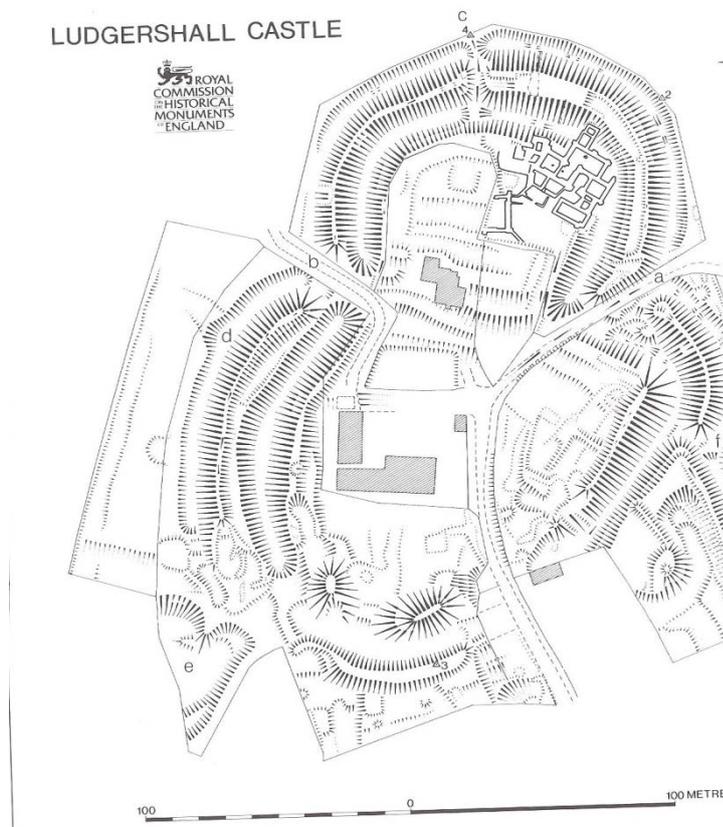


Ludgershall, Wiltshire: archaeology and history (notes for visitors, prepared by the Royal Archaeological Institute, 2017)

Castles like Old Sarum were constructed initially to consolidate the Norman Conquest after 1066; others like Downton served in the twelfth-century civil war (see separate on-line entries). Ludgershall castle is not on a prominent or obviously defensible site, and raises the question of whether many ‘castles’ were any more than residences with ditches, earth banks and palisades around them to impress and to give privacy as much as security. The site is now in the Guardianship of English Heritage and was extensively excavated in the 1960s to reveal more about the site’s chronology and to lay it out for public understanding – an investigation of a type no longer feasible for financial reasons.

