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"WINNING STRATEGIES"

An Archaeological Study of Norman Castles in the Landscapes of Somerset, Monmouthshire & Co. Meath, 1066-1186

(Volume 1 of 2)

by

STUART PRIOR

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, architectural historians have studied castles as structural entities, concentrating upon their fabric, design and construction, in order to assess their defensive military potential, whilst military historians have examined their martial significance, function and role in medieval warfare. Recently, there has been a move away from military topics, castle studies now focusing upon political, social, economic, symbolic or aesthetic considerations. Despite many years of military castle studies and the recent shift in emphasis however, the strategies, tactics and stratagems that underpinned castle warfare remain largely unexplored. This thesis utilises the techniques of landscape archaeology, in conjunction with information in historic military manuals and archaeological, historical, architectural, topographical, geological and documentary sources, to explore the strategic and tactical positioning of castles in the landscapes of Somerset, Monmouthshire and Co. Meath.

The study outlines the 'strategic approach' to castles, arguing that it was not what was built, but where it was built that was the key to Norman success. Castles are placed into context via a study of contemporary and later sources, and it is argued that as warfare defined the Normans, politically, socially and culturally, castles must be viewed from a predominantly military perspective. Historic military manuals are examined to establish strategic and tactical criteria, against which the positions of castles in the landscape can be tested and understood. Castle positioning in the study areas is examined in detail, and the results integrated into historic narratives. The conclusions reached are, that in most cases, tactical and strategic considerations ultimately dictated where castles were constructed, that very often these considerations also provided the main impetus for castle construction, that the strategies, tactics and stratagems employed by the Normans made them a 'force-majeur par excellence', and that in order to appreciate the final conclusion it is necessary to see the Normans as part of a wider European phenomenon that drew its inspiration from the Roman Empire.
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original (and no part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree) except where indicated by special reference in the text. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol. This thesis has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Signed...........................................(Stuart Prior)   Date....9th Nov. 2024....
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CHAPTER 1 · CASTLES, ARCHITECTURALISTS, LANDSCAPISTS, PHENOMENOLOGISTS AND STRATEGISTS: AN INTRODUCTION

"Why another book on castles? The reader may well ask. What is there left to say that has not already been written in the seemingly endless succession of books on the subject? And indeed, apart from the details of recent excavations at several castles sites - and one can reckon that there will only be about a dozen interesting discoveries every 10 years - the subject may seem to have been all but exhausted. Yet it has not."

Plantagenet Somerset Fry, 1996, p.7

"Military action is important to the nation - it is the ground of death and life, the path of survival and destruction, so it is imperative to examine it."

Sun Tzu, The Art of War, 5th century BC
(In: Cleary, 1998, p.41)

Scope of Study

This thesis is primarily a study of the strategies, tactics and stratagems that formed the basis of Norman castle warfare – a subject that up until now has received surprisingly little academic attention. The castle was the Normans principal weapon of war, the tool that made their conquests possible, and the key to their overwhelming success. In isolation the castle was simply a 'properly fortified military residence', a place that offered refuge in times of adversity, a form of defence; but in concert with others, as integral components in a carefully planned campaign strategy, castles became unsurpassed instruments of war, items of military hardware with huge offensive capabilities. Between 1066 and 1186 the Normans, utilising strategic castle warfare, successfully conquered England, most of Wales and a large part of Ireland. This study utilises the techniques of landscape archaeology, in conjunction with knowledge contained in historic military manuals, and information from archaeological, historical, architectural, topographical, geological and documentary sources, in order to explore the positioning of castles in the landscapes of Somerset, Monmouthshire and Co. Meath, in an effort to provide answers to the following questions:

- Did factors of a tactical and strategic nature provide the main incentives for the Norman castle building programme?

- Which tactical and strategic considerations influenced castle siting, and how important were they in terms of the final locations chosen for castle erection?

- Which strategies or stratagems did the Normans employ in regards to castle warfare, and were these schemes adapted from region to region, and over time?

- How successful were the Norman strategies of castle building in terms of establishing control in three very different environments?
Somerset, Monmouthshire and Co. Meath (Fig. 1) were selected as ideal territories for study as, from a practical viewpoint, they each contain well preserved Norman castle sites, in relatively undisturbed surroundings, with suitable surviving documentary evidence, and when combined serve to highlight the chronological progression of Norman influence; whilst historically, from a military perspective, each was strategically and tactically important. Somerset was important since it had formerly been one of King Harold's major landholdings, forming the heart of Saxon Wessex; Monmouthshire was important as it was the first Welsh territory invaded by the Normans, forming their bridging point into Wales, and Co. Meath was important as it was near Dublin, and Dublin was important for several reasons. Tactically, without holding Dublin, the Normans could never hope to effectively hold Leinster. Strategically, Dublin was of great importance because of its geographical position vis-à-vis Ulster, Man, Wales, and England. Economically, Dublin was an internationally famous trading centre; and from a religious standpoint, Dublin was of increasing ecclesiastical importance as a metropolitan see.

The date of 1066 for the start of the study is self evident, marking the beginning of the Norman Conquest of England, but the closing date of 1186 merits explanation. In 1186 Hugh de Lacy, whilst supervising the construction of a castle at Durrow, Co. Offaly, was murdered - be-headed by an Irish axe. Hugh de Lacy was arguably the last of the great Anglo-Norman leaders, and in his lifetime gained renown as a great warrior, competent campaigner, proficient strategist, and effective statesman and politician. With his death the last real hope for complete Anglo-Norman domination in Ireland died also, and as 'there was no place further for the old warriors to go...they settled down to the thankless task of garrison duty along a frontier which no longer meant opportunity, but toil. Their frontier had come to an end' (Nelson, 1966, p.150). 1186 then, marks the end of a major period of Norman expansionism and conquest, and thus the end of this study.

Traditionally, the study of castles has been dominated by militaristic themes. Architectural historians have examined castles as functional structural entities, concentrating upon their fabric, design and construction, in order to assess their defensive military potential. The key element in their argument that the architectural evolution of the castle was the product of a continual struggle between increasingly sophisticated techniques of attack and progressively more scientific methods of defence, whilst military historians have examined their martial significance, operational purpose, and role in medieval warfare. Recently, there has been a move away from military topics per se, the emphasis for castle studies now focusing upon political, social, economic, symbolic or even aesthetic considerations. Despite many years of military castle studies and the recent shift in emphasis, the strategies and tactics associated with castle usage have yet to be fully explored however. These themes have often been mentioned in passing, but only a handful of scholars have attempted to confront them directly, and in general, their work has been largely ignored. This study has been designed to bridge this gap in the knowledge of Castellology. The study aims to further understanding of the reasoning behind the various locations selected for castle erection and works towards a greater appreciation of how castles were perceived and utilised by the Normans during their various campaigns, ultimately demonstrating the remarkable military prowess of the Normans themselves.
In essence, this study is not particularly concerned with the castles themselves, but rather with the positioning of castles in the immediate and wider landscape, and with the thinking underlying the various sites selected. The study is therefore primarily approached utilising the tools and techniques available to the landscape archaeologist, but, out of necessity, also draws heavily upon the wide variety of secondary sources mentioned above. The study begins, in Chapter 1, by outlining the 'strategic approach' to castles, arguing that it was not what was built, but where it was built that was the key to Norman success, as structure, in most instances, was less important than location. Chapter 2 contains a critique of the contemporary Norman sources, and the successive interpretations of those sources, in order to provide a background against which the castles can be viewed, and it is argued that as warfare defined the Normans, politically, socially and culturally, castles are best understood if approached from a predominantly military perspective. Chapter 3 examines historic military manuals, in order to establish a framework against which the positions of castles in the landscape can be tested and understood. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 explore the positions of castles in the landscapes of the chosen study areas, identifying the underlying strategies, tactics and stratagems, and tying these results into the historic narratives for the territories, further identifying and studying some of the principal Norman strategists involved in the various campaigns. The conclusion reached, in Chapter 7, is that, in the vast majority of cases, tactical and strategic considerations, above all else, dictated where castles were constructed, and that, very often, these considerations also provided the main impetus for castle construction. The study further arguing that the strategies, tactics and stratagems employed by the Normans made them a 'force-majeur par excellence', and that in order to fully appreciate this conclusion it is necessary to see the Normans as they saw themselves - as part of a wider European phenomenon, which took its inspiration from the Roman Empire.

As this thesis concentrates upon the strategies and tactics that formed the basis of Norman castle warfare, both the time span covered and the locations for study have been unashamedly chosen for their military potential. There would be little point in selecting, for example, Dorset, Worcestershire and Staffordshire as suitable areas for initial study, as these areas contain relatively few castles and seem to have offered little in the way of resistance to the Norman conquerors. Somerset, Monmouthshire and Co. Meath, on the other hand, contain large numbers of castles and appear to have presented fierce military opposition to Norman occupation. Similarly, there would be little point in beginning with, for example, a study of the castles built in England during the reign of Henry II (1154-1189), in relatively peaceful times, as such castles were almost certainly constructed to serve a variety of functions, and their military capabilities may have been very low down on the list of priorities. Indeed, there is mounting evidence to suggest that a growing number of early castles exhibit qualities of lordly display, peaceable power, iconography and symbolism; although at time of writing this evidence is still very marginal, and the earliest example so far identified is the keep constructed at Norwich, Norfolk, by Henry I between 1119 and 1132 (Fig. 2) (Heslop, 1994). On the other hand, castles built in the wake of the Conquest, and for that matter subsequent conquests, were undoubtedly constructed to perform a variety of military functions and, consequently, such castles form a suitable basis for study.
The periods covered by this work, and the three regions selected for study, are perhaps then extraordinary in that they represent times of prolonged conquest and conflict in areas which offered maximum resistance to Norman occupation. However, a study of the castles constructed in these locales, during such times, produces results which may influence the study of castles in other less exceptional regions, erected during less confrontational periods. Adopting a militaristic approach to the study of castles is currently unfashionable, but not necessarily invalid, and in support attention can be drawn to the changing perspectives on Hadrian's Wall, within Roman archaeological studies, over the years. Opinions have shifted from the traditional military interpretation of the wall established in the 1930's, to seeing the wall as a purely symbolic monument commemorating Hadrian in the 1980's, only to return to an ever more militaristic interpretation of the structure in recent years as a direct result of findings from up to the minute geophysical prospections (See: Appendix 1).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that this study avoids dogmatic arguments over what constitutes a 'castle', taking for its basic definition, 'the castle as a properly fortified military residence'. The term 'lordly', which is often used in many definitions to describe a castle, has been purposely omitted, as many of the castles reviewed in this study can hardly be described as residences befitting a lord. A large proportion of 'castles', especially in the frontier regions of Wales and Ireland, were simply, roughly constructed earth and timber outposts, designed to hold nothing more than a few troops, alongside their mounts and provisions.

The Historiography of Castle Studies in Britain

For most of the twentieth century the study of castles was dominated by a single overriding theme, that of warfare. Those who studied castles, studied - at a macroscopic level - their military significance and their role in contemporary warfare, and - at a microscopic level - the way in which a castle functioned in terms of an item of ancillary military hardware. Towards the end of the century however there was a gradual change in emphasis, and a growing number of general syntheses rejected the traditional, somewhat formulaic, military approach to castle studies in favour of other avenues of research (Creighton, 2002, p.6). As a result the start of the twenty-first century has witnessed a substantial backlash against what is now termed 'military determinism' (Coulson, 2003, p.1), and the military view of castles is supposedly in headlong retreat (Johnson, 2002, p.6), with the militarists who supported such notions standing accused of casting long shadows over twentieth century studies, retarding ambitions towards a more holistic understanding of castles (Creighton, 2002, p.6). In order to understand why the militaristic approach has become so unpopular it is necessary to examine briefly the historiography of castle studies in Britain - which will also help to highlight where this current work fits into the research framework.

Surprisingly, the discipline of castle studies is almost as old as the castles themselves. The focus for the earliest work was the enumeration of England's many castles: recording began in the early thirteenth century with the Mappa Mundi of Gervase of Canterbury, and continued in 1487 with William
of Worcester, and in 1533 with John Leland - in their *Itineraries* (King, 1983, p.xi). From the sixteenth century onwards, antiquarians took a keen interest in castles as reflections of aristocratic culture, and in 1789, James Moore published a directory for antiquarian tourists entitled *A List of Principal Castles and Monasteries in Great Britain* which contained some 530 castle entries. During the early part of the nineteenth century the study of ecclesiastical architecture advanced apace, and from these roots grew a more mature approach to the study of secular architecture (Creighton & Higham, 2003, p.8), leading to the publication of two highly influential works on castles. In 1884, George Thomas Clark published what can be considered the first academic study of castles in Britain, entitled *Medieval Military Architecture in England*; and in 1912, A. Hamilton Thompson published *Military Architecture in England during the Middle Ages*. At this time archaeologists also began to take an interest in castles, and by the late nineteenth century Captain Morgan was excavating at Bishopston in Glamorgan, and General Pitt Rivers at Folkestone in Kent (ibid. p.9). The single most important publication during this period however was *Early Norman Castles of the British Isles*, published in 1912 by Ella Armitage. Ms. Armitage single-handedly fixed the chronology of castles in England, and established, beyond all reasonable doubt, that England's castles were Norman importations (Brown, 1989, p.3).

The works of Clark, Hamilton Thompson and Armitage, written in late-Victorian Britain at a time when strategic, imperial and soldiery ideals prevailed, unsurprisingly, all contain a common ideology, that castles were predominantly military in nature (Coulson, 2003, p.5). Armitage, gravitating towards historical accounts of the Norman conquest such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Gesta Guillelmi*, championed a notion made popular by E.A. Freeman in his *The History of the Norman Conquest of England* (1867-1879), that castles were tools of English subjugation, whilst Clark and Hamilton Thompson saw castles primarily as military buildings, and their architectural development as a series of responses to the demands of war. The argument maintained was that castles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were primarily military edifices, which eventually devolved into the fortified mansions of the fifteenth century, due to a steady decline in the need for martial structures with the demise of 'feudalism' (Liddiard, R., 2000i, p.3). Thus - argue modern castellologists - 'the castle's image as the fortification of a brutal age was set in place and attempts to understand and define its role and function became bound by the straitjacket of military architecture' (Liddiard, 2003, p.6).

The militaristic approach to castles remained the dominant theme throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and was further popularised in the works of R. Allen Brown (1954 onwards), who 'joined lifestyle to militarism with rare historical authority' (Coulson, 2003, p.5). During the last decades of the twentieth century however, there was a reaction against the military approach, principally focussed upon the later medieval period, but increasingly applied to the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Liddiard, 2003, p.7). As castellologists expanded their repertoires to include an ever widening array of source materials, methodologies and fresh technologies, new questions began to be asked of castles, and consequently new agendas for research developed. In 1967, Davidson challenged Armitage's notion of the Norman origin of English castles - following a survey of mottes in Normandy which failed to date any to before 1066 (Davidson, 1969). Davidson's work, although inconclusive, rekindled archaeological interest in earthwork castles, and Higham and Barker's book *Timber Castles* (1992) placed
them firmly on the castle studies agenda. In 1990, Pound's book on the medieval castle opened debate on the social and economic roles of castles; and more recently, discussion has centered upon the castle's social and architectural contexts. Architectural studies have also witnessed a move away from 'military functionalism' towards 'iconographic symbolism'; with Coulson (1979 onwards) placing increasing emphasis upon the defensive shortcomings of many castles in an attempt to transport castle-building into the realms of aristocratic chivalric culture, where status and social competition become the more dominant characteristics, whilst Dixon (1990; [& with Marshall] 1993) and Heslop (1991) have explored the social functions of castles, highlighting the sophistication of domestic planning to the detriment of military design.

In 1984, Austin argued that castles needed to be studied within a wider historical framework, and his work on Barnard Castle was instrumental in demonstrating the importance of the castle's landscape setting, which has led to a move away from seeing all landscapes as purely functional environments (Liddiard, 2000i, p.2). During a Royal Commission survey of Bodiam Castle in 1990, Taylor, Everson and Wilson-North - following Austin's lead - successfully recorded 'pleasure-gardens' associated with the castle, and thereby raised awareness of 'designed castle landscapes'. Consequently 'Medieval Ornamental Landscapes' are now being identified exponentially at ecclesiastic and secular sites nationwide (Taylor, 2000). This has led to an explosion in castle landscape studies, and to the birth of the landscape approach, with landscape archaeologists and historians all endeavouring to discover how the castle may have functioned in relation to its surroundings (Creighton 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002; Hughes 1998; Liddiard 2000i, 2003).

The most recent approach applied to the study of castles however is the phenomenological approach. Castellologists are becoming increasingly concerned with the ways in which landscapes were perceived and experienced by past societies, and with the impact of the castle 'monument' upon the human senses (Creighton, 2002, p.65). O'Keeffe has suggested that the Greek Cross Plan of certain castle great towers 'was more concerned with complex Christian symbolism and display than with defensibility' (2000, p.37); and in parallel with this Marten-Holden has argued that castle environs often contained landscape components that embodied biblical iconography - which would have been understood regardless of the linguistic and cultural differences - as a means to symbolically exert Norman dominion (2001, pp.51-2). Johnson has argued that the iconic role of the castle as a symbol of power and influence coexisted with, and sometimes transcended, its military importance (1996, pp.122-2): sentiments echoed by Lewis et al who propose that the castle was a highly visible physical manifestation of seigneurial authority (1997, p.231). Whilst Creighton has demonstrated that the landscape around the castle was often remodelled to emphasise its iconic status, by presenting the seigneurial site from the most favourable angle, against a backcloth of landscape features with elite connotations (Creighton, 2002, p.65). Finally, and most recently, Johnson has suggested that an entirely new approach to castles is required: that we must view the castle in relation to the identities of the people who used and lived in them (2003, p.i). A sentiment that will almost certainly be echoed in Austin's much anticipated book, Acts of Perception – Barnard Castle (forthcoming).
Today then, as far as the vast majority of castellologists are concerned, the militaristic approach to castles - which for so long held pride of place in the historiographical literature - has seemingly had its day, and architecturalists, landscapists and phenomenologists are far more likely to interpret castles and their landscapes in terms of lordly display, peaceable power, iconography, symbolism, society, economy, politics, administration, or even folkish considerations, than from any kind of military perspective. This fact is suitably evidenced in Creighton and Higham’s recent publication Medieval Castles (2003), where, despite over 100 years of military castle studies, ‘Castles at War’ forms one of the shortest chapters, whilst ‘Castles: Status and Society’ forms one of the longest. Moreover, this publication is also useful for demonstrating another critical factor: in the entire book (albeit very short) only three lines are given over to the tactical and strategic use and positioning of castles (p.26). This is hardly surprising however, as traditionally the topic of military strategy proper has been largely ignored by castellologists, and currently all popular approaches to castle studies are continually failing to address the important relationship between strategy and tactics and castle. The time is therefore ripe for a new approach to castle studies - an approach which takes into account, examines, and lays stress upon the importance of military strategies and tactics associated with castles - namely the Strategic Approach. Probably the best way to demonstrate how the Strategic Approach fits into the castle studies genre is via the use of an analogy which includes the major approaches taken towards castle studies over the years.

Castles, architecturalists, landscapists, phenomenologists and strategists

In the county of Northumberland, at the neck of a loop in the River Coquet, on high ground overlooking and blocking the only dry approach to a village, lies Warkworth Castle. The castle began its life in the eleventh century as a Norman motte and bailey, but today the earthworks are crowned with the majestic ruins of a masonry castle - a patchwork of various dates – the most impressive of which is the late fourteenth century cruciform great keep which straddles the motte (Fig. 3).

Approaching the castle from the south, a large group of people is encountered, each member, with back resolutely turned upon the landscape beyond, is facing inwards towards the castle. The group is engaged in meticulously studying, measuring and recording every inch of the architecture of the gatehouse, paying particular attention to the embrasures and merlons, ashlar and freestone blocks, quoins, mouldings, types of mortar, depth of portcullis slot, type of arrow slit, and number of murder holes. These are the 'militarists', architectural historians whose primarily concerns traditionally lay with dating the castle, and with establishing how the castle functioned as an item of military hardware. Around the castle other such groups are discovered, some studying the massive ashlar-clad curtain walls complete with flanking towers, some - with much admiration - recording the seventeen feet long (5.00m) fish-tailed cross-bow loops in Grey Mare’s Tail Tower, whilst others are inspecting the cruciform great keep for its defensive potential.

Moving to the roof of the cruciform great keep, a different, somewhat smaller, group of people is encountered. Almost oblivious to the castle upon which they stand, the various members of the party are
staring out over the castle walls to the landscape beyond - these are the 'landscapists', or landscape archaeologists. Each landscapist is firmly focused upon the castle's immediate environs, scouring the countryside beyond the castle walls for the remains of a deer park, ornamental garden feature, or the surviving earthworks of a rabbit warren, fishpond or dovecote, in an effort to understand how the castle may have functioned in relation to its surrounding landscape. With such features located, debate quickly ensues over the castle's iconic role as a symbol of lordly power, status and influence. To landscapists the very presence of such features, seemingly, instantly negating the castle's role as a piece of military hardware, whilst simultaneously establishing the fact that it must surely have served other, hotly disputed, purposes.

Moving inside Warkworth's great keep, an even smaller group of people is happened upon. They wander from chamber to chamber, and up and down the multitude of internal staircases, pausing occasionally to stare out of a window, or arrow slit, to ponder over the way in which the castle was perceived and experienced by its long dead occupants, and by the townsfolk who once lived in its shadow. These are the 'phenomenologists', those who hold with the notion that inquiry ought to focus upon what might be called “encountering” as it is directed at objects and, correlatively, upon “objects as they are encountered”. At the entrance to the keep there is a dark doorway and narrow stairwell, which contrasts sharply with the size and light of the rooms on the first floor, here a group of phenomenologists muse over the possible presence of a theatrical element. Outside, beneath the huge heraldic sculpture of a lion resplendently adorning the wall of the keep (an emblem of the Percy family erected c.1377) others debate the psychological impact of the symbol upon the townsfolk it once overlooked. Whilst another is found wandering the castle grounds, a copy of the complete works of Shakespeare tucked firmly under one arm, considering why in Henry IV Part 2 such a fine castle as this should be described as “this worm-eaten hold of ragged stone” - all continually asking the question, “of what is the nature or meaning of the castle”.

Where then in this analogy are the 'strategists'? In order to find them one must turn one's attention skywards, towards the heavens. Hovering above the landscape, like proverbial kestrels, the strategists stare down upon the castle from on high. From this vantage point the strategists can not only observe, appreciate and understand Warkworth's superb tactical location, they are also able to see other castles at nearby Alnwick, Edlingham, Bothall and Morpeth, as well as those further afield, at Dunstanburgh, Wooler, Cartington, Harbottle and Bellingham. They view castles not as isolated fortifications existing within a single landscape, but as integral components in systems which traverse myriad landscapes. From their lofty positions the strategists observe the twisting courses of rivers, the routes of ancient roads, ranges of hills, distant mountains, and narrow valleys and passes. As they look the castles begin to form distinctive patterns in the landscape, here a chain of castles guard and control a road, there a chain block passages through the hills, whilst others, strung out along river courses, act in concert to control navigable sections, and consequently the routes of communication, transport and supply. The castle strategists see beyond single castles, and their immediate environs, to systems of castles that exert influence across entire landscapes - their primary concern lying with the identification and analysis of the stratagems that underpinned castle warfare.
The Strategic Approach

"Given the mass of literature on castles it is curious that historians and archaeologists have generally neglected the subject of their siting. This is all the more strange given that by any standard their construction was an expensive and significant undertaking and those who built them could hardly have been indifferent to their position within the landscape."

Liddiard, 2000i, p.169

There can be little question that it is commonly believed that castles were tactically or strategically positioned in the landscape: indeed when this matter was recently discussed in front of a secondary school teacher, she stated that most Year 7 pupils would be able to tell you that castles were strategically located in the countryside in relation to rivers and roads, and that many school text books contain just such information. Claims that the tactical and strategic considerations relating to castles have yet to be widely examined or properly investigated may, then, seem surprising to some. The basic concept of the tactically or strategically positioned castle has filtered down, over time, into popular culture from suggestions made in many of the ‘traditional’, militarily-focused, studies of castles (e.g. Renn, 1968; and Brown, 1976 & 1980). In general however the vast majority of these studies lack the hard facts, or suitably convincing examples, necessary to support such theories – which has led to their downfall of late (Coulson, 2003, p.1; Johnson, 2002, p.6; Creighton, 2002, p.6). The strategic approach to castles is also not entirely new, as previously several other scholars have adopted similar lines of inquiry. Unfortunately however their work was either heavily criticised, or largely ignored by their contemporaries, and thus failed to make much headway generally.

One of the first to adopt a strategic approach to castles was W. H. St. John Hope, who interestingly enough was an archaeologist and Director of the Royal Archaeological Institute. In The Strategical Aspects of English Castles, published in 1910, St. John Hope succinctly covered many of the tactical and strategic principles relating to castle usage (p.293), and further argued that castles must ‘be looked upon as forming part of...[a] great offensive and defensive scheme’ (p.292). A year later Alfred Harvey’s Castles and Walled Towns of England was published. Harvey also believed that ‘[C]astles were not isolated fortresses...but were arranged on a definite scientific plan’; but both works were quickly swept aside with the publication of Ella Armitage’s book in 1912.

‘Another brave effort was that of Professor John Beeler of the University of North Carolina’ (King, 1983, p.xiii). Beeler, in three published works (1951, 1956 & 1966), was the first to properly analyse the vast majority of the tactical and strategic principles of castle warfare, but there were problems with his methodologies and conclusions, ultimately leading to heavy criticisms of his work. Pounds states that Beeler ‘ascribes to the Conqueror a topographical knowledge which few of us possess’; ‘that the dates of foundation of all castles built before the end of the twelfth century were conflated, so that they appear contemporary, and, by implication, are ascribed to the early years of the Conquest’; and that ‘the rationalisation by which the siting of the humblest ringwork is explained verges on the ludicrous’ (1990, p.54). Creighton claims that Beeler was wholly mistaken in interpreting ‘the map of English castles as the product of the same type of strategic master planning that influenced the distribution of Roman forts
and frontier works' (2002, p.6). Finally, more recently, Bernard Bachrach has adopted a more considered, but perhaps over-cautious, approach to the subject, in *The Angevin Strategy of Castle-Building in the Reign of Fulk Nerra, 987-1040* (1983), his approach no-doubt tempered by the recent shift in emphasis in castle studies.

Apart from the few studies mentioned above, it is fair to state then that the vast majority of works dealing with Norman castles, to date, fail to appreciate the assertion that in most instances *it was not what was built, but where it was built that was the key to Norman success*; structure in most cases being less important than location. Moreover, in the small number of books where the topic of location is discussed, most scholars firmly adhere to the belief that there was no 'abstract military thinking' and hence no real 'strategy' involved behind the siting of castles: the main reason advocated for the choice of site being simply one of convenience (McNeill, 1992, p.33).

*On Strategy and Tactics*

Before explaining the strategic approach to castles, it is first necessary to clarify a few terms. The terms strategy and tactics are both in general use today, and are often used interchangeably. This however is a common mistake. The *Websters New World Dictionary* (1998) describes *strategy* as: "(a) The science of planning and directing large-scale military operations, (b) - A plan or action based on this"; whilst *tactics* is described as: "(a) The science of arranging and manoeuvring military and naval forces in action or before the enemy, esp. (as distinguished from Strategy) with reference to short-range objectives; (b) - Actions in accord with this science". From these two definitions, it is apparent that the two 'sciences' are interrelated, but that there is a vital difference between them. Tactics are 'short term objectives', whilst strategy 'is concerned with the overall conduct of military operations against the enemy'. Perhaps the best definition comes from Clausewitz (1780-1831) who distinguished between tactics – 'the art of winning battles' – and strategy – 'the art of using battles in order to gain the objectives of the campaign' (Creveld, 2000, p.116).

Militarily, strategy and tactics also relate directly to landscape. In any given expanse of land, there are two types of location that are important from the military's perspective: the first are 'tactically significant', and the second are 'strategically significant'. Tactically significant locations are points in the landscape which are topographically or geologically strong, where, due to the nature of the terrain, a weaker force could hold its own against a potentially stronger aggressor - such as a high, naturally defended, rocky outcrop. Strategically significant locations are points in the landscape which, due to their geographical positions, afford control of 'key strategic elements' - such as mountain passes, defiles, rivers, fords, and road networks (British Army 'Field Service Pocket Book', 1914). In terms of castle construction then, tactical considerations are best viewed as localised considerations, relating to the positioning of a castle in the immediate vicinity, connected primarily with the issue of defence; whereas strategic considerations are best viewed as wider considerations, relating to the positioning of castles at
carefully selected points across an entire landscape, where, due to their geographical locations, the castles afford control of key strategic elements.

With the above points in mind, the basic tenet of the strategic approach to castles is the belief that, in the vast majority of cases, tactical and strategic considerations, above all else, dictated where castles were constructed; and that, very often, these considerations also provided the main impetus for castle construction. By default, this implies that there was a certain degree of planning involved in the locations selected for castle construction. In all previous strategic approaches taken to castle studies ‘castles have been seen as part of an integrated scheme, planned and controlled from somewhere close to the king’ (Pounds, 1990, p.54). This is not what is being argued in this thesis however, as it is felt that such an overall plan was not necessary, and that the Normans could not have known the geography of each region invaded well enough to carry out such a plan. Rather, what is being argued here is that the Norman castle building programme developed in an ad hoc fashion over the course of various conquests, but that the programme was ultimately successful because it relied heavily upon a sound understanding of - and adherence to – the basic strategic and tactical principles of warfare. The model proposed is that the Normans, and later Anglo-Normans, upon entering a region, would assess the lie of the land, in terms of its strategically and tactically significant locations, and then select the best site, or sites, upon which to erect their castles to afford them control of those locations: and further, that the vast majority of castles were constructed at carefully chosen positions in the landscape in order to affect Norman control over key strategic elements, leading ultimately to Norman victory. This action, of carefully choosing sites upon which to erect castles, is, in itself, a form of strategy, and can be sensibly termed ‘The Stratagem of Optimum Site Selection’. The dictionary definition of ‘stratagem’ being ‘A plan or scheme for deceiving an enemy or gaining an advantage’ (Chambers Etymological English Dictionary, 1900).

The Stratagem of Optimum Site Selection

At this point it is felt that the concept of ‘the stratagem of optimum site selection’ deserves a fuller explanation, and the best way to achieve this is with a look at why the Normans constructed castles, in combination with scenarios where such stratagems could have been, and probably were, implemented. This will also help to clarify the strategist’s approach to castle studies, by highlighting where strategic and tactical considerations arguably influenced the Norman castle building programme (Fig. 4).

In what can be termed the Initial Conquest Period – that is during the initial military invasion and conquest of a region - the Normans would have had need to effect control of, and gain mastery over, terrain, territory, lines of transport, communication and supply, and their potential adversaries, the native population: and to those ends they constructed castles.

Terrain, in this instance, refers to small, localised areas of land, which in order to capture and secure, the Normans utilised castles as items of military hardware. In this capacity, the castle functioned primarily as a base from which to plan and launch attacks, as a place to muster troops, as a depot for
supplies and as a safe retreat in times of crisis. The term ‘castle’ derives from the Latin ‘castellum’, meaning ‘little fort’ (Pettifer, 1995, p.313), a highly apt description here for the castle’s functional role - but the castle was also a powerful psychological device. For troops venturing into hostile territory, the familiar context of the castle’s defences would have provided a welcome sense of security. With the enemy and wild beasts separated from the troops by a ditch, rampart and palisade, the men could eat, wash, care for their equipment and mounts, and converse in a relaxed atmosphere (King, 1983, p.xxvi). This same sense of security would also allow them to sleep soundly at night, and so be fit for action or battle the following day. Also, although castle building took a huge investment of effort, once constructed, the castle became a labour saving device, as it could be guarded with a minimum of men, allowing the remainder of the troops to rest and recuperate in relative safety (Luttwak, 1981, pp.56-7). A castle used in this way enabled a smaller force to hold its own against a potentially stronger aggressor, thereby allowing commanders to hold terrain in perhaps otherwise untenable locations. The ‘stratagem of optimum site selection’ almost certainly came into play here, when selecting, and co-opting, tactically significant, naturally defensible sites, which were readily adaptable to fortification and which effected access to potable water supplies, construction materials, the surrounding countryside, and routes of communication and supply.

Territory, in this instance, refers to larger areas of land such as counties, which in order to capture and secure - the strategist would argue - the Normans positioned castles at carefully selected, strategically significant, ‘optimum sites’ in the landscape, to afford them control over the physical geography, naturally occurring resources and key strategic elements of such regions. In this scenario the features of the landscape did not necessarily govern the locations chosen for castle erection (i.e. ‘physical determinism’), but rather, through the process of the human selection of ‘optimum sites’, castles governed landscape features (Halsall, 2000). An added bonus in this case being, that the naturally occurring physical obstacles of a region were further endowed with additional military strength by the erection of the fortifications. Thus, mountain ranges, ranges of hills, ridgeways and river courses all became physical barriers to movement with the addition of castles (Howard & Paret, 1984; Duffy, 1996).

Lines of transport, communication and supply are of utmost importance in every military campaign, and as such are considered separately here - although in reality they fall into the ‘key strategic elements’ category. In order to gain control of Roman roads, Saxon Herepaðs, navigable river systems and other lines of transport, communication and supply within a territory, the strategist would suggest that the Normans positioned castles at carefully selected strategically significant ‘optimum sites’ in the landscape, close to, or overlooking such resources. This would enable the Normans to monitor and control all movement along such routes, effectively placing them firmly under their jurisdiction, whilst conversely guaranteeing their own lines of transport, communication and supply - the castles effectively forming useful ‘way-stations’ (Manual of Field Fortification, 1871; Field Service Pocket Book, 1914; King, 1983, pp.xx-xxiii; Cleary, 1998, p.62; Duffy, 1996, p.22; Creighton, 2000, p.105).

The native populations of territories invaded by the Normans were seemingly subdued and controlled via castles in many ways – the two examples given here are based upon strategic principles.
Firstly, it is thought probable that additional castles were constructed in relation to those initially used to win territory and lines of transport, communication and supply, thereby forming ‘castle networks’, giving the Normans spatial control, resulting in the suppression of the native population’s freedom of movement (Orpen, 1906 & 1907; Graham, 1972, 1975 & 1980; McNeill, 2000, pp.67-8). The castles were probably constructed at carefully selected strategically significant ‘optimum sites’ in the landscape, chosen for their ability to enable individual castles, or, better still, several castles acting in concert, to interpose a strategic barrier in the path of a potential aggressor. Secondly, in contrast to ‘the active use of military force’, it is felt that castles may have also been utilised as ‘images of force’, for the purposes of diplomatic coercion (Luttwak, 1981, p.xii). The Normans, through the erection of castles at carefully selected ‘symbolically significant’ sites, or through the construction of large, visually impressive castles, inflicted a form of psychological warfare upon the native population, in an attempt to symbolically suppress them (King, 1983, p.xix).

Later, during what can be termed the Subjugation Period - in which the invader attempts to consolidate and secure his position whilst forcibly suppressing and subjugating the invaded - the Normans would have had need to effect control of, and gain mastery over, pre-Norman political and administrative units, existing towns and villages, and trade and commerce: and to those ends they constructed castles.

The functions of many pre-Norman political and administrative units were seemingly often usurped by dividing them up, and adding a castle at a carefully selected central location inside each newly established estate. The site for the castle was no doubt chosen for its ability to allow the castle to develop as the caput of the newly created Norman lordship. A good example of this occurs in Somerset, where the castle and borough founded at Stogursey quickly replaced the importance and role of the former royal estate at Cannington (Aston, 1986, p.64). In this way the castle essentially became a new ‘central place’ in the landscape, the focus around which the entire local community was forced to revolve, thereby making many of the old central places redundant, effectively creating a new, highly symbolic, ‘social landscape’⁴. Again, such tactics bear all the hallmarks of careful strategic planning.

Towns are an important consideration in any military campaign, as they are heavily populated, are rich in resources and provisions that can be used to supply an army, and are therefore potentially dangerous to any invader (Howard & Paret, 1984, p.395; Duffy, 1996, pp.22 & 27). The Normans gained control of towns by erecting castles at carefully selected ‘optimum sites’ inside existing town boundaries - evidenced at Lincoln, York and Winchester - or at strategically significant positions in the countryside surrounding a town - good examples surviving in Somerset around Bath and Ilchester⁵. The castles, in both instances, constructed at locations chosen for their ability to enable the castle garrison to easily observe, and thus govern the actions and movements of the town’s inhabitants (Harvey, 1925; Pounds, 1990, pp.207-221; Creighton & Higham, 2003, pp.58-9). Villages posed similar threats, and were dealt with in a similar fashion, with castles often being erected close to, abutting, or even partly over them. At Montacute, Somerset, the castle overlooks the village from a distance - being 91.44m (300ft) away. At Sheriff Hutton, North Yorkshire, the earlier castle abuts the village, at its east end, whilst at Rampton and Eaton Socon, Cambridgeshire, parts of the villages were obliterated during castle construction (Creighton
& Higham, 2003, pp.55-6). In the case of villages, the castle usually became the new focal point in the settlement hierarchy, the original village being relegated in status to that of a suburb - a process which Lilley has termed 'suburbanization' (2002).

The two essential requirements of any evolving civilisation are said to be a sound material base and adequate security (Luttwak, 1981, p.1). The challenge faced by the Normans was to gain control of existing trade and commerce in occupied territory, and encourage new trade, whilst continuing to protect themselves with adequate security, but without letting this security prejudice the vitality of the territory's economic base. This, it seems, was accomplished in two ways. Firstly, it is known that many existing castles became bastions for commercial enterprise, with fairs and markets often being forced to relocate to an area within the bounds of the castle – allowing the castle's owner to control and tax such enterprise (Austin, 1982, pp.293-300; Dyer, 1998, pp.80-3). Secondly, it is thought possible that new castles were erected in regions of rich agricultural land at carefully selected strategically significant 'optimum sites', chosen for their ability to enable the castle garrison to oversee and thus control the production and movement of goods and produce. Many such castles were constructed close to the river and road networks used in the transportation process. Castles thus enabled the Normans to capitalise upon the economic wealth present within their newly won territories and such sites often developed into 'New Towns' (Beresford, 1967).

By the time of, what can be termed, the Colonisation Period – in which the invader settles down, assumes control, and establishes a new home for himself – the Normans, through their castle building programme and use of 'stratagems of optimum site selection', had already effectively gained control of, and mastery over, urban and rural development, economics, politics and society.

From the late eleventh century onwards, urban castles and urban growth and development rapidly became symbiotically related (Creighton, 2002). Purpose built 'New Towns' or 'Boroughs' were constructed adjacent to the existing castles, and large numbers of the population were relocated into them (Pounds, 1990, pp.216-21; Rowley, 1999, pp.94-7). Good examples of castles and new towns functioning as complimentary units exist at Kidwelly in Carmarthenshire, Plympton in Devon, Tickhill in South Yorkshire, and Warkworth in Northumberland. Some towns, such as Bridgnorth in Shropshire, Richmond in North Yorkshire and Trowbridge in Wiltshire, growing up inside castle precincts, whilst others, such as Corfe in Dorset, simply grew up around the existing market place (Creighton & Higham, 2003, p.60). The urban centres offered a greater degree of personal freedom for the individual, along with the prospect of economic enterprise, whilst conversely providing an income for the lord through burgage rents and market tolls (Pounds, 1990, p.216). The borough, or new town, relied on the might of the lordly castle which overshadowed it for its protection and survival, whilst rural development came to depend heavily upon the castles already located amongst the small dispersed rural settlements. Such castles effectively becoming the 'machinery of manorial complexes', protecting, monitoring, and governing the welfare, enterprise, and subsequent growth, of local farming communities (Creighton & Higham, 2003, pp.55-7; Pounds, 1990, pp.201-7).
Castles also became centres for the regulation of economic factors in Norman occupied territories. The castles, now firmly established as permanent centres of governance, oversaw the production, distribution and consumption of wealth and thereby controlled the fortunes of the local and national economies (Britnell, 1978; Coulson, 2003; Liddiard, 2003). Castles eventually became the focal points around which the whole of society was forced to revolve. The population coming to rely wholesale upon the feudal lord in his castle, for political governance, the continuation of trade, commercial enterprise, employment, administration and protection.

From the above scenarios then, it is seemingly apparent that considerations of a strategic or tactical nature often provided the impetus for castle construction, and that these same considerations, probably, frequently dictated where roughly in a territory castles should be constructed. The Normans, with these considerations firmly in mind, carefully singled out the best sites upon which to erect their castles (‘strategy of optimum site selection’) in order to maximise a castle’s efficiency, or to afford it the greatest impact in the landscape. In this manner, through careful planning and building, the Normans effected control of key strategic elements, thereby gaining the upper hand militarily.

It has frequently been argued that control of roads, rivers, fords and other such key strategic elements via castles actually afforded the Normans very little advantage in real terms, as the highly mobile armies of the Middle Ages could easily circumnavigate these positions (Pounds, 1990, p.54; McNeill, 2000, p.68; Creighton & Higham, 2003, p.26). The tendency to evaluate defensive systems in absolute terms fails to fully appreciate the military raison d’être of strategically positioned Norman castles however. If a defence can be penetrated it is said to be ‘useless’, and only an impenetrable defence is conceded to be of value. Such an appraisal is highly misleading, as its equivalent for offence would be to regard as useless any offensive system that could not prevail against all forms of resistance, under all circumstances (Luttwak, 1976, p.61). Defensive systems should instead be evaluated in relative terms: firstly, the vast majority of Norman castles were erected within ‘occupied territories’, consequently the threat was ostensibly ‘internal’, and with the Normans firmly in control of landscape, and all systems of transport, communication and supply, it would have been virtually impossible to raise an army in the first instance. Secondly, if an invading or marauding army did manage to by-pass a chain or network of castles, once past, they would be cut-off, as messengers could not get back, or supplies forward. Thirdly, and most importantly, the foremost strategic function of a castle was the holding of territory. King succinctly covers this argument, stating that ‘the strategic usefulness of castles lay in their hold on the country’, and in support cites John des Roches’ c.1330 report to Edward III on the defence of the Channel Islands: “The castles must never be unprepared, for should the isles be taken by overwhelming numbers, you can always get back your land by means of your castles” (King, 1983, p.xxii). The final word here though goes to Beeler: ‘Above all, no area could be permanently occupied as long as its castles held out’ (1971, p.148).

Evidently then, in order to validate the strategic approach to castle studies, it is necessary to prove that the theories, notions, ideas and examples embodied in the above scenarios are in fact historical realities. Hence, an in-depth examination of the historical application of the strategies and tactics that
formed the basis for castle warfare must be carried out, in combination with a methodology that provides tangible proof of their existence and usage in the field. Emphasis here being placed firmly upon the word 'proof', as today many castellologists would argue that tactical and strategic planning in relation to castle usage was a fallacy dreamt up by militarists in the last century, ultimately deriving from studies of warfare since Napoleon, heightened by events in 1914-18 and 1939-45 (Coulson, 2003, p.4).

