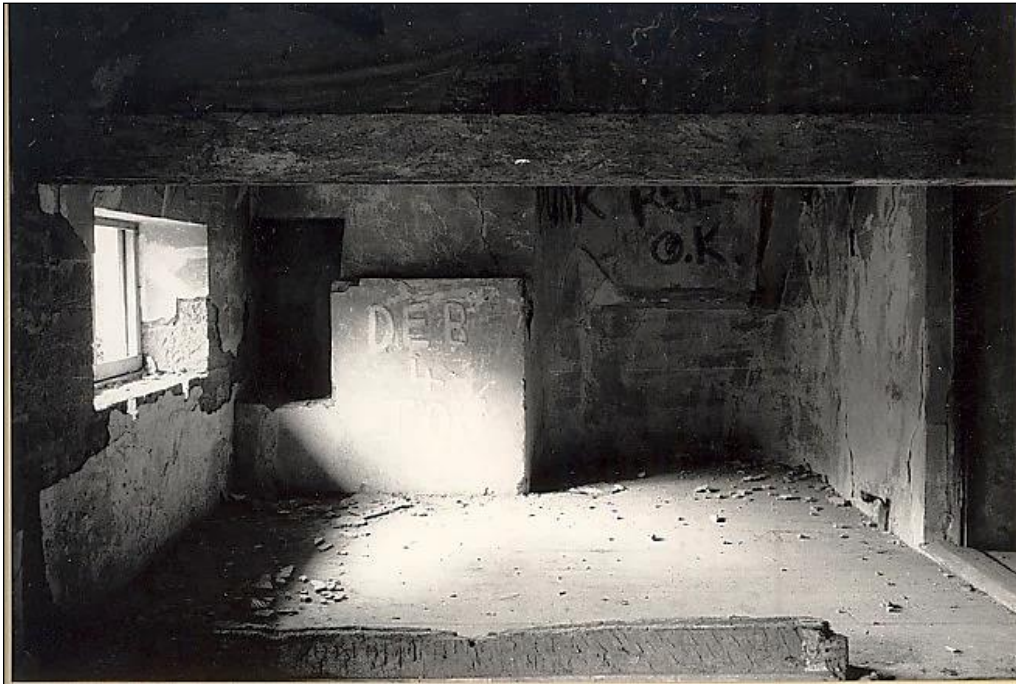
embrasures; all this corner had to be rebuilt, right round to the east window. Subsidence of the north west corner was solved by underpinning, again using tiles rather than concrete.

When all the walls of the cottage had been repaired and repointed, they were rendered (except for the south elevation where the masonry is of higher quality) and lime-washed, to distinguish the 17th-century work from the medieval.

The main change to the appearance of the cottage has been the replacement of the 19th-century tile roof by thatch - which is how it was roofed originally. The 19th-century roof timbers were retained, but modified, to deepen the eaves. In the crosswing one of the 17th-century trusses survived, but needed some reinforcement and repair. The second main truss had to be renewed. New elm gutters were fitted, and the chimneys were rebuilt.

The small section of roof over the base of the north tower, on the east side of the gatehouse, was collapsing when Landmark took on the building, and all the timber was rotten, so it had to be completely reformed.

Nearly all the 17th-century oak window-frames survived (although one, from the north bedroom, had been thrown into the moat), and simply needed to be repaired and reglazed. The window over the entrance had been blocked up, but the frame was still there. The small window in the north gable was renewed. Of the 19th-century windows in the south elevation, one was repaired, and the others were renewed. One entirely new window was made to light the stairs. And once again, to distinguish 17th-century work from medieval, the leaded panes for the cottage windows are rectangular, while those for the arrow-loops of the gatehouse tower are diamond-shaped.



**Upstairs, looking west. The bathroom is now on the left, the stairs in their original 17th-century position, on the right.**



**17th-century wattle and daub survived in the area of the closed truss.**



### **The cottage - inside**

Inside, the main change has been the removal of the 19th-century staircase from the sitting room, and the building of a new oak stair in the original 17th-century turret - the brickwork of which needed a lot of repair.

The ground floor is otherwise much as it was; the doors are all old (except for the gates to the porch), as are the paved floors. The kitchen fireplace was opened up and the lintel repaired. The walls were all replastered and limewashed.