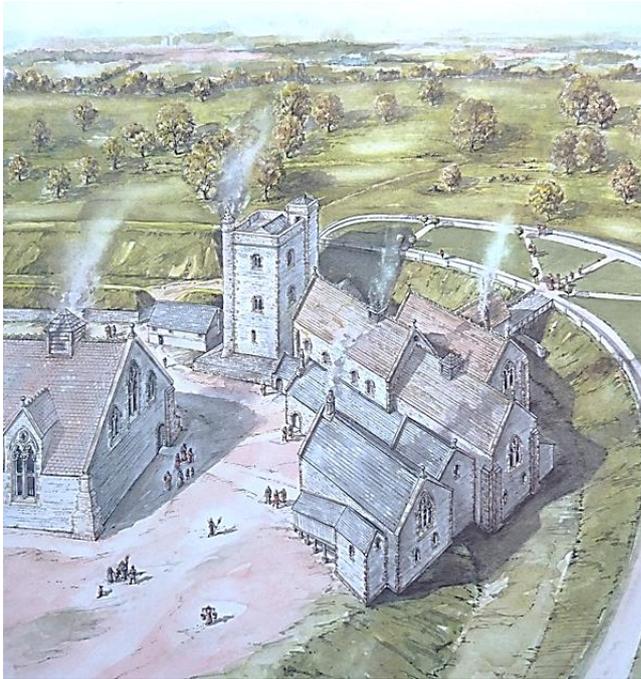


The castle has a figure-of-eight plan (plan, Historic England: Ellis (ed.) 2000, 98) giving two enclosures, i.e. an inner and an outer bailey. Excavations found no definite evidence of eleventh-century or earlier use, but it remains possible that, despite the absence of pottery, the southern enclosure was remodelled from an Iron Age one. That aside, the site was probably open downland until some sort of lodge was built by Henry I (1100-35), who is recorded as staying ‘at Lotergarsal’. Ludgershall was a castle in the mid twelfth-century civil war, tied in with Marlborough to control a baronial enclave; the North Enclosure had stone and timber buildings inside, including a

keep, perhaps left unfinished; stones carved in the Romanesque style showed a high standard of decoration. After the war the castle had occasional use by Henry II and his successors on perambulations between their more public appearances in Sarum, Marlborough and Clarendon. A tower was added c. 1190 against the north bank of the inner bailey, its ruins now the only standing masonry (photograph by Isobel Thompson). Adjoining it was a



suite of rooms that included a first-floor great chamber, and there was probably another hall in the interior.



The castle's heyday came after 1224, after which it was remodelled in stages to create comfortable private accommodation inside the North Enclosure. In 1244-7 a new hall was built; although small, the hall was aisled and built to a high standard. It is recorded that the timber aisle-posts were painted to look like marble; there were wall-paintings with scenes such as the story of Dives and Lazarus; and the excavations found enough remains of masonry to indicate that the windows were tall and carved with stiff-leaf ornamentation of the most up-to-date kind. With a gate into the South Enclosure, and other less solid buildings,

little space was left; the bank was encroached upon, and chambers were even built out over the moat (reconstruction by Peter Dunn for *Historic England: Ellis (ed.) 2000, 253*. The 1244-7 hall is the detached building on the left). There were various renovations and new works in the fourteenth century, but the place was probably too cramped either for lavish entertaining or for increasingly needed security in the fifteenth. It was ruinous by the late sixteenth century, from collapse, but deliberate demolition followed, perhaps to make the space suitable as a landscape feature to a new house or lodge, now under Castle Farm.

From the tower and ramparts, views across extensive downland could be obtained, and in particular over two hunting parks, places for relaxation and the hunting of deer and other game. The North Enclosure's bank may at one time have been reduced in height to create a more spacious platform from which to watch the entertainment.

*

By 1194, Ludgershall castle had a small town attached to it. Although the small present-day market-place with its very worn stump of a medieval cross looks typical of small planned boroughs, here appended at right angles to the east-west main road, the siting of the church at a distance from it has been taken as evidence of substantial rearrangement, because a remission of tolls granted in 1348 refers to road closures and emparkment (*Ellis (ed.) 2000, 3; VCH 1995*). The town was not unsuccessful, having 117 tax-payers in 1379, but withered despite absence of immediate competition, probably because of the declining demand from the castle for its services. By the nineteenth century it had become a 'rotten borough', like Sarum.



The cross is attributed to the mid fourteenth century, so could have been created from the money saved by the 1348 toll remission. It is not on its original base, and has carved scenes in cusped niches on all four sides. They are very hard to decipher, but one is almost certainly the Descent from the Cross and another may be the Harrowing of Hell (Stocker 2000: photograph by Historic England).



References and further reading

- Ellis, P. (ed.) 2000. *Ludgershall Castle. Excavations by Peter Addyman 1964-72*, Devizes: Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society Monograph Series 2
- Stocker, D. 2000. Appendix. The market cross, 115-20 in Ellis (ed.)
- VCH 1995. *Victoria History of the Counties of England, Volume 15, Wiltshire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

These notes were originally prepared for the annual summer meeting of the Royal Archaeological institute held in July 2016; see www.royalarchinst.org for further information. RAI members have access to the printed Report which contains syntheses of the significance of recent research to archaeological understanding of the county. The notes on Ludgershall were prepared by John Hare and David A. Hinton. Other on-line entries can be accessed through the RAI web-site.