Towards a Strategic Approach: The Methodology for Study

"In order to fully appreciate how castles worked we must strive to understand topographical and geographical relationships, juxtaposition, interactions, networks and castle morphology; and study closely the immediate surroundings of a castle...and, in order to gain even the simplest understanding of the various interactions of castle to landscape and castle to castle network, we must endeavour, at all costs, to date the sites we work with."

Dr. R. Higham
(‘Castles and Hinterlands in Medieval Europe’ conference: 9/2/01)

Previous Strategic Approaches to castle studies have been heavily criticised for their poor methodologies and lack of adequate case studies (Coulson, 2003, p.1; Johnson, 2002, p.6; Creighton, 2002, p.6). In order to suggest answers to the four questions posed under Scope of Study, a reliable methodology had to be developed, and applied in territories chosen for their potential to provide proof of tactical and strategic considerations in relation to castle usage.

To date studies of castles in the landscape have generally utilised either thematic or regionalistic approaches: both of which have associated problems. The thematic approach – where individual themes are selected as a basis for study – is problematic in that it is obviously, by default, not a holistic approach, often viewing castles in isolation from such important factors as their overall landscape setting, palimpsest, archaeological, historical, or castle network contexts. Whereas the regionalistic approach – where all of the castles within a geographically defined area are selected as a basis for study – often causes problems when the theories and conclusions derived from studying castles in one region are generalised, and then applied wholesale across the board. In order to avoid such problems, a broader comparative approach was adopted for this study, examining castles in three very different locations.

The methodology for study in each of the selected locations developed as follows. Firstly, in combination with a rigorous program of field visits, archaeological, historical, architectural, modern, topographical, geological and documentary sources were consulted in order to identify all of the Norman castles existing within the bounds of a territory. Then, with the sites clearly identified, the sources were further scrutinised in an effort to establish dates for the construction, use and abandonment of each castle; in many cases also establishing the identity of the person initially responsible for building a castle at the site.
Dating is another important issue that has plagued castle research over the years. Most studies usually contain distribution maps upon which the castles discussed in the text are plotted. These maps generally form integral components of the research, utilised as tools to work out the various associations existing between castles, or between castle and landscape elements, forming the basis for many of the conclusions reached. Often however, when such maps are scrutinised, it becomes obvious that the dates of the plotted castles have been conflated, so that they appear contemporary; in reality, a far too simplistic view (Pounds, 1990, p.54). One of the last, and largest, motte and baileys to be constructed in England was Caus Castle, Shropshire, built by the Corbet family between c.1134-40. If 1066 is accepted as the starting date for the construction of this type of fortification, then with the completion of Caus Castle, we arrive at a time span of approximately 74 years. Thus, there was then plenty of time for large numbers of motte and baileys to be constructed, utilised, and then abandoned, at different times, in different decades, regionally or nationally. For example, 'a small castle abandoned at an early date was that presumed to have been built by Ernulf de Hesdin at Ruislip in Middlesex. It would appear to have passed out of use...[by 1069, for at that time]...the site was given to the monks of the Normandy Abbey of Bec' (ibid. p.10). It has been stated that 'allowance must be made for the inherent deficiency in any such [distribution] maps, which exaggerate the quantity of activity in the landscape by putting together sites which may not all have been in contemporary use' (Higham & Barker, 1990, p.27). A fact seemingly still being overlooked by many castellologists and presumably the reason why, at the recent Castles and Hinterlands in Medieval Europe conference, Dr. R. Higham spoke loudest when stating, “we must strive wholeheartedly to date these sites, in order to gain a proper understanding of the various interactions of castle to landscape, and castle to castle network” (9/2/01).

Returning to the methodology, having established dates for as many castles within a territory as sources would permit – no easy task considering that ‘the foundation of castles in the Conqueror’s time is so ill-recorded (King, 1983, p.xxxi) - the sites were plotted onto phased distribution maps. The phasing based either upon historically occurring chronological divisions, derived from accounts of Norman activity in the area, or upon hypothetically determined ones, such as the ‘Initial Conquest, Subjugation and Colonisation Periods’ outlined above. The use of phased distribution maps helped to eliminate many of the problems associated with previous castle studies: allowing an accurate picture of the distribution of castles within a territory, at key intervals in time, to emerge. Once completed, the maps were carefully and methodically analysed for signs of patterns or schemes underlying castle positioning, and for signs of associations or relationships existing between castles, or castles and landscape. This analysis provides the main material for discussion in each of the regional case studies, from which new interpretations and conclusions are drawn, leading to a greater appreciation of the stratagems that underpinned Norman castle warfare. During scrutiny of the maps, it was additionally noted that certain castles tended to stand out, either because they were excellent examples of their class or because they did not fit logically into any recognisable ‘scheme’. In such instances, these sites were further examined, in an effort to provide first class examples for particular aspects of the study, or to determine what made them ‘unusual’. With all three territories fully investigated, the results and findings from each were correlated and compared, leading to further valuable insights, affording answers to all of the questions posed.
In order to identify any schemes or stratagems underlying the Norman castle building programme it is clearly necessary to have a sound understanding of the nature and concept of landscape, in combination with a knowledge of tactical and strategic considerations relating to the siting of fortifications within the landscape. To these ends, this study utilises many of the tools and techniques available to the landscape archaeologist, in combination with criteria contained in many military manuals relating to the positioning of fortifications in the landscape. The information contained in the military manuals provides a framework against which theories, notions and ideas on the tactical and strategic positioning of castles can be tested and understood. Finally, it has been stated that: 'Too often castle-study has operated in a historical vacuum. Instead of examining the structure in the light of the builder's career, social position, and political aims, or of the family history of ownership, sometimes even without considering properly the state of the local peace, a scenario of constant pressing danger has tended to be assumed but is seldom proved' (Coulson, 2003, p.3). To avoid this dilemma, historical and documentary sources are utilised throughout this work; castles are placed into context via a study of the Normans themselves; any findings relating to the strategic or tactical positioning of castles within a territory are, where possible, tied into the historical narrative for the region; and the overall results of the study are examined within the broader historical context of Norman history.

Problems and Difficulties of the Study

"Understand that most problems are a good sign. Problems indicate that progress is being made, wheels are turning, you are moving toward your goals. Beware when you have no problems. Then you've really got a problem...."

Alexander Scott, Scottish Poet, c.1515-1583

Some of the practical difficulties and problems that this study had to overcome, such as the dating of sites and the avoidance of a thematic or regionalistic approach, have already been discussed, whilst others, such as the problems unique to working in Wales or Ireland, will be dealt with in the relevant chapters. Instead, this section deals briefly with the main problem facing an archaeologist when working in the field of Castellology. Castellology as a discipline comprises a complex mix of Architectural Studies, History, Documentary Studies, Historical Geography, Military Studies, Landscape History, Medieval Studies, Archaeology, Field Survey, and Landscape Archaeology. Laying aside the obvious difficulty of having to be conversant in such a wide range of specialist areas, it is apparent from the list that traditionally the study of castles has primarily been approached through the medium of history – Castellology being viewed primarily as the preserve of the historian, due to the fact that castles were constructed in the 'historical period'. For an archaeologist this presents two interconnected problems: firstly, there is a history of conflict between archaeologists and historians working within the castle-studies field; and secondly, an archaeologist attempting to study a castle must do so through the medium of 'Historical Archaeology', a discipline, at present, struggling to define itself, and one which many historians claim is 'an expensive way of telling us what we already know!' (Sawyer, 1983, p.15).
Historians vs. Archaeologists

In 1966, on the 900th anniversary of the Norman Conquest, the third *Château-Gaillard Conference for European Castle Studies* was held at Battle, Sussex, on the site, and almost to the day, of the Battle of Hastings. The conference whilst proving a great success, 'inspiring historians to attempt a fresh assessment of the significance of the Conquest as a major turning point in English social and institutional history' (Saunders; in Parsons, 1978, p.1), also served to highlight an area of study which was worthy of more attention. It was realised that the physical means by which the Normans secured their hold on England - namely their castles - had received less analytical attention than they deserved, and plans were soon formulated to address this issue. It was decided that historians and archaeologists, working together, could usefully re-examine the processes whereby the Norman castle came to dominate the English landscape. The following year the *Royal Archaeological Institute* adopted the research project, and a study into the 'Origins of the Castle in England' began.

The project ran for 10 years and achieved a fair degree of success, instigating research into castle origin, development, morphology, and function. However, whilst 'it can be justly claimed that the Institute's research project...provided a stimulus for archaeological fieldwork and excavation amongst the earliest of our castles' (Ibid. p.8), it must also be noted that from the outset the project was not without its pitfalls. The research was led and governed by historians, who unfortunately set a tone and agenda for the project's fieldwork that was at odds with usual archaeological practice. Instead of allowing the archaeological research to be used as a tool to test, and perhaps disprove, the existing well-established theories surrounding castles, the project was intentionally manipulated to produce results that would support the traditionally accepted historical narratives. R. Allen Brown, in a lecture to the Institute in 1969, reminding archaeologists 'to remember who they are, [being only] specialists within the school of history'; and going on to state that he was concerned that archaeologists might 'join the ranks of those who saw elements of feudalism in Anglo-Saxon England and did not recognise the well-established case for the introduction of the knight, the castle and the fief into England by the Normans'. And furthermore, that as an historian, he was strongly against putting forward untried hypothesis as a basis for discussion (Brown, 1989, p.1).

It has been claimed that the Institute's project was successful 'in bringing together the historian and the archaeologist in...castle studies (Saunders; in Parsons, 1978, p.8). In the short term this may well have been true, but the eventual outcome of the 'Origins' project was that many archaeologists subsequently turned their attentions away from the study of castles, and the Norman period *per se*, and found other avenues for their work. Archaeological excavations continued at castle sites, but more often than not this fieldwork was carried out simply to enhance the monuments potential as a tourist attraction, whilst simultaneously providing artefacts for display; and it is only very recently that things have really begun to change. The formation in 1987 of the *Castle Studies Group* has served to attract a new group of archaeologists to the subject; whilst the growth of historical archaeology as a discipline has opened-up many new avenues for research. However, it is important to remember that bias still exists within the
Castellology discipline, and any archaeologist working within this field must be prepared to embrace both history and archaeology equally, or suffer the consequences.

**Historical Archaeology**

"The knowledge of fragments, studied in turns, each for its own sake, will never produce the knowledge of the whole; it will not even produce that of the fragments themselves."

Bloch, 1953, p.155

There is an important division within the field of archaeology between the study of periods without writing and the study of periods with writing, a division which separates 'Prehistoric Archaeology' from 'Historical Archaeology'. The obvious way forwards for any archaeologist working within Castellology, with the important emphasis it places upon working equally with history, is to approach the subject from the perspective of historical archaeology (i.e. the study of the material remains of societies with written records). Historical archaeology is often seen as a new discipline, but in reality, it is the legacy of a breakthrough in modern human science in the middle of the nineteenth century. 'In the antiquarian tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the boundary did not exist, since it was an impossibility. Antiquarian study was based on the idea that human history as a whole could be followed through texts; even Creation itself was known through the book of Genesis' (Andrén, 1998, p.1).

Thus the notion of a prehistory, encompassing a vast tract of time before the horizon of writing, was both a radical break with antiquarian thinking and the very foundation of archaeology as a modern science. 'Prehistoric Archaeology' was not created in isolation however, as with it came the creation of 'Classical Archaeology', which by its very nature is a professional 'Historical Archaeology'. 'The division into prehistoric and historic archaeologies can thus be traced back to the beginnings of modern archaeology' (ibid.).

Historical archaeology then, seems to offer a long-established and well-trodden path to any archaeologist attempting to work within the field of Castellology. Unfortunately though this path is fragmentary, often diverges, is full of twists and turns, and consequently is extremely difficult to traverse. Over the past two or three decades historical archaeology, in an attempt to escape from its perceived subservient role as the "handmaiden of history", in combination with its desire to raise its professional standing, has been the focus of much academic work. Historical archaeologists have attempted to construct a global synthesis for the discipline, and in the process have examined social and cultural processes, European expansion and colonialism, the mechanisms of domination and resistance, order and control, and the economic and political forms which were subsequently generated; in particular the spread of capitalism. Unfortunately however, instead of bringing about a world wide historical archaeology, this work has led to much fragmentation within the discipline (Funari, et al., 1999, p.2). The end result being the creation of a series of communities, each hermetically sealed from the next and regarding their own
credo as having been intellectually victorious (Johnson, 1999, p.26). The fragmentation making for obvious difficulties when attempting to work within the historical archaeology framework.

The fragmentation within historical archaeology has been blamed upon several disparate issues. Andrén suggests that the tendency to remain period or area specific within the discipline makes the topic difficult to assess in terms of its relationship to the general archaeological debate (1998, p.2). Moreland condemns the continual 'failure to consider the role of the written word in the construction of power and identity in the past' (2001, pp.105-6), and the 'failure to appreciate the full potential of written sources' (ibid., p.110). Whilst Johnson argues that the discipline has fragmented 'into an examination of particular contexts in particular ways' due to the lack of a common methodology or theory (1999, p.30). The idea that historical archaeology is destitute in terms of theory is a common notion, and many archaeologists have previously bemoaned this apparent lack, complaining that the discipline's academic debates are simply pale copies of the debates conducted in the prehistoric archaeologies (Andrén, 1998, p.2). The dearth of theory in historical archaeology could be deemed a serious problem, and as such deserves further discussion.

Prehistoric archaeologists would no doubt argue that the presence of written sources is a great advantage, since their archaeology is always dependent upon analogies in order to translate material culture into texts. Conversely however, the presence of texts can also be viewed as a great disadvantage, since their existence seems to leave little scope for archaeology by hampering the potential for archaeological analyses and interpretation. Indeed many 'archaeologists claim that it is precisely the presence of written sources that has led to the characteristic 'theorylessness' of many historical archaeologies, since writing appears to take on the same explanatory value as theories in "prehistoric" periods' (Andrén, 1998, p.3). If historical archaeology were truly being hampered by the presence of the written word, and was unequivocally failing in its attempts to develop practical and sustainable theories, then its usefulness in studying literate societies would be questionable. The truth of the matter however is that 'most theoretical perspectives can be applied in the field of historical archaeology...[and] it is thus scarcely possible to recommend certain theoretical perspectives as being particularly suitable for the historical archaeologies' (ibid., p.180).

To date, historical archaeology may not have developed into a fully unified academic discipline, having many hurdles to overcome before it attains this goal, but there can be little question that it has already made significant contributions to our understanding of literate societies – despite its inconsistency in theory and methodology. Andrén lists five methodological strategies currently employed in historical archaeology - each designed to avoid tautological results in studies of text-rich periods - all of which are yielding excellent results. The first emphasises its methodological role in prehistoric archaeology; historical archaeology, because of its access to texts, being perceived as a proving ground for archaeological method and theory. The second emphasises its complimentarity with history; historical archaeology being utilised to fill in gaps in text based historical narratives. The third emphasises the material dimension of existence; historical archaeology, concentrating upon the correspondence between artefact and text, reinterpreting history on the basis of a previously unknown material background. The
fourth emphasises the materiality of text; historical archaeology treating documents and writing as archaeological objects in themselves. The fifth emphasises the contrast between material culture and writing; historical archaeology, avoiding the confirmation of written evidence, instead creating a partly new and unique image of the past (Andrén, 1998, pp.181-2).

The above strategies demonstrate that historical archaeology is not simply confined to the study of the modern world (Orser, 1996, p.27), or to the study of colonialism (Leone & Potter, 1988, pp.1-22) or capitalism (Johnson, 1996). It is not simply a study of "the cultural remains of literate societies that were capable of recording their own history" (Deetz, 1977, p.5). Nor is it the bringing together of archaeology and written sources for particular periods of the past. Rather, historical archaeology contains the potential to exploit 'both objects and texts in the present for informing us about social practice in the past (Moreland, 2001, p.111). For the purposes of this study the second and third methodological strategies are the ones most likely to be employed, as attempts will be made to provide answers to questions that cannot be answered via contemporary written documentation, and the correspondence between castle and text will be scrutinised in an effort to reinterpret history on the basis of a previously unknown material background. Finally, the study will endeavour to embody Moreland's highly valid argument, that artefacts and texts are more than just sources of evidence about the past, because they had efficacy in the past, and will seek to determine the way in which they were used in the construction of social relationships and identities in the historically specific circumstances (Moreland, 2001, p.111).
"Credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly... who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Theodore Roosevelt, 'Man in the Arena' Speech
(Delivered: April 23, 1910)

It has been stated that ‘castles must not be studied in an historical vacuum’ (Coulson, 2003, Intro.), or in isolation from those who built them (Johnson, 2002). In order to appreciate the place, nature and true value of the castle in the Norman period then, it is necessary to examine the context in which they were constructed, both historical and cultural. For without the solid foundations of context for support, the castle cannot hope to stand-up as a military structure in its own right.

The Norman Achievement!

For centuries all those that have studied, or encountered their achievements, or the fragmentary remains of their culture, have held the Normans in the highest regard. They earned the respect of their contemporaries through their conquests and their martial prowess, and came to be admired by generations of historians for the ways in which they adopted, and often improved upon, the cultures and civilisations of the peoples they came to dominate. Historically, during the tenth century, they succeeded in acquiring the civilisation of the Franks, without losing any of their martial virtues, and knights from Normandy were abroad conquering lands in Italy – capturing Aversa in 1030, Apulia and Calabria in 1059 – and most of Sicily by 1072. They launched expeditions against the mighty Byzantine Empire on the mainland of Greece, between 1082 and 1084, and played a major role in the first crusade – annexing the principality of Antioch in 1098. Thus, by the second half of the eleventh century the Normans ‘were in the front rank of European civilisation, famous for their monasteries, their schools and their architecture...[whilst]...still unsurpassed in war’ (Davis, 1997, p.7). The achievement that most people associate with the Normans though is the Conquest of England, beginning with the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The conquest being ‘quick, complete and permanent, and as a result...the Normans became some of the richest people in Europe and their Duke was made a King’ (ibid., p.8). The Normans attributing these successful conquests to their innate martial valour; their achievements eventually setting them high amongst the ranks of the world’s famed empire builders. Of all their achievements however, they will most surely be remembered for the excellence of their army, their cunning adaptation and use of the feudal system, and the magnificence of their castles.
The Norman Army

The rise of Normandy as a powerful principality in the first half of the eleventh century was in-part paralleled by its immediate neighbours, Anjou, Flanders and Brittany; as in each of these 'proto-states' princes established powerful new infra-structures centered around castles, or other newly created seats of power (Rowley, 1999, p.32). What set the Normans apart from their would-be-rivals however was the fact that they had the foresight to take this development a stage further, reorganising their civil, ecclesiastical and military institutions; and of these it was their army that was to eventually place them leagues ahead of their contemporaries. Norman culture was born in battle and weaned on war, conquest and martial virtue forming the mainstay of society, and in the make-up of the Norman army can be glimpsed a reflection of the advanced battle skills of the Norman commanders gained through living in such a society; the army being designed to deal effectively with almost all eventualities.

The Norman army included amongst its ranks large numbers of highly skilled knights (miles), divided into two classes: landholding milites or mediae nobilitatis, who were vassals and leading followers, and landless gregarii or stipendiarii who served for wages. The knights were trained to fight as cavalry, with lance and sword, from the backs of nimble, specially bred and trained, war-horses (Hyland, pp.15 & 144; Bradbury, 1996, pp.84-88). In addition to which, the army included heavy and light infantry and the arrière-ban, or general levy of freemen, all skilled in the use of spear, bow and crossbow. The knights and heavy infantry wore a light metal helmet, conical in shape, with a nose-piece attached, a knee length byrnie or hauberk (a coat of chain mail with short sleeves) over a leather or quilted tunic (gambeson), with puttees on the legs, and carried a kite-shaped shield made of leather stretched over a wooden frame. The light infantry, on the other hand, consisting mainly of archers and crossbowmen, were lightly armoured in leather, as they needed to be highly mobile and effective from a distance. The whole was a testament to the notion of tactical flexibility; Nicolle stating that the arrangement of the Norman army made it ‘one of the most cohesive and effective fighting forces seen in the 11th century’ (1995, p.61). A sentiment echoed by Rowley, who states, ‘the value of efficient military organisation within the Frankish world should not be underestimated...[as]...the Norman dukes owed much of their influence to their strength in this department’ (1999, p.32).

The Feudal System

Over the years, of all the disputed topics concerning the Norman Conquest of England, it is the concept of feudalism that has been the most contentious. Morillo has succinctly defined the questions at the heart of this debate: ‘What did William introduce into England? Why did he introduce it? Did the introduction of whatever it was constitute a revolution for English society?’ (1999, p.23). Bloch, in his seminal work on feudal society, summarises the characteristics of European Feudalism as: a subject peasantry; widespread use of the service tenement instead of a salary; the supremacy of a class of specialist warriors; ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man; fragmentation of authority; and the survival within this of state and family as alternate forms of organisation (ibid.). This model is
generally termed the social definition of feudalism, and is clearly not what William introduced into England. Another model often proposed is the military definition of feudalism, in which it is a purely 'military service' rendered in exchange for a fief; normally added to which is the belief that only skilled soldiers could offer their services as knights, and that castles should be seen as playing a vital role in the overall scheme - clearly more akin to the system that William actually introduced, based upon the historical and archaeological evidence.

In the early 1990s, after years of debate, scholars finally settled upon the military definition of feudalism as the truest reflection of historical reality - with one proviso, that feudalism could not have been brought fully fledged from France. William instead improved upon the already present machinery of the Saxon system of governance, in an arrangement by which each man's obligations were far more clearly defined than those of his European neighbours (Poly & Bournazel, 1991; Barlow, 1999). The system functioned along the following lines: Barons, named tenants-in-chief, were granted their estates directly via the hand of the conqueror (each estate usually consisted of a unit of land created via an amalgamation of parcels of Saxon land, previously in the hands of any number of Saxon landowners), in return for which, the Barons owed service of a stated number of knights to the crown. The barons in turn sub-let parts of their estates to knights, named sub-tenants, who would if required fulfil the Baron's obligations. Here then was a revised form of feudalism that had as its principle obligation the allegiance of every man in the kingdom to the king first, and to his immediate overlord, or superior tenant, second. William almost certainly introduced this system out of military necessity, as it would have been necessary to maintain a reasonably large field army for several years after 1066 to ensure continued subjection.

The Castle

The Normans were a relatively short-lived cultural and political phenomenon – disappearing from the map in the mid-thirteenth century. Yet during their limited existence they managed to climb from a position of relative obscurity to the forefront of European civilisation, and their claim to a permanent legacy can be witnessed in many of the remains they left behind. The great abbeys, stylish churches and planned towns stand forever as enduring monuments to their creators, but one, above all, embodies the true spirit of the Normans – the castle. The Normans were by no means the first people to build castles, as castles first appeared on the European mainland in the late ninth and early tenth centuries following the collapse of the empire of Charlemagne, and the resulting collapse of the authority of central government in Western Europe. But the Normans were the first to fully appreciate their value, 'and built them in enormous numbers, in order to ensure the continued subjection of the peoples they had conquered' (Davis, 1997, pp.7-8).

When the Normans first arrived in England few of them could have had an intimate knowledge of the country that they had invaded, and although many of William's men had already successfully campaigned under his command, all were probably well aware that the conquest was somewhat of a gamble. The success of the whole campaign hinged upon the winning of time, so that a strategy of
settlement might develop (Platt, 1995, p.1). To that end, 'one of William's earliest tasks, after the
Conquest, was to provide a secure political and military base in England...' (Rowley, 1999, p.88). 'The
surviving records of the survey ordered by William I of the kingdom he had conquered, the Domesday
Book, provide us with a detailed picture of most of England in 1066 and 1085. From it, for the first time,
we can estimate the size of the population, at around two million' (Welch, 1994, p.120). As many as one
tenth of these people lived in towns, but the majority lived in the rural landscape, with 13,418 named vills
and 268,984 recorded individuals. William's army, on the other hand, numbered somewhere in the region
of 7000 men, many of whom were mercenaries, to be paid off and sent home at the earliest opportunity.
If William was not planning to rely solely upon strength of numbers to conquer England, subjugate the
populace, and take permanent control, then it follows that he had to have devised a strategy for the rapid
appropriation of territory, a means of securing quickly and permanently the many areas of land captured.
William's strategy was simple - he instigated the development and use of the most formidable tool of
conquest - the castle. McNeill states that, 'the Normans introduced into England, as part of their
conquest, a new kind of fortification, the castle' (1992, p.31), and it was this structure that was to firmly
anchor their conquest to English soil. By 1086 then, there were at least fifty castles in England for which
we have documentation, and many more that are without record.

The Norman Achievement?

'In England, and by English historians, few subjects have been studied for longer that the Norman
Conquest, and, regrettably, few, if any, have been more bent and twisted in the process of
misinterpretation, caused by unhistorical considerations and emotions.'

Brown, 1989, p.75

Outlined above is a somewhat selective, 'traditional view' of the Norman achievements. In truth
however great interest has always been shown in the so-called 'Norman Epic', and the subject has often
been at the centre of numerous, invariably conflicting, perspectives and interpretations, with each age
finding in it something relevant to apply to the constitutional, social and cultural issues of its day
(Chibnall, 1999). Unsurprisingly then, recent work upon a variety of Norman topics has led to the
questioning of the validity of many of these traditional viewpoints.

Military Prowess?

'Almost the only thing about the Norman Conquest that isn't controversial is the fact that the Normans
won the Battle of Hastings!'

Brown, 1980ii, p.284

There can be little doubt that the subject most often associated with the Normans is that of
warfare. Indeed, ever since the early chroniclers first extolled the virtues of Norman military prowess, the
topic has been all but inseparable from the folk themselves, and it could be argued that without this
martial aspect we would have a hard job identifying the Normans at all. It may therefore come as a surprise to learn that this aspect of 'Normanness' has recently been challenged, and is most evident in terms of the Conquest of England.

McLynn has argued generally against Norman superiority in terms of technology, military science and expertise, and more specifically, that contrary to popular belief, the Saxons did, in fact, have a very good idea of what they faced when they engaged their enemy at the Battle of Hastings. That the Saxons were, in reality, able to deal effectively with the heavily armoured Norman cavalry, and that Norman archers did not, as previously supposed, win the day for William at Hastings; Harold loosing simply because of an incredible run of bad fortune and some treachery from the Saxon elite (1988). Underwood has also argued that there were virtually no differences between Saxon and Norman weapons and protective equipment, and that the two sides had more in common than they had differences (1999). Bradbury suggests that the depiction of an English archer on the Bayeux Tapestry 'must caution us against stating categorically that the Anglo-Saxons had no archers at Hastings', and further 'that the evidence for the use of the bow in Normandy before 1066 is as slight as that for England' (1985, pp.21-2). Bradbury's first point is supported by historic sources, as according to Snorri Sturlusson, a thirteenth century Icelandic chronicler, the Anglo-Saxons used archery at the Battle of Stamford Bridge (Magnusson & Falsson, 1966, p.152); whilst the Worcester Chronicle states that the English were also quite capable of fighting from horseback, although it was not their usual custom (Thorpe, 1848-9, i, p.213). This point was picked up by Glover (1952) and Maitland (1960), who both argued for the use of cavalry by the Old English armies. The most controversial argument however comes from Bates, who opines that the Normans were merely the leaders of sections of a much larger migration of peoples from many parts of France, and as such should not be viewed as culturally outstanding, should not be accredited with any predetermined reasons for success, and should not be associated in any way with a supposedly unique Norman genius for war and conquest (2001, p.18).

A Feudal System?

In an article written in 1974, Brown objected to what she saw as the "tyranny" of the construct of feudalism. This concept was recently revived, leading to a move away from 'the dominance of feudalism in the military aspect, which Round...forced on historical studies' (Chibnall, 1999, p.79). In 1994, Reynolds argued that the debate on feudalism had previously been conducted on rather too narrow a front, with historians focusing overly upon military service and on a hierarchy of tenure and property rights, concluding that whilst vassalage and fief may be definable and comprehensible, they are not helpful to the understanding of medieval history; although she was willing to concede that "feudal" could have some meaning in reference to fiefs. Her argument was taken up by Bisson, who - concerned with power and the nature of lordship – rejected outright the notion of feudalism in favour of the acceptance of 'noble lordship' as the primary basis for social order (1996, pp.6-42). With the work of historians gravitating toward issues of 'lordship' at the time, the question of what was meant by 'feudalism', and whether it could ever have been imported became largely irrelevant and it was not long before the 'military
definition of feudalism' was either forgotten or rejected. As Holt states, 'we no longer seem to believe in feudalism, let alone the notion that it was established at a single stroke' (1987, pp.42-3). Thus the term 'feudalism' is no longer seen as a helpful label, Bates suggesting that we would probably do best to regard 'feudalism' and 'feudal society' as terms which were invented in modern times to make the study of the Middle Ages more difficult (2001, p.24).

Military Fortifications?

The traditional interpretation of the castle as a military edifice derived initially from historical accounts of the Norman Conquest, which portray the event as a ruthless military take-over. The castle occupying 'a similar place in the historiography of the conquest to that of the Norman knight: championed as a tool of victory by Normanists, and seen as an instrument of defeat by Anglo-Saxon apologists' (Liddiard, 2000i, p.3). The most acclaimed statement on castle-building is that written by Orderic Vitalis in 1125: 'to meet the danger the king rode to all parts of the kingdom and fortified strategic sites against enemy attacks, and the English, though brave and warlike, have very few of those fortifications which the French call castles (castella) in their land. It was this which made their resistance to the conquerors so feeble' (Chibnall, 1969, pp.218-19). As demonstrated in chapter 1 however, the 'military orthodoxy' surrounding castles has recently become a subject for debate, and the castle, once championed as the symbol of Norman military superiority, is now being approached from a variety of new and interesting perspectives. Indeed, as previously mentioned, castellologists are currently far more likely to interpret castles and their landscapes in terms of lordly display, peaceable power, iconography, symbolism, society, economy, politics, administration, or even folkish considerations, than from any kind of military perspective. A far cry indeed from Freeman's 'stem square tower, perched on its height, frowning over the city or guarding the entrance of the valley...the sign of dominion of the stranger' (1867-79, Vol.5, pp.646-7).

A Tainted Source?

'Never accept a theory without first checking the facts upon which it is based. Never accept a fact without locating the source from whence it sprang. Never accept a source without first sampling the water - if the water is not pure, then the theory will be tainted.'

Prior, 1999, p.10

One should be questioning at this point how it is possible to arrive at two such contrasting perspectives; the Normans, on the one hand, being extolled for their achievements and their superior martial qualities, and on the other, denigrated and labelled culturally inferior (Stenton, 1987). The truth is that much of our knowledge of the Norman achievements stems from a body of literature which has been passed down to us through the ages, and the fragmentary and often conflicting nature of this literature leaves it open to conjecture, leading to a variety of interpretations. Medieval archaeology - being 'a relatively new subject' (Aston & Burrow, 1982, p.123) - having little to offer on the topic (Rowley, 1997, 35
In order to arrive at a sensible discourse upon the Normans then, it is necessary to review some of this literature. This is not only essential in gaining an understanding of how current theories have evolved, but also serves to put these theories into their proper historical context. As there is a vast amount of material upon all manner of Norman topics, this review will concentrate primarily on the Norman Conquest of England, it being the best example of how theories, ideas and opinions have changed over the years.

The first writers to address the subject of Norman history and the conquest were the Normans themselves. Dudo of St-Quentin, a dean of the collegiate church of St-Quentin, Vermandois, became one of Duke Richard II's leading chaplains by 1025, and was subsequently commissioned to record the story of Normandy and its rulers. His version of Norman origins (De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum) became the master-narrative behind the work of every successive generation (Crouch, 2002, p.314). After Dudo came William de Jumièges (d. c.1080), a monk of the abbey of Jumièges, near Rouen. William continued Dudo's work, beginning writing as early as 1026 and finishing his work (De Gesta Normannorum Ducum) in the year 1069. Next came William de Poitiers (d. c.1080), a knight turned cleric, who became one of Duke William's chaplains in the 1050s, and was promoted to the archdeaconry in the 1060s. In the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, William began an account of the deeds of King William (Gesta Guillelmi Duci Normannorum et Regis Anglorum), of which an incomplete manuscript [up to 1076] survives, the missing books [up to 1079] being preserved, in part, by Orderic Vitalis's use of them (Crouch, 2002, p.319). Orderic Vitalis (d. c.1141), the son of a French priest, was born in Shropshire into the household of Roger of Montgomery, to an English mother, and was sent to Normandy in 1085 as a child oblate, to the Benedictine abbey of St-Evroult, southern Normandy. There he became a senior monk, noted for his literary abilities, beginning work on an 'ecclesiastical history' of the Norman church (Historia Ecclesiastica) around 1114, and continuing until his death, around 1141: a large part of this work is a history of the Norman people and its rulers. Lastly, mention must be made of William of Malmesbury (d. c.1143), the most prolific and, arguably, most distinguished of the Anglo-Norman historians. William was a librarian at Malmesbury abbey and a compulsive traveller and researcher. His first major historical works, compiled in the 1120's, are a paired secular and ecclesiastical history of England (De gestis regum Anglorum & De gestis pontificum Anglorum).

With so many excellent contemporary historians writing upon the subject of Norman history it would seem that modern historians have little grounds for complaint, yet this is not the case. Attention is frequently drawn to the numerous gaps in the sources, and the chroniclers, being God-fearing men, are often accused of interpreting events as expressions of God's purpose, causing them to distort their evidence to fit into some grandiose scheme (Bates, 2001, pp.26-7). The chroniclers are further arraigned on charges of bias, with historians claiming that the main purpose of their work was to justify William's bloody aggrandisement (Rain Patterson, 2002, p.9; Walker, 1997, p.91). The accounts are said to contain 'malicious distortions and other falsifications' and 'absurd exaggerations and allegations'; the details springing not from 'veritable fact but from legend' (Rain Patterson, 2002, pp.9-10). Dudo is often criticised for concentrating excessively upon Norman piety and Frenchness. William of Jumièges and
William of Poitiers stand accused of writing with the express intention of praising the Conqueror and justifying his actions, and to those ends, being overly selective in their choice of facts; their work being treated as little more than early propaganda (Bates, 2001, pp.27-8). Orderic Vitalis is frequently criticised for his highly selective use of quotations and allusions, gleaned from the work of his predecessor William of Poitiers (Chibnall, 1999, p.13; Liddiard, 2000i, p.4); whilst William of Malmesbury is accused of rewriting history to satisfy his personal religious beliefs. The Bayeux Tapestry is also viewed as propaganda: Tetlow arguing that the entire sequence of events is a fabrication, a fraud committed by William's talented eleventh century apologists (Tetlow, 1974), and Domesday Book, with the apparent objectivity of its statistics, is regarded as biased, since it was a record produced on William's orders (Bates, 2001, p.30).

It is often stated that history is written by the winners, and in this instance this certainly appears to have been the case, for it has been suggested that following the conquest the English people 'were at first too traumatised to attempt to write histories' (Chibnall, 1999, p.12). Thus the earliest recorded history of the Normans is invariably viewed as an unbalanced and biased account of events, firmly favouring the achievements of the Normans, whilst denigrating the achievements of the Saxons.

During the later medieval period, writers increasingly focused their attentions upon the linguistic and legal consequences of the Norman victory; 'and lordship, whether rightly or wrongly, was becoming increasingly associated with the conquest' (Chibnall, 1999, p.23). The obligations attached to the various forms of tenure, especially military tenure, became part of the everyday dealings of the law courts, and the legal records, amassed at the time for precedent, harboured facts that would later be twisted to form a new and distorted view of the effects of the Norman Conquest. 'Anglo-Saxonists' claim that during the later Middle Ages the English also regained their voice and subtly began to hit back at their 'oppressors'. Edward the Confessor was popularised, both as king and saint, and Alfred was proffered as a symbol of national independence, with other brief chronicle entries recording the bitterness and loss of the 'Saxon' dispossessed. It must be remembered however that, by this time, many of the writers were of mixed parentage, so the number of texts that can truly be considered a solid discourse upon the 'Saxon vs. Norman' topic is debatable. Rather the writings must be seen in context, as 'Anglo-Norman vs. Norman Institution', with the downtrodden of the day allying themselves with the Saxons of old.

In the heated political climate of the seventeenth century – born out of a study of the legal documents preserved from the Middle Ages – the concepts of feudalism and the 'Norman-Yoke' were popularised and soon took on added meaning for both Royalist and Parliamentarian alike. The proposed argument was that prior to 1066 the Anglo-Saxons had lived as free and equal citizens governed by representative institutions, the Normans later depriving the English of their liberties under the tyranny of an alien king and alien landlords. These arguments quickly became relevant to debates over constitutional rights and social reform and Sir Henry Spellman (d. 1641) and Sir Robert Cotton (d. 1631) traced many 'illegal abuses' back to the Normans and the Norman feudal system. Thomas Paine (1737-1809) went one stage further and attributed all of the problems that England experienced after 1066 to 'the French bastard and his banditti' (Rowley, 1999, p.12), firmly quashing any notions that the Norman
invasion may have simply been the second time in the eleventh century that a foreign king had taken the throne by force - an act which, in the long run, had made relatively little difference to lives of the general populace.

In the early nineteenth century, the story of the Norman Conquest became a key element in a neat linear version of English history often termed the 'Whig Interpretation'. The Whig Interpretation drew upon the biased narratives of previous generations and forged a new 'nationalistic' version of the past in which 'the Anglo-Saxons tended to become “us” and the Normans “them”, with William the Conqueror cast as a foreign tyrant winning a regrettable victory over clean-limbed Englishmen with marked liberal and Protestant leanings' (Head, 1995, p.7). This view found favour with romantic novelists of the day, and by the end of the nineteenth century the history of Saxon England had been transformed into an idyllic vision of a lost Saxon paradise, populated by the likes of Robin Hood and Hereward the Wake. Patriotic leaders emerging in the form of the unlikely figures of Godwin, Earl of Wessex, and Harold his son: 'with the result that to this day Harold is popularly regarded as a national hero, rather than an over mighty subject usurping the throne' (ibid., p.8).

Clearly then, over the centuries, perceptions of Norman history - and perceptions of the impact of the conquest upon Anglo-Saxon society - have altered dramatically. A process which is still ongoing, as new questions - spurred on by modern experience of, and concern with, social and cultural change, regionalism, gender relations, war, dismantling empires, and national identities - are currently being asked (Chibnall, 1999, Intro.). Interest now focusing upon such topics as the nature of lordship, people and races, frontier societies, family and gender, colonialism, general economic movements and art and architecture. The fact that there have been numerous interpretations of a single set of events is not surprising however, as it must be remembered that no historian writes in isolation from the work of his or her predecessors, and furthermore no historian can stand aloof from the insistent pressures, priorities and demands of his or her day. Far from being set in stone then, Norman history appears to change and reinvent itself with every successive generation, each - staying true to the maxim of the hermeneutical spiral – imposing upon it their own thoughts and beliefs, along with the up-held cultural values of the day.

**The Normans In Perspective**

"I have argued that the imposition of the present destroys the distinctiveness of the past. In so doing, we deny ourselves the possibility of understanding the past and of utilising this knowledge to challenge the naturalisms of the present."

Moreland, 2001, p.119

From the above discourse upon the historiography of the Norman Conquest two factors emerge: first, that attitudes towards the topic continually fluctuate, and second, that many of the texts written on the subject over the years may have severely distorted our understanding of the Normans themselves, of their conquest of England, and of the extent of their achievements.
Today, the vast majority of academics studying and writing upon the subject of the conquest, and upon other aspects of Norman history, are privileged to do so from the veritable comfort of 'western style' universities. Furthermore, most have never experienced the realities of conflict or war in any-way-shape-or-form within their lifetimes (except perhaps from the safety of their own armchairs, in the form of the somewhat surreal, televised episodes of the Falklands, Grenada, Gulf or Afghanistan conflicts). Considering then, the reality of comfortable living and the knowledge of a safe existence experienced by most modern academics, it is unsurprising that recent debates, upon all manner of Norman subjects, have tended to swing away from military or martial aspects and gravitate instead towards more culturally comprehensible topics. Buckley and Bozell, writing upon McCarthy, sum this phenomenon up nicely with the statement, 'a hard and indelible fact of freedom is that a conformity of sorts is always dominant...[the] freeman's principle concern [being], that it shall be a conformity that honours the values he esteems, rather than those he rejects' (1954, p.120). In light of this it could be argued that the present trend of denigrating the achievements of the Normans, whilst viewing them from a non-military perspective, is in fact simply the next link in a long chain of dialogues, disagreements and controversies that stretches down, unbroken, from the time of the Normans themselves; and that in the future the non-military viewpoint currently promoted in much of our literature will be seen simply as a 'product of our time' - assuming of course that there are changes in society.

In order to move away from current anti-military sentiment, it is obvious that a new approach must be taken toward the study of the relevant historical material. Fortunately, historical archaeology provides just such an approach. As previously mentioned, historians have often looked upon contemporary Norman histories as propaganda, or as biased, distorted, gap-ridden, highly subjective, or selective accounts. Historical archaeologists now condemn such viewpoints, Moreland stating that 'historians who focus only on the content of texts weave for...[the] people [who wrote them] a warped identity from a very denuded thread'; and further, that those who see 'texts simply as evidence about the past, and...as given, distorted or supplemental, can never produce...[a fully comprehensive] knowledge' (2001, pp.96 & 119). What historical archaeology is suggesting is that writing must instead be viewed as a technology of power, the written word being more than a 'neutral' recording system, as it was 'active, or activated, in social practice, in the construction of identity, in the production and transformation of social relations, and in the exercise of power. People in the past construct[ed] their identities through an engagement with memory, texts and the material world' (Moreland, 2001, p.96). Stories and texts provided communities with a common set of symbols that helped create the boundaries delineating and containing the community or society (Remensnyder, 1995, p.3).

Ever since the achievements of the Normans were first praised by their own historians, it has been assumed that they formed part of a unified common design, the saga of a distinct Norman race, but this is an oversimplification. The Normans were not a 'folk' as such, but a complex mix of Danish and Norwegian Vikings, Franks, Bretons and Flemings: Ritchie describing 'Duke William's Breton, Lotharingian, Flemish, Picard, Atresian, Cenomanian, Angevin, general-French and Norman Conquest' (1954, p.157). In fact, 'the more one studies the history of the Normans, the more one is bound to question who or what they were' (Davis, 1997, p.12). In the tenth century, the Carolingians called them
Nordmanni, a century later they were known as frencyscan (the ‘Frenchmen’) to the Anglo-Saxons, and as ‘Franks’ or ‘Celts’ to the Byzantines (Nicolle, 1999, p. 21), whilst by the twelfth century those that had settled in England called themselves ‘English’. There is little doubt however that the Normans thought of themselves as a nation apart (Davis, 1997, p. 49; Chibnall, 1999, pp. 125-36), the definition of a nation being ‘any considerable group of people who believe they are one’ (Galbraith, 1941, p. 13). An eleventh century monk of Saint-Wandrille, writing shortly before the conquest of England, stated that Rollo quickly reconciled ‘the men of all origins and different occupations, and made a single people out of the various peoples’ (Chibnall, 1999, p. 127). This raises the question, what served to bind the Normans together and provide them with a common identity? Here Davis provides an answer, suggesting that, ‘if peoples are formed, not by race or language...[then identity may be formed] by a common political, military or emotional experience’, adding the proviso, that they will ‘remain peoples only so long as that experience is kept alive, by handing on the story of it from generation to generation’ (1997, p. 15).