Upstairs a bathroom had to be fitted in, and a 19th-century doorway was blocked up. The ceiling was removed in the south bedroom, to show the 17th-century closed-truss, forming the partition with the bathroom. Two of the struts for this were found lying in the moat, and were put back in their proper positions. Original wattle-and-daub survived in the apex of the truss. The floorboards of both rooms were renewed, but using second-hand timber - oak in the south bedroom and pine in the north. The doors are new, and the walls were replastered. All services - e.g. electricity and plumbing - are new, and the digging of the septic tank in fact provided the archaeologists with a good opportunity to examine the structure of the mound, and establish the ground level beneath it.



An exciting discovery was made when repairs were being carried out to the wall around the main entrance arch. When part of the wall was cut away, the outer face of a jamb and the beginning of the original entrance arch of about 1300 was revealed. It would have been very difficult to have left this exposed, since it would have meant altering the whole east wall, so it was covered up again, after it had been recorded.



**Part of the original entrance arch, found behind the east wall.**

### **The bridge, the moat, and the watercourses**

The most exciting discovery of all was, of course, the bridge. Trial holes dug round the bridge revealed its masonry still to be mainly intact, and also showed the voussoirs, or stones forming the arches, to be chamfered and stopped, proving them to be medieval. When the mud had all been dug away, there it was, an almost complete bridge of about 1300. Some stones, inevitably, were missing, but several of these were still lying around and could be re-used. Where a whole stone had to be replaced, the new work was carried out in stone-tiles, to make it clearly visible. The whole bridge was then re-pointed.

The bridge had been repaved by the Victorians; these stones were taken off and new paving laid, nearer the original level. There was no sign of there ever having been parapets on the bridge top and the stone bridge did not, of course, meet the east face of the gatehouse; it would not have been possible to put back a true drawbridge (we do not in any case know what sort of drawbridge there was) so the gap was bridged instead with a new section made of oak.

The main digging and dredging of the moat came in 1983 - when a number of finds were made, including a section of chain mail, a pottery chafing dish (found by chance in the spoil left on the bank by the digger), an archer's wrist band, leather shoe-soles, a small piece of ornamental lead from a window, a window shutter and other pieces of timber from earlier bridges, as well as the archaeologist's normal diet of pottery shards and bones (in this case including a whale's vertebrae, perhaps washed up on the coast near Kilve and carried to the castle for food).



**The bridge is revealed (above) and laying new paving (below).**



When this had been done, the leats bringing water from the Stogursey Brook to the west of the castle, which had already been repaired and cleared, could be opened, and water could be allowed to flow in. The following year, the weir and outfall to the mill-pond were repaired. The castle stood, once again, guarded by water, ready for adventure.