It can therefore be argued that contemporary Norman histories were indeed a form of propaganda, but rather than viewing these sources in a negative light, as historians have so often done, they should instead be seen in a more positive light, as texts constructed in an attempt to define and consolidate Norman identity. For it is ‘only when we recognise that people in the past conducted their social practice, and constructed their identities, through...the word in specific historical circumstances will...[history] fulfill its real potential’ (Moreland, 2001, p. 119). It is widely accepted that the Normans created an ‘origin myth’ for themselves when first establishing their identity (Davis, 1997, pp. 16-17 & 49-69; Chibnall, 1999, pp. 126-7). Dudo claimed that Rollo and his men came from ‘Dacia’, and were descended indirectly from a group of Trojans led by a certain Antenor (Dudo, 1865). Their later histories should thus be seen as a continuation of this tradition, the texts providing continuing social cohesion and a common identity. The Norman chroniclers were no doubt well aware of the fact that once a history has been written about a people, those people become a historical reality. Furthermore, as Guy of Amiens, William of Jumièges, William of Poitiers, Orderic Vitalis, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon and even Wace constructed their histories, almost entirely, around a framework of warfare and the Norman warrior ethos, there can really be very little doubt that the identity the Normans were seeking to establish was wholly martial in origin. War was central to the narrative sociopolitical story of the Normans. It was also central to their cultural history. Indeed, their martial secular culture may arguably be claimed to be, along with their Christian ideology, one of the two chief defining characteristics of their civilisation. Liddiard stated that, ‘Warfare was so central to notions of aristocratic [Norman] identity that it permeated every aspect of elite culture’ (2003, p. 7) - a factor beautifully illustrated by William’s personal seal, where he is depicted riding to war in armour, with shield and spear. This is how he saw himself, as prince and ruler, his power founded on military might, rooted in the horseback military culture of the camp (Crouch, 2002, p. 63; Carpenter, 2003, p. 74; Strickland, 2000, p. ix).

If contemporary Norman sources are, as suggested, viewed as positive statements about Norman identity, and current arguments are placed into context alongside the more traditional ones, a very different story of the Norman achievements tends to emerge.
Norman Military Superiority

Even where allowance is made for a certain degree of bias on the part of the Norman chroniclers, the briefest of glances at any of the contemporary narratives quickly reveals that the traditional view of Norman military might and superiority in the art of war is the most viable standpoint. The Norman army emerges from every contemporary account as a 'force-majeur par excellence'. It is not necessary here to rely solely upon these accounts however, as the facts speak for themselves. The Normans won the battle of Hastings. The Norman army, consisting of some seven thousand men, conquered a nation with a population of around two million. Military power made the conquest possible and continued to sustain the Anglo-Norman kingdom in its early years. Norman knights successfully conquered lands in Italy, Sicily and Greece, and played a major role in the first crusade. The Bayeux tapestry vividly depicts scenes of careful preparation for the conquest, the wholesale transportation of horses, differing arms and technologies, and the use of castles, 'all of which illuminate Norman military might and the quality of the Conqueror's leadership' (Brown, R.A., 1980, p.269).

A careful reassessment of the sources, both contemporary and modern, equally provides the reasons for the veritable success of the Norman army. Firstly, the Norman army was better trained than its contemporaries. Norman and Pottinger suggest that the vital difference between the Norman and Saxon armies was that the Normans trained both in peacetime and war, unlike the Saxon housecarles who only served in time of war (1979, pp.29-30). Secondly, the Norman army was more flexible. The English had no cavalry, whilst mounted knights formed the mainstay of the Norman army (Koch, 1978, p.60; Carpenter, 2003, p.73); and as mounted warfare takes a huge amount of training, Norman society was far more militarised than the English. The Norman army was additionally superior because dismounting knights, trained as cavalry, could fight equally well on foot (Bradbury, 1996, p.86). The truth here is that a force that could fight on horse as well as foot was superior to one that could only do the latter. The Norman army also contained large numbers of archers and crossbowmen (Norman & Pottinger, 1979, pp.29; Koch, 1978, p.60); the shields and bodies of the English depicted on the Bayeux tapestry bristle with Norman arrows, whilst only one English bow-man is shown (Carpenter, 2003, p.73). Thirdly, the Norman army was better equipped. The Normans carried finer swords, with highly polished steel blades, (Norman & Pottinger, 1979, p.30), and utilised superior, long, kite-shaped shields, which offered better protection than the circular Saxon types (Nicolle, 2002, p.115). In conclusion, as Brown suggested, the Norman army was successful because of its 'superior military techniques and technologies' and 'superior generalship' (1980ii, p.284).

A System of Governance

"Feudalism is a good word, and will cover a multitude of ignorances."

Maitland, 1960

If the concept of a military feudal system is unconditionally rejected then we are left with a quandary - how did William maintain control? Control not only over the country that he had invaded, but
also over his own Norman lords. It seems ludicrous that the concept of the feudal system should be rejected thus, especially when upon its removal historians generally fail to offer an alternative model as a system for governance. Why has the notion of ‘feudalism’ been questioned at all? The answer seems to lie with the simple matter of a badly applied ‘umbrella terminology’. Sir John Spelman invented the word ‘feudal’ in 1639, when tracing many ‘illegal abuses’ back to the Normans and their political system. The “feudal system” first appeared in the writings of Adam Smith in 1776, with “feudalism” proper emerging around 1839 (Chibnall, 1999, p.79). Originally, the terms were utilised as conceptual tools for interpreting a number of separate, but interconnected, medieval structures and practices. Problems later arose however, when historians attempted to simplify matters by melding these disparate elements together into what they saw as a coherent and intelligible whole: the term ‘feudalism’ being utilised as a skin to hold the entire construct together. Modern historians are therefore right to argue that ‘feudalism’, as such, did not exist, but are wrong to think that no coherent system of governance existed per se.

History clearly demonstrates that William introduced into England a new political system centered on military considerations, and it is highly likely that this system was constructed around the already present machinery of the English Royal Government. However, the system was not, as many have argued in the past, a rigid schematised pyramid, with the king at the top, his lords beneath him, and their knights below them. Nor was it the system of tenure and law that evolved in the twelfth century. ‘Rather, it consisted of numerous personal relationships, which could cut across one another, and which might involve many and varied obligations. A wealthy member of the Norman aristocracy would certainly acknowledge William as his lord and render him service, including providing a contingent of warriors when requested. But this lord might also become a vassal for other property which he held. Such multiple relationships would normally impose no more stress on their participants than do numerous personal and professional obligations which most of us inevitably enter into during our modern-day lives’ (Bates, 2001, p.24). Lordship and vassalage were a type of ‘social cement’ through which the powerful in society made arrangements, which we would now recognise as contracts, agreements or treaties. In this way Norman society was ‘a society organised for war...[and] it is impossible to dissociate warfare and military tactics from social history as it is architecture’ (Brown, 1980, p.13).

The Castle

As previously mentioned, the most widely acclaimed statement on castle building is that written by Orderic Vitalis in 1125. Liddiard cautions against the use of Orderic’s statement as a prop to support the militaristic view of castles however, arguing that his approach is overly simplistic in nature, and that he may have been drawing upon the lost conclusions of William of Poitiers’ Gesta Guillelmi when writing. Therefore, he continues, the comment ‘should be seen within the context of a piece of writing with the chief aim being the eulogising of William the Conqueror, and not necessarily an accurate picture of events...[or] a commentary on nation-wide castle building in the period 1066-1070’ (2000i, p.4). Most historians firmly adhere to an opposing belief however, arguing that Orderic’s statements, far from being oversimplifications, are actually part of the most accurate account of Norman history; whilst Orderic
himself is seen as the most remarkable of the chroniclers (Davis, 1997, p.15; Chibnall, 1999, 2001 & 2003 [In: Liddiard, 2003]; Albu, 2001, pp.180-213; Bates, 2001). ‘The range of his interests and the vividness with which he presented his material are truly remarkable...[as] is his desire to tell an accurate and unbiased story’ (Bates, 2001, p.29). If then, as suggested above, Orderic’s work is instead viewed in a more positive light, its principal concern laying with establishing Norman identity, it conversely becomes an invaluable source on the art of Norman castle building. ‘Castles in war occupy many pages of the Ecclesiastical History. To Orderic and his contemporaries in Normandy the importance of castles for both attack and defence was almost axiomatic...Orderic saw...castle-building as a normal process in conquest and the suppression of rebellion’ (Chibnall, 2003, p.123 [In: Liddiard, 2003]).

There is no need to rely wholly upon Orderic’s work to establish the military importance and use of the castle in England by the Normans however, as attention can be drawn to other contemporary sources. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry [D], sub anno 1066, states ‘Bishop Odo and Earl William stayed behind and built castles far and wide throughout this country, and distressed the wretched folk, and always after that it grew much worse.’ In addition, the Laud Chronicle (E), sub anno 1086, states ‘he caused castles to be built, which were a sore burden to the poor’. Another good example coming from William of Poitiers, who wrote ‘the King pursued his march into diverse parts of the kingdom, everywhere making dispositions as he pleased...he placed capable castellans with ample forces of horse and foot in his castles, men brought over from France in whose loyalty no less than competence he could trust. He gave them rich fiefs in return for which they willingly endured hardship and danger’ (Chibnall & Davis, 1998).

Pounds suggests that, ‘it is important to realise that the England of the years following the conquest was not a peaceful realm, where the rule of law was enforced and the King’s writ ran everywhere. It was, by contrast, violent, bloody and disorderly...we must think...of fearful men seeking to control a rebellious land under the threat of hostile invasion, men ruthless and rapacious, driven by repressions and barbarous cruelties, conquerors in many ways inferior to the conquered’ (1990, p.10). For instance, during the “Harrowing of the North” the Normans carried out a scorched earth policy, and William slaughtered anyone who stood in his path, regardless of age or sex. Crops and livestock were burnt and villages destroyed. Contemporary accounts estimating that between 10,000 and 20,000 people starved to death as a direct result of the ensuing famine (Cruickshank, 2001, p.18). As the Conqueror himself said, ‘I have persecuted (England’s)...native inhabitants beyond all reason. Whether gentle or simple, I have cruelly oppressed them; many I unjustly disinherited; innumerable multitudes...perished through me by famine or the sword’ (Chibnall, 1969, p.286). Seemingly then, these were ‘barbaric times’ in which military considerations were of paramount importance, and during which, the castle likely took centre stage as a decisive tool for both oppression and defence. In light of this, castles in this study will be viewed primarily as military structures, which were introduced by the Normans to subjugate the populace, and to ensure that any land captured was subsequently held, in perpetuity. In the words of Brown, ‘the castle’s role in war was the most obvious, the most romantic and basically the most important’ (1976, p.172).
CHAPTER 3 - MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS

“Previous writers have judged that the exact reasons behind a castle’s location were either military (a classification usually based on twentieth-century tactical principles), or are unrecoverable given the nature of the sources.”

Liddiard, 2000ii, p.169

In order to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis it is necessary to establish a framework against which the positions of castles in the landscape can be tested and understood. This framework cannot be derived solely from twentieth century tactical principles however, as these principles, considered in isolation, are basically far too modern in origin. To construct a valid and acceptable framework, it is instead necessary to draw upon long-standing strategic and tactical principles and upon other traditional military stratagems: the products of many ages and cultures. Each principle selected on the basis that it is known to have formerly affected decisions concerning the siting of fortifications in the landscape. Historic military manuals, texts and treatise contain references and allusions to many such principles and stratagems, and their study affords the production of a workable, practical framework.

The most obvious starting point for such a study would be to examine any surviving Norman military treatise. Unfortunately however, despite the fact that Norman chroniclers produced vast amounts of literature - Davis stating ‘that they could never have stopped talking or writing about themselves’ (1997, p.15) - it appears that no such works were ever penned. Almost every nation, martial enough to have warranted study by military historians, produced military manuals; especially those associated with the term ‘Empire’. The manuals document the military thinking, technical abilities, strategies, tactical ideologies and theories of the day. The ‘Warring States’ period in ancient China (400-200BC) produced Sun Tzu’s ‘The Art of War’, the Greek ‘Empire’ spawned Xenophon’s ‘Cyropaedia’ (430-355BC), the Roman Empire generated Frontinus’ ‘Strategemata’ (late 1st century AD), whilst the Byzantine Empire inspired Emperor Maurice’s ‘Strategikon’ (582-602AD). The ‘Norman Empire’ however, seemingly failed to produce any such texts.

Initially then, to those unfamiliar with military history and theory, it would appear that the lack of Norman military treatise would pose an insurmountable obstacle to progress – the Norman Empire being an enigma in not having any military manuals to claim as its own. Fortunately, however, ‘the laws of strategy are eternal’, and consequently have changed very little down through the ages (Maguire; in Hope, 1910, p.297). Although the technology of warfare may have progressively evolved throughout history, its underlying principles, in reality, remain largely unchanged, and as such much of the experience of the past is still relevant today (Halsall, 2000, p.3). Subsequently, all of the surviving historic military treatise can be said to contain ‘enduring truths’, each one highly relevant to discussions upon warfare, no matter what the period in question. It can therefore be argued that although the Normans themselves never produced any kind of military manual, when selecting sites in the landscape
for the erection of their castles their engineers must, out of necessity, have adhered to lines of reasoning similar to those presented in the various historic military manuals dating from other periods - assuming of course that their castles were intended to fulfil military functions.

In this chapter, a selection of military manuals from a wide range of historic periods will be examined in an effort to establish the strategic and tactical criteria applicable to the siting of military fortifications in the landscape. Principles, in fact, that any military engineer would consider when selecting a site upon which to erect a fortification. As these criteria tend to remain eerily consistent throughout the ages they provide the perfect framework for assessing the locations selected for Norman castles. It is worth mentioning here that no study of this sort has previously been attempted, because until very recently perceptions of the castle as a military edifice remained largely unchallenged, so such a study was unwarranted.

The Sources

In order to establish an accurate and comprehensive set of criteria upon which to base the framework for study, a wide range of specialist military texts were consulted. The vast majority of these texts were studied in the library of The College of Royal Engineers, Chatham, whilst copies of others were obtained from the library of The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. A short summary of the career of each author consulted is given below, along with any relevant dates, the title of the author’s work, and a bibliographical reference to a translation [if applicable]. The summaries have been included as an aid to assist in establishing a picture of the time in which each text was written, thereby placing each work into its proper historical context.

China

Sun Tzu (first half of the 5th century BC)

*The Art of War* (Translated by Cleary, 1998)

Sun Tzu was a mysterious warrior-philosopher who wrote *The Art of War* during the so-called ‘Warring States’ period in ancient China, which lasted from the fifth to the third century BC. This was a time of protracted disintegration of the Chou (Zhou) dynasty, which had been founded over five hundred years earlier by the political sages who wrote the *I Ching*. ‘The collapse of the ancient order was marked by destabilisation of interstate relationships and interminable warfare among aspirants to hegemony in the midst of ever-shifting alliance and opposition’ (Cleary, 1998, p.27). Sun Tzu’s work was - and remains - highly influential, being translated many times over. The translation by Cleary is based upon a standard collection of commentaries by eleven interpreters, some of whom will be mentioned independently during this study. These include Cao Cao (155-200BC), Li Quan (Tang Dynasty, 618-906AD), Jia Lin (Tang Dynasty, 618-906AD), Du You (735-812AD), Du Mu (803-852AD), Zhang Yu (Sung Dynasty, 960-
1278AD), Ho Yanxi (Sung Dynasty), Mei Yaochen (1002-1060AD), and Wang Xi (Sung Dynasty, Early 12th Century AD).

The Roman Empire

Sextus Julius Frontinus (late 1st century AD)
Strategemata (Translated by Bennett & McElwain, 1925)

Frontinus was probably born in 35AD, and was almost certainly educated at the Alexandrian School of Mathematics. He was three times elected consul, first in 73 or 74AD, again in 98AD and a third time in 100AD. After his first incumbency of this office, he was dispatched to Britain to act as provincial governor where he succeeded in subduing the Silures, a powerful and warlike tribe from Wales. He returned to Rome in 78AD, and probably wrote his treatise on the ‘Art of War’ at this time. He is best known for his De Aquis, a work on the aqueducts of Rome - holding the office of ‘Water Commissioner’ himself for a time.

Hyginus Gromaticus (2nd century AD)
De Munitionibus Castrorum (Translated into French by Lenoir, 1979)

‘Hyginus’ is a Latinised version of a Greek name, and ‘Gromaticus’ means ‘the surveyor’. Three authors are known under this name: Hyginus ‘the first’ wrote De Limitibus and De Condicionibus Agrorum, at the time of Trajan; Hyginus ‘the second’ wrote De Constituendis; and Hyginus ‘the third’ was the author of De Munitionibus Castrorum. The third Hyginus hardly ever uses the third person, so the work appears to be a compilation, and although no sources are ever mentioned, it may derive from Polybus.

Flavlius Renatus Vegetius (late 4th Century AD)
Epitoma rei Militaris (Translated by Clark & Phillips, 1985)
& De re Militari (Edited by Lester, 1988)

Vegetius was a high ranking officer of state serving under the Christian Emperor Theodosius I ‘the Great’ (379-395AD) at the end of the fourth century AD. He was perhaps born in the eastern part of the empire, or in one of the border provinces (Pannonia of Illyria) and, as he himself states, ‘journeyed widely throughout the empire’ (Shrader, 1979, p.280). He held office as comes sacrarum largitionum, or imperial finance minister, his duties rapidly acquainting him with many military matters, including recruiting, equipment and training. Epitoma rei Militaris became one of the most influential treatise in the western world from Roman times to the nineteenth century.
France & Sweden

Count Maurice de Saxe (1696-1750)
Reveries of Memoirs upon the Art of War (First Published in 1732; Published in English in 1787)

Saxe was a French Commander-in-Chief during the War of Austrian Succession. In 1732, allegedly over the course of thirteen feverish nights, he wrote his book Reveries of Memoirs upon the Art of War. The book quickly gained renown in military circles, and in many ways epitomises eighteenth-century warfare.

Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban (1633-1707)
The Attack and Defence of Places (In: Duffy, 1996)

Vauban was a French soldier, a military engineer, and an expert on fortification and siegecraft. He spent his life alternately building fortifications for Louis XIV, or conducting sieges in the king's name. His book (in 2 volumes) was a model of its kind, and a starting point for the 'enlightenment of military thought' in general.

Philippe Maigret (1727)
Traité de la Sûreté et Conservation des Etats par le Moyen des Forteresses (In: Duffy, 1996)

Maigret was the principal engineer to Charles XII of Sweden on his fatal Norwegian campaign in 1718. Consequently, Maigret ended his military career in the comparatively lowly position of resident engineer at Péronne. However, he is credited with drawing up one of the most complete and convincing statements on the purposes of fortification.

The Prussian Empire

Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831)
On War (Translated by Howard & Paret, 1984)

Clausewitz is credited as being one of the greatest western military thinkers of all time. His early military career was somewhat unfortunate however, as he was taken prisoner by the French for his part in the disastrous campaign of 1806. Following his incarceration, he was appointed to the General Staff in Berlin, where he helped Scharnhorst, his revered master, rebuild the Prussian army. During this period he developed his talents as a theoretician, and by 1811 he was instructing the Crown Prince (later, Friedrich Wilhelm IV) on war. In 1812, he found himself fighting for Napoleon in Russia. During the campaigns of 1813-15 he was active as a staff officer, and in 1817 he assumed administrative control of
the Berlin Staff College, or Kreigsakademie. Rising to the rank of general, it was there that he produced his great work *On War*.

**Captain Reinhold Wagner**

*Principles of Fortification*  
(Translated by Shaw & Pilkington, 1872)

Wagner rose to the rank of Captain in the Prussian Engineers. His book, *Principles of Fortification*, contains information on tactical fortification as taught in the German Military Schools after the experiences of war in 1870-71. The philosophical spirit in which the book is written, the careful manner in which strategy and tactics are considered in relation to fortification, and the ways in which the various relationships existing between defensive works and the troops who use them is covered, gives it a particularly high value.

**England**

*The Manual of Field Fortification – Military Sketching and Reconnaissance*  
(MFF)  
(British Army Publications, 1871)

*The Field Service Pocket Book*  
(FSPB)  
(His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1914)

These training manuals were produced by, and for, the British Army. Both were designed to act as 'handy and concise books of reference for use on active service, at manoeuvres, or on instructional exercise' (from the introductions of both manuals). *The Field Service Pocket Book* is still actively studied, and its contents utilised, by soldiers in the modern British Army.

**From Military Manuals, Texts and Treatises:**

**On the Strategic and Tactical Importance of Terrain**

All of the works consulted, without exception, agreed upon one vitally important issue, that the possession of certain types, or areas, of terrain are of the utmost importance to the winning of any war. Zhang Yu states that ‘advantage in a military operation is [gained by] getting help from the land’ (Cleary, 1998, p.133), and Wang Xi echoes this statement with the words 'you cannot overlook the question of the advantages of terrain' (ibid., p.147). Vegetius, on the same topic, writes that 'the nature of the ground is often more of consequence than courage (Clark & Phillips, 1985, p.112). The most complete statement on the subject comes from Wagner however, who writes 'the importance of a place, whether it be for a
particular theatre of war, or for the whole country, may be so great that possibly the result of the campaign, or even that of the whole war, may depend on its possession' (Shaw & Pilkington, 1872, p. 5).

As previously demonstrated, in any given expanse of land there are two types of location that are important from the military's perspective - the first are 'tactically significant' and the second are 'strategically significant'. Dealing firstly with the former, 'a defensive position will normally include a number of localities of special tactical importance. The efforts of the defender must be directed in the first instance to occupying and securing these points, so that they may form pivots upon which to hinge the defence of the remainder of the position. The defences at these localities should be arranged so that they give each other mutual support' (FSPB, 1914, p. 88). Furthermore, 'in the presence of an enemy, tactical considerations, e.g. favourable ground for defence in case of attack, concealment, facilities for protection, and economy in outposts are of the first importance' (ibid., p. 43). Tactically significant locations then, are points in the landscape which are topographically or geologically strong, where, due to the nature of the terrain - such as a high, naturally defended, rocky outcrop - a weaker force could hold its own against a potentially stronger aggressor.

Clausewitz, on strategically significant locations, writes 'rivers which traverse the country, mountain ranges, and other natural obstacles will serve [well] as...[strategic] defensive lines' (Howard & Paret, 1984, p. 402). Wagner takes this argument a step further, stating that 'those places which are [the] most important strategically, because of their inherent advantages [must be] secured as “fortified places”...The permanent fortifications [at these] special points may be either fortresses or forts...Securing the possession of such points [is] indispensable for carrying on the war' (Shaw & Pilkington, 1872, p. 6). Strategically significant locations then, are points in the landscape which, due to their geographical positions, afford control of key strategic elements - such as mountain passes, defiles, rivers, fords and road networks. The ancient Chinese named these strategic locations ‘grounds of contention’:

'A ground of inevitable contention is any natural barricade or strategic pass' (Du Mu; in Cleary, 1998, p. 149).

'A ground of contention is ground from which a few could overcome the many. The weak could strike at the powerful’ (Cao Cao; ibid., p. 87).

'It is not advantageous to attack an enemy on a ground of contention; what is advantageous is to get there first' (Cao Cao; ibid., p. 151).

The modern British Army tends to refer to such locations as “pivotal” or “nodal points”, and ‘the result of the campaign, or even that of the whole war, may depend on...[their] possession’ (Wagner; in Shaw & Pilkington, 1872, p. 5). As previously stated, this study argues that the Normans had a sound understanding of the principles of military strategy, and further, that it is not what they built, but where they built, that led to their eventual success. As ‘strategically significant locations’ are clearly the most important considerations, both in real terms and in terms of this argument, this thesis will primarily concentrate upon these locations. As ‘the army that finds its ground flourishes, and the army that loses its
ground perishes. Here the ground means a place of strategic importance’ (Li Quan; in Cleary, 1998, p.90).

On the Importance of ‘Defended Places’

The most significant point raised, concerning the construction of ‘defended places’ in connection with ‘strategically significant’ locations, comes from Wagner. Wagner states that ‘however small the [strategically significant] number of places may be, the possession of which...[is] essential from the...point of view for carrying on a war successfully; to hold them by troops alone would not be admissible, because it would entail too much division and frittering away of the army’ (Shaw & Pilkington, 1872, p.3). It is obvious then that such places must be secured with the minimum number of troops, to leave as many men as possible available for active operations in the field. ‘The means by which this can be affected is via the construction of fortifications’ (ibid.). The Normans, it seems, were well aware of this point, and constructed their fortifications to great effect: ‘To meet the danger the king rode to all parts of the kingdom and [there] fortified strategic sites against enemy attacks, and the English, though brave and warlike, have very few of those fortifications which the French call castles in their land. It was this which made their resistance to the conquerors so feeble’ (Chibnall, 1969, pp.218-19).

Once fortifications have been constructed, further advantages are gained, as the fortifications serve additionally ‘as entrenched camps, or war-harbours, for the safe sheltering and formation of active forces...as arsenals, manufactories of war materials, or war dockyards...as magazines and depots, or marine depots, for the safe storage of war materials...as points governing the use of communications...as barriers...[and] as bridge-heads, as well as securing...passage in the presence of an enemies army (Wagner; in Shaw & Pilkington, 1872, p.3). Moreover, they ‘cover a country, and subject an enemy to the necessity of attacking them, before he can penetrate further’ (Saxe, 1787, p.84). Sun Tzu writes that ‘the rule of military operations is not to count on opponents not coming, but to rely on having ways of dealing with them; not to count on opponents not attacking, but to rely on having what cannot be attacked. The I Ching says, “if you take on too much without a solid foundation you will eventually be drained leaving you with embarrassment and bad luck”’ (Cleary, 1998, p.23). There can be little doubt that with a chain of fortresses constructed at strategically significant locations in a landscape, in combination with the additional benefits that each fortress confers, any army would have ‘strong enough foundations’ from which to confront their enemy.

Finally here, Vegetius reminds us of the disadvantages of not having such fortifications: ‘this valuable art is now entirely lost, for it is long since any of our camps have been fortified either with trenches or palisades. By this neglect our forces have been often surprised, day and night, by the enemy’s cavalry and have suffered severe losses. The importance of this custom appears not only from the danger to which our troops are perpetually exposed who camp without such precautions. But also, from the distressful situation of an army, which after receiving a check in the field, finds itself without a retreat to which to retire, and consequently at the mercy of the enemy’ (Clark & Phillips, 1985, pp.27-29).
On the Siting of 'Defended Places' - generally

Tactical Locations and Localised Considerations

All of the manuals and treatise consulted contained much advice on the proper selection of sites for the erection of fortifications. In terms of the most suitable tactical locations, *The Manual of Field Fortification* states 'a good military position...should command a view of the movements of an assailant...[and] should not be commanded in front or on the flanks by any higher ground' (1871, pp.148-9). To which can be added, 'a fortress...must offer a full view of the countryside' (Clausewitz; in Howard & Paret, 1984, p.398). High ground then is preferable as, 'a flat country will not furnish so many good positions as a hilly one' (MFF, 1871, p.149). In situations where hills are lacking however, good positions may still be found, 'particularly where natural obstacles exist, such as villages, woods, marshes, hollow roads, and enclosures' (ibid.). Rivers also figure in this equation, as Vegetius states, 'all cities and castles must be warded, either by kind, or by the craft of man's hand, or by both...By kind, the city may be set on a high hill, or on a slope, or in a place where can be seen the ebb and flow all about, or in a mire, or where a fresh river may run all about - all these are wards of a kind (Clark & Phillips, 1985, p.160). But 'in a country where rivers are wanting, there are nevertheless other situations to be found, so strongly fortified by nature, that it is next to an impossibility to invest them; and which being only accessible in one place; may at a small expense be rendered in a manner impregnable, for in general, I look upon the works of mother nature to be infinitely stronger than those of art: what reason therefore can we plausibly assign for neglecting to make proper use of them?' (Saxe, 1787, p.85).

In addition to stating where fortifications should be constructed, the military manuals also elaborated on locations, or conditions, that should be avoided. Hyginus states that, 'unfavourable positions...should be avoided as all costs...[so that there is neither] a ravine, or valleys, by which one could approach the camp without being seen' (Lenoir, 1979, p.22). Whilst Vegetius suggests that 'an army should not encamp in summer near bad water, or far from good, nor in winter in a situation without plenty of forage and wood. The camp should not be liable to sudden inundations. The avenues of approach should not be too steep and narrow lest, if vested, the troops should find it difficult to retreat; nor should it be commanded by any eminences from which it may be harmed by the enemies weapons' (Clark & Phillips, 1985, p.82).

The manuals also consider access to local 'amenities' - important to the well-being of one's troops - and the selection of sites to aid with the general health of the army. *The Field Service Pocket Book* states that 'the site [for a camp] should be dry and on grass if possible...avoid[ing] steep slopes, large woods with undergrowth, low meadows, the bottom of narrow valleys and newly turned soil; as all are apt to be unhealthy': further adding that 'ravines and watercourses are dangerous sites' (1914, p.44). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the healthiness of a site was one of the single most important considerations for determining the position of a fortress. Pestilential and swampy sites were notorious for the rate at which they killed off their garrisons and the prospecting engineers tried to shun districts where they noticed that the inhabitants wore yellow or greyish complexions and died young, and where the
livers of animals were pallid and corrupt (Duffy, 1996, p.30). Vegetius also makes this point, stating that ‘a camp, especially in the neighbourhood of an enemy, must be chosen with great care. Its situation should be topographically strong, and there should be plenty of wood, forage and water. If the army is to continue in it any considerable time, attention must also be had to the sanitation of the place (Clark & Phillips, 1985, pp.27-29). William the Conqueror would have been well advised to adhere to such considerations, as it is known from the accounts of William of Poitiers that whilst encamped at Dover the Norman army was struck by an outbreak of dysentery – some of William’s troops actually dying from the disease. Orderic Vitalis recorded that the outbreak was so severe that many men suffered from its effects for the rest of their natural lives (Chibnall, 1969-80, ii, p.180). Disease was a constant threat to large armies billeted in confined quarters, as in addition to the problems of human sanitation, there were hundreds of tons of horse manure to cope with, posing a serious risk to health (Rowley, 1997, pp.47-8).

The most complete statement on the selection of sites for the construction of fortifications comes from The Manual of Field Fortification, which succinctly covers all of the above points: ‘A camp should be well supplied with water within a convenient distance and secure from interruption by the enemy. It should also afford the means of fuel, so as to prevent the necessity of its being brought from a distance. The neighbourhood of a camp should furnish as many supplies as possible for the support of the troops. A camp should be situated upon dry, healthy ground, and should of course be accessible from the road’ (1871, p.152).

Strategic Considerations

Several of the manuals and treatise consulted, contained advice on the strategic positioning of fortifications in the landscape. Clausewitz, however, emerges as the leading authority on this subject: ‘Having examined the roles of fortresses, let us now consider their location. At first glance, the matter looks extremely complicated, given the wide variety of determinants, every one of which is modified by its locality. But...it will be clear that all requirements can be satisfied simultaneously if all the largest and wealthiest towns in the area of the operational theatre are fortified – those that lie on the main highways linking the two countries, and especially those located at ports and gulfs, on major rivers and in mountains. Major towns and major roads always go together, and both have a natural affinity for the great rivers and the seacoast. These four requirements will, therefore, coexist easily and cause no conflicts’ (Howard & Paret, 1984, p.400). Similarly, Wagner suggests that ‘the choice of place to be fortified must be made, like most other engineering questions, with reference to the “best possible use of the ground” (terrainbenutzung). The most secure basis for the choice rests therefore on the geographical configuration of the country: The great centres of habitation – cities, and the systems of communication between them. Both are means by which war can be carried on, and their possession is consequently essential in a greater or lesser degree’ (Shaw & Pilkington, 1872, p.2).
On the Siting of ‘Defended Places’ - specifically

This chapter has so far considered what can be termed ‘non-specific criteria’ for the siting of fortifications in the landscape. The sources covering such diverse points as: the advantages, or dangers, inherent in certain types of terrain; the significance of centres of habitation; routes of communication and supply; the importance of health and sanitation; and the necessity of access to supplies of potable water, fuel and sustenance. However, the sources also contain numerous examples of ‘specific criteria’ that relate directly to the various points already discussed. These ‘specifics’ are of utmost importance to this thesis, and as such are examined thoroughly here.

On Higher Ground

‘Ordinarily, an army likes high places and dislikes low ground, values light and despises darkness.’

(Sun Tzu; in Cleary, 1998, p.132)

‘In Cappadocia Gnaeus Pompey chose a lofty sight for his camp. As a result the elevation so assisted the outset of his troops that he easily overcame Mithridates by the sheer weight of his assault [In 66BC].’

(Frontinus; in Bennett & McElwain, 1925, pp.98-101)

Sun Tzu states that ‘the rule for military operations is not to face a high hill, and not to oppose those with their backs to a hill’ (Cleary, 1988, p.122). Sentiments echoed by Du Mu, who writes ‘when opponents are on high ground you shouldn’t attack upward, and when they are charging downward you shouldn’t oppose them’ (ibid.). Frontinus records an event in 47BC that highlights the advantages of higher ground: ‘when Gaius Caesar was about to contend with Pharnaces, son of Mithridates, he drew up his line of battle on a hill. This move made victory easy for him. Since the darts hurled from higher ground against the barbarians charging from below, straight-away put them to flight’ (Bennett & McElwain, 1925, p.101). Vegetius covers a similar point when discussing camps: ‘a camp, especially in the neighbourhood of the enemy, must be chosen with great care...the camp must not be commanded by any higher ground from whence it might be annoyed by the enemy’ (Clark & Phillips, 1985, p.29). In a book entitled ‘Fortifications for Officers of the Army and Students of Military History’, Lieut. Henry Yule summarises the advantages of higher ground, ‘the strength [of a military position on a hill] is attained in proportion as: 1st - The defenders position is protected from the observation and missiles of his assailant; 2nd - The assailants access to the position is difficult and obstructed; 3rd - The defenders position affords him every advantage in the observation of his assailant, and in the direction of his troops and weapons against him’ (1851, p.2).

Higher ground then, tends to be the location of choice for the construction of military fortifications, as it affords natural protection, offers many advantages in conflict - ‘it is convenient for your fighters if they are heading downhill’ (Mei Yaochen; in Cleary, 1988, p.132), especially when employing missile weapons - permits the ready observation of an advancing enemy, allows for inter-
visibility between fortifications, and enables the fortification to visually dominate the region. ‘As far as the choice of terrain is concerned, the first choice goes to a camp on a gentle slope towards a height; positioned so that the portus decumanus [gate] is placed at the highest point, so that the camp dominates the country’ (Hyginus; in Lenoir, 1979, p.22). Furthermore, ‘high grounds are exhilarating, so the people are comfortable...Low ground is damp, which promotes illness, and makes it hard to fight’ (Mei Yaochen; in Cleary, 1988, p.132).

The manuals also warn against allowing the enemy access to higher ground. Frontinus records that ‘Lysimachus, one of the heirs to Alexander’s power, having determined on one occasion to pitch his camp on a high hill, was conducted by the inadvertence of his men to a lower one. Fearing that the enemy would attack from above, he dug a triple line of trenches and encircled these with a rampart. Then running a single trench all around the tents, he thus fortified the entire camp. [Later] Having thus shut off the advance of the enemy, he filled in the ditches with earth and leaves and made his way across them to higher ground [323-281BC] (Bennett & McElwain, 1925, pp.40-43). Hyginus issues a similar warning: ‘Unfavourable positions...should be avoided at all costs; lest any mountain should dominate the camp which the enemy could use to attack from on high, or see from a distance what is going on in the camp (Lenoir, 1979, p.22). Thus ‘when selecting the site [for a camp] the necessity for occupying the chief points from which snipers can fire into the camp and for forming a defensive perimeter around it should be borne in mind’ (FSPB, 1914, p.44).

This obvious, and yet often overlooked, point about the advantages of higher ground, demonstrates the fact that even though the years, countries, authors, and languages might change, tactical ideologies and strategic considerations, in reality, alter very little. If you have the higher ground, militarily, you have the advantage. It must be stressed however, that it is not simply a case of selecting the highest hill upon which to build a fortification, as there are generally other considerations uppermost in mind. For example, there is little point in constructing a castle on a hill simply because it is the largest prominence in the area, if that hill happens to be miles away from the town which the fortification is intended to protect, or miles away from the nearest potable water supply. The general rule of thumb appears to be then, to utilise the highest ground available, in an area which has already been selected for usurpation or defence - which is itself not overlooked by higher ground again. It therefore follows that ‘higher ground’ alone is not a strategic consideration - but rather one of tactical advantage - as there is already generally another reason for the decision to construct a fortification at a given location.

On Mountains and Passes

‘Whenever you station an army to observe an opponent, cut off the mountains and stay by the valleys.’

(Sun Tzu; in Cleary, 1998, p.130)

‘If...you hold an essential pass, you can make it impossible for opponents to get to you. As it is said: “One cat at the hole, and ten-thousand mice dare not come out; one tiger in the valley, and ten-thousand deer cannot pass through.”

(Du You; in Cleary, 1998, p.101)
Mountain and valley passes have always played an important role in warfare. Frontinus makes their virtue very clear: 'Against a countless horde of Persians, three hundred Spartans seized and held the pass of Thermopylae which was capable of admitting only a like number of hand to hand opponents. In consequence, the Spartans became numerically equal to the barbarians, so far as the opportunity for fighting was concerned, and being superior to them in valour, slew large numbers of them. Nor would they have been overcome, had not the enemy been led around to the rear by the traitor Ephialtes the Trachinian, and thus been enabled to overwhelm them [In 480BC]' (Bennett & McElwain, 1925, pp.104-5). Therefore, ‘if the location and direction of a chain of mountains make it a suitable line of defence, it will be necessary to block its roads and passes with minor forts especially built for that purpose’ (Clausewitz; in Howard & Paret, 1984, p.400). As, 'in mountainous areas...fortresses...can open or close whole networks of roads that converge upon them, and thereby dominate the whole area to which the roads give access. Thus, they serve as a veritable buttress for the whole defensive system' (ibid., p.399). Furthermore, 'well sited fortresses [can] endow natural obstacles with additional strength. In mountain valleys a single fortress can hermetically seal the only path of access, and seal the pasturelands from enemy foragers (Vauban & Maigret; in Duffy, 1996, p.22).

Fortifications were also often built on the enemies side of the mountains: 'For many powers, the maintenance of a fortress on the far, or enemy, side of a mountain chain was the only means of keeping a military presence in a distant province...The defence of such isolated strategic footholds demanded a great deal of garrisons...[and] for that reason...one or more major strong-points... [were often planted on one's] own side of the watershed, to act as a rearward barrier and a base of operations' (Vauban & Maigret; in Duffy, 1996, p.23). Clausewitz cautions against this practise however, arguing that 'a fortress on the enemy's side of a mountain range is poorly placed because it is difficult to relieve. [Whereas]...if it is located on the near side, the enemy will be hard put to besiege it, for the mountains will obstruct his lines of communication' (Howard & Paret, 1984, p.403).

The mountain or valley pass then, is the first ‘specific’ example of a strategically significant location - or ‘pivotal point’ - to be included in any list of criteria for the siting of fortifications in the landscape. In a passive or defensive role a castle constructed in, or adjacent to, a pass tends to grant the occupiers control of the route-way, and they are thus able to block the passage of any would-be assailants, thereby protecting their lands from harm. In an active or aggressive role a castle could be constructed at the enemy’s end of the pass, thus enabling the occupants to observe the movements of their potential assailants, and if necessary launch attacks against them. An added bonus in this case being that the naturally occurring physical obstacles are further endowed with additional strength. Interesting also is the idea that two such fortifications should be built, one, as it were, on the 'home' side, and one on the 'away' side, to act in concert with each other for mutual support.
On Supplies and Supply Routes

'If a position is to be occupied for any length of time it should, of course, afford the means of supplying water, fuel and provisions.'

Manual of Field Fortification, 1871, p.150

The necessity of supplies in wartime is self-evident. It is essential to ensure that one's own army is well provided for whilst conversely ensuring that the enemy receives no provisions whatsoever. One of the first rules of war is that these provisions should come from the enemy, as the 'transportation of provisions itself consumes twenty times the amount transported' and 'if the terrain is rugged, it takes more than that' (Cao Cao & Zhang Yu; in Cleary, 1998, p.62). Cutting off an enemy's supplies then, is a prime consideration in any campaign as it serves to weaken the opposing army whilst strengthening one's own. Wang Xi states that you should 'first occupy a position of advantage, and then cut off their supply routes by special strike forces, and they will do as you plan' (Cleary, 1998, p.152). Zhang Yu takes a similar line, stating 'a skilful martialist ruins plans, spoils relations, cuts supplies, or blocks the way, and hence can overcome people without fighting' (ibid., p.73). Cao Cao and Li Quan adding, 'cut off their supply routes, guard their return routes, and attack their civilian leadership' (ibid., p.105).

Enemy supply routes can be severed via the construction of fortifications adjacent to roads and rivers. This yields great strategic advantages, as food, water, materials, and the munitions of war can be safely transported to one's own troops, whilst conversely ensuring that the enemy receives none. 'If there are many roads in an area, and there is free travel that cannot be cut off, this is what is called "trafficked ground"' (Zhang Yu; in Cleary, 1998, p.149). 'Trafficked ground should not be cut off, so that the roads may be used advantageously as supply routes' (Wang Xi; ibid., p.151). The Chinese writers references to 'trafficked ground' being especially important here, as they imply that the optimum locations available for taking control of existing road networks are to be found in areas where many roads converge.

On Lines of Communication

'If there is a division among the ranks of the enemy, so that there is no coherent chain of command, then they will fall apart by themselves'.

(Du Mu; in Cleary, 1998, p.74)

'All ranks are responsible for doing everything in their power to keep the means of communication intact.'

(Field Service Pocket Book, 1914, p.59)

As with supply routes, good routes of communication are imperative for successful military operations. Traditionally, fortifications have been used to great effect in maintaining, or severing, these routes. Wagner states that, 'for freedom of communication...points in a system of communications are essential, the occupation of which would influence their use for considerable distances...[and] the most important of these, are those which pass the greatest natural obstacles (rivers, swamps,
mountains)…towards which the greatest number of communications converge, as generally happens at
important river crossings, whence as a rule, roads branch off into important towns. These latter are
therefore also essential as junctions of communications, either for concentration of bodies of troops, or for
bases of operations for armies, enabling them to act in several different directions' (Shaw & Pilkington,
1872, pp.2-3). ‘A well-stocked stronghold...effectively shorten[ing]...[the] lines of communication'
(Vauban & Maigret; in Duffy, 1996, p.22).