Charlotte Haslam

1987

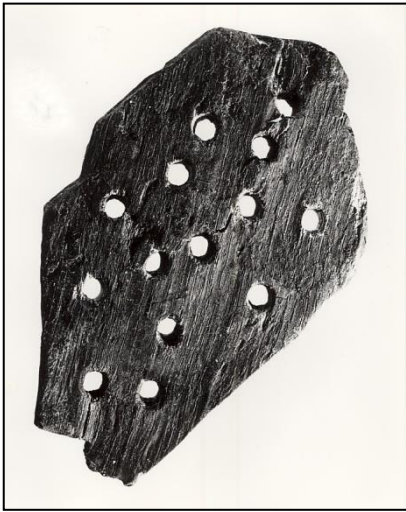


**Digging the moat.**



**Chafing dish found in the moat.**

**Various objects found in the moat**



**Wooden object; probably a  
brush actual length 10.5cm**



**Wooden object; actual  
length 12 cm**

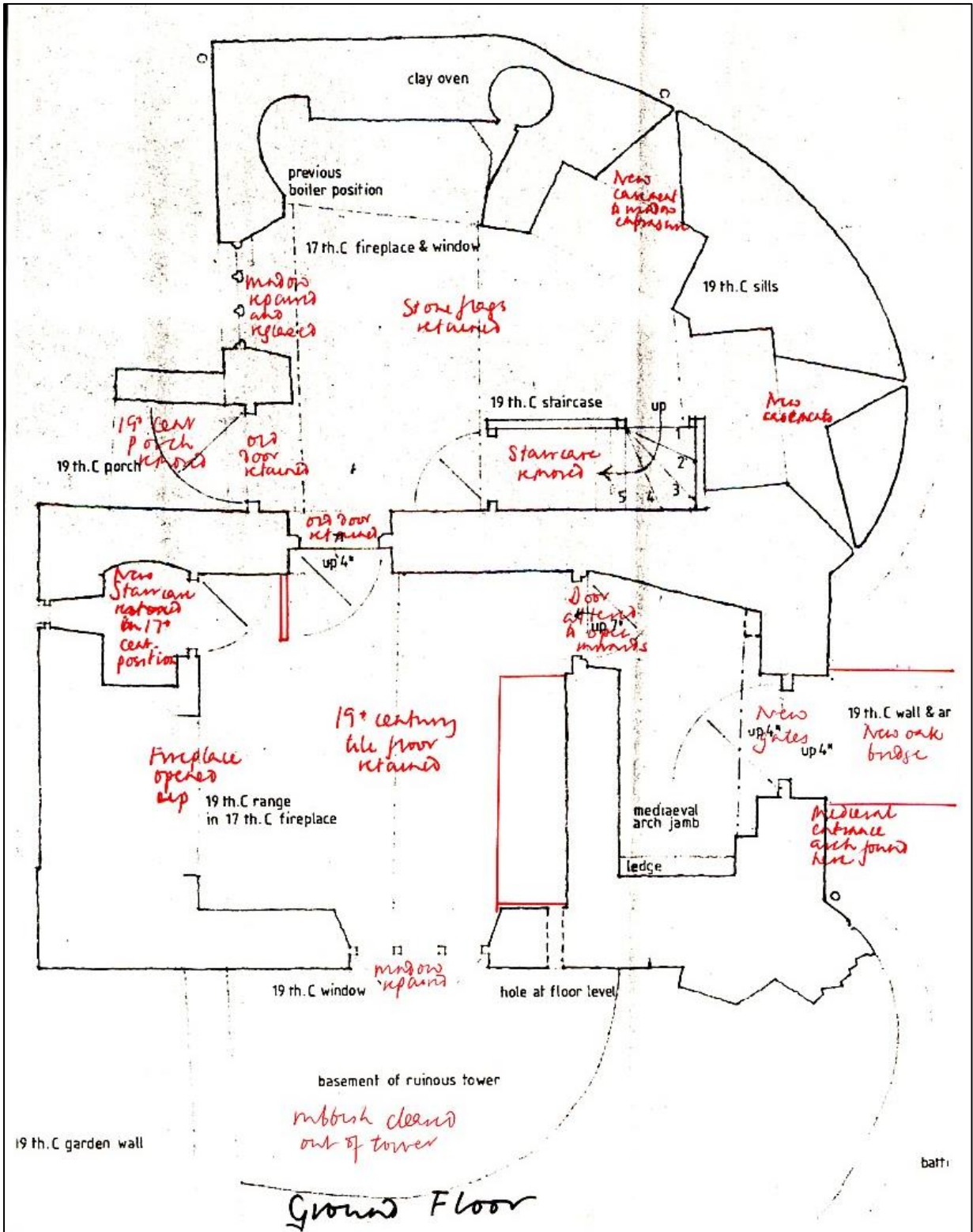


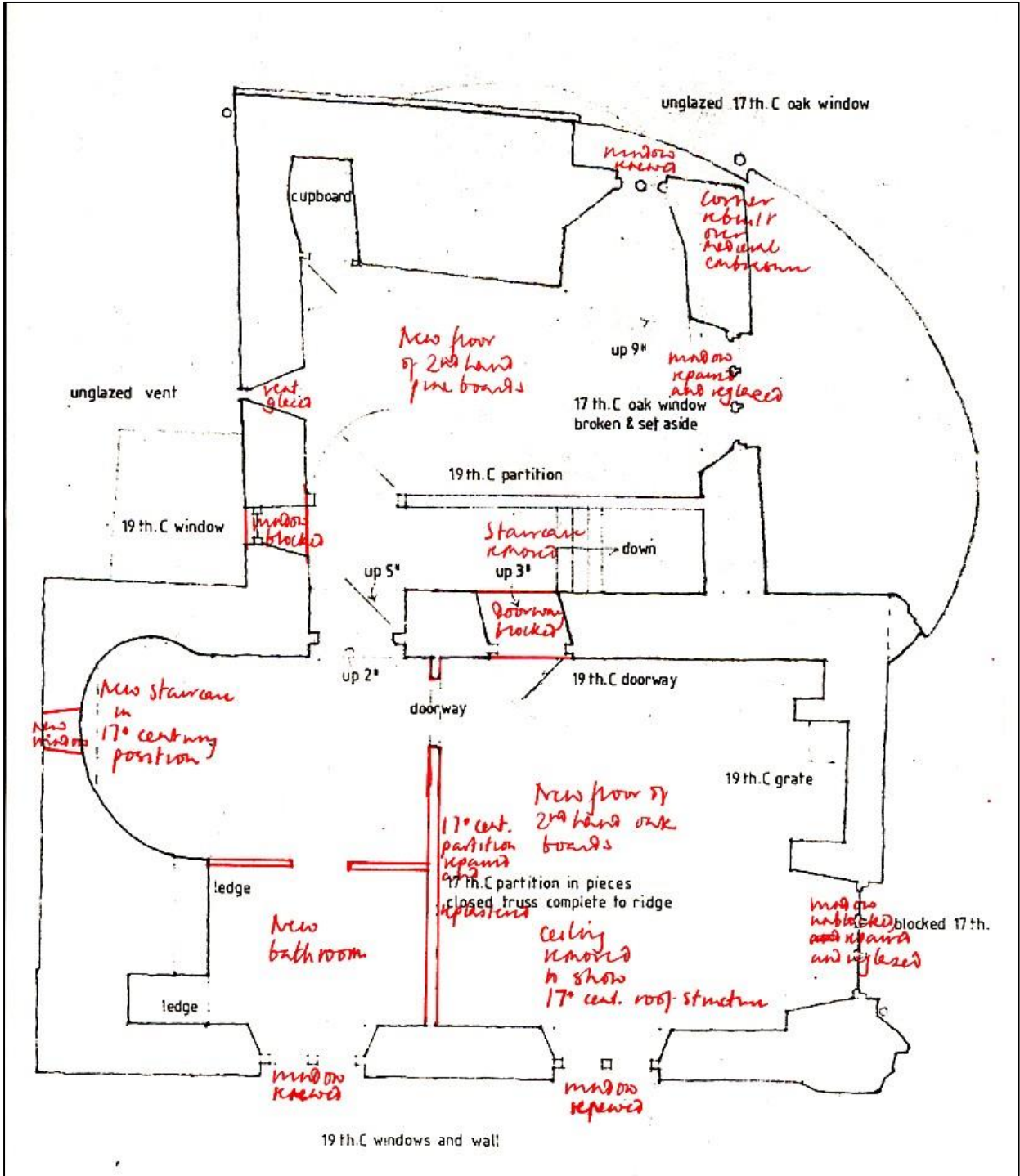
**Uncertain object  
(wood and  
bronze); actual  
length 9 cm**



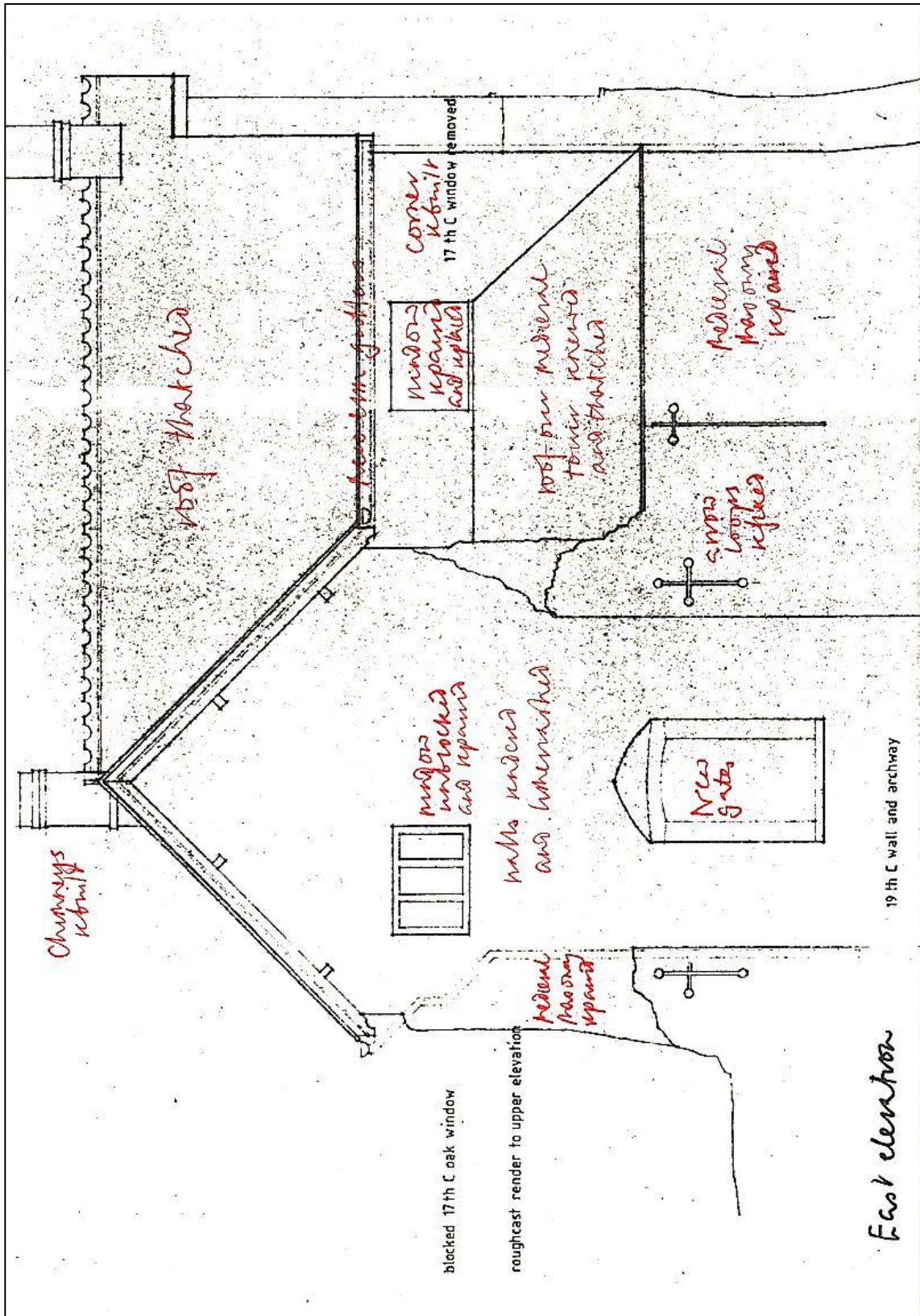
**Uncertain wooden  
object; actual length  
10.5cm**