All of the military manuals consulted contained advice on the proper siting of fortifications in
order to influence communications routes. Hyginus suggests that ‘one must chiefly look out for a road to
pass along the side of the camp’ (Lenoir, 1979, p.22). The Field Service Pocket Book agreeing, stating
that ‘depots should be near good roads’ (1914, p.43). The Chinese writers also concur, further suggesting
the use of ‘intersecting ground’. ‘Intersecting ground means the intersections of main arteries linking
together numerous highway systems: occupy this ground, and the people will have to go with you. So if
you get it you are secure, if you lose it you are in peril’ (Ho Yanxi; in Cleary, 1998, p.149). Clausewitz
gives the most complete statement however: ‘We suggest that fortresses constitute the first and foremost
support of defence...where fortresses are located along the defender’s lines of communication...as real
barriers. These fortresses block[ing] the roads, and also, in most cases, the rivers on which they are
located. It is not so easy as one might think to find a serviceable detour to bypass the fortress...If the
terrain is at all difficult, the slightest deviation from the road can often cause delays worth a whole days
march. This can be of great importance if the road is used repeatedly. The extent to which a blockage of
river traffic will affect operations is clear enough... A fortress...must block one of the main roads and
must effectively cover an expanse of 15 to 20 miles’ (Howard & Paret, 1984, p.395-7). The construction
of fortifications adjacent to road and river networks thus enables full control of the communications
routes, effectively meaning that an enemy has little chance of launching a surprise attack, or - in occupied
territory - of organising and mobilising an opposing force.

On Rivers

‘Rivers are of the utmost importance in war, as they have a great influence upon military operations.’

(Manual of Field Fortification, 1871, p.143)

‘Nowhere can a fortress serve so many purposes or play so many parts as when it is located on a great
river. Here it can assure a safe crossing at any time, prevent the enemy from crossing within a radius of
several miles, command river traffic, shelter ships, close roads and bridges, and make it possible to
defend the river indirectly – this is, by holding a position on the enemy’s bank. It is clear that this
versatile influence greatly facilitates the defence of a river and must rank as one of the essential elements
in warfare.’

(Clausewitz; in Howard & Paret, 1984, p.399)

Beyond lines of communication, rivers are of further importance. Rivers act as barriers and ‘a
skilful defender could derive much profit by combining the peculiar properties of fortresses and river
barriers. He could secure the best bridges and fords and intercept the roads which followed the bank,
thereby endangering the flank and rear of the enemy who was rash enough to have passed the river at
some other place’ (Vauban & Maigret; in Duffy, 1996, p.25). Also, ‘on rivers, or narrow straits, a fortress
could deny a useful crossing to the enemy, and compel water-borne foreign trade to stop and pay dues’
(ibid., p.22). There are thus many inherent strategic advantages to be gained by building one’s
fortifications close to rivers. These include: gaining control of the river as a means of communication and
supply; the securing of all river crossings (be they bridges or fords); the interception and control of roads
which follow the river banks (the river essentially becoming a strategic barrier, effectively repelling
enemy crossings); and the control of all waterborne traffic. Furthermore, rivers can aid in the defence of
the fortification itself, as Saxe explains:

‘we shall find it most prudent and advantageous to have them [fortresses] erected at the junction of two
rivers, because in such situations the enemy will be obliged to divide his army into three distinct bodies,
before he can be able to invest them, one of which may be repulsed and discomforted, before it can be
succeeded by the others: two sides of your fortress will likewise always remain open, till the blockade is
complete, which cannot possibly be done in a single day; neither can the necessary communication
between the divisions of his army be kept up, without the use of three bridges, which will be exposed to
the hazard of those sudden storms and inundation’s which usually happen in campaign season. Moreover,
in being thus master of the rivers, one thereby obtains command of the whole country: one may divert
their course, if occasion shall require it; may be readily furnished with supplies of provisions; may have
magazines formed, and ammunition, or other sorts of military stores transported to you with ease’ (1787,
p.84).

Despite the apparent usefulness of rivers however, there are also inherent dangers in being so
close to water. Some of the manuals go into detail upon this issue: ‘In a river basin your armies can be
flooded out, and poison can be put into the streams’ (Jia Lin; in Cleary, 1998, p.131). ‘It also means that
your boats should not be moored downstream, lest the enemy ride the current right over you’ (Du Mu;
ibid.). Therefore, ‘unfavourable positions…should be avoided at all costs…[so that there is not…a
torrent nearby, the sudden swell of which could flood and annihilate the camp (Hyginus; in Lenoir, 1979,
p.22). Frontinus provides an example of such an event: ‘Lucius Metellus, when fighting in Hither Spain,
diverted the course of a river and directed it from a higher level against the camp of an enemy, which was
located on low ground. Then when the enemy were in panic from the sudden flood he had them slain by
men whom he had stationed in ambush for this very purpose [In 143-142BC]’ (Bennett & McElwain,
1925, pp.226-7). It is apparent then, that no fortification should be constructed within a river basin, or
upon the very low ground adjacent to a river, lest it be flooded - either on purpose (via an enemy) or
through natural circumstance. In addition, constructing fortifications downstream - if the stream is to be
used as a source of drinking water - could lead to the water being poisoned by an enemy. The most
tactically advantageous ground for the construction of fortifications associated with rivers then, is on an
area of higher ground close to, and overlooking, the river, and upstream if possible.

Apart from the obvious danger of being flooded out when constructing fortifications close to
rivers, another important issue needs to be addressed. ‘A good military position should…be perfectly free
and uninterrupted by ravines, marshes or other impassable obstacles [such as rivers] which would prevent
the free circulation of troops from one part of the position to the other...because... in that case the enemy
might attack and beat one part of the defensive force before the other part could come to its assistance’
(MFF, 1871, p.148-50). In a similar vein, even though ‘a fortress will be twice as useful if it lies on the
coast, on a stream or great river, or in the mountains...if a fortress cannot be located directly on a river, it
is better not to place it in the immediate vicinity...otherwise the river will cut through and interfere with its sphere of influence (Clausewitz; in Howard & Paret, 1984, p.403).

On Potable Water Supplies

'As the health of the force depends largely on the purity of the water provided, everything possible must be done to ensure an ample supply of pure drinking water'.

(Field Service Pocket Book, 1914, p.52)

'When Marius was fighting against the Cimbrians and Teutons his engineers on one occasion had heedlessly chosen such a site for camp that the barbarians controlled the water supply. In response to the soldier's demands for water, Marius pointed his finger toward the enemy and said: “there is where you must get it.” Thus inspired, the Romans straightaway drove the barbarians from the place [In 102BC]'

(Frontinus; in Bennett & McElwain, 1925, pp.174-75)

An old Tamil proverb states, "If you have planted a tree you must water it too". In other words, if men are stationed in one location for any length of time, then they must be amply supplied with water. The Field Service Pocket Book states that 'a daily average of 1 gallon per man is sufficient for drinking and cooking purposes. A horse, bullock or mule drinks about 1½ gallons at a time. In standing camps, an average allowance of 5 gallons should be given for a man and 10 gallons for a horse...Each mule or ox drinks 6 to 8 gallons. Each sheep or pig 6 to 8 pints. These are minimum quantities' (1914, p.52). Putting this into terms of a castle garrison, if a castle is manned by 20 men - the size of an average garrison based upon the proportions of many motte and baileys - and each man has a horse, then the castle must be supplied with approximately 300 gallons of water a day, which is a surprisingly large amount. It is often argued that potable water is more of a tactical consideration, but once the vast quantity of water involved is extrapolated, it is obvious that it must instead have formed one of the most important strategic considerations - 'he who controls the water wins the war'. Water is a resource which has been much underrated in the past when looking at the locations selected for castle erection. As Hyginus states, 'the camp...should have, on one side of it, or the other, a river, or a spring (Lenoir, 1979, p.22).

On Woodland and Marsh

'Large impenetrable forests and marshes should be avoided; for, although they make life difficult for any besieging enemy, they tend to interfere adversely with the fortresses sphere of influence.'

(Clausewitz; in Howard & Paret, 1984, p.403)

Woodland, despite being an invaluable commodity, providing timber for building and wood for fuel, can conversely prove dangerous to any army that encamps, or builds, too close to the trees. Hyginus states that 'unfavourable positions...should be avoided at all costs; [so that] there is not a nearby forest which could hide the enemy' (Lenoir, 1979, p.22). Furthermore, in addition to an approaching enemy being obscured from vision, they could also set the woods alight. Frontinus records such an event: 'When
the camp of the Volscians had been pitched near bushes and woods, Camillus set fire to everything which could carry the flames, once started, up to the very fortifications. In this way he deprived the enemy of their camp [In 389BC] (Bennett & McElwain, 1925, pp.326-7).

Marshy and swampy areas often afford good protection, but there are several major drawbacks in their usage as positions for fortifications. Swamp fortresses enjoy the advantage that they can be attacked only at a few points and the strength of the marsh fortress increases with every yard that the besieger has to cross. However, a swamp fortress suffers from the disadvantage of being unsuited to sorties, and is generally easier for the enemy to blockade. Whilst it may be completely deprived of its watery protection by summer drought or winter frost, and the worst feature of all is that such areas often harbour disease (Vauban & Maigret; in Duffy, 1996, p.23).

On the Military Importance of Towns and Fortified Places

As outlined above, towns are the hubs of communications networks; Vauban and Maigret both agreeing that ‘major towns...[are] nearly always important military objects, if only because they...[are] sited almost by definition on nodal points of communication’ (Vauban & Maigret; in Duffy, 1996, p.27). In addition, towns also contain supplies for one’s own troops: ‘We suggest that fortresses constitute...protection for large and prosperous towns...because large and prosperous towns, especially commercial ones, are an army’s natural sources of supply, which is therefore, immediately affected by their possession or loss’ (Clausewitz; in Howard & Paret, 1984, p.395). Thus, ‘it is well worth while to fortify rich cities...since their wealth had to be protected against the enemy, and because these places nearly always stood on important avenues of access’ (Vauban & Maigret; in Duffy, 1996, p.22).

In friendly territory then, ‘the large towns of a district offer the greatest assistance to an army, both giving shelter to the troops, and safe storage for their provisions and war materials, partly by themselves, partly by the military establishments of all sorts found in them. Their possession is therefore more or less essential for the organisation of armies, as well as for their administration and maintenance’ (Wagner; in Shaw & Pilkington, 1872, p.2), whilst in enemy territory, towns must be closely guarded, lest the citizens rise up against the invaders. Towns are therefore a major strategic consideration in any military campaign.

On the Distances Between Fortifications

Saxe, Vauban, Maigret, Clausewitz and Wagner all wrote upon the subject of the positioning of fortresses in relation to one another. These arguments have not been included here however, as they are, for the most part, rambling and inconclusive discourses, that are overly concerned with ‘patterns’ of fortresses (e.g. ‘should fortresses be distributed evenly, or in groups’; ‘is a geometric pattern better than a line of fortresses’; ‘should fortresses be placed in one or several rows’; or ‘should they be arranged as on a checkerboard’). All of the sources seem to agree however, that fortresses, or castles, should not be
more than half a days journey apart - by horse. The Field Service Pocket Book contains a table of ‘rates of movement in the field’ (1914, p.37). For a mounted rider the distances given are: Walking - yards in a minute = 117; miles per hour - including short halts = 3½; minutes required to traverse one mile = 15. Trotting - yards in a minute = 235; miles per hour - including short halts = 7; minutes required to traverse one mile = 8. It therefore follows that the appropriate distance separating fortresses, or castles, lays somewhere between 16 and 30 miles apart (based upon a ride lasting four hours).

The Norman use of cavalry was critical to their success. If the castle was the instrument by which the Normans consolidated their grip on England, the task was aided by the use of the horse. The horse transformed the castle from a means of passive defence into an instrument for controlling the surrounding countryside. A mounted garrison stationed at a castle - based on the above figures - could obviously dominate a relatively large area. Thus, castles formed secure bases from which territory could be controlled (Rowley, 1997, pp.66-7).

On Medieval Artillery

In discussions on castle defence, and the relationship between castle and nearby ‘higher ground’ in terms of a safe distance away, much is often made of the ranges that medieval weaponry and artillery could shoot or hurl projectiles. Often however, the distances given are wildly inaccurate. Historically, the exact distances are unrecorded, but later medieval military manuals offer some clues, and modern reconstructions of medieval weaponry affords some approximations of possible ranges.

Beginning with hand-held weapons, medieval warfare was largely dominated by the use of the shortbow, the longbow and the crossbow. The shortbow could achieve a range of approximately 200 yards (Oakeshott, 1960, pp.293-4), the longbow approximately 250 yards, and the crossbow, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, approximately 100 yards - rising to 220 yards in the thirteenth century with improvements in design (Bradbury, 1997, pp.146-50).

Prior to the introduction of the cannon, artillery pieces could be divided into three basic categories: those that worked by tension, by torsion, or by counterpoise. The most basic tension based engine was the ‘springal’. The springal relied for its propulsion on the tension of a bent beam of wood. There were two types of springal, in both the beam was winched back and then quickly released, but in one the tip of the beam struck the rear end of a missile set on a platform before it, the impact discharging the missile, whilst in the other a cup was fixed at the end of the beam to hold a projectile. Reconstructions have shown that these could shoot approximately 200 yards (Liddiard, 2000, p.7). A more accurate tension based engine was the ‘ballista’, which was essentially a giant crossbow, the propulsion being provided by a large horizontal bow (Gravett, 2000, p.47). The ballista was used to pick off individual defenders on the ramparts, and had an effective range of approximately 165 yards (Liddiard, 2000, pp.6-7).
The most widely used torsion based engine was the 'mangonel', which was basically the earliest form of catapult. The mangonel relied for its propulsion on the torsion of a tightly twisted rope. A skein was set horizontally and a stout beam inserted into the middle before twisting the skein and so forcing the beam up vertically against a padded crossbar. The end of the beam was furnished with a cup, and the whole forced down by a winch (Gravett, 2000, p.49). The mangonel could achieve distances of approximately 180 yards. However, the most feared siege engine before the advent of cannon was the 'trébuchet', which relied on counterpoise for propulsion. There were two types of trebuchet, the earliest form was the traction trebuchet, and the later the counterweight trebuchet. The traction trebuchet consisted of a long beam (or set of beams bound together) pivoted between a pair of uprights. Ropes were attached to one end of the beam and a sling to the other. A stone was placed in the sling and a group of men hauled on the ropes and so pivoted the beam. At the critical moment the sling opened and released its missile. The counterweight trebuchet, which appeared in the Mediterranean in the late twelfth century, worked on the same principal except that a box filled with earth, sand, stones or lead was substituted for the muscle power of the men (Gravett, 2000, pp.49-50).

Reconstructions have shown that a traction trebuchet could hurl a fifteen-pound missile over 190 yards with the accuracy of a modern mortar (Liddiard, 2000, p.7), whilst the larger counterweight trebuchet could hurl stone balls weighing about 100-200lbs about 300 yards (Gravett, 2000, p.51). There is some debate over the date of the introduction of the trebuchet into Western Europe. Gravett suggests that it appeared in the west in the early twelfth century (2000, p.49), but Liddiard has demonstrated that dates anywhere between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries are commonly given (2000, p.7). The most recent survey shows however, that while there is clear evidence for trebuchets being used in the thirteenth century, there is little firm evidence to confirm when they first made their appearance in European siege warfare (Hill, 1973, pp.99-144; Gillmoor, 1981, pp.1-8).

The average maximum effective range (or mean distance) of all these weapons then, is around 200 yards. Thus, in later chapters, if a castle is said to be ideally 'tactically located', one of the considerations taken into account will be the fact that the castle is not overlooked by higher ground within 200 yards. Conversely, 'if it is argued that a castle is compromised militarily by virtue of the fact that it is overlooked by higher ground, this refers to a situation where any attacker would have gained a significant advantage had they placed siege weapons within 200 yards of the castle' (Liddiard, 2000, p.7).

The Criteria Established!

Part three of The Manual of Field Fortification deals specifically with the issue of military reconnaissance. The sub-headings of the section clearly illustrate the factors that any engineer, from any age, involved in the construction of fortifications, would have been forced to consider. These are 'Topographical Reconnaissances', 'Reconnaissance of a Road', 'of a River', 'of a Wood', 'of a Position', and 'of a Camping Ground'. The section also covers such diverse topics as the nature of defiles, supplies, water, towns and villages, the population, the enemy, bridges, fords and marshes, and the extent to which
rivers freeze - all of which have been outlined above. In chapter one of this study there was a discussion on why the Normans constructed castles, if the points raised during that discussion are combined with the above criteria - which in effect details where castles were [or should have been] constructed - the considerations applied to the satisfactory construction of a fortress, or castle, may be summarised as follows:

1. **Strategic Considerations** - "a reason, or reasons, for a fortress, or castle, to exist", which may include one or more of the following:

   a. to control and protect a border, or border area;
   b. to command lines of communication and supply, particularly river crossings, roads, defiles or passes;
   c. to dominate a locality or region of perceived value - such as a commercial centre, rich agricultural land, or a resource-producing area;
   d. to provide a secure base from which field armies may operate, or a place of refuge in times of adversity.

2. **Tactical Considerations**

   a. Defensibility - this is enhanced by the presence of natural obstacles, such as steep slopes, cliffs, rivers, marshes or shorelines. Where such features are not available, they may be provided by the construction of ditches or moats.
   b. Security - the site should not be overlooked, particularly by higher ground, or be within the range of currently available missile weapons and artillery, and ideally should provide good visibility, hence a common preference for dominating areas of higher ground.
   c. Accessibility - while it is essential to exclude hostile forces, it is also important to ensure relatively easy access for friendly troops and supplies, and, in case of emergency, an escape route. Ready access to potable water is also vitally important.
   d. Practicality - there are a number of practical considerations that any military engineer needs to take into account when constructing fortifications. These include ready access to suitable construction materials, firm foundations upon which to build, a reliable water supply, and the selection of a well-drained, 'healthy', site.

'The fundamental requirements (including strategic purpose) and practical essentials of fortress construction...[all being], to a greater or lesser extent, constrained by local and/or regional geological factors' (Halsall, 2000, pp.3-5).

The above considerations then, constitute factors or elements that can be looked for when seeking to determine whether or not a castle has been situated in the landscape with military objectives in mind. In the past, similar considerations have been applied haphazardly to the study of castles, but these considerations were derived mainly from twentieth-century tactical principles, rather than from the works.
of generations of great military strategists and tacticians. Having thus established a practical workable framework of strategic and tactical principles, against which the positions of castles in the landscape can be tested and understood, these considerations can now be systematically applied to the castles in the chosen study areas.
'Neither rashly nor unjustly, but after taking council and guided by equity I have crossed the sea to enter this land, of which my lord and kinsman King Edward made me his heir, on account of the great honours and numerous benefits which I and my ancestors conferred on him and his brothers and their men; also because, of all those belonging to his line, he believed me to be the most worthy and the most able to help him while he lived or to govern the kingdom after his death.'

Duke William of Normandy, in a letter written to Harold Godwinson on the 13th of October 1066 (William of Poitiers; Chibnall & Davis, 1998, p.121)

Towards the Consolidation of Norman Control

Following Norman victory at Hastings on the 14th of October 1066 — and a circuitous march through the counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire, resulting in the fall of London - William was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey on Christmas day 1066. After his coronation William remained in England until March 1067, during which time, according to William of Poitiers, he received English submissions, made laws (including confirming to London the laws which it had enjoyed under Edward the Confessor), meted out justice and ensured that a firm discipline was maintained within the ranks of his large army (Chibnall & Davis, 1998). He forbade his men to drink in taverns, in order to prevent the kind of troubles that would follow, whilst ordering them to keep within the law, and to refrain from killing and rape; setting up severe punishments for those who disobeyed. There can be little doubt that during this time his thoughts must also have turned to the rest of the country, and what was to be done there in order to consolidate his grip on the entire kingdom.

It is often stated that when William left for Normandy - to embark upon his triumphal procession - he placed England into the care of his most trusted lieutenants. The closest of these were his two half-brothers, Bishop Odo of Bayeux and Robert the Count of Mortain, and beyond them, Roger of Montgomery and William fitz Osbern. William delegated control of the south-east of the country to Bishop Odo, who was duly installed in Dover castle and made Earl of Kent, and power over all of the land to the north of the Thames was given to William fitz Osbern, the new Earl of Hereford, who was installed in a newly constructed castle at Winchester (Rowley, 1999, p.65). The sources remain silent about the fate of the south-west of England at this time. Following this, the next topic generally discussed in the multitude of histories that cover the Norman Conquest, is the uprising in Herefordshire. During the uprising, in the summer of 1067, the men of Kent, having found themselves an unlikely ally in Count Eustace of Boulogne, laid siege to Dover castle. Count Eustace apparently supported their cause because he felt that he had been ill-rewarded for his services at Hastings (ibid., p.66). There is then a jump in all of the sources, both contemporary and modern, into early 1068. William, shortly after his return from Normandy, marched into the south-west of England, into the furthest reaches of Wessex, to lay siege to the city of Exeter, where Harold's mother had taken up refuge.
Currently then, our knowledge of the initial phase of the Norman Conquest is, at best, fragmentary. There is a finite amount of contemporary source material documenting the period, whilst later accounts and narratives are of limited use, as they tend to rely too heavily upon the information contained in William of Poitiers incomplete Gesta Guillelmi, and upon other contemporary, but largely inadequate, Norman sources. The over-reliance on contemporary accounts is, as previously discussed, fraught with inherent difficulties, which cause no end of problems. Thus, the written word can only go so far in the telling of the story of the Norman Conquest of England. A story, which, if presented in book form, would be missing an entire chapter: “The Norman Campaign in the West Country”. Fortunately however, there is another avenue open for study. An examination of the surviving physical remains of the conquest - Norman castles - via archaeology, can greatly enrich our understanding of the Norman invasion and conquest of England.

Somerset's Norman Castles: applied methodology

Figure 5 shows ‘supposed’ Norman castle sites in Somerset. The sites plotted are all those which, at one time or another, have been listed or mentioned, in various sources, as Norman castles existing within the boundaries of the county. The distribution of castles shown upon the map could easily lead to the belief that the Normans utilised no stratagems whatsoever within the county, the area instead simply being swamped with castles. This map is inherently flawed however, as it fails to take into account the fact that many of the castles plotted are drawn from listings containing spurious entries; often derived from inaccurate or incorrect field monument recordings.

Following the completion of several in-depth reports upon a number of Somerset’s castles (Prior, 1999 & 2000), in combination with a rigorous program of field visits, and (where available) an examination of excavation reports and modern and contemporary sources for all of the sites listed, ‘A Gazetteer of Castle Sites in Somerset’ was produced (see Vol. 2). Figure 6 summarises some of the information contained in the gazetteer, and from it, it can be noted that nine, out of 36, castles have been rejected. The rejected sites are all those which were previously incorrectly identified as castles. Figure 7 shows the ‘actual’ Norman castle sites in Somerset. This map is reminiscent of many of the distribution maps one regularly finds accompanying studies of castles: the maps often being utilised as tools to work out the various associations existing between castles, or between castle and landscape elements. As discussed in chapter one however, this kind of map has its limitations, as all too often the various castle sites plotted are simply ‘lumped together’ as ‘Norman’ ignoring any notion of time-scale. The assumption being that all of the castles must have existed in use contemporaneously: a view that has been shown to be, in reality, far too simplistic. Therefore, in order to establish a firm foundation upon which to build, phased distribution maps are required.

Figure 8 contains a series of entries for Somerset’s ‘actual’ Norman castles. The table lists the castle’s name, the type of castle first constructed upon the site, the likely owner or builder of the castle, the probable date for the first phase of castle construction, and any later or associated structures, along
with the ‘period’ to which the castle belongs, or through which it developed. The most important column here is ‘probable date’, it being the culmination of many hours of painstaking research, spent pawing through reams of historical documents and excavation reports.

Having established dates for the first phases of castle construction at each site throughout the county, phased distribution maps were created. Figure 9 shows Somerset’s earliest Norman castles (Pre-1086). The map, perhaps for the first time, immediately makes for the identification of specific areas within the county that were the first to be infiltrated by the Normans, as well as giving an insight into the various locations selected for the construction of Somerset’s earliest castles. In short, nuances which one could never hope to identify utilising ordinary distribution maps.

On Castle Morphology

‘The earliest Norman castles in England were not mottes, but enclosures built up against earlier defences’ (Higham & Barker, 1992, p.58). These Enclosure Castles were designed to provide space for large garrisons of ‘invasion troops’. The Normans would utilise an existing fortification and construct within it an earthen enclosure castle of their own. Examples of this early type of ‘re-fortification’ can be seen inside the remains of the Roman forts at Pevensey and Folkestone (Fig. 10), within the Roman and Saxon defences at London and Winchester, and possibly within the Iron Age and Saxon defences at Hastings and Dover (ibid.). Later Enclosure Castles were ‘free-standing’ (i.e. not utilising existing defensive structures), good examples of which can be seen at Deddington and Rochester.

Following on from, and in places contemporaneous with, early Enclosure Castles are what have been termed Castle Ringwork and Ringwork and Bailey Castles. At one time the ringwork was attributed to the Anglo-Saxons, but research carried out by Armitage in the early 1900’s, in combination with further studies in the 1960’s and 1970’s, has firmly established their Norman origin (Armitage, 1912; King & Alcock, 1969; Davidson, 1977). The ringwork - a defensive bank and ditch that was circular or oval in plan - was utilised in two ways. In the Ringwork and Bailey Castle, the ringwork took the place of a motte and stood within, or adjacent to, a bailey, and surrounded the hall or other central buildings offering those within a means of protection, whilst the Castle Ringwork, which comprised a small defensive earthen ditch, rampart and palisade, was probably utilised as a defensive structure in its own right. It was perfect for use during the initial conquest period as a temporary campaign fortification, as it would have been quick and easy to construct. Good examples of Ringwork and Bailey Castles can be seen at Warrington (Lancashire) and Cefn Bryntalch, Llandyssil (Powys) (Fig. 11), whilst good examples of Castle Ringworks can be seen at Sweyn’s Camp (Kent), Y-Gaer, St. Nicholas (Glamorgan), and Sulgrave (Northamptonshire) (Fig. 12).

In general then, the stages of development for the various types of Norman castle in England are, in the ‘initial conquest period’, Enclosure Castles - constructed within existing defensive structures in order to provide enough space for large garrisons of invasion troops - closely followed by Castle
Ringworks - designed for use as temporary campaign fortifications. Later, during the 'subjugation period' - with the addition of a bailey to the ringwork - the Ringwork and Bailey Castle evolved, alongside the Motte and Bailey Castle - both designed to keep the household's knights together around the Tenant-in-Chief, who was safely housed within a central strong-point. This lead, in the 'colonisation period', to the development of the Keep and Bailey Castle - where the wooden tower on the motte was replaced by a stone one (a Shell-Keep or Donjon), or, where no motte existed, by a very large stone Keep or Donjon constructed at ground level; in both instances, the baileys being surrounded by a defensive stone curtain-wall or timber palisade.

Norman castle origins, typology and development have all been topics for intellectual debate over the years. In truth however, no two castles are alike and there is certainly no such thing as a standard Norman castle. The most likely explanation for the large variety of castle types, and their differing evolutionary stages, probably stems from three sources. Firstly, William's army, although certainly built up around a core of his own Norman vassals, included among its ranks, Bretons, Flemings, Lorrainers and men of Anjou (Jones, 1998). All of these men would have had experience in the art of castle building, in one form or another, and it is almost certain that they would have previously carried out their castle building in a wide variety of terrains. It therefore follows that these men may have applied the lessons of this experience very variously, leading to the many forms of castle constructed (Platt, 1995, p.4). Secondly, the terrain in England - unlike much of Germany, Italy and western France - does not usually lend itself easily to natural fortification. Therefore, each site chosen - because of its tactical or strategic importance - must be seen as offering a differing defensive potential, and it is these differing potentials that led to the initial types of castle constructed, and to the subsequent diversity in evolutionary development. The natural topography of an area ultimately dictated what could and would be constructed. Finally, the third theory, which encompasses the other two, is that Norman castles were always composite and adaptable structures, whose final forms were only achieved after much alteration due to a large number of variables, including terrain, location, military importance, the human variable (i.e. personal taste), function, available materials, manpower and defensive strategies.

Looking to Somerset, it is immediately apparent that all of the various types of Norman castle are present within the boundaries of the county (Figs. 8 & 13). Firstly - in the initial conquest period - an Enclosure Castle (Neroche [20]) appears to have been constructed within an existing Iron Age Hillfort to provide space for a large garrison of invasion troops; whilst contemporaneously in other parts of the county Castle Ringworks, such as those at Cockroad Wood [10] and Stowey [34], were thrown up to act as temporary campaign fortifications. Then later, with the county somewhat more secure - during the subjugation period - the Normans built Ringwork and Bailey Castles, such as Hales [30], Culverhay [33] and Cary [7], alongside Motte and Bailey Castles, like those found at Edithmead [27] and Locking Head [4]. These were eventually followed - during the colonisation period - by the construction of what Dunning terms 'Feudal Strongholds' (1995, p.11). A Keep and Bailey Castle was erected at Bridgwater [28], whilst at Stogursey [18] the wooden tower on the motte was replaced by a shell-keep; in both cases the baileys being defended by stone curtain-walls. It can therefore be concluded that the Normans, in
order to conquer, hold and subdue Somerset, had to implement a full program of castle building within the county.

The Norman Invasion of Somerset: 'how the west was won'

In his book 'The Origins of Somerset' Costen wrote, 'we do not know how and when the first Normans entered Somerset' (1992, p.158). Having correlated all of the available data for Somerset's Norman castles however, this statement can now be challenged. When William left England for Normandy in March 1067 - delegating control of the south-east of the country to Bishop Odo, and the lands to the north of the Thames to William fitz Osbern - it seems that it was to his half-brother, Robert of Mortain, that he entrusted the lands of the south-west.

The distribution of Somerset's earliest castles (Fig. 9), in combination with a knowledge of the dates of initial foundation, and the identity of the castle builders (Fig. 8), suggests that the Normans carried out a planned offensive in Somerset, in the form of a three pronged invasion, shortly after William's departure for Normandy, and that three Norman lords were involved in the campaign. The lords were Robert of Mortain, Walter of Douai and William de Mohun, and the locations of the castles they founded indicate three main entry points into the county: from the north-east near Bath, from the south-east, and from the west, probably via the Bristol Channel (Fig. 14). A planned offensive was deemed necessary as the Normans almost certainly expected to meet with strong resistance in the region; bearing in mind that King Harold himself had formerly been 'Earl of Wessex'. Little wonder then that William sent his own half-brother to capture and subdue Saxon Somerset.

From the north-east came Walter of Douai and his forces. Walter may have marched his troops overland from the east, possibly treading the same roads across the Wiltshire uplands that the Saxons had taken in 577, when the armies of the West Saxons marched to the Battle of Dyrham (Deorham), slew three British kings and captured the cities of Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath, or he may have sailed up the Bristol Channel, and from there up the River Avon. What is certain however, is that by 1086 the north and east of the county, including the coastline, was ringed by castles of his making: namely, Edithmead (motte and bailey), Batch (ringwork - later developed into a motte with two baileys - Fig. 15), Cary (ringwork - later developed into a ringwork and bailey) and Cockroad Wood (ringwork - later developed into a motte with two baileys - Fig. 16) for certain, and probably also Stowey (ringwork - later developed into a motte and bailey) and Hales (ringwork and bailey). The castle ringworks primarily acted as temporary campaign fortifications for Walter and his men; who once established, set about developing their motte and bailey, and ringwork and bailey, castles.

From the south-east came Robert of Mortain and his forces. It is tempting and not improbable to suggest that Robert marched his troops straight down an old well-used route-way dating back into prehistory; known today as the A303. Three Norman castle sites near Penselwood lie on its course, as does the motte and bailey at Montacute and the early enclosure castle at Neroche. In recent
years, when the Wincanton by-pass was constructed, archaeological research was carried out into the history of the A303 route-way. The research highlighted the fact that the road is quite literally littered with important archaeological remains from all periods of history (Hollinrake, 1991). The three Norman castles constructed near Penselwood - namely, Cockroad Wood [10], Ballands [6] and Stourton [Wilts.] - occupy an area of both military and historical importance: two of the reasons why the castles came to be sited here. Militarily, the area is strategically important as the greensand escarpment in Selwood Forest is the only place where a large army can easily descend from the uplands of Wiltshire; and additionally it is where the Dorset, Wiltshire and Somerset borders meet. Traditionally, the West Saxon army is reputed to have fought the Battle of Pen (Peonna) here in 658, and the Egbricht stone lies here - the place where King Alfred supposedly rallied the armies of Dorset, Wiltshire and Somerset before marching on to the Battle of Edington, fought against the Danes in 878. A co-ordinated march down such an important route-way as this by Robert and his forces could therefore have been used to display Norman military might and their rights of conquest; or if stealth was required, the Forest of Selwood, which lined the route, would have provided excellent cover.

Robert and his men thus entered Somerset from the south-east and, judging by the historical and archaeological evidence, immediately began to construct two castles. The first, Castle Neroche [20], viewed from a military perspective, was skilfully positioned at an optimum strategic and tactical location inside the county. Neroche was an early style enclosure castle thrown up inside the defences of an existing Iron Age Hillfort to provide space for Robert's large garrison of 'invasion troops' (Fig. 17). The second, a motte and bailey at Montacute [13], was erected contemporaneously with, or very shortly after, Neroche. By 1068, Robert had two large castles on the southern border of Somerset.

Lastly, from the west came William de Mohun and his forces. It is likely that William and his troops came to Somerset by sea, sailing up the Bristol Channel. William had been granted estates in both east and west Somerset, but his estates in the west were by far the most important. Due to their size and coastal location, William's estates in West Somerset incorporated many positions of great strategic military value. Indeed, the locations of both William and Walter's estates (Fig. 18) appear to indicate that William the Conqueror still saw the sons of the defeated King Harold as a continued threat along the coast. The county was obviously vulnerable to sea-borne attack, and it seems that it was this that William in the west and Walter in the north were set to defend against. The locations of their estates and the positions of their castles seemingly following the same purposes as the coastal defences of Alfred and Edward the Elder, namely the first line of defence against sea-borne invasion (Dunning, 1995, p.7). To this end, William de Mohun constructed a mighty motte and bailey at Dunster, on a rocky cliff above an inlet of the sea (Fig. 19).
Robert’s Campaign in the Southwest

‘Robert of Mortain, half brother of William the Conqueror, was second only to Roger of Montgomery amongst the lay magnates in terms of landed wealth in post-conquest England. Yet strangely he remained the least known of William’s leading vassals. As Count of Mortain he held a frontier lordship of great strategic importance in the south-west of the duchy of Normandy, bordering on Brittany, Maine and Bellême. In England he held estates in twenty counties. He totally dominated feudal society in the south-west, especially in Cornwall; he held the important rape of Pevensey; he had a number of strategically placed manors round London; his lands in Northamptonshire and Yorkshire were extensive. By his death in 1095 he had established a large ‘empire’ stretching from northern England to Maine: his legacy, though short lived, was enormous. Yet this man, seemingly so important, appears to have been largely ignored by his contemporaries and modern historians alike.’

Golding, 1991, p.119

In chapter two it was argued that warfare was chief among the defining characteristics of Norman civilization, and that warrior ethos was central to Norman identity. The Normans prided themselves on their military prowess and Robert of Mortain was a champion of this virtue. Orderic Vitalis calls him one of the most important Norman magnates (Chibnall, 1969-80, ii, p.141). The Brevis Relatio records that Robert provided 120 ships for his brother’s invasion fleet, more than any other individual (Van Houts, 1987, p.169). William of Poitiers notes his presence at the Duke’s pre-invasion councils (Chibnall & Davis, 1998, p.149) and on the Bayeux Tapestry he is shown having dinner with his brothers after the Pevensey landing. He held a leading position on the field at Hastings; a charter in favour of Mont St Michel stating that he carried the standard of St Michael during the battle (Golding, 1991, p.121). Robert was through-and-through a great military commander, one whose judgement could be trusted implicitly when it came to the affairs of war. Unsurprisingly then, it was he who was sent into the west to deal with the rebellious West Saxons.

As mentioned above, Robert and his forces advanced westwards from London shortly after William’s departure for Normandy, presumably arriving in Somerset in April 1067. Upon their arrival they began to construct castles to secure and advance their positions: the Normans seeing castles ‘not just as places for civilians to hide in, nor as simple barracks for the soldiery, but as integral units…and…solid bases for a very mobile form of warfare’ (Brice, 1984, pp.74-5). It seems unlikely that the Normans moved much beyond the boundaries of the county at this time however, as Devon and Cornwall appear to have actively resisted their advance: Gytha, Harold’s mother, and Godwin, Edmund and Magnus, his bastard sons, finding refuge at Exeter amongst thegns still loyal to the English cause. For a short time then Somerset appears to have become ‘frontier territory’, with the heights of Exmoor and the Brendon and Blackdown hills interposing a physical barrier between both Saxon resistance and Norman advance, and the shires of Wessex that had fallen and those that still stood firm. The Normans no doubt sent scouts and raiding parties into Devon to test the strength of the opposition there; falling back to the safety of their castles if the enemy or the local Somerset militia gained the upper hand. Robert at this time alternated between the border castle at Neroche, where he organised the troops and the military operations, and the castle at Montacute, which for a short time became his second home - the castle from which he administered his estates in the south-west (Golding, 1991, p.121). This situation appears to have persisted into early 1068; Robert probably spending Christmas at Montacute.

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William returned to England in December 1067 and after receiving news from Robert regarding the situation in the Southwest immediately called for the submission of Exeter. 'Exeter replied as York may have answered King Harold two years earlier: it would pay its accustomed tribute and perform its due services, but it would not swear fealty or receive the king within its walls' (Barlow, 1999, p.72). This reply must have so enraged William that in January 1068, in a totally unprecedented move, he mobilised his army in the thick of winter and marched into the west to join his half-brother: together they marched on Exeter. Exeter's gates and walls were manned by her citizens, and William, having taken hostages on-route, had one blinded before them in an attempt to affect a swift surrender. The ruse failed however, so the Norman forces surrounded the city and lay siege to it for 18 days. Exeter eventually surrendered when it became obvious that further resistance was futile. William then entered the city and ordered the construction of the so-called 'Rougemont Castle' within Exeter's walls. Unfortunately for William, Harold's sons had managed to escape during the siege, but Gytha remained a 'guest' of the city. After the fall of Exeter, Devon and Cornwall quickly submitted, and Gloucester and Bristol soon followed suit. However, the siege and its aftermath 'marked the turning point in the relationship between the English and the Normans. The policy of coexistence turned into one of domination' (Rowley, 1997, p.55).

With Exeter safely in Norman hands, William and Robert marched on into Cornwall - presumably to obtain more English submissions - installing a Breton named Brian as the new Earl of Cornwall before returning to Winchester for Easter (23rd March 1068). After Easter Matilda was brought to England from Normandy, to be crowned queen at Westminster on Whit Sunday (11th May 1068), the witness list confirming that among the many important guests present were Robert the Count of Mortain, as well as the lesser known English thegn Tovi, the Sheriff of Somerset.

Following Matilda's coronation, Robert does not appear to have returned to the West Country. During the harrying of the north, Orderic states that he was left in Lindsey with Robert the Count of Eu, to deal with the Danish threat (Chibnall, 1969-80, ii, p.230); and after the suppression of the English rebellions in 1069 it seems likely that he returned to Normandy. 'His whereabouts in the 1070's are unknown. He may have been in England between the summer of 1080 and 1082 but his first certain appearance in England after that date was in 1086' (Golding, 1991, p.124).

Robert may have left the West Country in early 1068, but Saxon resistance in the region was still far from over. Harold's sons, who had escaped during the siege of Exeter, fled to Ireland where they succeeded in raising a force to support their cause; returning to England on two separate occasions. In 1068 they raided North Somerset and attacked Bristol, which fought them off only to see them continue their raids down the entire length of Somerset's coastline. Then a year later, in 1069, they brought a fleet of sixty-four ships to England and landed them at the mouth of the River Taw, North Devon, before moving on Exeter and causing devastation all around the city. They were eventually driven off in two attacks led by Brian, Earl of Cornwall, and escaped in two small ships back to Ireland: William of Jumièges recording that 1,700 had been killed in their venture (Van Houts, 1992-5). The failure of her
grandsons was sufficient to cause Gytha, Harold’s mother, to leave Exeter and travel to Flanders, where she went into exile, and later died.

Saxon resistance to the Norman Conquest persisted just as strongly in South Somerset and North Dorset. In 1069, the men of Somerset and Dorset rose up and attacked Robert’s stronghold at Montacute. The rebellion was crushed by Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances, ‘with the help...of the English forces of the shires and cities which were already conquered...The ferocity with which the attack on Montacute was suppressed and the devastation in the surrounding area which followed the English defeat possibly explaining why so many of the manors in South Somerset are recorded in the Domesday Survey as having decreased in value’ (Trask, 1898, p.30).

Somerset was very obviously, then, in the thick of the war of conquest; and a county where the strategies and tactics associated with castle-building must have played an important role in securing eventual Norman victory in the region. Before moving on to examine these topics in depth however, one question remains: “Why was so little written of Robert’s campaign in the Southwest?” In answer to this Golding suggests that ‘Robert played a comparatively minor role in the politics and government of the country...[and] a possible clue to his neglect is to be found in William of Malmesbury’s Gesta Regum. He states that Herluin of Con庭ille, a man of moderate wealth, had two sons. Robert was of stupid dull disposition (crassi et hebetis ingenii) while Odo was of quicker talents. So perhaps Robert was not regarded as sufficiently intelligent to take part in royal councils or to take an active role in politics. Perhaps he was ignored by his contemporaries because his activities were not thought worthy of mention’ (1991, p.122). To which can be added the account given in the Vita of Vital of Savigny, which tells of Robert abusing and beating his wife and terrorising his chaplain (Sauvage, 1882, pp.362-4); suggesting that he was a headstrong individual given to rages and bouts of exaggerated remorse. Robert may have been a competent military commander, but he was apparently not a born councillor. It therefore appears that Robert was of a stubborn, hard-headed and violent disposition, his actions going largely unrecorded because he was a wholly unpopular character. Although, ‘it must be remembered that duke William had considered him sufficiently responsible to place him in position of considerable importance as lord of the frontier lands of Mortain, a task which could not be performed by an incompetent’ (Golding, 1991, p.122).