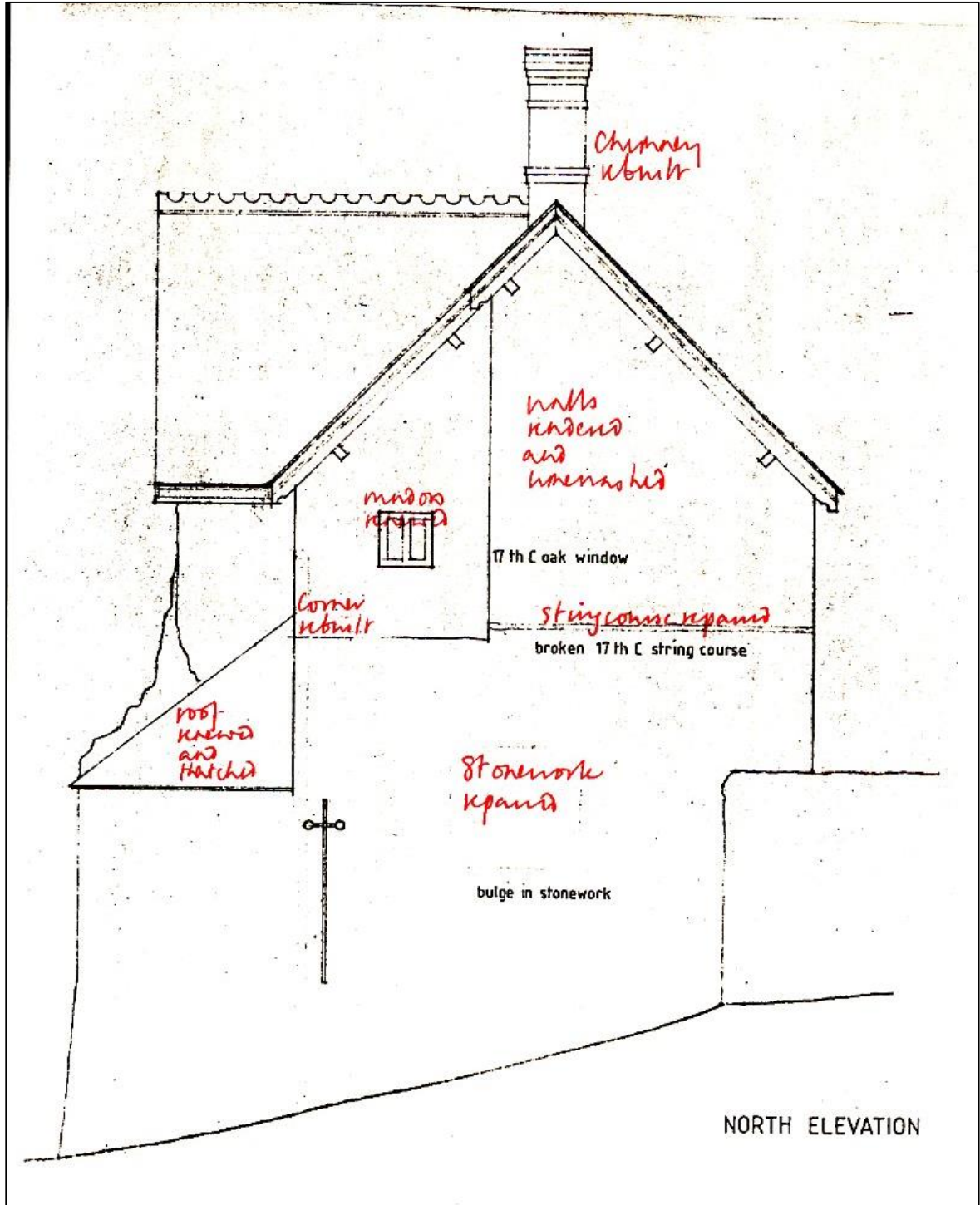


First floor

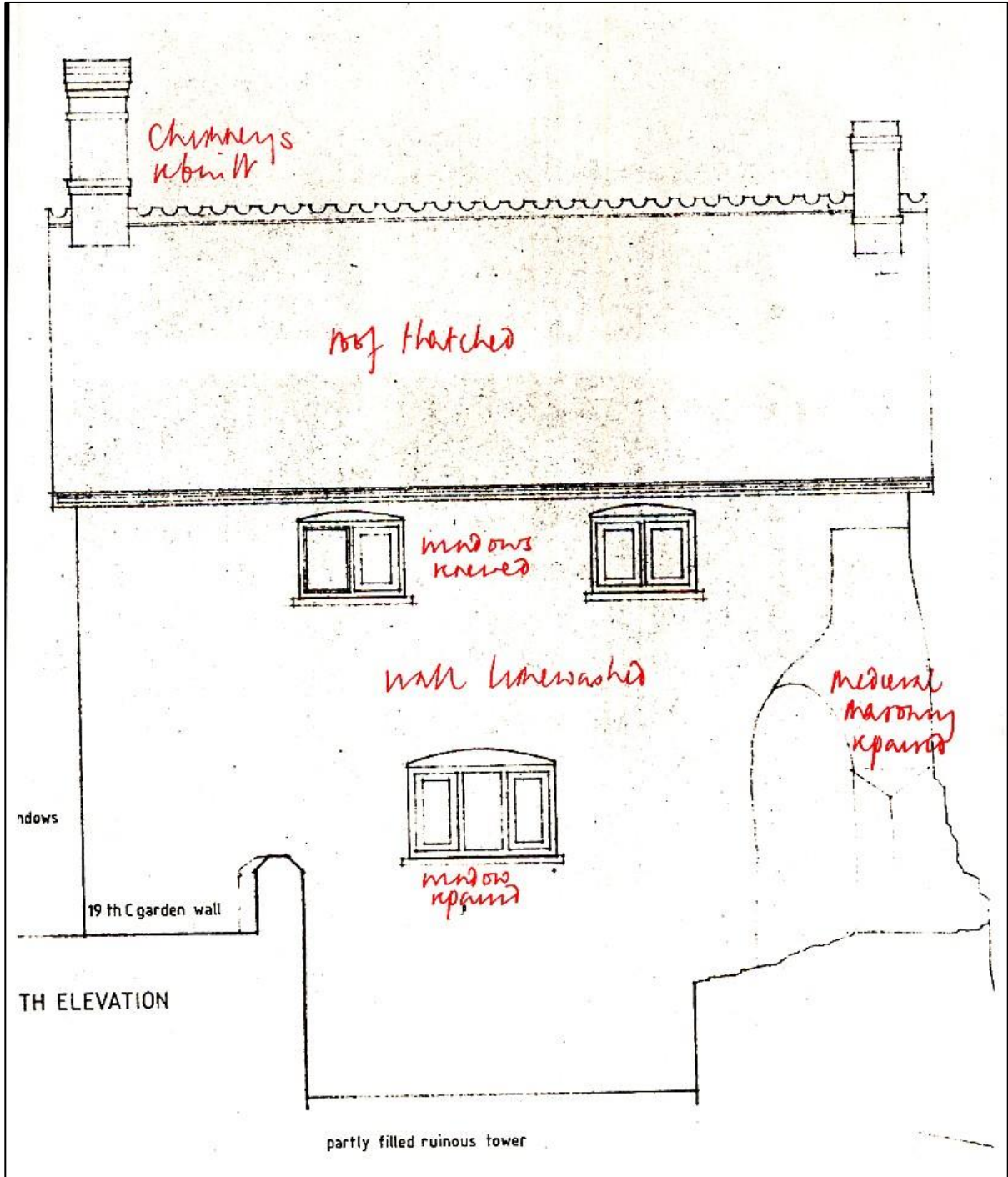


The East elevation





The North elevation