Historic Somerset

Looking at the distribution and boundaries of the estates granted to the first Norman lords of Somerset, along with the positions of the earliest castles (Fig. 18), it is apparent that Somerset was treated as an entity in its own right - the land grants respecting the long established country boundaries. This fact is relatively unsurprising, considering that Somerset was one of six West Saxon shires in existence by the early ninth century (Williams, 1999, p.54), but it does mean that it is perfectly acceptable to write of ‘the castles of Somerset’ in the safe knowledge that the Normans did indeed recognise the county as such.
The Lie of the Land

The historic county of Somerset, some 70 miles (112km) east-west and 50 miles (80km) north-south, is situated on the southern shore of the Bristol Channel; containing strong contrasts in both geography and geology (Fig. 20). The county is enclosed by a rough semi-circle of hills. In the far west are the heights of Exmoor - rising to 519m A.O.D. - and the Brendons, both comprising Devonian sandstone and slate and Lower Triassic limestone. In the south-west the Blackdowns, comprising Permian limestone and Cretaceous greensands, gault clays and gravels, mark the boundary with Devon. In the south, beginning with a deposit of Ham stone and Yeovil sands, is a vast ridge of limestone, which continues south-east as a series of abrupt hills. In the east are the foothills of Salisbury Plain, marked by a greensand escarpment in Selwood Forest, and in the north, the lower reaches of the Cotswolds (Dunning, 1983, p.11).

Within this semi-circle, running north-west to south-east, are three parallel ridges of hills: the Mendips in the north, the Quantocks in the west, and the Poldens in between. The Mendips, which comprise mainly of carboniferous limestone, rise to 325m A.O.D. at Beacon Batch and dip north-east towards Bristol, in pockets of marl, coal measures and sandstone. The Quantocks, which rise to over 300m A.O.D., comprise Devonian sandstone, whilst the Poldens, noticeable because they rise out of some of the lowest and flattest land in England, comprise mainly blue lias limestone.

Between these ridges, across the county’s rich heartland, the Somerset Levels, run the valleys of the Axe, Tone, Isle, Brue, Cary, Yeo and Parrett Rivers. During the Jurassic period, the sea inundated this whole area, and the Lower Liassic mud of the Levels survives here, with recent deposits of Quaternary peat covering large areas. The county’s coastal plain is divided into two by the Mendips. To the south, it comprises a narrow coastal clay belt, and to the north, the basin of the Congresbury Yeo and Kenn River produces another area of flat claylands. The southern and eastern borders of the county are characterised by hilly fertile zones (Costen, 1992, pp.1-4).

Geology and Castle Locations

It has been suggested that in certain instances underlying geology may have had a direct effect upon the locations selected for castle erection and upon the types of castle constructed (Halsall, 2000; Spurgeon, 1987; Neaverson, 1947). As figure 20 clearly shows however, Somerset’s castles are equally distributed across the entire spectrum of its underlying geology, and a comparison with figure 13 demonstrates that, in Somerset at least, no one type of underlying geology gave rise to a particular form of Norman castle. It can therefore be stated that underlying geology does not appear to have been a significant factor in the siting or formation of Norman castles in the landscape of Somerset.
Norman Castle Building Strategies in Somerset

Castles and Rivers

'Rivers are of the utmost importance in war, as they have a great influence upon military operations.'

Manual of Field Fortification; 1871, p.143

Rivers, to date, remain a largely untapped source of information for archaeological studies. This is surprising considering that, until fairly recently, rivers formed the backbone of the transportation system in England. This fact has been duly noted by the archaeological community; a seminar at Queen's College, Oxford, in 1999 taking the first step towards addressing 'the place of rivers in archaeological studies' (Blair, forthcoming).

It is well documented that the Vikings used rivers in England to raid inland, 'their longships, with clinkered hulls of oak strakes and a single keel for unprecedented stability...carrying a sail a dozen yards broad...driven by wind or oar, seaworthy on the open ocean and shallow enough in draught for river passage, light enough to be carried overland by its crew and shaped to run ashore at speed on beaches of sand, shingle or rock – a fast efficient and reliable landing craft' (Marsden, 1996 p.20). Yet, of the Normans, the descendants of Rollo and his 'Vikings', we know little of their use of ships or boats. It is widely accepted that the Normans had maritime expertise (Bartlett, 2000, p.258); Normandy having a long coastline with many inhabitants who made their living from the sea. However, by 1066, Normandy had yet to engage in naval warfare and had no naval traditions, apart from its Viking past.

Fortunately, the Bayeux Tapestry provides an incomparable pictorial record of the construction, provisioning and launching of William's armada (Fig. 21). The Tapestry depicts shallow-draft, Viking-style longships, with masts, sails, rigging, oar-holes, tillers, and anchors (Fig. 22) (Bartlett, 2000, p.258; Rain Patterson, 2002, p.72). Indeed, contemporary accounts call William's own ship a snecca; the poetic keening for a longship derived from the Old Norse word for 'serpent'. Thus the Normans, like their Viking ancestors, had the capacity to strike upriver far inland. The invasion fleet would also have contained a host of other types of ship, including cargo-style vessels for the safe transportation of the many war-horses needed for the Conquest. The true size of William's fleet is unknown however, as there are no reliable figures: Wace suggests 696 vessels (Burgess, 2004), but this estimate seems rather low.

To the Norman use of longships can be added their use of smaller watercraft. Figure 23 shows a boat uncovered at Årby in Uppland, which dates from the Viking period. This lightly built shallow-draft vessel, some 3.8m in length, was used to navigate the small, very shallow rivers in the central Swedish farmlands. This type of boat and its descendants would have been used all over Northern Europe; the inland waterways forming important arteries for transport, communication and supply throughout the Viking, Norman and Medieval periods, and beyond. Two early maps of Britain, the c.1250 Matthew Paris map, which was among the first to give accurate topographical detail, and the c.1360 'Gough' map, both emphasise the importance of rivers for trade and communication within the country (Hindle, 1989).
Unlike their modern counterparts, which depict rivers as a series of fine lines, both maps show rivers as broad snakes leading to the sea, indicative of the great distances that navigable waterways once penetrated into the middle of the English landmass. In 1340, for instance, the Trent and Ouse rivers could take seagoing ships to Nottingham and York. The earlier 'Paris' map depicts overland routes only in areas where river transport would have been of limited use, such as between Dover and Newcastle or Southampton and London, whilst the later 'Gough' map shows a growing network of roads covering most of England and Wales. Before c.1348 the maps show that roads seldom ran close to the coast, from which can be inferred that traffic along it tended to be by water, thus having an adequate transport route to the coast must have been of major importance. Furthermore, the balance between the use of the road and water transport varied in different parts of the country according to the nature of the terrain and the waterways; and importantly, for this study, in the Fenlands, transport was predominately by water (Hutchinson, 1994, pp.117-18).

When discussing the possible invasion routes taken by the Normans into Somerset, it was mentioned that William de Mohun, Walter of Douai, and their troops, may have sailed up the Bristol Channel - Walter then sailing up the River Avon - to points where they could safely establish themselves and begin to erect their castles. This, taken in combination with the evidence for the two types of shallow-draft vessel at their disposal, seems to suggest that rivers played a critically important, yet hitherto unexplored, role in the Norman Conquest of England.

Figure 24 shows Somerset's river systems and Norman castles; the map clearly demonstrates that every castle in the county is located on, or very close to, a river. Figure 25 contains an entry for every Somerset castle, showing the actual distance that each is located away from a navigable river. Figure 26 shows Somerset's castles at incremental distances from the nearest navigable river. The chart and the table are both highly significant, as together they prove that at no point in the county is a castle located more than 2.50 miles (4.02 km) away from a river; whilst 13, out of a total of 27 castles, are situated on, or less than a quarter of a mile away, from a navigable river. It must be stressed here that some of the rivers used in this study are no longer entirely navigable; due to a fall in the water table since the Middle Ages, in combination with the drainage of the Somerset Levels, and the natural silting up of many of the old watercourses due to neglect. Thus, for castles that now sit upon non-navigable sections of rivers, the location of the nearest navigable portion of the river during the Norman period has been deduced.

In terms of rivers and the Norman use of stratagems of optimum site selection, the majority of castles in Somerset appear to have been skilfully positioned upon areas of higher ground, close to, and overlooking, rivers. In many cases upstream, which, as previously demonstrated, in terms of tactical considerations, are the prime locations for such fortifications; keeping the castles safe from flooding and the garrisons clear of stagnant or poisoned water, whilst conversely ensuring a goodly supply of fresh potable water. Geologists tend to divide rivers into three stages, youth, maturity and old age, each stage having distinctive features and characteristics (Ardley, et al., 1978, p.99). In terms of strategic considerations, castles have been sited in the youthful stage, overlooking river sources (e.g. Cary [7] &
Cockroad Wood [10]), in the maturity stage, mid-way along river courses in river valleys (e.g. Taunton [22] & Burrow Mump [24]), and in the old age stage, at river mouths (e.g. Dunster [17] & Downend [23]). The Normans thereby formed a strategic network of castles, which afforded them control over the waterways and waterborne traffic, as well as providing them with a means of transport, communication and supply. Additionally, river crossings were secured, enabling the interception and control of traffic on the roads that either crossed, or followed, the riverbanks. These are hardly surprising results, considering that this is exactly what one would expect to see from a well trained military force operating in a predominantly low-lying region like Somerset. What is surprising however, is that rivers, their role and significance, have generally been ignored as a topic for intellectual debate. Most accounts of the Conquest record the Norman advance as a purely land-based affair, the Normans presumably moving across the country by way of the old Roman roads. It is just as likely however, that much of their movement around the country was by water. William the Conqueror, for instance, crossed the Channel at least seventeen times in the twenty-one years of his reign (Le Patourel, 1976, p.164). Rivers formed a Norman lifeline to the outside world, and obviously played an important role in the siting of many castles. It is not hard to imagine the Normans utilising shallow-draft watercraft to carry troops, messages and supplies up shallow rivers far inland, just as their Viking forefathers had done two hundred years earlier.

In combination, figures 24 and 25 also appear to offer an insight into the positioning of some of Somerset’s, seemingly, more randomly placed castles. Croft Castle [8], near Crewkerne, lay exactly midway between the navigable portions of the rivers Parrett and Axe. Fenny Castle [29], near Wells, on the Somerset Levels, was located on the River Sheppy (not shown on the map) within a mile of the rivers Brue and Axe. It must be remembered that in the medieval period however, the Brue flowed north through the Panborough Gap to join the Axe, along with the Whitelake and Heartlake rivers. Whilst Cockroad Wood Castle [10], near Wincanton, lay less than a quarter of a mile away from the River Calc, and one mile away from the River Brue. The positions of these castles in relation to the rivers strongly suggest that they lay upon what can be termed ‘portage routes’; places where cargoes were carried overland from one river to another. Croft Castle may well have been positioned thus to guard an important portage route between the River Parrett in Somerset and the River Axe in Dorset. Theoretically, one could sail across the Channel from Normandy, up the Axe, exit the river, carry goods, or march men, overland past Croft Castle, and then, by way of the Parrett, reach the Bristol Channel. Fenny castle appears to have acted in a similar capacity, controlling portage routes leading from the Sheppy, Brue and Axe rivers to Glastonbury and Wells: and from the Brue, by way of the ‘Cockroad Wood Portage Route’, one could join the River Cale, then the River Stour, and travel as far east as Christchurch Harbour, or, via the Wiltshire Avon, travel north to Salisbury and the Plains. This theory may help to explain the origins of other castles in similar positions in the landscape.
Rivers and the Castles of Cary and Downend

The previous section concentrated upon the overall distribution of Somerset's castles in relation to its rivers. This section will focus upon two specific castles, Cary [7] and Downend [23], each fulfilling an important strategic role in connection with a major Somerset river.

Castle Cary

Castle Cary Castle and the River Cary

A castle at Cary is first mentioned in 1138 when attacked and taken by King Stephen, and this has led many to assign a twelfth century date to the site (Meade, 1856-7 & 1877-8; King, 1983, ii, p.442; Plantagenet Somerset Fry, 1996, p.134). However, recent archaeological excavations have recorded a succession of ditches and recovered tenth to eleventh century pottery (Leach & Ellis, forthcoming), pointing to an earlier date of foundation. According to Domesday Book the first Norman lord to hold Cary was Walter of Douai (Williams & Martin, 2002, p.261), and it can be argued that the holding dated back to the Conquest. Walter of Douai was the most prolific of the Norman castle builders in Somerset and, as discussed above, his sphere of influence was in the north and east of the county, where he was responsible for the construction of three, or possibly even five, early castles. The topography of the site at Cary and the location of the recently recorded ditch and other early features suggest that the initial Norman occupation on the site was in the form of a D-shaped ringwork; a type that compares favourably with the other castles known to have been constructed by Walter. The castle was situated upon the lower north-west facing slope of Lodge Hill, and the suggested ringwork is seen as occupying a natural spur extending south-west from the foot of the hill overlooking the source of the River Cary (Fig. 27- Period 2i).

Tactically, the Cary site is ideal, as it is naturally defensible, occupies an area of higher ground providing good all round visibility, affords an elevated escape route along a ridge to the north-east, and enables ready access to a potable water supply. It has been suggested that the higher ground to the south-east of the site could compromise its tactical viability (SMR Entry No.5/18/03), but this ground is approximately 400m away, placing the ringwork well outside of the range of weapons of the period.

Tactical considerations alone are seldom influence enough to dictate where a fortification should be erected however, the decision to build invariably deriving from the strategic importance of a given location. The decision to construct a ringwork at Cary came as a result of two such strategic considerations. Firstly, it was important to guard and control the county's borders. Cary is situated only 6 miles (9.65km) from the Wiltshire border and 6½ miles (10.46km) from the Dorset border. The ringwork, acting in unison with Walter of Douai's other castles in the region, would have formed part of a chain of linked sites around the northern perimeter of the county. Secondly, it was essential to gain control of the county's systems of transport, communication and supply. The ringwork, carefully positioned to completely dominate the source of the River Cary, was only 1 mile (1.60km) from a navigable stretch of the River Brue and 2½ miles (4.02km) from the source of the River Cale. But more
significantly, 7 miles (11km) downstream from the ringwork, at the point where the River Cary became navigable, was the small motte of Wimble Toot [15], and 19 miles (30km) further downstream again, at the point where the Cary ends, was the motte and bailey of Downend [23]. Thus, working in concert with other castles in Somerset, the Cary ringwork would have formed part of a strategic network designed to afford the Normans control of the county’s river systems.

**Downend and the River Parrett**

At the extreme western end of the Polden ridge, between the mouths of the rivers Parrett and Brue, lies the small and rather unimportant looking motte and bailey of Downend (Fig. 28). The motte, which was formed by cutting a trench across the terminus of the ridge and scarping what remained into an elliptical mount, rises 5.00m above the surrounding low-lying estuarine alluvial levels. The associated earthworks, three large banks which form the defences for two baileys, lie in an adjacent, roughly circular, field named ‘Bally Field’ (Bailey Field). At the foot of the motte, on the southern side, a spring used to erupt, but this has now been capped to form a well. The site was the subject of a small-scale excavation in 1908 (Chater & Major, 1910), and pottery from the excavation has recently been matched to similar Norman wares found at Castle Neroche, suggesting a c.1100 date for the construction of the castle.

In order to grasp the strategic significance of Downend, one must understand the importance of the River Parrett. The Parrett has its source in Dorset, entering Somerset near North Perrott; and from there it flows east of Crewkerne, in a northerly direction, and on past South Petherton, Kingsbury Episcopi, and the ruins of Muchelney Abbey, to Langport. It then runs in a north-westerly course to Burrow Bridge and Bridgwater; and then on, by a very winding channel, to Combwich, entering the Bristol Channel at Burnham (Phelps, 1836). The Parrett is a large tidal river; in fact ‘of all the Level’s rivers, only the Parrett and its tributaries are open to the influx of the tide’ (Williams, 1970, p.10). This tidal influence can be felt as far inland as Langport on the Parrett, and Creech St Michael on the Tone; its navigability making it second in importance only to the River Avon. Until fairly recently the Parrett was navigable for larger vessels as far as the port of Bridgwater; whilst by its branches, the rivers Brue, Tone and Yeo, barges could journey to Glastonbury, Taunton, Langport and Ilchester. The Parrett, now a forgotten highway, was once vital for transport, trade and communication within the county: a recent study highlighting its strategic importance in the campaign of King Alfred in 878, and its influence upon the siting of early monasteries and royal estates during the Anglo-Saxon period (Hollinrake; in Blair, forthcoming).

The navigability of the River Parrett was unquestionably the reason for the erection of a castle at Downend. The Normans recognised early on in their campaign the strategic significance of the gap between the western end of the Polden Hills and the River Parrett; ‘the junction of the north-south routes with the sea and river traffic, and the east-west Polden ridgeway’ (Aston & Leech, 1977, p.39). Tactically the site was also ideal, situated between the confluence of two rivers, the Parrett and Brue, and
additionally defended north and west by a stream (Fig. 28), it was highly defensible; and it was supplied with its own source of fresh water (the spring). The castle at Downend is a prime example of the Norman use of the stratagem of optimum site selection.

Unsurprisingly, with such a well-positioned castle, once military tensions lessened the agriculturally rich environs were exploited for their economic potential, and the location was developed into a 'New Town' with thriving river port (Fig. 29). By 1266, a borough had been established at Downend, but the town may have been in existence as early as 1159; Philip de Columbers owing 10 shillings for burgriht (the right to hold a Burh) (Aston & Leech, 1977, p.39). The de Columbers family were the most likely founders of the c.1100 motte and bailey.

Castles and Roads

*One must chiefly look out for a road to pass along the side of the camp.*

Hyginus; In: Lenoir, 1979, p.22

Roman Roads

The earliest Norman fortifications in England, erected between 1066 and 1071, appear to follow a pattern similar to the spread of the Roman Conquest of Britain in the first century AD. The Normans constructed castles along the south coast from Exeter to Dover. A scatter of fortifications were built in the Midlands stretching up as far as Lincoln and York. There was another concentration in the West Midlands, and in the Welsh Marches where Chester formed the north-western point of attack and, at the estuary of the River Wye, Chepstow the southernmost. The north-western chain of defences roughly coinciding with the line of Icknield Street, which the Romans originally intended as the north-western boundary of their occupied territory in Britain (Rowley, 1999, pp.88-9). Costen states, ‘the evidence that Roman roads were still in use in many places is very strong. The term street is widely distributed and was commonly used to describe a paved or made road, usually of Roman origin...The Fosseway was clearly recognised and in use across north-west Wiltshire, as it was in Somerset. There are hints that other parts of the Roman system around Swindon and Salisbury were also in use’ (Costen; In: Aston & Lewis, 1994, p.97-113).

Figure 30 shows Norman castles and known Roman roads in Somerset. It is immediately apparent from the map that the correlation between the castles and the Roman road systems is not as significant as that between the castles and the county’s river systems. This is as expected however, as on the Levels, as ‘in the Fenlands, transport was predominately by water’ (Hutchinson, 1994, pp.117-118). It can therefore be stated that whilst it is known that the Normans did utilise the Roman road networks, the roads were not necessarily considered of primary importance when deciding upon locations for castles; in Somerset at least. There are however a few exceptions.
It was mentioned above that Downend [23] was sited to take advantage ‘of the junction of the north-south routes with the sea and river traffic, and the east-west Polden ridgeway’ (Aston & Leech, 1977, p.39). It is likely that the east-west route was actually a Roman road. Greenhill states, that ‘many years ago a Roman road could be traced, starting at the mound, running through the adjoining orchard, and along the ridge of the hill; and it seemed not unlikely that the road between Street and Glastonbury was connected to it’ (PSANHS, 1886, Vol.23, p.35).

Breach Wood Castle [31], near Wanstrow, was situated close to a Roman road which appears to have run all the way from Salisbury to Shepton Mallet, whilst nearby Hales Castle [30], close to Longleat Park, was situated on the route of a Roman road which may have run all the way from Poole Harbour to Bath, and on into Gloucestershire. The siting of these two castles can almost certainly be attributed to the continuing use of Roman roads in the Norman period, as can the ringwork at Culverhay [33], near Bath, which sat close to a major junction, between the Roman road from Poole Harbour and the Fosseway.

Croft Castle [8], near Crewkerne, was strategically placed upon one of the highest hills in the area [Castle Hill at 140m A.O.D.] overlooking the Fosseway, which lay 2¼ miles (4.42km) to the north-west. It was mentioned above that Croft Castle lay exactly midway between the navigable portions of the rivers Parrett and Axe, on what may have been a ‘portage route’. If one were looking for an easy way to transport cargoes, men and supplies between the two rivers, then the Fosseway would have provided the ideal route. It crosses both rivers: the distance between the crossing points being as little as 12 miles (19.31km). The fact that Croft Castle was skilfully positioned to overlook the Fosseway, as well as lying equidistant between the two rivers, lends further credence to the argument that there may have been a portage route in operation in the area.

Costen writes of Montacute [13], ‘that it was close to the Fosseway, running down to Exeter. In addition it was only a few miles south of Ilchester and within easy striking distance of the routes through Sherborne to Crewkerne and from Ilchester south to Dorchester’ (1992, p.160). The castle at Montacute is also situated close to both the A303 (a prehistoric route-way) and another minor road that is almost certainly of Roman origin. On modern maps this minor road forms part of the ‘Leland Trail’, and is labelled ‘Monarchs Way’. It heads south from Ilchester, passing through Sock Dennis and Cole Cross to Kissmedown Lane, where it climbs to a height of 81.00m A.O.D., passing close to the Roman villa site at Ball’s Water. The road then descends, continuing southwards through Montacute, and climbs again to pass close to the Iron Age Hillfort at Ham Hill, running on towards Odcombe; at which point it is known as ‘Street Lane’, a good indication of its Roman origin. From there, it continues southwards towards Haselbury Plucknett and the River Parrett. This road has previously been overlooked, and was only recognised during an intensive study of the Montacute area (Prior, 2000), and it may well be that other castles in the West Country lie on similar roads of Roman origin that have yet to be rediscovered.

One of the most important towns in Roman Somerset was Ilchester. Ilchester was located at a major crossing of the River Yeo, at the junction of five Roman roads, and ‘despite its relatively modest status today, Ilchester lay towards the centre of that part of the Durotrigian civitas within Somerset and

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has some claim to administrative importance rivalling the civitas capital at Dorchester' (Leach, 2001, p.52). The Normans could not possibly have overlooked Ilchester’s importance and strategic significance, and it follows that at some point there must have been a Norman fortification in, or near, the town. Sandford refers to a castle at Ilchester, traditionally standing where Ilchester Gaol was later erected (i.e. on the southern bank of the Yeo, just inside the north gate of the town at Castle Farm) (In: Page, 1911, VCH, Vol.2). Cox, an Ordnance Survey Field Investigator, was unable to find any satisfactory evidence of this castle however (SMR Entry No.196543). The search was almost certainly carried out in the wrong place though, as it is well known that ‘not a single early castle was built in a Somerset town’ (Costen, 1992, p.161). The search should instead have occurred outside the town, adjacent to the roads themselves.

About 3 1/4 miles (5.23km) north-east of Ilchester, as the crow flies, is an earthwork known as Wimble Toot (Fig. 31). In the past this has been listed as a tumulus, a round barrow, a bowl barrow, or, as the name suggests, a windmill mound (SAM Entry No.22071). Having re-examined the earthwork, it can be argued that it is in fact the remains of a small motte, some 2.74m in height with a diameter of 27.47m, with a well-preserved ditch around most of its eastern side (Fig. 32). The motte lies in the ancient parish of ‘Steart’ (Domesday Book - Esturt), meaning 'a tongue or neck of land' from the Old English word steort, or possibly ‘a [?]Roman' street’ from a vagrant form of the Old English word street. Figure 31 shows that Steart and neighbouring Babcary are both situated upon an area of raised land (stretching south-west to north-east), surrounded by marshy ground; and that Steart does indeed sit upon a ‘neck of land’. Wimble Toot sitting upon the highest point of the pronounced headland, overlooking the Cary Valley to the north, a tributary of the Cary to the south and the Fosseway ('a Roman street') to the east. An ideal location for a castle erected to monitor movement along the Fosseway, and movement along the River Cary and its adjoining tributary. It therefore seems likely that the Normans decided not to construct a castle within Ilchester itself, opting instead for a tactically superior site, of greater strategic value. The location of the castle enabled them to command more of the area’s militarily important features. Domesday Book states that ‘two porters from Montacute hold Steart for the Count of Mortain’ (Williams & Martin, 2002, p.251); thus Robert, our competent campaign commander, was no doubt the man behind the decision and the instigator of the castle.

It would, however, be pointless having a castle to the north of Ilchester, without another to act in concert with it to the south. About 1 1/4 miles (2.01km) south of Ilchester, midway between the Fosseway and the Roman road from Dorchester, on the Leland Trail, lies the small settlement of Sock Dennis (Fig. 31). Sock Dennis, like Wimble Toot, is situated upon the highest point of a pronounced headland, surrounded by marshy ground, overlooking Roman roads to the east and west, and Ilchester and the River Yeo to the north. At Sock Dennis, there is a sub-rectangular moat with a raised platform in the south-east corner, along with the remains of partly destroyed fishponds and a second platform to the north (SMR Entry no.53043). In 1205, King John stayed at Sock Dennis (Dunning, 1983, p.29), and it is likely, due to its strategic military location, that the origins of the manor lay in the early Norman period.
With the exception of the seven castles mentioned above, the Roman road network appears to have had less of an impact upon the locations chosen for Somerset's castles than would be thought likely. The Normans may have utilised the surviving Roman road network, but it appears that the roads themselves were not considered of vital importance when deciding upon locations for castles within the county. As mentioned above, this may be down to the fact that Somerset's rivers were thought to be of far greater importance, but another factor may also have been at work - Saxon herepaðs.

Saxon Herepaðs

Roman roads were not the only roads in existence when the Normans arrived in England. The Anglo-Saxon's had also established a system of roads, known as herepaðs. The herepað is often described as an 'Army Road', 'but there is really nothing to suggest that such roads were "military" roads built for the purposes of war' (Costen, 1994, p.105). Since herepaðs carried traffic over relatively long distances, it is perhaps wiser to think of them as routes upon which one might chance across the war-band of a king or nobleman. Costen breaks the herepað system down into three groups: Long distance routes stretched between the major political, religious and trading centres. These would have been frequented by high status individuals, such as the King and other noblemen, travelling between estates or centres of ecclesiastical power, who would have been joined on route by merchants carrying currency and goods of high commercial value, who would have been anxious to pass swiftly through the countryside. Middle distance routes stretched between central places, facilitating political exchanges and the redistribution of high value goods and the exchange of surpluses. Short local routes linked smaller dependant and tributary estates, providing them with a means of internal communication and a way of moving goods around within the central place's territory, enabling the influence of the central place, as a site of justice and as a religious centre, to be exercised (ibid.).

The evidence for the existence of herepaðs comes from Anglo-Saxon charters, where they are described in terms of boundaries delimiting the edges of estates. 'In Somerset references to herepað, lanu, pað, stræt and weg occur 117 times. In Wiltshire, the figure is 178 times and in Dorset 64 times (ibid.). There are two major problems associated with the study of herepaðs however. Firstly, although counties such as Somerset are rich in charters, to date, little academic use has been made of the information they contain, and even less work has been carried out transcribing the relevant information on herepaðs onto maps. Secondly, the charters only ever refer to the short sections of herepaðs pertaining to the boundaries of estates. Presently then, the information available on the routes of herepaðs is somewhat limited, and until a large number of bounds are plotted nationally, many of the long distance herepað routes remain highly conjectural.

Figure 33 shows Norman castles and the system of Herepaðs around the city of Bath. It is apparent from the map that a significant correlation is present. 'The Anglo-Saxon charters of the tenth century for this region show that roads to Bath were already important...Roads are mentioned in the charters for Weston and North Stoke, on the western side of Bath, to the north of the River Avon and
Stanton Prior, Marksbury, Priston, Corston and Evesty all use roads as parts of boundaries. Nearly all these roads run to Bath, showing how much it dominated the communications and trade of the north-eastern part of Somerset' (Costen, 1992, p.139). The Normans appear to have placed castles at strategic locations alongside, or at the ends of these herepads, in order to exert their influence over the city. Each herepad leaving Bath on its southern side can be observed heading towards a Norman castle; namely Hales [30], Breach Wood [31], Richmont [36] Stowey [34] and Culverhay [33]; and it is possible that an early castle was also in existence at Newton St Loe (ST 6937 6401)\(^{37}\). Whilst to the north of Bath, herepads run towards Bristol (castle established c.1088), Lasborough Castle (Glous. - ST 824 941) and Castle Combe (Wils. - ST 837 777); and it is possible that an early castle was also in existence at Kelston Tump, Roundhill\(^{38}\) (ST 711 677 - Fig. 34). Additionally, Bath, situated upon the lowest reaches of the Cotswolds, is surrounded in the north and north-east by a very high range of hills, and the Normans no-doubt relied upon this natural topography to further bolster their strategic castle system: 'as natural obstacles often serve well as strategic defensive lines' (Clausewitz; In: Howard & Paret, 1984, p.402).

By the time of the Norman invasion, the city of Bath was clearly dominating communications and trade in the north-eastern part of Somerset, and had grown quite large. It is well known that the Normans considered towns and cities as centres of resistance, and in Somerset they avoided building castles in them until at least 1107 (Taunton castle [22], founded sometime between 1107 and 1129, was the first). Bath was, very obviously, a major threat to Norman power in the region and, as a reaction to this threat, the Normans constructed castles at strategically significant locations in the surrounding countryside adjacent to herepads. This would have afforded them a large degree of control over the affairs of the city, whilst avoiding the necessity of building castles within. The proliferation of castles in the region seemingly indicating an area of military tension, where the castles acted as a group rather than as individual units. In the words of Vauban and Maigret, 'within enemy territory, towns must be closely guarded, lest the citizens rise up against the invaders; they are therefore a major strategic consideration in any military campaign' (In: Duffy, 1996, p.22).

In summary then, there does appear to be a reasonable correlation between the Anglo-Saxon system of roads and the locations chosen for Norman castles in Somerset. Further examples exist at Neroche [20], which is situated upon the ‘Broadway Herepad’ \(^{39}\); at Rimpton, where a herepad, forming the westerly boundary of the estate, likely ran from Sherborne to the Fosseway, passing suggestively close to Montacute [13]; whilst, from the same charter, another herepad can be noted running from Ilchester (past Sock Dennis) to Milborne Port and thence eastwards towards Wilton. However, in order to be absolutely certain of the influence that herepads exerted over the positioning of castles in the landscape, it is necessary to await the transcription of more herepad routes onto maps in the future.

Saxon Hundreds, Burhs, Towns and Norman Castles

'Somerset in the eighth and ninth centuries had no towns. The royal centres, where the King might have his hall, probably consisted of the hall and its associated service buildings and nothing more. Yet activities which were typically urban at a later date, such as manufacturing and trade, took place at
the king's hall' (Costen, 1992, pp.134-5). This situation persisted until the late ninth century when, in the reign of Alfred (871-899), the Danes began attacking and raiding along the English coast. As a child Alfred had been taken to Rome, and on his travels he would, doubtless, have encountered fortified continental towns: these towns appear to have provided Alfred with a model and, in an effort to counter the Danish attacks, he set about creating a chain of 'burhs' or strongholds across southern England. These burhs were earth and timber forts designed for communal defence, and an administrative text connected with their construction, known as the Burghal Hidage, indicates that at no point in the country was a Vill more than 20 miles (32.181an) from a fortified centre. Somerset has five burhs named in the Burghal Hidage document: Axbridge, Bath, Langport, Lyng and Watchet, all of which were linked to royal estates. By the early eleventh century, defences had been built at South Cadbury, and probably also at Bristol, Ilchester and Taunton; and at least some of these burhs were planned as fortified towns, rather than as simple refuges (Cambell, et al, 1982, pp 152-3).

With the establishment of the burhs, and the security that they provided, it was not long before other sites began to be exploited as towns, and during the tenth century more urban centres developed in Somerset than anywhere else in the Southwest. By 1086, in addition to Bath and Axbridge, Bruton, Ilchester, Langport, Milborne Port, Milverton and Taunton all had burgesses, Crewkerne, South Cadbury, South Petherton and Watchet all had royal mints, and Frome and Ilminster had markets (Costen, 1992); and nowhere in the well-developed eastern part of the county [was] more than 10 miles (16km) from a "town" of some sort (Aston, 1986, p.61).

From the ninth century onwards the basic administration and organisation of the Anglo-Saxon countryside was conducted through the arrangement of hundreds (Fig. 35), and the meeting of courts for those hundreds on a regular basis. In Somerset, there is noticeable correlation between 'towns' in the Anglo-Saxon period and hundredal arrangements. Each hundred seems to have had a 'central place' fulfilling its administrative, economic, social, judicial, religious and trading requirements; and many of these towns are hundred centres on hundredal manors (Aston, 1986, p.61). Indeed, 'a borough acted as both administrative centre and market for some burghal district often described as a hundred;...the borough was equivalent to the royal village on which the hundred centred' (Britnell, 1978, p.187; cited in Aston, 1986, p.61).

The Anglo-Saxon system of hundreds, each complete with governing 'central place', was the territorial system that the Normans would have encountered covering almost all of southern England upon their arrival in 1066. As Costen states, 'the royal foundations of the tenth century provided the skeleton around which the flesh was later wrapped' (1992, p.143). Interestingly however, Somerset's central places, which were obviously of great significance to the West Saxons, seem to have had only a very minor impact upon the siting of the county's Norman castles. An unusual factor considering that many of these central places were burhs, and burhs 'were located to take advantage of natural defensive features such as rivers...and [were] surrounded by earthwork defences' (Friar, 2001, p.44). Figure 36 shows the locations of Somerset's Saxon burhs and towns, and the positions of its Norman castles. It is obvious from the map that in the vast majority of cases the Normans avoided the original Saxon centres of...
governance; and the only places where the old can clearly be seen to meet the new are Taunton, Crewkerne and Athelney.

Taunton Castle [22] was most likely constructed between 1107 and 1129, by William Gifford, to replace the royal - and later episcopal - centre at the heart of the vast Taunton estate. Croft Castle [8], Crewkerne, was established some time between 1100 and 1150, by father and son Richard and Baldwin de Redvers, Earls of Devon. Thus, both castles are of relatively late date, established long after the West Saxons had been subdued. Burrow Mump [24], on the other hand, whilst possibly of relatively early date (?pre-1086), cannot be directly associated with the burh at Athelney as it is situated too far beyond its outer perimeter to be of much effective use; although it may have acted in a similar capacity to Wimble Toot and Sock Dennis at Ilchester. Traditionally, it has been argued that Somerset’s ‘castles were imposed upon the countryside in order to...provide a counterweight to the towns which were potentially dangerous to the Normans, since they were often defensible and difficult to capture’ (Costen, 1992, p.161). It is equally possible however, that another factor was at work here: The Normans, rather than being forced to impose their castles upon the countryside because they were unable to capture any of Somerset’s towns, chose instead to site their castles away from existing Saxon central places as part of a carefully conceived stratagem.

It has been argued that the redistribution of lands at the time of the Norman Conquest resulted in the redefining of old Saxon estates and holdings into new Norman baronies; that the caputs of the old Saxon estates were replaced by new Norman centres; and that from 1066 onwards, castles were a direct manifestation of the rearrangement of estates, emphasising that new administrative Norman centres were being created in the landscape, replacing the earlier Saxon central places (Aston, 1986, p.64). This argument is clearly supported by the evidence from Somerset. If the bounds of the landholdings of Somerset’s first Norman lords (Fig. 18) are compared to the bounds of the county’s original Saxon hundreds (Fig. 35), it is apparent that many of the old Saxon estates were rearranged to form the new Norman baronies (‘the skeleton around which the flesh was later wrapped’); whilst the Saxon caputs of burhs and towns were usurped by a new mechanism for governance, the Norman castle (Fig. 36). For example, Watchet appears to have been supplanted by Over Stowey [25], Cadbury appears to have been supplanted by Cary [7], Ilchester appears to have been supplanted by Montacute [13], and Axbridge appears to have been supplanted by Edithmead [27]. Given the fact that the Normans intentionally redistributed Saxon estates and purposefully transferred power away from important Saxon central places, their stratagem becomes clear, the wholesale destruction of the Saxon hundred system. With the destruction of the Saxon ‘political landscape’, the Normans were free to institute a political landscape of their own, the ‘landscape of feudalism’; which, according to many Anglo-Saxon apologists, spelled the end for the traditional Anglo-Saxon way of life.
Montacute Castle: A Symbol of Norman Dominion?

‘Castles are such conspicuous and characteristic monuments of aristocratic activity, in war and peace, that their impact on the rest of society can easily be neglected. Since they were both instrument and symbol of lordship to the ruling classes who possessed them, castles were conversely reminders of inferior status to the commons.’

Brown, 1980i, p.101

Even those who doubt the merits of the strategic approach to castles, with its use of tactical and strategic criteria for assessing the relative positions of castles in the landscape, cannot fail to appreciate the system’s overall consistency. This consistent approach quickly affords the pinpointing of tactical locations in the landscape where castles should have been constructed in order to gain strategic command of territory, natural resources, routes of transport, communication and supply, and the like. The castle at Montacute [13] (Fig. 37) has already been mentioned in terms of its strategic location and associated military functions: Montacute watched over the southern border of Somerset, lay adjacent to an old and well used route-way dating back into prehistory, and was ‘close to the Fosseway, running down to Exeter...and within easy striking distance of the routes through Sherborne to Crewkerne and from Ilchester south to Dorchester’ (Costen, 1992, p.160). In terms of its tactical location however, Montacute was somewhat poorly positioned.

Fletcher, discussing the castle at Montacute, states that ‘its position, apparently partially obscured by Ham Hill, suggests that it had both a limited impact and significance as a prominent feature in the landscape’ (2000, p.1). The motte and bailey at Montacute lies only 500 metres away from one of the largest Iron Age hillforts in Europe; Ham Hill (Fig. 38). Ham Hill was continually occupied from the Mesolithic period until the end of the Roman period due to its strategic importance and natural defensibility; the Romans building first a fort and later a villa in its interior. The ideal position for a castle in this locale was therefore, unquestionably, upon Ham Hill. Strange then that the Normans apparently chose to ignore the strategically significant, tactically superior, hillfort as a site upon which to erect their castle, opting instead for a location which, at first glance, appears far less suited to their purpose: the castle at Montacute lying in a predominantly agricultural zone, in a position that is tactically questionable.

The origins of the settlement at Montacute lie in the estate known as Logworesbeorh, Lodegaresbergh or Logderesdone, in the seventh century. The name probably derived from the personal name ‘Logor’, whom William of Malmesbury links to one of the twelve original monks of Glastonbury when St Patrick arrived (Dunning, 1974, p.212), and the Old English word ‘beorg’ meaning ‘a hill’. No documents relating to this estate survive from the tenth or first half of the eleventh centuries, but the Cronica states that William the Conqueror himself seized Lodgaresburgh from Glastonbury Abbey (Townsend, 1985). The evidence that Glastonbury Abbey ever held this estate is questionable however, as the documentary evidence is conflicting and cannot be properly substantiated, and other independent evidence survives which seems to indicate that during Cnut’s reign Montacute was in the hands of Tovi,
the Sheriff of Somerset (Abrams, 1996, p.160). In Domesday Book, the estate is called Bishopstone, and Robert, Count of Mortain, is recorded as holding nine hides there in 1086, which Athelney Abbey held in 1066: Robert obtaining this land in exchange for the manor of Purse Caundle (Candeb), Dorset. Domesday Book further records that the Count himself held it in lordship, ‘and there is his castle which is called Montacute’ (Williams & Martin, 2002, p.253). Nothing survives to suggest how the estate might have come to belong to Athelney Abbey however. What can be agreed upon though, is that either William or Robert considered the estate to be of importance, and took steps in the period immediately following William’s coronation to obtain it. The question that needs to be addressed here then is why?

The Saxon word ‘beorg’ is generally taken to mean ‘a hill’; it can, however, equally apply to artificial works, and is often confused with ‘byrig’ or ‘burh’ and may therefore carry some suggestion of pre-Norman defensive works. Significantly, the surviving earthworks of the motte and bailey appear to support the argument for a pre-Norman defensive structure of some kind. ‘St Michael’s Hill...has recognisably been carved into a motte or castle mound with a bailey on its ESE side and a wide terrace on the remaining sides (Fig. 38), but whether this terrace constituted a lower bailey is not certain...a bank around the base of the motte on the W side appears to be continued as a perimeter feature by terrace works within the bailey; these are incompatible with the bailey and...could suggest an original ?ring-work, possibly pre-Norman’ (SMR Entry No.54297). Furthermore, John Leland, Henry VIII’s Antiquarian, who travelled through the area between 1535 and 1543, recorded the tradition of a Saxon stronghold here. Possibly the reason why Ham Hill was ignored as an ideal castle location, and the reason why either William or Robert was so quick to secure the estate after the coronation, was that St Michael’s Hill itself was a place of some significance to the West Saxons. This notion is further supported by the fact that the hill was considered important enough to be given an individual Saxon name (‘Logworesbeorh’); and was of sufficient merit to warrant claim by the abbeys of Glastonbury and Athelney, and by Tovi, the Sheriff of Somerset.

Why was St Michael’s Hill significant, and why did the Saxon’s choose to defend it by building a protective earthwork, or stronghold, of some kind upon its summit? The answer appears to lie in a manuscript entitled De Inventione Sanctae Crucis Nostrae that was written by a Canon of Waltham Abbey in the twelfth century. The manuscript recounts that in year 1035, during the reign of Cnut, a local blacksmith found a ‘miraculous holy cross’ buried on top of St Michael’s Hill after it was revealed to him in a vision (Pooley, 1877). The cross was presented to Tovi, Lord of Montacute and Sheriff of Somerset, who carried the sacred relic by oxen cart to Waltham in Essex (Warbis, 1900, p.9), where he also owned land, and built a church to house it. When Tovi died, the church and the cross passed to Harold Godwinson, the future King of England. Harold set great store by the cross, and believed himself to have been miraculously cured of sickness through its powers. He set about enlarging Tovi’s church which, in time, grew to become Waltham Abbey. Later, Henry II further enlarged it, as part of his penance for the murder of Thomas à Becket, making it one of England’s most powerful abbeys (Adkins, 1992).
The Holy Cross, or Holy Rood, became an object of popular veneration and pilgrimage, and Harold apparently believed that its powers would help him in his struggle against the Vikings and the Normans. The manuscript records that Harold prayed before the cross on the eve of the Battle of Hastings, and on the day itself, and that while he lay prostrate on the floor praying for victory, the Abbot noticed the head of the Christ bent down instead of up, and because of this ill omen two priests accompanied Harold onto the battlefield (Dean, 1973, p.5). 'Holy Cross' was the battle cry of Harold's armies both at Hastings and Stamford Bridge, and when Harold was killed at Hastings his body was taken to Waltham Abbey where he was buried; a plain stone slab is believed to mark his grave. 'As for the holy cross, it remains shrouded in mystery. Despite its apparent failure at Hastings, it continued to work miracles and made Waltham Abbey a place of pilgrimage right up to the dissolution of the abbey in 1540' (Adkins, 1992, p.25); after such times its fate is unknown.

It is feasible then that the hill known as Logworesbeorh was considered a place of great religious significance by the Saxons; and this may have led to their building some kind of defensive or protective structure upon the summit. Later, the significance of the hill did not escape the attention of the Normans, and by 1068, Robert of Mortain had constructed a substantial motte and bailey upon the site. The erection of a castle upon the very spot where the legendary fragment of the 'True Cross' had been found must have inflicted a serious blow to the morale of the defeated Saxons; which was, almost certainly, the reason for the castle's construction. Phenomenologists have recently argued that some castles functioned iconographically as symbols of Norman power and influence; a role which sometimes transcended their military importance (Johnson, 1996, pp.122-2; Lewis et al, 1997, p.231; Creighton, 2002, p.65). The castle at Montacute seems to fall into this category, as its military importance seems to coexist with its function as a symbol of Norman dominion. 'A symbol of the Saxon’s bondage and the living instrument of their oppression' (Trask, 1898, p.30).

It has also been suggested that the landscape surrounding castles often contained deliberately created components which embodied biblical iconography that would have been understood regardless of linguistic and cultural differences (Marten-Holden, 2001, pp.51-2). In the book of Genesis God granted Adam dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and the beasts that walk upon the earth. In the shadow of Montacute castle is an eleventh century deer park, and a c.1102 Cluniac Priory, with associated fishponds and dovecote. Marten-Holden argues that this combination of features were symbolic representations of the facets of dominion granted to Adam, and subsequently claimed by the Norman lord of the manor (Ibid.). A complex mix of Anglo-Saxon precedent and Norman innovation, based upon a universally recognised model, deliberately used as propaganda, as part of a strategy of lordship.

The fact that the castle at Montacute was, apparently, intentionally erected over a Saxon holy site, and the surrounding landscape carefully manipulated to graphically portray the Norman lord's god given right over the biblical facets of dominion, leads to one conclusion only: that the Normans were attempting to utilise symbolism to psychologically suppress the local Saxon population. "The use of propaganda or other psychological means to influence or confuse the thinking, undermine the morale, etc.
of an enemy or opponent", is the dictionary definition of psychological warfare! Taking the phenomenological argument to a logical conclusion, the Normans may have been utilising castles in symbolic or iconographic ways, but their intent may often have been ‘the use of the castle as a psychological weapon’, rather than ‘the use of the castle as a status symbol’.

There are two other castles in Somerset that may also embody symbolic elements: Cary [7] and Neroche [20]. Leach and Ellis, discussing Cary, state that ‘Norman castle builders, whilst making use of existing features, were also frequently aware of the symbolic importance of the sites chosen. This combination of motives can be seen in the use, common within the region, of prehistoric earthworks, as at Castle Neroche, Old Sarum and Malmesbury. It may [therefore] be argued that the Cary ringwork was located at a site of significance to the Saxons associated with the source of the Cary, perhaps marked by a continuing religious focus from the Roman period [Period 1]’ (forthcoming). Excavations in 1903 (Gray, 1903) and 1961-4 (Davidson, 1972) failed to uncover any evidence for prehistoric activity at Neroche however, and it is possible that the large Phase 1 earthwork (Fig. 17) is in fact Saxon in origin. Neroche, like Montacute, may also, therefore, have been constructed upon a site of Saxon, rather than Iron Age, significance. In addition, the topography and landscape setting of Neroche is strikingly similar to that of Mortain itself. The fact that Robert of Mortain held the manor of Staple Fitzpaine (Williams & Martin, 2002, p.250) which included Neroche, possibly suggesting that the ‘symbolic’ aspect may have served a dual purpose here; Neroche symbolically reminding Robert of home.

The building of Robert’s castle upon Logworesbeorh at Montacute must have been a massive affront to Saxon pride in the area; to such an extent that in 1069, ‘the men of Somerset and Dorset rose with one heart and one soul to attack the stronghold...It was around the walls of this castle on the peaked hill that Englishmen dealt the last blow for the freedom of the western shires...[and] it was there that the last patriotic rising was crushed by the heavy hand of Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances, with the help...of the English forces of the shires and cities which were already conquered’ (Trask, 1898, p.30).

Norman Castle Building Strategies: A Scheme for Somerset

'We cannot know what debates there may have been before the decision was taken to build a castle...but...the establishment of a castle must have been a matter for serious deliberation.'

Pounds, 1990, p.54

Before the Norman Conquest, Somerset had been one of King Harold's staunchest supporters; and, due to its rich, waterlogged, reed-filled, almost impenetrable interior, the county in which King Alfred had successfully managed to avoid the Danes and, in 878, rally an army to fight them off without interference. The first conclusion that can be drawn about post-conquest Somerset then is that, for the Normans, it must have proved hostile territory indeed. Until at least 1107, unlike many of England's other counties, not one Norman castle was constructed inside a Somerset town, and Somerset never
received a royal castle at its heart. The Normans, out of necessity, were forced to implement a full castle building program in the county; and the vast majority of the castles they erected appear to have been positioned with strategic and or tactical considerations in mind. Each site was methodically selected so that the castle would have maximum influence over its primary objective, and, in addition, over its immediate environs and wider landscape setting, and, consequently, over the local Saxon populace. In several places, a proliferation of castles exists, such as those clustered around Bath or along the coast, suggesting that military tension in those areas ran high, the castles acting in concert rather than as individual units. In addition to which, William thought the county a serious enough threat to warrant despatching his own half-brother, Robert of Mortain, to deal with its suppression.

During the initial Invasion Period (Fig. 8), William de Mohun took, and then defended, the western coastal region (Fig. 18), the passes over Exmoor and the Quantocks (Figs. 7 & 20), and the royal estates along the coast at Carhampton and Williton (Fig. 36). Walter of Douai took, and then defended, the northern coastal region (Fig. 18), the routes north, and the approaches into Selwood Forest (Fig. 7). Whilst the south and east were taken, and then held, by Robert of Mortain (Fig. 18), who guarded the county’s borders and the cross country routes from Wiltshire into Devon (Fig. 30), and was ready to defend against insurrection by the local Saxon militia.

In chapter three, based upon rates of movement in the field for a mounted rider trotting, it was stated that the appropriate distance separating castles lay somewhere between 16 and 30 miles apart. Figure 9 shows that Somerset’s earliest castles were mainly located upon the rough semi-circle of hills which form a natural perimeter enclosing the county, and that the castles, on average, were spaced approximately 15 miles apart (24.131an). Three conclusions can be drawn here. Firstly, as the castles are below the appropriate distance apart, they again indicate that the area was hostile, the castles clustering close together for mutual support, shortening the length of time it took to ride between them: a mounted rider, trotting, safely covering the distance in just under 2 hours. Secondly, their roughly even distribution means that in just 4 hours, riders setting out from each castle could have successfully scoured the vast majority of the county: a horse, trotting, taking 8 minutes to traverse 1 mile (1.60km). The castle’s spheres of influence, in combination, being wide reaching enough to give complete territorial control to the Normans; their use of cavalry transforming the castle from a means of passive defence into an instrument for controlling the surrounding countryside. Thirdly, the castles literally ring the county, effectively fencing in the native Saxon population.

These early castles, in their carefully chosen strategic positions, quickly gave the Normans command of Somerset’s most important rivers, major ports, and road networks - and with them control over the county’s systems of communication and supply - as well control of the border, and with it the passage of goods and people in and out of the county. This would have effectively tied the local Saxon population up in knots, as they would not have been able to move in, around, or out of the county without the Normans being aware of their journey; and any large Saxon force attempting to cross into, or out of, Somerset would have been easily detected. This early scheme, with its economic, yet highly effective, use of a few well positioned castles, was incredibly successful; as the capture of Exeter, the fall of Devon
and Cornwall, the defeat of Harold’s sons, the suppression of the rebellion at Montacute, and the relatively trouble-free pacification of Somerset show.

It has been stated that ‘the crucial factor’ in the Norman selection of sites for castles ‘does not appear to have been any abstract military thinking: the main reason for choosing a site was apparently convenience’ (McNeill, 1992, p.33) - a statement directly challenged by the above findings. The Normans did not cover Somerset in random ‘castles of convenience’, rather they positioned castles at carefully selected ‘optimum sites’ in the landscape, each site chosen for its strategic and or tactical potential; the castles, in the vast majority of cases, fulfilling more than one military function, and operating simultaneously on several critical levels. These results are further strengthened by the fact that a similar pattern appears to have occurred in neighbouring Wiltshire. ‘The early castles of Wiltshire...were suspended within the web of medieval landscape at a variety of levels. As military sites with strategic or tactical roles, mottes and ringworks were often sited to dominate key resources and routes of communication’ (Creighton, 2000, p.105).

With Somerset held tentatively in their grasp, the Normans began moving cautiously in towards the centre of the county, pressing home their advantage: the Subjugation Period witnessing the introduction of a ‘Feudal System’ so that ‘a strategy of settlement might develop’ (Platt, 1995, p.1). By 1086, Walter of Douai held West Harptree manor and his son Robert of Bampton, from the newly built Richmont Castle [36], held, of the Count of Mortain, East Harptree manor, and together they controlled the routes across the Mendips. Alfred d’Epaignes constructed a motte at Over Stowey [25] and William of Falaise built a motte and bailey at Locking [4] further strengthening the Norman coastal defences. At the same time, William de Say constructed a motte and bailey at Bury [16] to protect Somerset’s southwestern border with Devon, to command the southern passes across Exmoor, and to control the River Exe, which flows south into Devon. The distribution and position of these new castles suggest that defence was still an important issue prior to c.1100, and that the Norman advance into the centre of the county was a slow one. The fact that the new castles cluster close to the earlier ones points to the continuing need for support, castle to castle, in the event of trouble.

After c.1100, the need for strategically placed military strongholds within the county gradually declined: as ‘the period when castles were needed to protect the Normans against the English was...quite short (Costen, 1992, p.161). From this point on, the Saxons appeared to pose less of a threat to the Normans, and consequently the locations chosen for the erection of new castles in the Somerset landscape slowly began to change. Castles were no longer built at locations with a purely military significance, emphasis instead shifting towards sites with influence over pre-Norman political and administrative units, existing towns and villages, and trade and commerce (Fig. 3). For example, a castle [18] and borough founded at this time at Stogursey, by William de Curci, quickly supplanted the importance and role of the former royal estate at Cannington (Aston, 1986, p.64). Between 1107 and 1129, William Gifford erected a castle [22] in Taunton to replace the royal - and later episcopal - centre at the heart of the vast Taunton estate. Between 1134 and 1154, Fitzharding erected a motte at Portbury [5] in order to exploit the possibility of trade with Bristol, its port, and the River Avon. Meanwhile, Neroche [20], Dunster [17],
Culverhay [33] and Cary [7] (See: Appendix 2) were given additional, visually impressive, defences to increase their status. 'Thereafter, the spread of castle building went hand-in-hand with the emergence of feudal politics, and the struggle for control of land and vassals, signalled by rebellion and private war...Castles formed the caputs of honours of the new landholders, at once the chief seat of the family and the centre of their administration' (Costen, 1992, pp.161-1).

The last castles that the Normans erected in Somerset have been appropriately termed 'Feudal Strongholds' (Dunning, 1995, p.11). These castles could be defended, but their military significance, and consequently their tactical and strategic positioning, appears to take second place to their value as administrative or political centres (Ibid. p.15). The castles of the Colonisation Period, unlike their predecessors, were not constructed in lofty, isolated, defensible locations, but in low-lying areas, very close to the people that the Norman lords elected to govern. Isabel de Chandos, the daughter of Alfred d'Epaignes, built a motte with two or, more probably, three baileys at Nether Stowey [26], to replace her father's ageing motte at Over Stowey [25]. The new castle, complete with stunning views of the Bristol Channel and the Quantock Hills, had a keep on the motte, built from the outset in stone. In 1202, a stone keep and bailey castle was built under royal licence at Bridgwater [28]. The castle was constructed on a low-lying site adjacent to the River Parrett, and was integrated into the 'New Town'. These new castles were no emergency structures, they were well planned and beautifully executed in stone, setting a precedent for the next phase of castle building in England: the awe inspiring stone built castles of the High Middle Ages. Other castles in Somerset, such as Dunster [17], Culverhay [33], Cary [7], Taunton [22] and Stogursey [18] developed into feudal strongholds: the wooden tower on the motte at Stogursey, for instance, being replaced by a shell-keep.

All those who have previously adopted a Strategic Approach to castles have generally addressed the issue of Norman forward planning from one of two sides. Harvey (1925) and Beeler (1956 & 1966) argued that castles were part of an integrated scheme, planned and controlled from somewhere close to the king (Pounds, 1990, p.54): Harvey stating that 'Castles were not isolated fortresses, but were arranged on a definite scientific plan' (1925, p.3). Whilst, on the other side, Brown claimed that 'the basic geographical knowledge was not available for such strategic planning from the centre even had the basic political and economic structure of the kingdom made it conceivable' (1926, p.189): Barlow adding that 'castle building was deliberate policy...but it should not be thought that it was controlled by a strategic master-plan (1961, p.89). The evidence presented in this chapter appears to support the latter view, in the words of Painter, 'the Conqueror and his sons could not have had sufficient geographical knowledge to formulate a national scheme of castle-building, and there was no need for such a plan' (1935, pp.321-2), to which can be added, 'because the use of castles in combination with military strategies, tactics and stratagems was plan enough to ensure a Norman victory over the Saxons'.

The Normans appear to have utilised a castle building scheme in Somerset that quickly afforded them control over the territory and its resources; leading swiftly to the subjugation of the local Saxon populace. This populace, once controlled, were unable to offer any kind of resistance to the introduction of a new form of political governance. In Somerset, a minority conquered the majority through stealth,
strategy and military prowess: a scenario, almost certainly, played out in many of England's other counties. The impact upon the Saxons, as the Norman castle network spread out across the landscape, must have been dramatic; and one cannot help feeling a touch of pity for the Saxons, who were evidently out-smarted and overawed by the use of a new military technology.
Almost nine hundred years ago, when the tide of Norman conquest rolled into the border shires and reached the frontier of the old Anglo-Saxon state... It soon became clear to the conquerors that the existence of an independent Wales posed a serious problem. Sudden descents by the turbulent Welsh tribesman had terrorised the border for years, and Norman control over the region would never be secure as long as this threat remained unchecked.'

Nelson, 1966, pp.4-5

The Trouble with the Welsh

In the seventh century, fierce Welsh resistance halted Mercian expansion into Wales. The Mercians were forced to stop short of the Cambrian Mountains, and gained only the foothills in the shadow of those heights. 'The barren uplands of Wales were apparently not worth the price the Mercians would have to pay for them' (Nelson, 1966, p.14). Due to the persistent Welsh threat, the Anglo-Saxon offensive turned rapidly into an exercise in the defensive, and King Offa (757-796AD) was compelled to construct a dyke that spanned the entire neck of the Welsh peninsula in an effort to define and stabilise Mercia's western border. The stabilisation of this border proved difficult however, and was only retained over time through a continued Saxon military presence.

The security of the western border was at greatest risk during the 1040's and 1050's, due to an internal Welsh power struggle between Gruffydd ap Llewelyn of Gwynedd and Gruffydd ap Rhydderch of Deheubarth: both rulers being responsible for savage raids launched into English territory. In 1039, Gruffydd ap Llewelyn seized the throne of Gwynedd and united it with that of Powys (Fig. 39). He then led the combined Welsh forces against an unsuspecting Mercian army encamped upon the banks of the River Severn and crushed them completely. Following this impressive victory Gruffydd ap Llewelyn turned his attentions to the conquest of Deheubarth, but was unable to force a decisive encounter with its king, Hywel ap Edwin, until 1041. When the encounter finally occurred Hywel was defeated, and in a second encounter between the two - in 1044 - killed. This left Gruffydd ap Llewelyn in a position to unite the crown of Deheubarth with that of Gwynedd and Powys. In spite of this victory however, Deheubarth remained strongly provincial, especially Dyfed and Ystrad Tywy, and Gruffydd ap Rhydderch emerged as a leader to use this provincialism in an attempt to displace Gruffydd ap Llewelyn. Gruffydd ap Llewelyn was so threatened by Gruffydd ap Rhydderch's rise to power that he made a pact with an English border Earl, Swegen Godwinson, whose lands included both Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. Thus, in 1049, an allied Welsh and English force invaded Deheubarth and devastated the surrounding countryside. Gruffydd ap Rhydderch managed to survive the attack however, and continued to solidify local opinion against Gruffydd ap Llewelyn.
In 1047, as a result of Gruffydd ap Rhydderch’s continuing propaganda, Gruffydd ap Llewellyn and his men were ambushed and defeated by the men of Ystrad Tywy. Gruffydd ap Llewellyn survived the encounter, but was temporarily forced into retirement in the north. Gruffydd ap Rhydderch then seized power for himself, and began a series of raids into English territory. In 1049, he struck up an alliance with a host of Irish Scandinavians, and with them raided into Herefordshire (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; Whitelock, et al, 1961, p.114), plundering the manor of Tidenham, and slaughtering a Saxon force sent against them by the Bishop of Worcester (Florence of Worcester; Thorpe, 1848-9, p.203). It is possible that these raids, and the exposed position of Herefordshire, led to the establishment of Norman colonies in the region. ‘Norman influences had been prominent in Edward’s court for some time, and a number of Norman immigrants had risen to high position with the benefit of royal influence. A group of these immigrants...established themselves in Herefordshire...erecting the new type of fortress which had been perfected in Normandy’ (Nelson, 1966, p.16). Osbern Penticost established the lordship of Ewyas Harold in the Black Mountains, where he built one of the first castles in England. Another Norman lord appears to have built Richard’s Castle, a little to the south of Ludlow, and King Edward’s nephew, Ralph, built himself a castle at Hereford (Rowley, 2001, p.89).

In 1052, when King Edward banished the entire Godwin household from England in an attempt to break their growing power, Gruffydd ap Llewellyn was inadvertently released from his pact with Swegan. Having suitably recovered from his defeat in 1048, he resumed his raids upon the Herefordshire border: attacking Earl Ralph’s Normano-English army, he dealt them a bitter defeat, and returned to Wales loaded with booty and a greatly heightened status.

In 1056, Gruffydd ap Rhydderch was killed, and Gruffydd ap Llewellyn finally won the Welsh power struggle (Brut y Tywysogyon; Jones, 1952, p.14 & 1955, p.25). Gruffydd ap Llewellyn quickly reunited Deheubarth to his realms, thrusting the English border region into even greater danger. Shortly after regaining Deheubarth, Gruffydd ap Llewellyn was approached by Aelfgar, an exiled English nobleman. Aelfgar was intent upon regaining his lost lands, and to that end had raised an army from Ireland’s Norse coastal towns. The two swiftly joined forces and marched upon Herefordshire. The combined Normano-English army, with Earl Ralph at its head, took flight before the allied Welsh, Danish and Irish force, leaving Aelfgar and Gruffydd free to plunder and burn Hereford itself.

The situation upon the border, and the threat posed to England’s stability, had become extremely serious. This fast escalating crisis needed to be dealt with promptly and efficiently, and Harold Godwinson rose to the challenge. Harold invaded Wales, but was unable to make much progress at this time due to the unfamiliar and difficult terrain, which forced him to come to terms with his enemies (Lloyd, 1954, p.365). ‘Aelfgar was reinstated as Earl of East Anglia, and Gruffydd appears to have been allowed to keep his border conquests’ (Nelson, 1966, p.18).

In 1062, Aelfgar died, depriving Gruffydd of his powerful ally. Harold quickly acted upon this turn of events, and in 1063 led a contingent of land and sea levies into Wales. Gruffydd ap Llewelyn’s seat at Rhuddlan was burnt, and Gruffydd was slain by his own men, who sent his head to Harold as a

By 1064, Harold had successfully managed to reduce the Welsh threat from one of national importance to one of mere border difficulties; but the problem persisted. In 1065, Harold led a Saxon force into troublesome Netherwent, and having subdued it ordered the building of a hunting-lodge at Portskewett. ‘So confident was he of the successful accomplishment of this work that he arranged that Edward should pay him a visit that summer to his new hunting-lodge, and saw to it that the place was fully provisioned’ (Lloyd, 1954, pp.372-3). As the lodge was nearing completion however, it was attacked and destroyed by Gruffydd ap Rhydderch’s son, Caradog, who carried off the provisions intended for the royal household (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; Whitelock, et al, 1961, p.114). This is the only solid piece of evidence for Saxon occupation in Gwent, and demonstrates that ‘the spirit of the Welsh remained unbroken and their independence was scarcely less ample that before’ (ibid.).

Wales then, had always been a country divided, its princes were not subject to supreme authority, and its alliances and frontiers shifted with kaleidoscopic rapidity (Golding, 1994, p.49). The Welsh had no effective central government, and short of making a treaty with every free Welshman, the English could not establish stable relations with them, making it virtually impossible to eliminate the threat of Welsh raids into England. ‘Neither diplomacy nor terrorism could pacify the decentralised and intensely localistic Welsh for any length of time. Peace along the border could not be secured unless a Welsh leader emerged who was strong enough to enforce it among the turbulent tribesmen’ (Nelson, 1966, p.19). Unfortunately for the English, every time such a leader emerged, peace seems to have been the last item on the agenda, as the Welsh, once united, immediately became formidable opponents, threatening the security of the West of England time and again.

The Arrival of the Normans

‘Nor were hands wanting for the task of subduing the Welsh. For some invaders, at least, Wales represented not so much a threat as an opportunity. Beyond the border lay lands to be had for the taking: lands that were, to all intents and purposes, free and empty. Impelled by twin considerations of political expediency and personal gain, the Norman conquest of Wales began.’

Nelson, 1966, pp.5-6

William the Conqueror must have been aware of the danger that Wales posed to the security and stability of England; the Normans no-doubt placing the Welsh threat high on their list of possible barriers to the successful completion of their Conquest of England. The Welsh problem, as past events had so readily shown, was threefold: if the Welsh tribesmen were united under a single ruler they immediately became formidable enemies; if they were kept in a continual state of disunity they would persist in raiding across the English border; whilst an alliance between an over-mighty frontier lord and a Welsh king could
seriously threaten the overall security of the whole of England, as the alliance between Aelfgar and Gruffydd had done. These problems needed a solution and William appears to have found one.

William’s solution was also threefold. First, he strove to keep the Welsh fragmented so that their overall threat was greatly lessened. Second, he was careful not to place too much power into the hands of any single Norman frontier lord. He created three compact evenly sized earldoms and granted them to men he could trust. ‘It is usual to refer to these three earldoms as ‘palatinates’. A palatinate is a territory within which royal power had been delegated to a local prince...but [in this case] authority was less than palatine’ (Pounds, 1990, p.35). Third, he established strong local forces that were given capable direction and considerable freedom of action thereby creating an effective defence against the Welsh raids (Nelson, 1966, p.20).

The three palatinates centred on Chester, Shrewsbury and Hereford and each was defended by a network of castles both internally, and where possible, westwards into Wales (Rowley, 2001, p.92). In the north, Hugh d’Avranches (d.1101) was installed as ‘Earl of Chester’. He was given jurisdiction over an area of land roughly coinciding with the dimensions of the modern county of Cheshire, but with no boundary in the west, leaving him free to pass into and out of Wales as he wished. A forward defence being established at the borough of Rhuddlan, under his cousin Robert (d.1093). In the centre, Roger of Montgomery (d.1094) was installed as ‘Earl of Shropshire’. He made the castle at Shrewsbury his seat and erected an outpost on the Welsh side of Offa’s Dyke in the region of Montgomery, thereby securing his western flank (ibid.). In the south, William fitz Osbem (d.1071) was installed as ‘Earl of Hereford’. He made the castle at Hereford his seat, and was set the task of defending the Wye basin from his newly established castles at Wigmore, Clifford and Ewyas Harold. Each Earl was ‘charged with the task of attempting the conquest and settlement of adjacent Welsh territory...either by themselves or by encouraging lesser men to do so on their behalf’ (Turvey, 2002, p.41).

The Lie of the Land

‘Physical geography...has imposed its own complex pattern of fragmentation on Wales. It was a pattern which made for diversity, not for unity.’

Davies, 2000, p.8

The Welsh landscape proved a huge obstacle to Norman success, as Turvey states ‘apart from the fierce resistance of the natives, the Normans had to contend with a country which proved wholly unsuited for their methods of warfare. Couched in thick woodlands, riven by mountain ranges, cut by deep river valleys and generously besprinkled with marshlands. Wales favoured the defender. The invader was largely denied the element of surprise, and mostly inhibited’ (2002, p.40). To appreciate the difficulties that the Normans faced in Wales, and to understand the character of the native Welsh themselves, a grasp of the country’s topography, geography and geology is essential.
Wales is dominated by mountains, which form its core. The central mountainous massif, cut diagonally by numerous river valleys, divides north and south, meaning that routes between the two regions are difficult and indirect. Historically, therefore, little communication occurred between the two, and there is a marked difference in the Welsh spoken (Howell & Beazley, 1977, p.15). Between east and west, there is an even greater topographical difference, and the inhospitable mountain core has restricted settlement to the coastal lowlands and river valleys. 'Wales was a country without a centre. Its population living along its peripheries, isolated from each other in pockets, large and small' (Davies, 2000, p.8).

Geographers tend to see Wales as a mountainous heartland, surrounded by the coastal regions of the north-west and Anglesey, the west, the south-west, the vale of Glamorgan and Gower, and the borderlands: northern, middle and south-eastern. These divisions align closely with Fox's 'Culture Provinces' of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (1932), where Wales is loosely divided into five major regions (Fig. 39). In the north-west, in an area naturally protected from English incursions by mountains and estuaries, lay fiercely independent Gwynedd with Anglesey at its centre. In the south-west, beyond the Cambrian Mountains, lay Dyfed, its outlook for centuries remaining westwards toward Ireland. In the north-east lay Clywd, gradually establishing cultural, commercial and social links with lowland England, its orientation was slowly becoming eastward facing. In the central borderlands, in an area of river valleys which provided ready access from England into Wales, lay predominantly eastward facing Powys; however, its rugged mountains, enclosed rounded-foothills and bleak moorlands, offered shelter and protection to many hostile native Welsh. In the south and south-east lay the rich agricultural lowlands of Glamorgan, Gwent and GwynNig, all exploited from an early date by English settlers. The south-east was in many ways the most distinctive region of Wales, its agricultural land was rich, it was well populated, its economic and social structures were more differentiated and complex, its settlement patterns were more securely established, and its links with England were close (Davies, 2000, p.9). Wales was a land of contrast, which by the eleventh century, despite being a well-recognised geographical expression, did not comfortably form a natural geographical unit.

Historic Monmouthshire

The historic county of Monmouthshire was not created until the 'Act of Union' in 1536, when the Tudor dynasty extended its rule over Wales and abolished the old political land divisions (Fig. 40); establishing in their place thirteen new shires based upon the English Model46. The new county took its name from Monmouth, which was established as the county town at this time. The boundaries of the new county roughly corresponded to a group of Norman marcher lordships, whose boundaries, in turn, had roughly corresponded to the Welsh system of commotes and cantrefs previously in existence in the region. Before the area was named 'Monmouthshire' it had unofficially been known as 'Gwent', the name deriving from the Celtic Caer-Went, for the Roman Venta Silurum; 'a fact which reflects the continuity between Roman settlement in the area and the subsequent Celtic kingdom of Gwent, which was bounded by the River Wye to the east and to the west by the River Usk' (Newman, 2000, p.1).
As it is important to define the geographical area for study, and as Monmouthshire’s borders have shifted on occasion\textsuperscript{47}, taking the early Welsh political land divisions as a starting point, this study will utilise Monmouthshire’s oldest county boundaries, and as such will include Gwynllŵg, Gwent Uwch Coed, Ewias, the majority of Gwent Is Coed, and the parish of Rhymney (part of Mid-Glamorgan since 1974) (Fig. 41). Gwent Is Coed originally included an area known as Ystrad Hafren, or Tidenham, lying to the east of the River Wye (now part of Gloucestershire), but this has been excluded from the study as it never became marcher lordship territory proper; the Normans passing swiftly through it and on into Gwent\textsuperscript{48}.

**Topography and Geology**

‘The southernmost extremes of the march, the ambivalent land of Gwent, too Welsh to be England, too English to be Wales, has always hovered elusively between the two, often claimed by both, occasionally disputed in arms by both. Here the rich soil of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire invades the starker foothills of Wales, desirable, accessible land, fertile and profitable, only made more delectable by the ridges of hills that overhang and shelter its valleys. Here the Normans made their first inroads into Wales...’

Peters & Morgan, 1997, p.47

Historic Monmouthshire, some 29 miles (46km) east-west and 42 miles (67km) north-south, is situated on the northern shore of the Bristol Channel; encompassing a zone of transition from highland to lowland (Fig. 42). The centre of the county, comprising old red sandstone, has been likened to an amphitheatre, the Vale of Usk, surfaced with low twisting ridges and valleys, forming the arena (Newman, 2000, p.3). In the north-west are the high coal measure uplands, rising to 500m A.O.D., associated, in the valleys which cut through them, with pennant sandstone (Fig. 50). In the north, comprising old red sandstone and rising to 300m A.O.D., are the Black Mountains, which are deeply trenched by the fertile parallel valleys of the Olchon, Escley Brook, Upper Monnow, Dulas and Dore (Rowley, 2001, p.21). South-east of the Black Mountains the topography consists of a gently rolling plateau shot through by the Monnow river valley. The Monnow joins the Wye at Monmouth, and between them, the two rivers form the county’s north-eastern and south-eastern boundary. West of the Wye is a region of rolling hills, geologically variable they rise to 110m A.O.D.; and out of them, comprising hard brownstone and rising to over 300m A.O.D., are the Trellech Plateau and Wentwood Ridge. South of the Wentwood Ridge, comprising quaternary peats, muds and silty sands, are the coastal levels that stretch along the Bristol Channel: to the east of the Usk, called the Caldicot levels, and to the west the Wentloog levels. North of the Wentloog levels rolling hills rise to 120m A.O.D., a mantle of morainic drift masking the regions solid geology: morainic drift also masking the solid geology of the White Castle, Bryngwyn and Raglan areas (Courtney, 1983, pp.5-6). West of the Wentloog levels, the River Rhymney forms the county’s western boundary. Finally, in the Llangibby area, the predominance of old red sandstone rocks is broken by an inlier of Silurian limestone and shales giving rise to a slightly more rugged landscape.
Monmouthshire's scenery today is one of 'rolling hills, quiet valleys, fields and hedgerows' (Howell & Beazley 1977, p.164), but in the early eleventh century the majority of the landscape was much less ordered. The lowlands were largely untilled, undrained, bogs and marshes, containing dense thickets of reeds with no dry ground, and the valleys were covered with thorns and thistles (Davis, 1982, pp.12-13). Dense forests, dominated by great oaks, blanketed the plains, and the undergrowth, for the most part, comprised gorse and bramble, presenting an almost impenetrable obstacle to travel and communication (Nelson, 1966, p.6; Davies, 2000, pp.139-71). In addition, the lowlands were home to bears, wolves, wildcats, and boars, further adding to the difficulties faced by potential settlers (Nelson, 1966, p.6). Unsurprisingly, the majority of Welsh settlement tended to occur along the upper slopes of the interior, on the edge of the open moorland, where forest growth thinned out (Edwards, 1997, pp.1-11). In contrast to the lowlands, these areas were comparatively habitable, but they were not ideal. Often damp and boggy, they were exposed to the full force of the moisture-laden westerly winds파, and the soil was characteristically thin and poor팍. To survive, the Welsh integrated the resources of upland and lowland to best effect. Practising transhumance from an early date, the communities availed themselves of the pastoral wealth of the uplands in summer and made maximum use of their limited arable and meadowland resources (Davies, 2000, p.140). Monmouthshire was, and to a certain extent still is, composed of two quite distinct environments, each one harbouring a host of potential problems for the incoming Norman settlers.

Monmouthshire's Norman Castles: applied methodology

'\textit{This small county is very much a Welsh March area (indeed, much of the western part was rather in Wales than the March) and the density of castles – one to 9.58 square miles – is higher than that of any other county except Northumberland and Herefordshire. The mountainous north-west of the county and the coastal marshes were unsuitable for anything but sparse population; elsewhere castles are very numerous – large, small, early, late, but almost all very interesting. As in all March counties, mottes are numerous, but there are numerous early castles of other types. Large and fairly well-preserved castles are common; in fact this is a county of unusual interest. 20 castles are mentioned in contemporary documents.}'

King, 1983, p.280

Following a study of modern팎 and contemporary sources, and excavation reports, in combination with a rigorous programme of field visits, 'A Gazetteer of Castle Sites in Monmouthshire' was produced (see Vol. 2): the study, in comparison to Somerset, proving far more problematic and labour intensive (See: Appendix 3). Figure 43 summarises some of the information contained in the gazetteer; the 83 entries팏 are all sites that have been listed or mentioned in various sources, at one time or another, as Norman castles existing within the boundaries of the county. Monmouthshire is proportionally smaller than Somerset, yet it seemingly contains twice as many castles. This fact could easily lead to the conclusion that the area was literally overrun with castles and no Norman stratagems were utilised. Again however, this is not the case, as the data that forms the basis for the listings contains spurious entries derived from inaccurate or incorrect field monument recordings.
Figure 44 contains additional information taken from the gazetteer, and from it, it can be noted that in the first instance 11, out of 83, castles have been rejected. The rejected sites being all those that were previously incorrectly identified as castles. The 'accepted or rejected' column appears again on figure 45, along with another column labelled 'further considerations'. This column contains information on site rejection, and also shows that some of the sites accepted initially as castles have been rejected on other grounds; the information again deriving from the gazetteer. The additional reasons for rejection ranging from castles having been constructed outside of the date range for this thesis (i.e. later than 1186), to castles being identified from contemporary sources as Welsh built (this being a study of early Norman castles), to the incorrect identification of other classes of historical earthwork as castles, to the results of recent archaeological excavations disproving the validity of certain castle sites. From figure 45, it can be noted that 25, out of the original 83, castles have been rejected. In Monmouthshire then, between 1067 and 1186, it is probable that a total of 58 Norman castles were erected, and it is these sites that will form the basis for the work in this chapter.

Figure 46 shows the 'actual' Norman castle sites in Monmouthshire. As has been shown however, these multi-period distribution maps are of limited use, and in order to work out the various associations existing between castles, or between castle and landscape elements, it is necessary to create phased distribution maps. Figure 47 contains a series of entries for Monmouthshire's 'actual' Norman castles. The table lists the castle's number and name, the type of castle first constructed at the site, the likely owner or builder of the castle, the probable date for the first phase of construction, and any later or associated structures, along with the 'period' to which the castle most likely belonged.

Having established dates - where sources allowed exact, otherwise approximate - for the first phases of castle construction at each site throughout the county, phased distribution maps were created. Figure 48 shows the castles constructed by William fitz Osbern between 1066 and 1071. The importance of William fitz Osbern and his role in the Norman invasion of Wales will be discussed at length below, here concern lies with the usefulness of the map itself. From the map, perhaps for the first time, specific areas within the county that were the first to be infiltrated by the Normans can be readily identified, and insight is gained into the various locations selected for the construction of Monmouthshire's earliest castles.

**Norman Castle Building Strategies in Monmouthshire**

It has already been stated that, until very recently, the military role of castles remained unchallenged, and as such the strategies associated with castle usage were largely unexplored. Nowhere is this factor more evident than in Wales. There are many books and articles that document the Norman use of castles in Wales, but there is hardly anywhere discussion of the various strategic or tactical functions of these castles, or, more importantly, discussion of the stratagems lying behind the choices of site selected for their construction.
Pettifer, in the most recent book on Welsh castles, avoids the issues of strategy and tactics completely (2000), whilst King offers his opinion of what the distribution of castles in the landscape do not represent (1983, Vol.1, p.xxxv). Renn, in passing, mentions William fitz Osbern’s castles, as protecting England’s western frontier, with Chepstow, Hereford and Monmouth castles lying about 25km apart along a medieval road; further suggesting that the site for the castle at Wigmore was probably selected to control the Roman road to Hereford (1987, p.57). Nelson briefly covers the usefulness of castles: in forming defensive border lines; in providing a refuge for men and goods; as a form of retro-defence employed to stop homeward bound, booty-laden, Welsh raiders from entering their valleys after pillaging in England; and the combination of castle and borough forming an economic unit of unprecedented vitality (1966). Rowley is a little more forthcoming on the subject, discussing the symbolic function of castles; their usage as strategic centres ‘from which Norman political control was exercised and military dominance clearly demonstrated’; and their role in ‘providing bases for active operations’; stating that their ‘distribution...was to some extent determined by the locations of...various uprisings against Norman control’ (2001, pp.93-4). Whilst Walters suggests that, ‘if castles were frequently found along roads and rivers [in Wales] it is only because most of the medieval population was found near them’ (1968, p.83). Most surprising though is Pounds, who, despite an entire chapter on ‘A Pattern of Castles’ (1990, pp.54-71), offers little by way of explanation for the siting of castles in the Welsh landscape: stating simply that ‘there was no overall plan of defence...[as] each castle could have been circumvented too easily for that’; arguing instead that ‘they served only for local protection against an enemy who came by stealth and at night to forage and loot’ (1990, p.70). Thus a study of castles in a Welsh landscape, from a military perspective, is long overdue.

Pivotal Points

The importance of ‘tactically significant’ and ‘strategically significant’ locations have already been discussed: tactically significant locations are highly defensible, topographically or geologically strong, points in the landscape, and strategically significant locations are points in the landscape which, due to their geographical positions, afford control of ‘key strategic elements’. Both types of location, because of their inherent advantages, compelling the military to acquire them, and then hold them via the construction of fortified places; ‘as the possession of such points [is] indispensable for carrying on the war’ (Wagner; in Shaw & Pilkington, 1872, p.6). The modern British army tends to refer to such locations as ‘nodal points’ or ‘pivotal points’.

Utilising the criteria established in chapter 3, it is possible to take a map of a given region and plot onto it the locations of the critical ‘pivotal points’. A map of castles existing in the region can then be compared with it, meaning that it is possible to suggest whether or not the castles in the landscape are at locations that are considered to be of strategic or tactical significance. Figure 49 shows the pivotal points in Monmouthshire’s landscape, alongside a map of its castles. There are 18 pivotal points plotted, and when this is compared with the map of castles existing in the region, it can be seen that at 14 of the pivotal points there are indeed castles; at 3 there are castles within a couple of miles radius (all in Ewias);
and at only one of the pivotal points there exists no castle whatsoever (at the juncture of the River Ebbw’s upper tributaries). There is a strong probability then, that many of the castles in Monmouthshire’s landscape were sited with military considerations in mind.

**Topography, Geology and Castle Locations**

‘facets of the local geology, such as the topography of the site, the physical properties of the substrate and the nature and availability of building materials in the area [placed constraints upon the] design and construction [of castles]...[but] medieval military architects, even though untrained in geological principles, generally made perceptive use of ground.’

Halsall, 2000, p.3

It has been suggested that in certain circumstances underlying geology may have had a direct effect upon the locations selected for castle erection, and upon the types of castle constructed (Halsall, 2000; Spurgeon, 1987; Neaverson, 1947). In neighbouring Glamorgan, for instance, a geological determinant apparently dictated the type of castle that could be constructed in certain areas, due to the presence or absence of glacial drift. All of Glamorgan’s mottes are located to the north of the ‘Port Way’58, which roughly follows the southern edge of a large glacial drift deposit, whilst to the south lay most of the county’s ringworks: the theory being, that mottes could not be raised upon the shallow soils over rock to the south of the Port Way (RCAHMW, 1991, pp.7 & 34-6), as ‘the construction of these strongholds requires the presence of a suitable substratum which could be rapidly fashioned into conical mounds’ (Neaverson, 1947, pp.6 & 17); thus ringworks were erected in their stead.

Figure 50 shows Monmouthshire’s geology and its Norman Castles. From the map, it is immediately apparent that no clear-cut divisions exist between castles and underlying geology in the region. This is to be expected however, as few areas display the abrupt and distinctly separate zones of drift and shallow soils over rock found in Glamorgan. Monmouthshire’s various castle types are, for the most part, widely distributed across the landscape upon assorted types of underlying geology. One exception is of interest geologically however. In the Vale of Usk, there is a concentrated group of seven ringworks. A quick glance at the gazetteer rules out the erection of these ringworks as part of a single campaign, as they range in date from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Spurgeon states that ‘this singular group of ringworks has yet to be tested for any possible geological anomaly’ (1987, p.35).

Figure 51 shows that two of the ringworks, Penhow [94] and Graig Foel [114], are situated over limestone. Limestone largely consists of calcium carbonate, which is easily dissolved by rainwater leaving little parent material to form soils; thus, soil deposits over limestone tend to be relatively shallow in nature (less than 28-30cm thick). This factor could easily account for the erection of the two ringworks, the substratum in the area being unsuitable for the construction of mottes. The other five ringworks [52, 73, 75, 77, 78] are however, situated over Old Red Sandstone, which gives rise to a sandy-textured, deep (70-200cm), fertile, Acidic Brown Earth; perfect conditions, in fact, for the construction of mottes. Why then were ringworks built in an area perfectly suited to the construction of mottes? The
answer appears to lie with the choice of sites selected for the erection of the castles themselves. Figure 51 shows that all of the castles in question were constructed at the crests of steep slopes, where, due to the action of certain geological processes, the soils are likely to be restricted to very shallow depths - called lithomorphic or ranker soils (less than 30 cm deep). Thus, the localised geological conditions made the erection of mottes impossible. Why did the Normans choose to build the castles at the summits of steep slopes? There is really only one answer to this question: the elevated sites were chosen for the castles due to the continual threat of danger in the area, making it necessary to erect castles in tactically defensible locations overlooking the Usk valley. Therefore, the choice of location and the associated local geology effectively dictated the construction of ringworks.

Moving to topography, at first glance figure 52 appears to indicate that most of Monmouthshire's castles were erected in the lowland zone. As the county contains strong contrasts in both geography and geology, the use of the term 'lowland' must be applied with some caution however. In fact, as figures 53 and 54 demonstrate, only 27% of Monmouthshire's castles were erected below 50.00m A.O.D., the majority of castles lying between 50.00m and 150.00m A.O.D., with a mere 7% above 300.00m A.O.D. In effect then, the majority of Monmouthshire's early Norman castles were founded in the zone of transition between upland and lowland, in a region which Davis terms 'the fertile plain' (1982, pp.12-13). Wales was not a land of easy opportunity or great reward, so the prospect of exploiting the rich fertile plain of Monmouthshire for its agricultural potential, once it had been deforested, must have been a great boon to Norman morale; and Norman interest in that direction is clearly evidenced by the distribution of many of the region's castles.