The South elevation



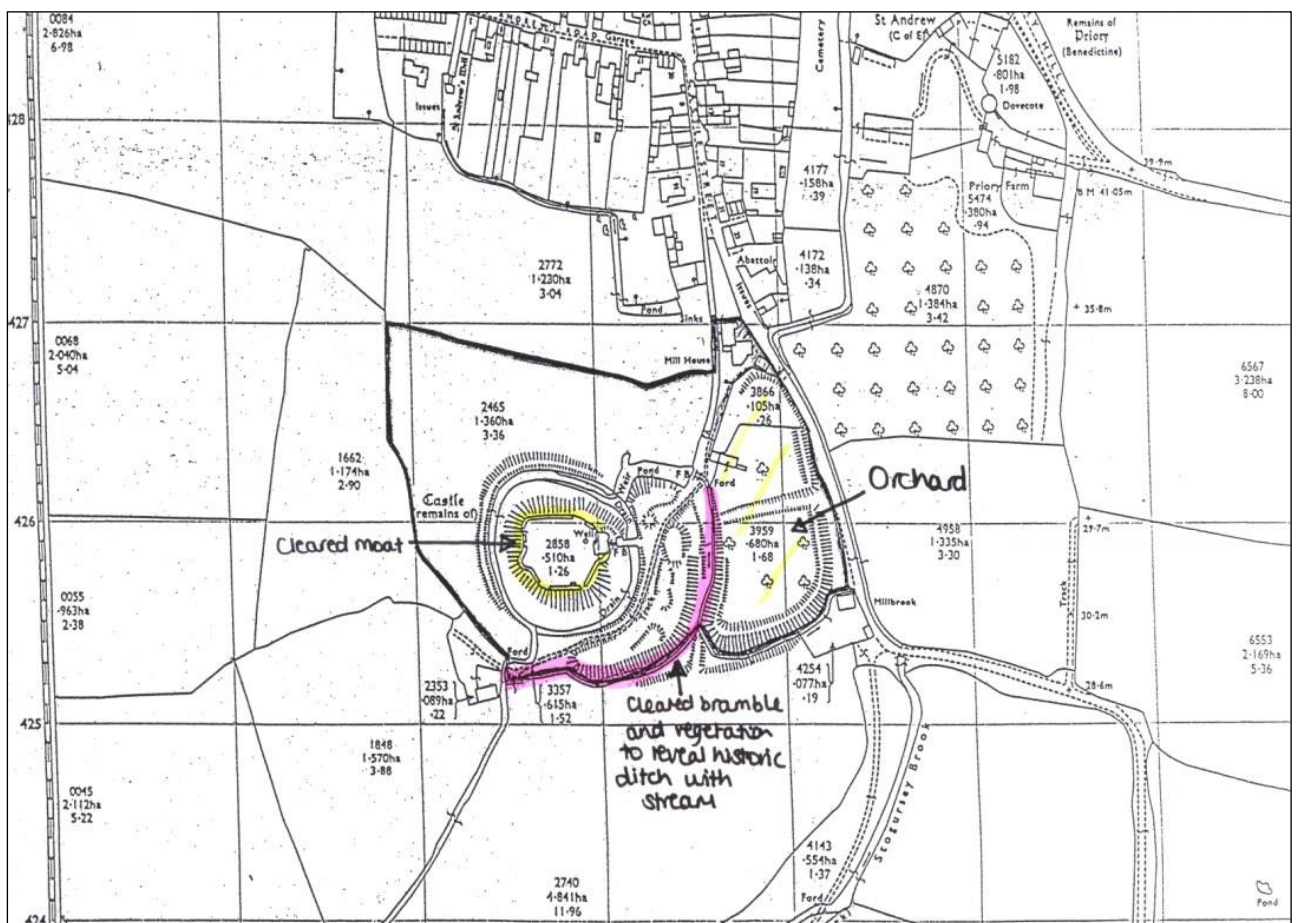
**Copyright photograph by Montague Cooper Taunton, Burnham and Lynton.**