In Monmouthshire, the Normans constructed the largest proportion of their castles in the fertile river valleys (King, 1983, p.xxxv), or upon the lands overlooking the profitable coastal regions (RCAHMW, 1991, pp.5-6). Where the Normans did manage to retain land, they: introduced a manorial structure (Davies, 2000, pp.82-107); founded nucleated villages with open field systems (Courtney, 1983); brought in large numbers of English settlers (Edwards, 1997, p.6) or French colonists (Rowley, 2001, p.97); reclaimed land from the sea (Rippon; in Edwards, 1997, pp.13-30); and founded new towns and boroughs (Rowley, 2001, p.97). Monmouthshire's new agrarian communities prospered by exploiting the region's rich soils, woods and fisheries; and consequently the towns, whose weekly markets served to stimulate the local economy through trade, also thrived (Turvey, 2002, p.54). The Normans had little interest in settling the comparatively barren uplands however, and these were left to the Welsh to inhabit. Thus, by the end of the twelfth century, Wales was a country of two peoples, Welsh and Anglo-Norman, and 'the territory was often divided into the 'Englishry' and the 'Welshry', the latter lying above the 120.00m mark. In these upland areas Welsh laws and customs and Welsh agricultural practices survived' (Thomas, 1977, p.20). The Normans transformed Wales - in terms of political mastery, social configuration, and cultural influence - more profoundly than any other group or movement up until the industrial revolution (Davies, 2000, p.82). Before all this could begin though, the Normans first had to take and then hold the land, and it is essential to remember that there are also some highly significant tactical and strategic reasons for positioning castles in river valleys, or near the
coastline: castles, in such locations, afforded their garrisons control over trade, and command of the region's routes of transport, communication and supply.

Castles, Rivers and the Bristol Channel

'Britain's inland waterways were unrivalled as major routes for goods, mail and sometimes passengers until the great 19th century campaigns of road and rail building.'

Bell, 2003

'Nowhere can a fortress serve so many purposes or play so many parts as when it is located on a great river.'

Clausewitz; in Howard & Paret, 1984, p.399

Figure 55 shows Monmouthshire's river systems and its Norman castles. From the map, it is obvious that many of the county's castles lie adjacent to its waterways. This fact is not particularly surprising however, as it is difficult to walk more than 4 miles (6.43km) in Monmouthshire without having to cross a river; whilst a castle garrison's demands for access to a ready supply of potable water tended to force construction close to rivers. The map also shows that there is a chain of castles stretched out along the coastline; indeed, along the coast of the Bristol Channel there is a more or less continuous line of castles as far as Pembrokeshire (King, 1983, p.xxxv). In order to determine which of Monmouthshire's castles were primarily associated with waterways then, more information is required.

The Pigot & Co. Directory for South Wales 1844, states that 'the Wye, which rises in Radnorshire, and the Usk, [which rises] in Brecknockshire, are amongst Wales' navigable waterways'. Whilst Kelly's Directory for Monmouthshire 1901, notes that 'the Usk is navigable as far as the ancient city of Caerleon'61. The Pigot & Co Directory for Monmouthshire 1850, further states that 'the county of Monmouth is abundantly watered with fine rivers, the principal of which are the Severn, the Wye, the Monnow (or Munnnow), the Rumney, the Usk, and the Ebwy'; adding that 'the...Severn [is a] powerful auxiliary of commerce', and that 'the River Wye...is navigable for barges to Monmouth, and ships of considerable berth come up to Chepstow'. A recent DEFRA paper (Wye Navigation Order 2002), suggests though that 'by normal standards the Wye is not a navigable river for large craft due to its long stretches of shallow streamy water...the upper river contain[ing] many rocky stretches'. Since the seventeenth century however, there has been some form of legislation permitting and protecting navigation on the Wye and an undisputed right of navigation exists by statute as far upriver as Hay on Wye (ibid.). Furthermore, A Map of Navigable Waterways, dated 1818, by Longman et al., appears to show that the Ebbw was navigable as far up river as Llanhilleth62 (www.waterwaysinteractive.com). Lastly, Courtney states that 'in 1324, Usk was referred to...as a port' (1983, p.134).

Combining the information above, figure 56 shows the navigable portions of Monmouthshire's rivers and associated Norman castles. It is apparent from the map that there is a significant correlation
between many of Monmouthshire’s most prominent and influential castles and the documented navigable stretches of its waterways. Moreover, after discussing a number of topics relating to rivers and fortifications in chapter three, it was stated, for a variety of reasons, that the optimum location for a castle designed to exert influence over a river, was on an area of higher ground close to, and overlooking, the river itself. Figure 57 contains an entry for each castle in Monmouthshire associated with a navigable stretch of river, and the column headed 'location' demonstrates that in almost every case the castles were positioned at tactically defensible locations, on areas of higher ground, overlooking navigable river sections. The Normans were clearly employing the strategy of optimum site selection here.

Apparently, one Norman objective in Monmouthshire then, was to gain control of the region's navigable waterways, as this would have given them an instant means of transport, communication and supply, whilst conversely enabling them to observe and control enemy movement along the river valleys. The Monnow and Wye rivers were the first to be secured, and may have been taken as early as 1066-67. Monmouth Castle [59] was constructed on the navigable lower reaches of the Monnow, and Chepstow Castle [83] was constructed on the lower reaches of the navigable River Wye; this, in effect, gave the Normans a supply route that stretched from the Bristol Channel in the south around the whole of the eastern edge of the county. Halsall states that 'the ideal site for a medieval castle would be an isolated rocky hillock, 100-300m diameter, sited alongside a navigable river or marine harbour' (2000, p.5). Chepstow Castle undoubtedly fits this description. The castle at Chepstow was supplied with provisions from the port at Bristol, and those provisions entered the castle by way of a ‘stout pulley arm projecting out of the doorway [of the cellar] over the river, the supplies being winched up from boats beached within a cave below (Turner, 2000, p.39). William fitz Osbern no doubt reaching and securing the area initially by way of the sixty ships he contributed - and filled with his own men - for the Norman invasion of England. Shortly after the appropriation of the River Wye, the castles of Caldicot [81] and Caerwent [79] were constructed; apparently in the shadow of safety cast by Chepstow Castle. Both these castles lie close to the Neder Brook, and the sites were probably first reached via this watercourse - perhaps in small boats. The Normans then moved westwards along the coast, and by way of the River Usk, reached Caerleon, establishing a motte [72] there by 1086. Usk Castle [40] was later established at the river's northernmost navigable point - before 1120.

The Norman invasion of southern Wales is generally perceived as an east to west, land-based affair, the Normans presumably moving across the country by way of the old Roman roads, such as the east-west Port Way. It is equally likely however, that the invasion was a waterborne one, as the castles strung out along the coastline suggest (Fig. 55). The RCAHMW state that 'despite much debate it is uncertain whether the Norman invaders arrived by sea or by land' (1991, p.5). Thomas gives the traditional version of events, stating 'fitz Osbern moved down into Gwent, established the lordship of Strigoil and fortified Chepstow and Monmouth. By the time of his death in 1071 he had reached the Usk' (1977, p.20). Davies, on the other hand, implies that the easiest access route into south-east Wales was across the Severn estuary (2000, p.28). This view is supported by Nelson, who argues that there is strong evidence that Robert fitz Hamon launched his attack on Wales from his lands across the Bristol Channel [in Gloucestershire] (1966, pp.105). In reality, the truth probably falls somewhere between the two
arguments, the invasion coming from both land and sea, with the earliest Norman invaders seeking out prime sites for castle erection upon existing lines of communication. Robert fitz Hamon appears to have sailed up the River Rhymney in 1093, establishing both Rumney Castle [62] and Caer Castle [64] on Monmouthshire’s western border: these castles, lying close to the tidal inlet, being supplied or relieved in an emergency by sea.

It has been said that ‘there was an advantage in siting a castle close to a navigable waterway, though the Normans were somewhat slow in learning it’ (Pounds, 1990, p.162): this section has demonstrated the contrary. The principal castles of the lordships of Newport, Chepstow, Abergavenny, Monmouth, Caerleon and Usk were all, in fact, situated at important river crossings, the last four at confluences 65 only Abergavenny and Usk castles lying upon unnavigable sections. In this way, the Normans were able to ensure a safe river crossing for themselves at all times, whilst preventing their enemies from crossing within a radius of several miles of their castles. This effectively turned the rivers into impassable strategic defensive barriers, halting almost all west-east movement. The Normans through their stratagem also gained the capacity to safely shelter their own ships, won control over all river traffic, and could intercept and restrict movement on the roads which followed the river banks or crossed the rivers themselves. ‘In being thus master of the rivers, one thereby obtains command of the whole country: one may divert their course, if occasion shall require it; may be readily furnished with supplies of provisions; may have magazines formed, and ammunition, or other sorts of military stores transported to you with ease’ (Saxe, 1787, p.84).

Castles, Roman Roads and Ancient Trackways

'Communications are an obvious factor involved in the conquest, settlement and subsequent domination of any region.'

RCAHMW, 1991, p.5

Monmouthshire was dissected by five Roman roads: the road from Kenchester (Herefordshire) to Abergavenny; the road from Brecon – via Abergavenny, Usk and Llantrisant - to Caerleon; the road from Weston under Penyard (Herefordshire) – via Monmouth and Usk – to Caerleon; the road from Hereford – via Monmouth – to Chepstow; and finally, the road from London to Carmarthen - often referred to in Wales as the Port Way - which branched beyond Silchester to reach Caerwent either via Cirencester and Gloucester, or via Bath and a Severn crossing from Sea Mills in the estuary of the Bristol Avon.

Figure 58 shows Monmouthshire’s Roman roads, Roman sites, and associated Norman castles 66. Two conclusions can be drawn from the map: first, many of Monmouthshire’s Norman castles were situated along the routes taken by Roman roads; second, Roman roads in Wales are different in nature to those found in England as they do not form the straight lines one would usually expect to see plotted onto maps associated with Roman engineering. Taking the latter point first, generally speaking, in Wales,
Roman roads did not run in straight lines for considerable distances, as the hilly nature of the country prevented actual straightness for any but short distances, although the general direction towards their objective was always maintained as far as conditions would allow. In addition, the roads were often not as well constructed as their English counterparts, as Roman roads in Wales often comprised only a single layer of metalling, made up of coarse quarried gravel, whilst those in England generally consisted of about five layers of differing materials (O'Dwyer, 1934, p.5).

Moving to castles, in Monmouthshire, unlike in Somerset, there is actually a very good correlation between the Roman road network and the sites selected for castle erection (Fig. 59). 26 of Monmouthshire’s castles, or 45%, were located on or near Roman roads, and almost all of those were positioned in the landscape utilising the stratagem of optimum site selection. The vast majority, as the ‘location’ column of figure 59 demonstrates, were located at tactically defensible locations overlooking Roman roads, with 15 on or near pivotal points. This suggests that, in Monmouthshire at least, the Roman road network was still very much in use and, consequently, of great strategic importance. It has been stated that ‘the Normans made good use of the decayed Roman road network in the south-east’ (Davies, 2000, p.92), and, judging by the evidence presented here, this statement cannot be disputed.

As to which of Monmouthshire’s Roman roads were the first to be taken by the Normans, figure 59 is also instructive; shedding further light upon the argument over a predominantly land-based or sea-borne invasion. It is known that the Port Way followed the line of the Roman road across South Wales, and that many important early castles lay on its line, often within or adjacent to Roman forts (RCAHIMW, 1991, p.7). This is certainly true in Monmouthshire, as the two earliest castles in the county, Chepstow [83] (1066-69) and Caerwent [79] (1066-67), lay upon its route, along with seven others, two of which are inside Roman fortifications (Caerwent [79] and Caerleon [72]). The Port Way was likely the first road in the territory utilised and secured by the Normans then, arguably because it formed the most natural invasion route for them to have followed. Nelson, writing upon the invasion of Glamorgan, is in accord, stating that the Normans entered the region by way of ‘the Roman road leading from Caerleon to Cardiff and then through the Vale of Glamorgan along the line now followed by the A48 highway’ (1966, p.106). Viewed in isolation, this could be used to imply that the Port Way formed the main route for the Norman invasion of South Wales. However, if this were true, one would expect the conqueror of Glamorgan to be also Lord of Gwent (ibid.). This was not the case however, as the conqueror of Glamorgan was Robert fitz Hamon, who was lord of the lands lying directly across the Bristol Channel from the region invaded. Thus, the argument for a largely sea-borne invasion is further strengthened.

Following the advance along the Port Way, it appears that the next inroad for the Normans into Monmouthshire was either the route from Weston under Penyard, or the one from Hereford, with Raglan Castle in existence and watching over the stretch of road from Monmouth to Usk by c.1070. This was closely followed by the appropriation of the road from Kenchester (Hercfordsire) to Abergavenny, with Grosmont [49], Walterstone [104] and Abergavenny [38] castles all in existence by c.1090, after which, with these strategically positioned strongholds in place, the Normans were free to the usurp the rest of the road network at their leisure.
Finally, it is interesting to note (Fig. 58) that Caerleon [72], Abergavenny [38], Monmouth [59], Usk [46] and Caerwent [79] castles were all located at the sites of important Roman centres. Courtney argues that 'it is possible that this reflects continuity of these settlements as administrative centres from Roman times (1983, p.69). It is more likely however, that these sites were occupied because the Roman roads continued to play an important role in the region's communication system, and that the Romans had sited their bases at vital strategic points, and these points retained their value into medieval times.

The Roman road network was not the only land-based system for transport, communication and supply in use when the Normans entered Monmouthshire. As King states, 'the lines of English advance and Welsh counter-attack were more often the drier and more practicable mountain trackways' (1983, p.xxxv). Unfortunately, there is no record of the locations of these early trackways, and many are probably now beneath modern roads, but the positions of several Norman castles may indicate the whereabouts of some of these routeways (Fig. 60).

Wem-y-Cwrt Castle Mound [48] overlooks an east-west route that is almost certainly of great antiquity. The track probably ran from Abergavenny at least as far as Raglan, and may have continued all the way to Monmouth and beyond. Its route from Abergavenny is now followed by the modern B4598, as far as Llanvihangle Gobion, and then by minor roads to Raglan, and it seems likely that both the northern ends of the Roman roads from Caerleon to Abergavenny, and Caerleon to Monmouth, overlie it.

The motte at Newcastle [53] is situated in an elevated position atop a north-south ridge now used by the B4347 road. This road continues north up the Golden Valley, to become the B4348, and, along with the B4293 to the south, may represent the remains of an ancient trackway stretching all the way from Chepstow to Hay on Wye. The track runs directly past seven early Norman castles and passes within 2 miles (3.211km) of 12 others. One of the castles on route is Rockfield Castle [117]. Rockfield is situated in an isolated location overlooking the Monnow river valley, but 'its position suggests...that it was better suited to guarding the col now used by the B4233 road' (Courtney, 1983, p.91). The B4233 runs due east from Abergavenny to Rockfield, deviating only slightly at Llantilio Crossenny. Llantilio (medieval Llanteylo or Llandeilo Gresynni) means 'the church of St. Teilo', the Welsh saint whose principal monastery was at Llandeilo Fawr in Carmarthenshire, and it is likely that the church here may have formed the centre of a large ecclesiastical estate belonging to the Bishop of Llandaff (Knight, 1987, p.47). Llantilio however, may have had prior religious significance, as the church stands atop an entrenched mound, possibly indicating 'Christian re-use of an earlier, perhaps pagan, site' (Thomas, 1977, p.132). Either way, it is clear that the road respects the antiquity of the settlement at Llantilio, swinging around it in a large arc to the north and it is feasible that this route represents another ancient trackway.

Finally, O'Dwyer mentions an ancient track that passes close to the old church at St Illtyd (1937, p.21) and it is perhaps possible that a trackway ran north-south, first down the Ebbw Fach and then down the Ebbw river valley, from Brecon all the way to the estuary of the River Usk. The route likely monitored and controlled by a garrison stationed at St Illtyd's Motte [37], which was set high on a promontory overlooking the junction of the two rivers.
As the vast majority of Monmouthshire's castles were strategically positioned at tactically defensible locations in the landscape connected to the winning and subsequent monitoring and control of road and river systems, it is clear that these systems must have formed the primary focus for the Norman campaign in the region. With their continuing programme of castle building gradually usurping Monmouthshire's river and road systems, the Normans were effectively casting their net of influence over the land and its people.

The Norman 'Invasion' of Monmouthshire

It has been stated that 'the detailed transactions by which the Normans effected their penetrations...of the Welsh March are hidden from view' (Edwards, 1956, p.157), and that 'the conquest of Gwent by the Normans is poorly documented' (Courtney, 1983, p.48). Having now established the principal focus of the Norman castle building programme in Monmouthshire, as well as a chronological sequence for the various phases of castle construction at each site throughout the county, it is possible, in combination with what little historical documentation there is left in existence, to construct a convincing narrative for the Norman invasion of the region.

Initial Invasion Period (1066-1093)

The Norman invasion of Wales began when William I created three palatinates centred on Chester, Shrewsbury and Hereford. By the 1070's, Hugh d'Avranches had extended Norman control along the north coast as far as the Conway estuary, and Roger of Montgomery had begun a slow advance up the Severn valley, but it is generally agreed that the most impressive gains were made by William fitz Osbern. The majority of accounts of the Norman advance into Wales state that 'the most immediate gains were made by William fitz Osbern. He crossed the River Wye and overran much of Gwent before his death in 1071' (Pettifer, 2000, p.xii). As will be demonstrated however, this statement cannot be substantiated by fact.

Figure 48, shows the castles that William fitz Osbern constructed between 1066 and 1071, and the map shows that his gains were not perhaps as immediate as previously supposed. The castles that can definitely be attributed to him, The Bage [111], Ewyas Harold [109], Grosmont [49], Monmouth [59], Chepstow [83], Caldicot [81], and Caerwent [79]), along with those that he may have constructed, Mouse Castle [97] and Skenfrith [56], suggest only very minor penetrations into Monmouthshire at this time, as the majority of the castles lie upon the edge of the county. Indeed, Courtney states, 'it is not certain how far William fitz Osbern penetrated into Gwent' (1983, p.48). The Brut y Tywysogyon records that in 1072, Meredud ap Owain of Deuheubarth was defeated on the banks of the River Rhymney by Caradog ap Gruffydd and a Norman knight named Roger de Breuteuil (Jones, 1952, p.16 & 1955, pp.27-8). Caradog was the son of Gruffydd ap Ilywelyn Gruffydd ap Rhydderch, the former ruler of Deuheubart.
Caradog is documented as ruling Gwent Uwch Coed, Ystradyw and Gwynllg during the reign of William I (Liber Landaviensis; Rees, 1840, p.279), and is further recorded as ruler of Morgannwg in a Llandaff Charter of c.1075 (ibid., p.272). It is therefore likely, as Maund has suggested (2000, p.73), that the Normans did not pursue any major invasions into south-east Wales until Caradog’s death in 1081. Caradog probably negotiating some kind of temporary alliance for mutual gain with his Norman neighbours (ibid.).

The same situation seems to have existed in Gwent Is Coed and Ewias. The Liber Landaviensis (Rees, 1840, p.279) states that during the reign of William I both of these areas were ruled by the cousin and rival of Caradog ap Gruffydd, Rhydderch ap Caradog, and it is possible that both Walterstone Castle [104], built c.1067-71 by Walter de Lacy, and Raglan Castle [51], built c.1070 by Walter Bloet, were constructed in agreement with the local Welsh ruler, rather than, as previously supposed, to conquer and suppress him. Caradog and Rhydderch continuing to rule their respective areas, but accepting the Normans as overlords. In 1071, William fitz Osbern was slain at the battle of Cassel in Flanders and his lands passed to his youngest son Roger, an entry in Liber Landaviensis for 1072 referring to Roger fitz Osbern as ‘Lord of Gwent’ (Rees, 1840, pp.272-4).

Rhydderch was killed in 1076 by a member of his own family, who may have sided with his rival and cousin Caradog, and Caradog was himself killed in an inter-Welsh battle in 1081. It is only after these two events that the Norman advance can be seen to gather momentum (Figs. 61 & 62). In c.1086, the Ballon family (?Winebald de Ballon) constructed ‘The Berries’ [82] motte and bailey on Ballan Moor, and Turstin fitz Rolf constructed Caerleon motte [72]; both castles lying in Gwent Is Coed, on land formerly belonging to Rhydderch. By c.1090, Winebald’s brother, Hamelin de Ballon, had established a motte and bailey at Abergavenny [38], close to the border with Talgarth, presumably in support of the conquest of Brycheiniog by Bernard Neufmarché. The castle lay on a highly defensible spur overlooking the Rivers Usk and Gwenny, in the cantref of Gwent Uwch Coed, on land that had previously belonged to Caradog. Hamelin probably entered the region by way of the old Roman road from Herefordshire, and must have been a very brave individual indeed, for his newly established castle lay deep within enemy territory. A charter of 1100-06 records Hamelin giving his lands and castle for a bourg to the Abbey of St Vincent and St Lawrence (near Le Mans): ‘He gave the tithes of all Wennescoit [?Gwent Uwch Coed] both of his own demesne and those lands which he had given or would give in fee’ (Cal. Docts., Round, 1899, pp.395-416).

Finally in this period, during widespread Norman advances into Wales following the death of Rhys ap Tewdwr in 1093, Robert fitz Hamon (d.1117) annexed the lowland regions of Gwynllg, after conquering the majority of the neighbouring kingdom of Morgannwg (Glamorgan)67. Robert established both Rumney Castle [62] and Caer Castle [64] on Monmouthshire’s western border, close to the River Rhymney, on land that had previously belonged to Caradog. Robert carrying out his conquests with the aid of troops stationed in his lands directly across the Bristol Channel. The Brut y Tywysogyon records that the Welsh of Breicheiniog, Gwynllg and Gwent Uwch Coed were in revolt in 1096, apparently indicating that by this time Robert had conquered Gwynllg, and Hamelin de Ballon had conquered
Gwent Uwch Coed (Jones, 1952, p.20 & 1955, p.35). Gwynll g - the Newport lordship - and Glamorgan remained in the hands of the fitz Hamon family until 1183, when a daughter, Isabel, the wife of King John, inherited. After the death of Isabel in 1217, the lordship passed into the hands of Richard de Clare.

**Attempted Subjugation Period (1094-1134)**

It is often assumed that by 1100, the Normans had conquered the majority of Monmouthshire. As Kightly states, 'Following in the footsteps of the Conqueror's Earls, the Normans succeeded in overrunning almost the whole of south and west Wales during the latter part of the eleventh century' (1979, p.95). This generalisation is again not supported by the evidence however. William is not documented as 'Lord of Monmouth' until 1101-2 (CaL Docts., Round, 1899, p.406) and even then, he was still very far from being master of it all. In combination, figures 61 and 62 show that the Normans were not in complete control of Monmouthshire by 1093, as large areas of land remained wholly unoccupied. The Vale of Usk, the western half of Ewias, the northern half of Gwent Uwch Coed, the Caldicott Levels and the valleys of the River Ebbw (i.e. the commote of Machen), contained no castles, and were no-doubt still under Welsh rule. Added to which, in 1096, as mentioned above, the Welsh of Breicheiniog, Gwynll g and Gwent Uwch Coed revolted, successfully defeating the Norman army that was sent into Gwent to crush the rebellion, suggesting that the Normans actually lost some ground at this point.

During this period, the Normans came to rely heavily upon their existing castles, governing the already conquered lands from behind the safety of castle walls, whilst, simultaneously, constructing new castles in previously unoccupied territory (Fig. 63). Usk Castle [46] was probably built by the de Clares sometime before 1120, and appears to represent the first Norman advance into the amphitheatre like arena of the Vale of Usk. The castle, from a military perspective, being ideally positioned, as strategically it lay at a 'pivotal point', at the crossing of two Roman roads, and tactically it lay in an area of land between two rivers. In *Domesday Book*, Turstin fitz Rolf is recorded as holding six carucates of land beyond the Usk (Farley & Ellis, 1783-1816, Vol.1, p.162b). It is likely however, that all these lands lay in the vicinity of Caerleon - taken by Turstin during the *Initial Invasion Period* - as it is uncertain how large an area beyond the Usk was under direct Norman control at this date (Courtney, 1983, p.61). Winebald de Ballon is recorded as granting lands in Caerleon to Montacute Priory in Somerset, in 1129 (Liber Landavensis; Rees, 1840, pp.30 & 54), suggesting that by this time he had become Lord of Caerleon. Also, in what would later become the lordship of Usk, the castle of Beiliau Llangwm [77] was constructed; and this castle, along with Penhow [94], built pre-1129 in the lordship of Chepstow, and Dinham [80], built by Walter fitz Richard de Clare or Geoffrey de Ivry in c.1128, in an area that would eventually belong to the lordship of Caldicot, appear to indicate further Norman annexations of the area around the Wentwood Ridge.

In the developing lordship of Monmouth, Dixton Mound [60] was erected, presumably in an effort to control movement along the Roman road which crosses the River Wye into England via a ford.
between Walford and Goodrich. The castle was almost certainly founded to protect England's border, in
direct response to the Welsh uprisings. Another motte constructed at this time, for similar reasons to that
of Dixton Mound, was Stow Hill Castle [118]. Stow Hill was Newport's earliest castle, founded in-part
to act as the administrative centre of the caput of Newport, it was built by Robert of Hay in c.1100 on
land given to him by Robert fitz Hamon. From a military point of view, Stow Hill Castle was perfectly
located in the landscape, as it was tactically positioned between the Rivers Ebbw and Usk, strategically
close to the major east-west Roman road across Monmouthshire, overlooking the port, with fine views to
the south and south-west, sitting exactly on a 'pivotal point'. The castle was doubtless initially
constructed as a safety precaution shortly after the Welsh revolt of 1096, to monitor and control the
region's transportation systems, erected at the heart of the 'grounds of contention' (Cao Cao; in Cleary,

Another interesting castle of this period is the White Castle [47], built by either Hugh de lacy
(c.1100) or Payn fitz John (1120-35). The White Castle was constructed on a hilltop in open countryside
and at first glance appears to be oddly placed. The other castles often associated with it, Skenfrith [56]
and Grosmont [49], are both located in the Monnow valley adjacent to the river, but the White Castle is
0.621 miles (1km) away from an unnavigable section of the River Trothy, and there is no obvious
associated Roman road or ancient trackway. Furthermore, the White Castle, unlike the castles of
Skenfrith and Grosmont, is not situated next to a village or parish church: the nearest village being
Llantilio Crossenny, 1.50 miles (2.40km) to the south-east. This fact is easily explained however, as the
church at Llantilio probably formed the centre of a large ecclesiastical estate belonging to the Bishop of
Llandaff (Knight, 1987, p.47), and the church is likely older in origin than the castle. Thus, the White
Castle was constructed on the only land available, beyond the bounds of the ecclesiastical estate. Why
build a castle in the area in the first place? The answer appears to lie in the morphology of the castle
itself. King states 'there was little grace or comfort about what was plainly a purely military structure'
(1983, vol.2, plate 12), and it is probable that the White Castle served mainly as a military base, store and
arsenal. Looking at its imposing bailey it is not difficult to imagine a garrison encamped within its walls,
ready to sally forth at a moment's notice in the event of trouble, either south into the Vale of Usk or north
into the Monnow valley. Between 1219 and 1232, Hubert de Burgh rebuilt the castles of Skenfrith and
Grosmont to make them more comfortable and habitable, whereas at the White Castle he simply
improved its defences, adding further weight to the argument that it served as a functional military
edifice. In the thirteenth century the White Castle served to close the easy way into Herefordshire and
north Monmouthshire for the Welsh operating out of the remaining native lordships of Gwent Is Coed,
and to stop them striking through the Gap of Abergavenny, and its earlier role may have been similar.

Finally, throughout this period, a host of castles appeared in the landscape of Ewias, which later
became the lordship of Ewias Lacy: founded no earlier than 1175. Walter de Lacy built Walterstone
Castle [104] in Ewias between 1067 and 1071, when he was granted the bulk of the commote by William
fitz Osbern as a reward for being his main follower. Walter died in 1085 and was succeeded by his son
Roger. In 1096, King Rufus exiled Roger for his part in the Mowbray Rebellion and his lands were
conferred upon his younger brother Hugh de Lacy. Little is known of the acts of Hugh, except for his re-
founding of Llanthony Prima in 1108, and it seems likely that he died shortly after this, as 'between 1108 and 1115 a writ was sent by Henry I to Bishop Reinhelm of Hereford [1102-1115] ordering that the monastery of St Peters...hold all the grants of Walter, Roger and Hugh Lacy in peace' (Remfry, 1997, p.5).

The castles that appear to have been founded in Ewias between 1094 and 1134 are: Pont-Hendre [103], built by Payn fitz John between 1118 and 1137; Nant-y-Bar [98]; Mynydd-brith [99]; Snodhill [101], built by the de Chandos family; Urishay [102]; Dorstone [112], built by the de Sollers; Cothill Tump [105], Chanstone Tumps [106] and Bacton [113]. It could be argued that the contemporaneous construction of nine castles within a relatively small area is unlikely: a result of erroneous dating. It must be remembered however, that the Olchon, Escley Brook, Upper Monnow, Dulas and Dore rivulets flow through incredibly fertile narrow parallel valleys that would have attracted Norman settlers from the first; as the valleys were ripe for exploitation and comprised ideal locations for planned towns. In addition, in hostile regions where military tension existed, numerous castles were often constructed, the castles acting in concert rather than as individual units. Remfry argues however, that Ewias ‘was populated, like Archenfield, by friendly Welsh...who...were acting as clients of the Normans and interpreters between the races’ (1997, p.4). If the native Welsh were friendly, questions arise over why the Normans went to the trouble of building castles in the region, especially considering ‘that by any standard their construction was an expensive and significant undertaking’ (Liddiard, 2000i, p.169). There are two possible explanations. First, with the death of Hugh (d.1108-15), it is known that the de Lacy estates disintegrated, leading to a period of in-fighting between the relatives and descendants of the first Walter de Lacy; Payn fitz John remaining the main contender up until his death in 1137. Second, the Welsh rebellion was slowly gathering pace, even in the previously peaceful commote of Ewias.

The Welsh Offensive (1135-1165)

By the beginning of the twelfth century, it seemed as if, despite occasional reverses, the Norman invaders were on the verge of conquering the whole of Wales. However, with the death of Henry I in 1135, the Welsh rose against the Normans on the Southern March (Knight, 1987, p.4). In 1136, led by Owain Gwynedd in the north and Gruffydd ap Rhys in the south, they fell upon the intruders and overran their castles, until at one stage only Pembrokeshire remained in Norman hands. The Welsh of Western Brycheiniog revolted and raided into Gower, inflicting a massive defeat upon the Norman forces set to defend the region, and Iorwerth ab Owain ap Caradog ap Gruffydd ambushed and killed Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, Lord of Ceredigion. Thus, the countryside was again at the mercy of the Welsh. King Stephen mounted two expeditions into Wales to try to quell the rebellion, but both failed dismally, after which the Marcher Lords were simply left to deal with the crisis themselves, Stephen essentially abdicating royal leadership in Wales. In 1154, Stephen died and the mighty King Henry II ascended the throne, but even he was unable to retrieve the situation in Wales fully. Henry managed to contain the Welsh princes' advances however, and by the end of the century he had forged an uneasy peace with
them. The Anglo-Normans were left holding the low-lying south and east of the country, whilst the Welsh held most of the mountainous north and west.

During these troubled times, more castles than ever were being constructed (Fig. 64). 26 castles were erected, in comparison to 16 in the Initial Invasion Period (1066-1093) and 16 in the Attempted Subjugation Period (1094-1134). Beginning in the north of the county, four castles were constructed in Ewias: The Moat [41] 1135-54; Llancillo Motte [107] 1138-54 by the Escotot family; Rowleston Motte [108] 1138-54 by the Turbeville family; and Longtown Castle [100] c.1175 by the second Hugh de Lacy. In 1119, the nobles of the commote of Ewias — as recorded by the Bishop of Llandaff — were Robert de Chandos [Golden Valley], and Geoffrey Broi and Payn fitz John [Ewias Lacy] (Liber Landaviensis; Clark, 1910, pp.93-4). Shortly after the death of the childless first Hugh de Lacy (d.1108-15), Payn fitz John had married Sibyl, Hugh’s niece, and through her gained the rights to the de Lacy lands. Payn remained lord of the majority of Ewias until his death in 1137, after which, the de Lacy lands, with the blessing of the recently enthroned Stephen [1135], passed to Cecily, Payn’s daughter, and Roger, her new husband (the son of Miles of Gloucester). Gilbert de Lacy, the son of the banished Roger de Lacy, took affront at this decision however, seeing it almost as a declaration of war by Stephen, as he had been in the Royal Court at the time pressing for the reinstatement of his family’s lands.

In 1138, Gilbert de Lacy seized Ludlow Castle and presumably declared in favour of the Empress Matilda. In the following year Stephen besieged Ludlow and eventually managed to oust the rebels, but Gilbert escaped. Around this time, The Moat [41], Rowleston Motte [108], and Llancillo Motte [107] were erected; the latter by the Scotney (Escotot) family who became prominent barons of the de Lacys in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Peters and Morgan state, ‘almost all of the magnates of the March took the side of the empress, so that a solid wall of their personal armies completely blocked the way into Wales against any campaign the king might mount against the rebels’ (1997, p.22). Interestingly enough, The Moat, Llancillo and Rowleston castles were all constructed on the northern bank of the River Monnow overlooking the floodplain, ostensibly to impede the progress of any troops along the low-lying river valley that provided ready access into the region via a Roman road situated on the river’s southern bank. Rowleston Motte additionally monitored the Cwm Brook, whose valley afforded passage onto the higher grounds in the south of the commote. In 1149, Gilbert was finally granted that which he sought, his hereditary dues in Herefordshire along with the castles in Ewias, as part of a general anti-King Stephen settlement, and with most of the Marcher lords siding with Matilda, there was precious little Stephen could do to rectify the situation. With the death of Stephen in 1154, Henry II assumed the crown without opposition, and in c.1155, upon the death of Roger, the son of Miles of Gloucester, officially granted the majority of the lordship of Ewias to Gilbert.

In 1160-62, Gilbert (d.1163+) granted his estates to his son, the second Hugh de Lacy, and it was during the next 10 years that Hugh obtained a charter confirming Ewias Lacy and other lands to him (Remfry, 1997, p.11). Hugh was an outstanding soldier and seasoned campaigner and during his lifetime, became one of Henry II’s favourites. In October 1171, as part of a royal expedition, Hugh set sail for Ireland, and remained there after Henry II returned to England in April 1172. Hugh was made Lord of
Meath, Constable of Dublin and Justiciar of Ireland, to counterbalance Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare’s growing power, eventually rising in 1177, to the rank of Procurator-general of Ireland. In c.1175, Hugh erected Longtown Castle [100], probably to replace the ageing Pont-Hendre [103], built by Payn fitz John between 1118 and 1137, and established a borough befitting his status. Giraldus states that Hugh ‘was the first to succeed in deriving any profit from that which had brought others nothing but trouble’ (Scott & Martin, 1978, p.191). Hugh held his lands in Ewias until his death in 1186, after which they were briefly seized by the crown, later to be returned to Hugh’s son and heir Walter, in 1189.

Moving south from Ewias, we enter the lordship of the Three Castles, founded during this period. It is often stated that ‘when Henry I died in 1135, the Welsh rose against the Normans on the southern March and two or three years later Stephen reunited the territory of the Three Castles in his own hands by exchange, to make a single unit for purposes of defence. In this way, the Three Castles came to be a single lordship, a block of territory which was to remain in one ownership until the last century’ (Knight, 1987, p.47). This is supported by documentary evidence, which shows that throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries Crown officials administered the lordship. However, in a charter of 1137-38, Grosmont and Llantilio (White Castle) are confirmed as belonging to Roger, son of Miles of Gloucester, and his wife Cecily: ‘lands which belonged to her late father, Payn fitz John, by acquisition or inheritance’ (Round, 1888, pp.35-8). It is feasible then that a mutually beneficial exchange took place between Stephen, on the one hand, and Roger and Cecily, on the other. The marriage between Cecily and Roger had been arranged by their fathers, Payn fitz John and Miles of Gloucester, in an effort to protect Payn’s de Lacy holdings – Cecily was to take the fiefs as dower. Unfortunately for Cecily, Payn was killed whilst chasing a Welsh raiding party and the marriage was halted. After an inquiry, ‘Stephen decided, in December 1137, to let the marriage between Roger and Cecily go ahead, with all that it entailed for the Lacy estates’ (Remfry, 1997, p.8). Stephen’s blessing did not come without a price however, and in this case, the price was almost certainly Cecily’s holdings of Grosmont and Llantilio (White Castle). Stephen thereby gained a block of strategically placed Marcher lordship territory, and into the bargain made a powerful enemy - Gilbert de Lacy.

It is possible that the previously mentioned castles, The Moat [41], Rowlston Motte [108], and Llancillo Motte [107], were raised in southern Ewias in direct response to Stephen’s founding of the lordship of the Three Castles. The castles, rather than defending the Normans against the Welsh, defending Gilbert de Lacy’s pro-Matilda barons in Ewias, from Stephen’s troops stationed in the lordship of the Three Castles. These events could also account for the construction of the Goytre Wood Castle Mound [43] that was erected in the north-western corner of the lordship of Grosmont at this time. Goytre Wood Castle is tactically positioned on an isolated spur high above the River Monnow, strategically situated on a ‘pivotal point’, directly across the valley from de Lacy’s Walterstone Castle [104], midway between The Moat [41] and Llancillo Motte [107], overlooking a Roman road, in a location suggestive of a role in monitoring the Monnow valley. Stephen probably instigated the construction of the motte in order to protect the northern border of his Three Castles lordship.
Moving further south, Rockfield Castle [117], Newcastle [53], and Mill Wood Castle Mound [57] were founded in the lordship of Monmouth during this period, their tactical positioning indicative of the troubled times in which they were constructed. Newcastle and Rockfield castle appear to have been built to monitor and control movement along two ancient trackways, one stretching from Chepstow to Hay on Wye and the other running from Abergavenny to Rockfield itself. Mill Wood Castle Mound, on the other hand, lies beside a modern bridge across the River Trothy and may once have guarded a river crossing into the south-west corner of the Monmouth lordship. As stated above, it is often assumed that with the advent of this period the Normans had become masters of all lands in the Monmouth lordship, however the tactical positioning of the castles erected at this juncture indicate the contrary. The church of Llangattock and its chapel of St Maughans and Llanllwyd are not documented in Norman hands until a papal Bull of 1146 (Courtney, 1983, p.52), suggesting that the Normans were not in total control of the Monmouth lordship until the early twelfth century.

A similar pattern of castle building can be observed in the remainder of the old cantref of Gwent Uwch Coed, in the fast developing lordship of Abergavenny, the castles likewise erected at important strategic locations. Pen-y-Clawdd Motte [39] was constructed in a tactical location, at the foot of the steep eastern slopes of the mountain of Bryn Arrw, next to one of the sources of the River Gwenny, 0.621 miles (1km) away from and overlooking the River Monnow. The castle’s location indicates a purely military function, observing movement along the Monnow and Gavenny Valleys leading from Abergavenny towards Herefordshire. It is also interesting to note that Pen-y-Clawdd lies directly across the river from The Moat [41], suggesting that its builder may have sympathised with either Gilbert de Lacy or Stephen.

St Mary’s Yard Mound [42] was erected on the west bank of the River Usk, adjacent to a Roman road from Caerleon to Abergavenny, on a ‘pivotal point’, monitoring the area’s communications routes. Similar functions were performed in the east of the lordship by Coed-y-Mount [50], which was constructed atop a ridge in a highly defensible position commanding the valley of the River Trothy, and Wern-y-Cwrt Castle Mound [48] which was erected in the valley overlooking an east-west routeway of great antiquity; both castles defending against the easy passage into the region afforded by the valley itself. The Hendre Hafaidd [116] ringwork was tactically positioned on an elevated spur between two brooks, its isolated location at the very heart of the lordship suggesting that it served in a similar capacity to that of the White Castle, as a military base, store and arsenal. St Illtyd’s Motte [37] built on the lordship’s extreme western border, probably lay within the bounds of the Newport lordship (Gwynll g) and will therefore be discussed below. Lastly, if doubts prevail over the strategic or tactical importance of the region’s castles, it is worth remembering that in 1184 Abergavenny Castle itself was attacked and taken during a Welsh revolt. The Welsh used scaling ladders to enter the bailey and captured the castle’s constable, his wife and most of the garrison (Giraldus; Thorpe, 1978, pp.111-13).

South of the lordship of Abergavenny, five new castles were founded in the lordship of Usk at this time, four of which have discernible military functions. New House Ringwork [52] was constructed in an isolated location atop a hillock with commanding views northwards up the valleys of the Olway and
Nant-y-Wilcae to Raglan, and the D-shaped ringwork of Graig Foel [114] was erected on a steep-sided spur projecting from high ground above the flood-plain of the River Usk, both castles positioned in tactically defensible locations, at key strategic sites connected with the control of the region's rivers. Whilst Trecastle [54], situated at the head of a valley, and Trostrey [119], erected on the tip of a prominent spur overlooking the Usk valley, were both built to monitor and control movement along the Roman roads which pass close to them. Courtney argues that the castles founded near Usk at this time reflect a continuing 'process of Normanisation' (1983, p.141). This implies that the lordship was firmly under Norman control, and that castles were being constructed to serve as administrative centres for entirely secure fees. The locations selected for the erection of Usk's castles suggest however, that the area was still very much at risk. In truth, signs of integration and permanent settlement within the region do not occur until the thirteenth century. An inquisition of 1296, revealed, for the first time, the existence of both English and Welsh fees in the lordship (Cal. Inq. p. m., 3, Edw. I, 371). The construction of the fifth castle, Cwrt-y-Gaer [78], in the late twelfth century, at a site with no obvious military significance, can perhaps be seen as heralding the dawn of peaceful integrated sedentary settlement within the region. Cwrt-y-Gaer is situated between Pill Brook and another minor tributary of the River Usk, on the eastern end of a ridge, overlooking the church and hamlet of Wolvesnewton. The area comprises some of the lordship's richest soils, and is ideal for arable cultivation, as the nearby 'Model Farm' demonstrates (ST 444 987). Furthermore, Wolvesnewton the new tun of the Wolf family, is the lordship's only major English place name.

Moving west, we enter the small lordship of Llangibby. Rees suggests that Llangibby was based upon a Welsh cantref named Tregrug (1930, p.194), but Courtney states that he could find no evidence to substantiate this claim (1983, p.155). The lordship was clearly independent however, as documentation from the late thirteenth century shows that Llangibby was eventually administered as part of the Usk lordship (Min. Acc., 1262-3; SC6/1202/1), but held separately from the King (Inq. p. m., Edw. I, 1307; C133/130/62). During the Welsh Offensive, in the centre of the lordship, Llangibby Castle Mound [73] was constructed. The ringwork was built high above the floodplain of the River Usk, and was protected on both its northern and southern sides by valleys and streams. Its tactical location reflecting the continuing strategic importance of the Usk Valley at this time. In addition, to the south of Llangibby, on the western edge of the lordship of Chepstow, Caer Licyn [90] was erected, and again there is no disputing the castle's military potential. It was built on a commanding ridge overlooking the River Usk and a Roman road that runs south from Usk itself, at the point where the valley narrows considerably. Tactically, the location is perfect, and strategically the castle is ideally situated to monitor and control the nearby systems of transport, communication and supply.