## Tree felling and landscaping works

In September 2008, contractors working under the guidance of English Heritage cleared a number of trees that had self set along the sides of the moat and were blocking out light. Fifteen specimen trees, growing at intervals around the outer bank of the moat, were left.

Sections of the defensive ditch surrounding the land attached to the castle had become overgrown with vegetation. This was cleared in 2009 and works to tidy the orchard also began. Further phases of landscaping works including hedge-laying are planned for 2010 to restore the setting of the castle.





**The overgrown moat before (above) and after.**





**The overgrowth had gone too far...**



Landmark and the Culture Recovery Fund 2020-21



**Landmarks that benefitted from the Cultural Recovery Fund 2020-21**

2020-21 was the year when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the UK, and for nine months out of twelve, Landmark had to close all its buildings, with a resulting cessation of the holiday income that funds our buildings' maintenance. Vital projects across Britain were put on hold because of the pandemic, because of uncertainty about when contracts could be agreed or when specialist builders and craftspeople would be allowed to work onsite again. The closure of Landmarks for holiday bookings from March to October 2020 and again from December to April 2021 was a devastating blow to our finances and directly impacted Landmark's maintenance budget.

However, in autumn 2020 we were delighted to receive a grant of £1.2million from the government's Culture Recovery Fund, allowing us to reignite our planned maintenance programme and ensure that none of our buildings fell into disrepair.

Under the auspices of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Culture Recovery Fund was designed to secure the future of Britain's museums, galleries, theatres, independent cinemas, heritage sites and music venues with emergency grants and loans. One strand of the Fund was the Heritage Stimulus Fund administered by Historic England, which included the Major Works Programme, source of the grant to Landmark. This transformative grant allowed a group of 15 critical maintenance projects at 17 Landmarks across England to go ahead.

The projects directly provided employment and training for more than 130 craftspeople, including many multi-generation family-run businesses local to our buildings. Masons, carpenters, architects, engineers and many more skilled specialists were involved across these sites, fuelling the recovery of the heritage sector and contributing to local economies on a national scale. Several sites hosted students and apprentices, providing vital opportunities at a time of great uncertainty.

Thanks to the CRF grant, we were able to progress stabilising the Grade-II\* listed curtain wall of the castle. These works – which were already scheduled to take place in 2020 - are just the latest phase in our long-term programme to conserve the extremely friable local lias stone. Ongoing, preventative maintenance is always the best way to slow down such decay. Getting materials across the moat is always a challenge.



**Stabilisation works underway at Stogursey in winter 2020.**