The reason for construction of these two castles is apparent. Llangibby Castle Mound secured Llangibby itself, and in addition protected the western border of the lordship of Usk, whilst Caer Licyn protected the western border of the lordship of Chepstow. The borders of both lordships were at risk of attack from the east at the time, as in 1154 the Normans had lost Caerleon to the Welsh. The Sheriff of Gloucester was allowed 40s. for crown lands granted to Morgan ap Owain in Caerleon (Great Pipe Roll, Henry II, 1155-8, 49), and this probably represents acceptance by the newly enthroned Henry II of the
military seizure of Caerleon by the Welsh (Courtney, 1983, p.62). Caerleon remained in Welsh hands until William Marshall seized it in 1217, after which the De Clare family purchased it.

The fact that Caerleon was attacked and taken by the Welsh accounts for the construction of three castles within the lordship itself at this time. Graig Wood [71] was constructed high above the floodplain of the Afon Lwyd in order to monitor and control the river valley, Langstone Court Mound [74] was erected at a 'pivotal point', on high ground immediately to the south of and overlooking the major east-west Roman road across Monmouthshire, and Kemeys Inferior Motte [75] was built in a naturally defensible location, on the western edge of a steep scarp slope, overlooking the Usk valley. Thus, the castles bear all of the hallmarks associated with military endeavour and their dates of foundation place them in the period immediately preceding the Welsh offensive (i.e. before 1154).

Finally, moving west, we enter perhaps the most interesting of the lordships during this period - Newport. In c.1114, Robert of Hay appears to have relinquished the lordship of Newport (the southern half of the old cantref of Gwynll g) to Robert, Earl of Gloucester, who ruled it, along with Morgannwg, until his death in 1147. In 1135, Robert granted 300 acres of the coastal levels in his demesne at Rumney to the sons of the Welsh prince of the commote of Machen (the northern upland half of the old cantref of Gwynll g) in what was almost certainly a diplomatic effort to restore peace in the area following the widespread violence that erupted after the death of Henry I (Crouch, 1985, p.230). Lightfoot argues that Machen came under the control of Robert fitz Hamon shortly after c.1093 (http://www.castleswales.com/glam_rum.html, p.2). The evidence suggests however, that Machen, which formed the northern upland area of the Newport lordship, remained under Welsh rule until the late thirteenth century.

In the Newport lordship, there was a clearly defined frontier, the Normans occupied the low-lying coastal regions to the south and the Welsh occupied the high uplands to the north. Courtney draws attention to a number of Welsh built stone castles in the Machen uplands, suggesting that their presence reflects continuing Welsh rule of the area (1983, pp.204-5). In addition, the Welsh would have constructed earth and timber castles in the commote, as they were not slow to imitate the Normans in their construction of castles. Indeed, from the late eleventh century to the time of the Edwardian conquest both sides were building castles as well as capturing them (Kenyon; in Liddiard, 2003, p.247). Figure 65, shows the Welsh stone castles in the commote of Machen and the Norman castles in the lordship of Newport. Between 1135 and 1165, in an effort to protect the lowland lordship of Newport from Welsh incursions, the Normans appear to have raised: Twyn-Bar-Lwm castle [65], within a large Iron Age enclosure atop a coal-measure mountain; St Illtyd's Motte [37], on a high promontory to the east of and overlooking the divide of the Ebbw Fach and Ebbw rivers; and Wentloog Castle [66], situated in a relatively low-lying position overlooking the main east-west Roman road which crosses Monmouthshire.

Twyn-Bar-Lwm, at 404.00m A.O.D., and St Illtyd's, at 350.00m A.O.D., are Monmouthshire's most elevated Norman castles, and their positioning is highly instructive. To the west of the castles lies the Ebbw river valley, which forms a natural north-south pass, through which, passing close to the old church at St Illtyd (O'Dwyer, 1937, p.21), runs an ancient trackway, possibly stretching all the way from
Brecon in the north, via the Ebbw Fach, to the estuary of the River Usk in the south. This afforded a very easy route for invasion of the lowland lordship of Newport by the Welsh of the uplands, and the Normans, in order to protect themselves, sealed this passage with the construction of two strategically positioned castles. To the north, at the point where the trackway emerged from the Ebbw Fach river valley, St Illtyd’s Motte was erected, and to the south, at the point where the trackway emerged from the Ebbw river valley, Twyn-Bar-Lwm Castle was erected.

As the castles lay in isolated exposed hostile territory they needed to rely for their defence upon the region’s mountainous terrain, and to that end the Norman engineers, with their commanding knowledge of tactical considerations, singled out two readily adaptable, naturally defensible, elevated sites. The elevation afforded the garrisons an impressive view of the surrounding landscape, and an approaching enemy would have been easily spotted (Figs. 66, 67 & 68). With the castles in place the Normans gained control of the routeway, blocked passage to the Welsh, and thereby protected the Newport lordship from harm. Furthermore, if an approaching Welsh force were too large for the garrison to sensibly deal with, signal fires could be lit to attract aid and serve warning. On a clear day, a beacon fire lit on Twyn-Bar-Lwm would be visible not only in the lowland Newport lordship, but could be seen from the English side of the Bristol Channel.

A similar system of control has been noted in the neighbouring lordship of Glamorgan (Morgannwg), which was also ruled by Robert, Earl of Gloucester, at this time. Glamorgan, like Newport, comprises a fertile lowland zone and an inhospitable upland interior, and ‘the castles on the southern fringes of the uplands primarily served to stiffen the outer perimeter of the lowlands’ (RCAHMW, 1991, p.5). Whilst in the later period, after the annexations, very few castles were founded or improved in the uplands, and those that were were works of an essentially military nature acting as advanced garrison-castles (ibid.).

Another previously outlined strategy, was that two fortifications, situated in mountainous terrain, often acted in concert for mutual support, with one as it were on the ‘home side’ and the other on the ‘away side’, and it seems reasonable to suggest that St Illtyd’s in the north and Twyn-Bar-Lwm in the south may have acted in this capacity.

Finally at this time, Wentloog Castle [66] was constructed to protect the Port Way, the main east-west Roman road across South Wales. As, descending from the uplands, the Welsh could, by way of this road and the river crossing near Rumney Castle [62], easily have attacked Cardiff. The system of control again extended into neighbouring Glamorgan (Morgannwg), with many of the lordship’s earliest castles lying along the route of the Port Way (RCAHMW; 1991, p.5).

The strategies of castle building in the Newport lordship appear to have been highly successful, as Robert continued to rule it until his death in 1147, after which it passed into the hands of his son and heir, William, who ruled until his own death in 1183. The lands then passed, for a time, into royal custody. The commote of Machen continued to present problems for the Normans however. In 1236,
Gilbert Marshall seized the castle at Machen from Morgan ap Hywel, although he quickly restored it through fear of Llywelyn, despite the fact that he had made a great dyke or fortification around it (Cal. of Pat. Rolls, 1, Henry III, 160). By 1251, the commote was still in Welsh hands, the possession of Maredudd ap Gruffydd (Lloyd, 1954, p.713, n.113).

Commotes, Cantrefs and Castles: A Conclusion

'The land through which the Normans moved was made up of cantrefs, which they occupied one by one, replacing the chieftain’s llys with the lord’s castle, taking over the obligations of the native Welsh, and transforming them into feudal dues.'

Pounds, 1990, p.156

The Welsh law books of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries show, if somewhat theoretically, that Welsh administration before the Norman conquest was based upon kingdoms divided into cantrefs, which were in turn comprised of commotes (Richards, 1969). These law books specify two commotes per cantref, but this may represent a somewhat idealised picture (Courtney, 1983, p.35). The commote was approximately equivalent to the English hundred and was in turn composed of townships or trefydd (sing. tref). At the head of each commote was the tywysog or prince, and his home, the llys, was generally a purpose built timber hall where he held court and ruled over his small patrimony. Monmouthshire itself was divided between four such cantrefs, Ewias, Gwent Uwch Coed, Gwent Is Coed and Gwynllwg, and these were further subdivided into commotes (Fig. 41).

It is often argued that commotes formed 'units of penetration' for the Normans; the Normans not simply acquiring Welsh lands, but commotes, or groups of commotes (Edwards, 1956, pp.163 & 168). Pounds states that 'when the Normans began to conquer Wales they occupied commotes, one at a time, so that these units remained the building blocks of which feudal Wales was made' (Pounds, 1990, p.154). Edwards goes further however, arguing that as the commote was bound up with the Welsh institution of the tywysog (prince), the Normans, 'by adopting the procedure of seizing commotes...were acquiring more than land: they were acquiring 'lordship' (Edwards, 1956, pp.169-70). This view is supported by Nelson who states, 'the marcher lords derived their powers directly from the Welsh chieftains whom they replaced' (Nelson, 1966, pp.158-9).

Edwards' theories were derived from a study of the lordship of Cardigan, where he observed that eleven castles and the associated castehies, founded between 1100 and 1136, correlated closely with the ten commotes of Ceredigion. Thus, he argued, the design appeared to have been, 'to each commote its Norman castle', and further, that each commote served as a 'unit of penetration' (Edwards, 1956, pp.165-69). With Edwards' study in mind, figure 69 was produced. The spreadsheet shows that in Monmouthshire, between 1066 and 1134, the Normans founded thirteen castles in the commote of Ewias, one in Uwch Coed, five in Teirtref, three in Brynbuga, six in Is Coed, and three in the cantref of Gwynllwg, whilst in the commotes of Tryleg, Tregrug and Llebenydd no Norman castles were
constructed (Fig. 70). Edwards' theories clearly do not hold sway in Monmouthshire then, the distribution of castles suggesting adherence to a very different design. A design, judging by the findings in this chapter, that focused upon the appropriation of the county's systems of communication, transportation and supply. It can therefore be concluded that the Norman campaign in Monmouthshire must be seen as a military take-over proper, rather than, as Edwards would have us believe a somewhat more political affair.

The idea that the Normans occupied Monmouthshire's cantrefs or commotes one at a time is further discredited by the fact that this chapter has demonstrated that the Normans were active at a variety of widespread locations from an early date (Fig. 71). Edwards argues that William fitz Osbern and his son Roger de Breuteuil held the two cantrefs of Gwent Uwch Coed and Gwent Is Coed between 1066 and 1075 (1956, pp.162-3), but Domesday Book does no more than record that they had been active in the region, between the Rivers Monnow and Usk (Williams & Martin, 2002, p.446), presumably because neither one held any area of land substantial enough for the Domesday Commissioners to describe. Eventually, the boundaries of the old cantrefs and commotes did become the framework for the system of lordships established in Monmouthshire (Figs. 70, 72, 73), but 'in the areas that were heavily colonised by the Anglo-Normans, notably lowland Gwent, Glamorgan, Gower and Pembroke, the Welsh divisions were quickly obliterated or mangled and replaced by knight's fees, lordships, castelries, mesne lordships and manors' (Davis, 2000, p.21).

In conclusion, it can be stated that in Monmouthshire, the Norman invasion and subsequent campaigns were fundamentally based upon the time honoured military principles of strategy and tactics, the majority of castles being sited in the landscape with a primary objective in mind: the usurpation of the region's networks of communication, transportation and supply. The Normans utilised 'the stratagem of optimum site selection' to great effect, positioning their castles in tactically defensible locations overlooking the county's rivers, roads, ancient trackways, and extensive coastline. As Davies states, 'the castles, almost without exception, displayed the Norman talent for choosing strategic sites to maximum military and territorial advantage (2000, p.90). Then, with their lines for supply and reinforcement assured, the Normans divided the land and established lordships in order to reap the benefits of their conquests. The estates being 'reorganised to form integrated military command-units or castleries centred upon a major castle' (ibid., p.89).

It must be remembered however, that the Norman conquest of Monmouthshire was not a single campaign planned and co-ordinated by a king, or powerful lord, but rather, many campaigns, carried out over time, by numerous individuals, in various locations. This, in effect, demonstrates just how well established the principles lying behind the Norman castle building programme were, and partially explains why the overall campaign was not wholly successful. The Norman conquest of England was the idea of one man, which was accomplished in less than twenty years, and embraced the whole of England. The Norman conquest of Wales, on the other hand, was achieved piecemeal, over the course of some one hundred and twenty years after the battle of Hastings, and only ever extended permanently to half of Wales; broadly speaking, the southern half. The Norman campaign in Wales being additionally thwarted
by terrain, flora and fauna, climate, and by the fact that the Welsh were afforded time to adapt. Giraldus noting that it was from the Normans that the Welsh learnt how to use arms, construct castles and fight on horseback (Giraldus; Thorpe, 1978).
CHAPTER 6 · ANGLO-NORMAN CASTLES IN CO. MEATH

The Celts came from a land beyond the sea,  
And settled at last on Erin's shore,  
And sang their songs of simple glee  
And loved and fought in the days of yore.  
But the Normans came with their feudal lore  
To banish forever the life they knew,  
Earl and Marshall - and something more -  
Sheriff and Bailiff and hangman too.

From: The Ballade of Law and Order by Colm O’Lochlainn  
(in Brady, 1961, p.38)

War, Kingship and Treachery

The Early Middle Ages (c.400-1200) have long been considered a ‘Golden Age’ in Ireland’s history. In a country newly converted to Christianity, literature, learning and the arts flourished (Edwards, 1996). The rural landscape was neatly divided into units (O’Keeffe, 1996, pp.142-53), interspersed with wealthy proto-urban monastic centres, and society was neatly divided into a hierarchy (Simms, 2000, pp.96-115). The lower classes lived in scattered farmsteads, sometimes inside defended enclosures (Edwards, 1996, pp.6-33), in comfortable dwellings (Rice, 2001, p.16), and reared cattle and pigs, and grew cereal crops (Cosgrove, 1993, p.lix). At the upper levels of society, Irish kings employed chancellors and issued charters, acquired houses in Norse sea-ports or monastic centres, constructed naval fleets, fielded large well organised armies, which they could provision and keep in the field for months at a time, presided over reforming synods of the church - gatherings which might also issue regulations on secular matters - and claimed territorial ownership over the kingdoms which they ruled (Simms, 2000; Flanagan, 1996; Byrne, 1993). The Irish were, then, far removed from the ‘primitive’, ‘barbarous’, ‘uncultivated’, ‘axe wielding’, ‘treacherous’, ‘wild and inhospitable people’, portrayed by Giralidus; who further claimed that they ‘lived like beasts’ and went ‘naked and unarmed into battle’ (O’Meara, 1985). Although an obvious form of early propaganda, the writing of Giralidus does contain an element of truth however, the Irish were a warlike nation.

The backdrop that formed the setting for the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland was in many respects similar to the situation that had existed in Wales prior to their invasion; a patchwork of rivalry, infighting and continual aggression. The history of Ireland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was the history of a nation evolving its monarchy. The armies of provincial kings marched and counter-marched across a ‘trembling sod’ in an attempt to secure for their leader a most elusive goal, the High-Kingship of all Ireland (Byrne, 1993). Warfare then, or at the very least an absence of peace, was central to the Irish historical experience (Bartlett & Jeffery, 1996), and the relentless struggle for power resulted in alliances and boundaries that shifted continually.
In 1072, Conor O'Melaghlin, king of Meath, killed the over ambitious king of Leinster, Dermot MacMaelnamo, only to be slain himself the following year. The deaths of these two influential men had a dual outcome: first, the way was cleared for the king of Munster, Toirrdelbach O'Brien, to rise to power, and second, the previously potent kingdom of Meath went into a decline.

From 1086 to 1114, the most dominant provincial king in Ireland was Muirchertach O'Brien of Munster (Figs. 74 & 75). Muirchertach and his father Toirrdelbach had, between them, come close to achieving true High-Kingship in Ireland from their capital at Limerick. Commanding most of the country, they instigated friendly relations with the Norwegian king of the House of Ivar at Waterford, established trading links with Rouen, the capital of the Duchy of Normandy, and encouraged ecclesiastical reform. Their pretensions to the monarchy of Ireland were held in check by Domnaill MacLochlainn of Ailech (in The North) however, who, being militarily more powerful, remained a rival claimant to the High-Kingship from 1083 to 1121 (Byrne, 1993, pp.28-33). This stalemate continued until 1114, when Muirchertach fell ill and was deposed by his brother Diarmait. Diarmait made a secret peace with Turlough O'Connor, king of Connacht - a former ally of MacLochlainn's - and upon the death of Muirchertach in 1119, Turlough partitioned Munster between the sons of Diarmait and Tadg MacCarthaig, thereby destroying the power of the O'Briens. With Munster greatly weakened, Turlough then threw his energies into making himself High-King of Ireland.

Putting aside for a moment Meath's strategic, economic and ecclesiastical importance, the county held a huge symbolic significance for any would-be High-King. Tradition suggests that from the second century AD, Meath was known as the Royal County, territory of the High-Kings of Ireland whose traditional residence was the Hill of Tara, thus Meath figures predominately in any narrative on Ireland's history. In the years 1115, 1125, 1127 and 1138 the ever ambitious Turlough made attempts to oust Murrough O'Melaghlin (Murchad) (Fig. 76), king of Meath, to secure the kingdom for himself. On each occasion Murrough managed to hold off Turlough's advances however, continuing to rule until his capture by Turlough's ally, Tiernan O'Rourke, king of Breifne, in 1143. Meath was then divided into three. Tiernan managed to push the borders of his kingdom of Breifne as far south as Kells and Slane, 'and was styled not altogether incorrectly as “King of the Meath Men” by Giraldus' (Scott & Martin, 1978, p.25). Tiernan's enemy, and uterine brother, Donncadh O'Carroll, king of Airgialla - and nephew of Murrough - occupied the ancient Brega kingdom of Fir Arda Ciannachta (Co. Louth). Whilst to the south, Dermot MacMurrough, king of Leinster - and Tiernan's greatest adversary - extended the borders of his kingdom into southern Brega. In 1150, Donncadh managed to retake Dermot's gains from him (Rice, 2001, p.15), restoring Murrough O'Melaghlin to the western half of Meath in 1152. Melaghlin (Maelechlainn), Murrough's son, was then given the eastern half of Meath, and together father and son ruled jointly as kings. Murrough's rule of West Meath was short-lived, as he died in 1153, after which Melaghlin claimed to be sole king of Meath.

Melaghlin ruled Meath until he was poisoned in 1155, at which point Donnell O'Melaghlin (Donnchad) seized the crown. Donnell's right to kingship was contested by his brother Dermot (Diarmaid), and as a result Donnell was deposed by the men of Meath and Dermot set up in his place
Over the next four years, Meath became a war-zone, as the two brothers - each a puppet of powerful allies - fought over the crown. In 1159, Donnell finally gained 'all of Meath from the Shannon to the sea', but was slain the very next year by the king of Delhna Mór (in Westmeath), the kingship reverting for a time to Dermot.

In 1156, Turlough O'Connell, king of Connacht, died, and upon his death supreme power in Ireland passed to the Muirchertach MacLochlainn, king of Tir Eógain (in The North) (Fig. 74). Muirchertach was quick to ally himself with Dermot MacMurrough, king of Leinster, against his main opponent, Turlough's son and heir, Rory O'Connor of Connacht; whilst unsurprisingly, Dermot's mortal enemy, Tiernan O'Rourke, king of Breifne, allied himself with Rory. The north-south alliance between Muirchertach and Dermot proved successful, and Muirchertach held the upper hand in Ireland for the next ten years. During this period Dermot, with the support of his ally, again expanded the northern borders of his kingdom into southern Brega (Meath), but this programme of aggressive expansion brought him once more into conflict with Tiernan of Breifne, and a bitter hatred grew between the two men. Hatred strengthened by the fact that in 1152, during the course of yet another dispute over territory in Meath, Dermot had abducted Tiernan's wife, Dervorgilla.

In 1166, Muirchertach MacLochlainn was slain in battle and Dermot MacMurrough lost his ally and protector. With Muirchertach dead, Rory O'Connor saw his chance at High-Kingship, and Tiernan O'Rourke saw an opportunity to avenge himself upon his old enemy (Orpen, 1911-20, i). Rory and Tiernan marched through Meath, where they received hostages from Dermot O'Melaghlin, to Dublin. The Ostmen (Norsemen) of Dublin submitted to Rory, and he was quickly inaugurated as High-King of Ireland. From Dublin, now accompanied by Ostmen, Rory and Tiernan moved to Mellifont, and there received hostages from Donncadh O'Carroll, king of Airgialla. Then only one man stood in Rory's way, Dermot MacMurrough king of Leinster. Rory and his allied forces marched on Leinster, and with their coming the princes in the north of the kingdom, the Ostmen of Wexford, and the majority of Dermot's chief vassals abandoned him (Rice, 2001, p.15). Dermot was forced to submit to the new High-King and lay aside his title of 'king of Leinster': Rory allowing him to retain Ui Ceinnsealach, his hereditary principality. For Tiernan O'Rourke this was not punishment enough however, and in late September 1166, aided by the Ostmen of Dublin and Dermot O'Melaghlin, king of Meath, he stormed into Ui Ceinnsealach. Deserted by almost everyone, and seeing no hope of a successful resistance, Dermot MacMurrough, the Prince of Ui Ceinnsealach, set sail for England.
The Prince, the Earl, the King and the Justiciar

The Prince

'Diarmait was tall and well built, a brave and warlike man... whose voice was hoarse as a result of constantly having been in the din of battle. He preferred to be feared by all rather than loved. He treated his nobles harshly and brought to prominence men of humble rank. He was inimical towards his own people and hated by others. “All men’s hands were against him, and he was hostile to all men”.'

Giraldus; in Scott & Martin, 1978, p.41

Having been abandoned by his allies in Ireland, and losing first his kingdom and then his princedom, Dermot MacMuffough (Fig. 77) set sail for Bristol on the 1st August 1166 to seek assistance from the Normans in England. After a brief stopover in Bristol with Robert fitz Harding, Dermot travelled to the continent to meet with Henry II. In 1167, Dermot caught up with Henry in Aquitaine and swore fealty and allegiance to him, and in return the king gave Dermot a letter of patent giving him permission to recruit volunteers from among the Norman colonists in Wales to assist him in regaining his kingdom in Leinster (Roche, 1995, pp.91-5). Dermot returned to Bristol, and then travelled into Wales, attempting to gain support for his proposed venture, ‘however it was not until he approached Richard, earl of Clare, nicknamed ‘Strongbow’, one of the great lords of the Welsh marches, that he found the support he needed’ (Barber, 2001, p.152).

The Earl

‘The Earl...had reddish hair and freckles, grey eyes, a feminine face, a weak voice and a short neck, though in almost all other respects he was of a tall build. He was a generous and easy-going man. What he could not accomplish by deeds he settled by the persuasiveness of his words...In peace time he had more the air of a rank-and-file soldier than of a leader, but in war more that of a leader than a true soldier. When acting on the advice of his followers he was brave enough for anything...When he took up a position in the midst of battle, he stood firm as an immovable standard round which his men could regroup and take refuge. In war, he remained steadfast and reliable in good fortune and bad alike. In adversity, no feelings of despair caused him to waver, while lack of self restraint did not make him run amok when successful.’

Giraldus; in Scott & Martin, 1978, pp.87-9

Strongbow, or Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare (Fig. 77), the lord of Strigoil, was the head of an influential Norman family and a battle-scarred veteran. His father, Gilbert de Clare, had been earl of Pembroke, and his grandfather, Richard de Clare, had fought at Hastings in 1066, and was descended from Godfrey, a natural son of Richard I of Normandy. In 1167, Strongbow was a troubled man however, as Henry II had confiscated much of his family's land and had denied him his title as earl of Pembroke, in retribution for his support of Stephen. In Dermot then, Strongbow saw a chance to recoup his fortunes. Strongbow's support was not easily won however, as to gain his assistance Dermot had to offer his own daughter, Aoife, in marriage, and the prospect of the kingdom of Leinster in succession to himself.
After winning Strongbow over to his cause, Dermot visited Rhys ap Gruffydd, prince of South Wales, to gain the freedom of Robert fitz Stephen, a 'knight of great renown', who was being held captive. At the request of Robert's half-brothers, David (bishop of St David's) and Maurice fitz Gerald, Robert was released on the condition that he went to Ireland to assist Dermot. With Strongbow and Robert fitz Stephen now on his side, other Cambro-Normans quickly began to flock to Dermot's cause, and by the Summer of 1167 he had achieved the promise of substantial aid (Nelson, 1966, p.136).

Having achieved his goal, Dermot returned to Ireland in August 1167, accompanied by a small force of Welsh and Flemish troops, under the command of Richard fitz Godebert, and there quickly re-established himself in his principedom of Ui Ceinnsealaigh (Otway-Ruthen, 1980, p.43). On 1st May 1169, Robert fitz Stephen landed near Wexford with 30 knights, 60 armoured sergeants and 300 archers, and on the following day Maurice de Prendergast landed with a force of around 200 to reinforce fitz Stephen's group. Over the next twelve months, fitz Stephen was followed by his cousins Maurice fitz Gerald and Raymond le Gros, who between them brought 20 more knights and 200 archers. Finally, Strongbow himself landed near Waterford on 23rd August 1170, with 200 knights and 1000 other troops (Bartlett, 2000, p.86).

Between 1168 and 1171, Dermot, with the backing of his Anglo-Norman allies, managed to reconquer his kingdom of Leinster, capture the Norse-Irish towns of Wexford, Waterford and Dublin, invade the neighbouring province of Meath, and harry Tiernan O'Rourke's kingdom of Breifne. 'Yet although, in the words of one contemporary source, “through the English he was exalted, with great pride and haughtiness”, his victories were soon over. In May 1171 he died, leaving Strongbow and his Anglo-Normans in a difficult predicament' (Bartlett, 2000, p.86).

The King

'Henry II...had hair that was almost red in colour, grey eyes, and a large round head. His eyes were bright, and in anger fierce and flecked with red. He had a fiery complexion, his voice was husky, his neck bent forward a little from the shoulders, and he had a broad chest and powerful arms...He was moderate and temperate...a most eloquent prince...and he was well read...in war a man of valour, and in time of peace a most prudent statesman...He treated the unruly with ferocity, but showed mercy towards those he conquered...for a long time he enjoyed success and everything turned out just as he wished.'

Giraldus; in Scott & Martin, 1978, pp.125-33

On 17th October 1171, Henry II (Fig. 77) landed in Ireland, near Waterford, accompanied by 400-500 knights and a total force of perhaps 4000 men-at-arms. There were several reasons for Henry's appearance in Ireland at this time. First, the original letter of patent which Henry had granted to Dermot covered only the recovering of his own territories, but before his death Dermot had gone far beyond those terms, 'contemplating the conquest of all Ireland' (Nelson, 1966, pp.147-8). Second, the taking of Wexford and Waterford and the capture of Dublin - Ireland’s political centre and richest town - by Strongbow, had made him a major power in the land (Martin, 1993, p.76). In addition to which, on 25th August 1170, Strongbow had married Aoife, and with the death of Dermot in May 1171, become lord of
Leinster. Third, the decision of the Anglo-Norman leaders neither to return across the sea, nor to seek to enter the service of another Irish king upon the death of Dermot, but to set up their own lordship over Leinster and Dublin, implied an attempt to create a political entity spanning the sea, with Chepstow and Kilkenny under the same master (Bartlett, 2000, p.86). Thus, Henry II journeyed to Ireland to curb the actions of the marauding Anglo-Normans, in an effort to prevent them establishing a rival state in Ireland under Strongbow.

Henry’s ploy was successful, Strongbow immediately submitted, ceding Dublin, Waterford and Wexford to him, and in return gained royal recognition of his possession of a trimmed-down Leinster, which was to be held as a fief in return for homage, fealty, and the service of 100 knights. Whilst the Irish turned to Henry for protection against the turbulent Anglo-Norman barons. Henry remained in Ireland until 17th April 1172, and during that time received oaths of fealty from many of the Irish kings: including Dermot MacCarthy, king of Desmond, Donal Mor O’Brien, king of Thomond, Murchadh O’Carroll, king of Airgialla, Tiernan O’Rourke, king of Breiffie, and Donn Sleibhe MacDunleavy, king of Ulaid, as well as from the Ostmen of Wexford. In fact the only Irish kingdoms not to submit at this time were mid and west Ulster, and possibly Connacht, under Rory O’Connor. Finally, before departing Ireland for the Continent, Henry carried out an act that can be considered a stroke of genius. Henry knew that Strongbow was by far the most powerful baron in Ireland, and one with royal aspirations. Therefore, in order to counterbalance this power, Henry enlisted the help of a trusted ally, Hugh de Lacy.

The Justiciar

‘Hugh’s complexion... was dark, with dark, sunken eyes and flattened nostrils. His face was grossly disfigured down the right side as far as his chin by a burn, the result of an accident. His neck was short, his body hairy and sinewy... he was a short man... misshapen... and... his character, resolute and reliable, restrained from excess by French sobriety. He paid much attention to his own private affairs, and was most careful in the administration of the office entrusted to him and in his conduct of public affairs. [He was] well versed in the business of war... and more ambitious for his own advancement and pre-eminence than was proper.’

Giraldus; in Scott & Martin, 1978, p.193

In 1172, Henry II appointed Hugh de Lacy (Fig. 77) ‘Constable of Dublin’ and ‘Justiciar of Ireland’, and granted him ‘the lands of Meath - from the Shannon to the sea - with all its appurtenances... to be held by him and his heirs for the service of 50 knights; to have and to hold... as fully as Murchad Ua Mael Sechlainn held it or any other before him’ (Gormanston Reg., f.5, p.177). This appointment made Hugh, arguably, the most powerful man in Ireland, and in keeping with his nature, he immediately sallied forth to stamp his mark upon his newly won territories. Hence the conquest for Meath began, and having learnt valuable lessons in Wales and the Marches, the Anglo-Norman invaders came armed this time with a carefully thought out plan of action71.
The Lie of the Land

'Ireland - The largest island beyond Britain, is situated in the western ocean about one short day's sailing from Wales...a country of uneven surface and rather mountainous. The soil is soft and watery, and there are many woods and marshes. Even at the tops of high and steep mountains you will find pools and swamps...here and there [are] some fine plains, but in comparison with the woods they are indeed small...The land is fruitful and rich in its fertile soil and plentiful harvests. Crops abound in the fields, flocks on the mountains, and wild animals in the woods. The island is, however, richer in pastures than in crops, and in grass than in grain...for this country more than any other suffers from storms of wind and rain.'

Giraldus; in O'Meara, 1985, pp.33-4

It has been stated that 'much of the history of Ireland is the story of how invaders coped with the physical problems posed by the island' (Edwards, 1973, p.21). Indeed, in a country so liberally supplied with rivers, lakes, bogs, mountains, drumlins and inhospitable coastline, the terrain must have held many insuperable obstacles for attacking forces. In order to appreciate the difficulties that the Anglo-Normans faced in Ireland then, and to understand the character of the native Irish themselves, a grasp of the country's topography, geography and geology is essential.

Ireland averages 220 miles in length (354km), 110 miles (177km) in breadth, covers an area of 32,588 square miles (84,399sq.km), and is remarkable for a topographical variety disproportionate to its size. The diversity of landscape is the product of a complex geographical history, and unlike many other European countries Ireland has no central mountainous area; instead the uplands are mainly coastal and form a sharp contrast to the poorly drained central lowlands (Edwards, 1999, p.6). Many rivers rise in the central lowlands, and they divide the island into sections with their long courses; whilst the mountains, although remarkably varied, rarely rise above 900m (3000ft).

To the north of Meath's rich pastures, running from Dundalk bay in the north-east to Donegal Bay in the north-west, is a broad curving band of glacial drumlins, low rounded hills, heavy in gley soils, shot through with a maze of small lakes and streams, forming the agriculturally limited borderlands of Ulster (Fig. 78). To the south-west of this band lies the flat limestone escarpment of Ben Bulbin, and to north-west, the precipitous cliffs of Slieve League, and the harsh and rocky landscape of Donegal. Whilst in the north-east, are the rich lowlands around Lough Neagh, hemmed in by the rounded ridges of the Mourne Mountains, the Sperrin Mountains, and the high cliffs formed by the Antrim Mountains.

To the west of Meath, beyond ancient routes that follow raised gravel eskers into the heartland of Ireland, is the River Shannon. Beyond this, to the north-west, are the distant mountains of West Connacht, skirting a landscape of barren blanket bog interrupted only by brown peaty lakes, to the west, the bare limestone karst of the Burren, and to the south-west, the sandstone and shale lowlands of west Clare.

To the south of Meath, on the borders of Leinster, are the older granite Wicklow Mountains, the treacherous Bog of Allen, and the flat sandy plains of the Curragh. Beyond these, are the fertile river
valleys of the Barrow, Nore and Suir, whose rivers discharge into the sea at Waterford. To the south-west, in Munster, the landscape is a patchwork of hills and valleys, and beyond that, lakes and mountains stretch towards a ragged coastline projecting far out into the Atlantic Ocean (Edwards, 1999, pp.6-8; O'Meara, 1982, pp.33-7).

Strategic Considerations and the Irish use of Terrain

Ireland was extensively wooded in the medieval period (O'Meara, 1982, p.34), and these large forests formed virtually impenetrable barriers to effective progress across much of the country. North-east Ulster and south-west Munster were practically inaccessible due to vast tracts of woodland, and extensive detours were necessary to reach many parts of Connacht. In Leinster, the mountainous and wooded areas of Wicklow made military manoeuvres difficult, and to the west, the Shannon posed a formidable obstacle to any advancing army, although it could be forded at some points.

The most naturally defended province in Ireland however was Ulster, and the strength of its physical defences probably explains why Gaelic rule continued in much of the region until 1603. There were only three entry routes into Ulster, two lay close together in the south-west, where Ulster and Connacht were separated by the River Erne, and the third lay to the south-east, between Dundalk and Newry. The first entry point was via a crossing on the River Erne near Ballyshannon, the second via a route between the lakes at Enniskillen, and the third via a gorge in the hills, through which the Slighe Mhidhluachra ran; the pass known collectively as ‘The Gateway to Ulster’, ‘The Moyry Pass’, and ‘The Gap of the North’ (Edwards, 1973, pp.33-4).

Clearly then, the great diversity of landscape, together with variations in climate and soil, would have had a profound effect upon the development of early Irish society, and it is worth mentioning here that the Irish knew their landscape well and utilised the terrain to utmost effect in times of war. They favoured, with good reason, the fastness of woods, marshes and bogs, and would not fight in the open unless absolutely pressed to do so; preferring instead to use stealth, ambush and other guerrilla tactics, more suited to the difficult terrain. The mountains, bogs and marshes were significant not as deserted wastelands, but as zones of retreat and refuge.
Co. Meath

'The territory of Meath I shall describe to you, and the territory of the powerful Breagha, from the Shannon with bright cormorants to the sea.'

From a c.1200 manuscript, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Rawlinson B 512/ folio 23)

The Midhe granted to Hugh de Lacy comprised the whole of East and West Meath, the northern half of Co. Dublin, the whole of Co. Longford, the baronies of Kilcoursey, Garrycastle, Eglish, Ballyboy, Ballycowan and Geashill, and the parish of Castlejordan in the barony of Warrenstown, in Offaly (formerly King's County) (Fig. 79). By the fourteenth century, the Anglo-Normans had established the basic political divisions of Ireland, but during the Tudor and Elizabethan periods Ireland's political geography underwent several changes, eventually emerging in the reign of James I as the system of four provinces - sub-divided into counties - recognisable today. In fact, the only difference between the contemporary divisions and those of the sixteenth century are that Connacht was much larger, comprising, in addition to its modern counties, of Cavan and Longford, while Ulster included Louth. In the reshuffles Midhe was gradually slimmed down, was finally delimited in 1542, and currently comprises the counties of East and West Meath, in the province of Leinster.

East Meath is today known simply as County Meath, or Meath, and for the purposes of this study, it is Meath that will be exclusively examined. The reason for this is straightforward enough; Meath alone contains ninety-three suspected Anglo-Norman castles, and this number is a more than adequate sample.

Topography and Geology

Meath is approximately 36 miles (58km) north-south, 45 miles (73km) east-west, and is bounded in the north by Cavan, Monaghan, and Louth, in the east by the Irish Channel and Dublin, in the south by Kildare, and in the west by West Meath (Fig. 80). It has a rich drift covered landscape of undulating lowland pasture, watered by many rivers and tributaries, and is noted for its fine horses and cattle; whilst on the Loughcrew Hills sheep are reared. Meath has always been a prosperous agricultural county, composed of some of the best land in Ireland, its soil, a rich fertile loam, commonly supporting wheat, oats, barley, clover, flax and root-vegetables.

Geologically, Meath lies within an extension of the central limestone plain of Ireland, comprising limestones from the Upper Carboniferous period which underlie the fertile plains surrounding Navan and the River Boyne (Fig. 81). In the northern part of the county, there is a zone of movement, with a series of faulting associated with the Longford-Down inlier. This zone contains older rocks of the Devonian Series, with some limestone, which has given rise to a landscape of low undulating hills.
There are several upland areas in the county, the largest of which, with an average height of more than 180m above sea level, occurs in the north-west along the border with Cavan. Other upland zones include Slieve Na Calliagh ('Hill of the Witches') in the Loughcrew Hills to the south-east of Oldcastle, and an area on the border with Louth, to the north of Slane. Although there are not many hills in the county, three of them are of major importance; the Hill of Tara was the site of residence of the High-Kings of Ireland, it was on the Hill of Slane that St. Patrick lit the Paschal Fire, and the Loughcrew Hills contain extensive megalithic tombs.

Meath's Anglo-Norman Castles: applied methodology

Following a study of modern and contemporary sources, and, where available, excavation reports, in combination with a rigorous programme of field visits, 'A Gazetteer of Castle Sites in East Meath' was produced (see Vol. 2). The study additionally identifying a set of problems and difficulties unique to working in Ireland (See: Appendix 4). Figure 82 summarises some of the information contained in the gazetteer; the 93 entries shown are all sites that have been listed or mentioned, at one time or another, in various sources, as Anglo-Norman castles existing within the boundaries of the county. As with the initial listings for Somerset and Monmouthshire, if one were to take the information presented at face value, and ignore any notion of chronology, it could easily be argued that the Anglo-Norman strategy in Meath was simply to blanket the countryside in castles. Again however, the data that forms the basis for the listings is flawed, containing spurious entries derived from inaccurate or incorrect field monument recordings.

Figure 83 contains additional information taken from the gazetteer, and from it, it can be noted that 15 sites, out of the initial 93, have been rejected. The rejected sites are all those that were previously incorrectly identified as castles. Figure 82 also contains the 'accepted or rejected' column, and a further column headed 'notes' includes the reasons for rejection. The main reason for rejection was the incorrect identification of natural landscape features, or other classes of historical earthwork, as castles. It is important to note here that, as yet, no castles have been rejected on the grounds that they fall outside of the date range for this thesis (i.e. later than 1186). Figure 84 shows Meath's 'actual' Anglo-Norman castles. As such multi-period distribution maps are of limited use however, it is generally necessary to create phased distribution maps. Unfortunately, in Ireland, this is somewhat of a problem.

Figure 85 contains a series of entries for Meath's 'actual' Anglo-Norman castles, and it is apparent from the table that many of the county's castles are in fact undateable. Out of the 78 accepted sites, only 39 can be ascribed dates. This anomaly is due to a lack of contemporary medieval documentation in Ireland (See: Appendix 4). Furthermore, it is not possible to examine archaeological reports for dating evidence, as only sixteen mottes have been excavated in the whole of the country (McNeill, 2000, p.63), and the morphology of the earthworks cannot be used as an aid to dating, as the undateable castles are all of a similar nature. Because of this lack of dating evidence, the information presented in this chapter will be dealt with slightly differently to that in the previous two. Discussions on
stratagems, tactics and strategies will include all 78 Anglo-Norman castles, whilst discussion on Hugh de Lacy's campaigns in Meath will utilise only the castles directly attributable to that period.

Anglo-Norman Castle Building Strategies in Meath

"Praecepit etiam castella per loca firmari"  
Henry II's instruction to his agents in Ireland; *Gesta Henrici*, i, p.30

"the less remote part of the country, as far as the river Shannon, which divides the three eastern parts of the island from the fourth in the west, should be secured and protected by the construction of many castles. But the more remote area should for the moment be coerced by levying an annual tribute."

Giraldus; in Scott & Martin, 1978, p.249

In Meath, unlike in Somerset and Monmouthshire, some work has already been carried out upon the Anglo-Norman strategies of castle building, with very interesting results. This chapter will draw upon these existing studies, with the aim of furthering current knowledge of the subject.

**Pivotal Points**

Figure 86 shows the tactically and strategically significant pivotal points in Meath's landscape, alongside a map of its castles. There are 30 pivotal points plotted, and when this is compared with the map of castles existing in the region three notable facts arise. Firstly, it can be seen that at 23 of the pivotal points there are indeed castles: Drogheda [151], Duleek [157], Trim [211], Culmullin [142], Ardmulchan [122], Rodanstown [204], Athboy [123], Oldcastle [196], Derver [145], Slane [207], Kilbeg Upper [170], Kells [168], Moathill [189], Nobber [195], Drumcondra [154], Rathfeigh [200], Milltown [183], Mulphedder [192], Athlumney [124], Castlerickard [132], Coolronan [139], Ginnets Great [163], and Lisdoran [179] are all positioned exactly on pivotal points. Secondly, at 2 pivotal points there are castles within a couple of miles: Ratoath [202] is 1.12 miles (1.80km) away from one, and Donaghpatrick [149] is 1.57 miles (2.53km) away from another. Thirdly, at only 5 of the pivotal points plotted there exist no castles whatsoever: namely, a point on the hills to the north-east of Grangegeeth overlooking the Devlin River; a point to the south-west of Ballivor overlooking the River Deel; a point on the hills to the north of Crossakeel overlooking the ancient Slighe Assail route-way; a point to the south-east of Tara, at the pre-Anglo-Norman ecclesiastical centre of Trevet, overlooking the source of the Broad Meadow River; and a point to the north of Innfield, on the hills to the north of, and overlooking, the ancient An tSlighe Mhór route-way. There is a strong probability then, that many of the castles in Meath's landscape were sited with military considerations in mind.
Geology, Land-use and Castle Locations

The simplest way to establish the factors that influenced Anglo-Norman decisions concerning the positioning of castles in Meath’s landscape is to firstly dismiss those elements which played no discernible part. Figure 87 shows Meath’s geology and its castles, and it is apparent from the map that no clear-cut divisions exist between the two. The various types of castle are, in general, widely distributed across the county, upon assorted types of underlying geology. It was mentioned in the previous chapter that limestone, consisting largely of calcium carbonate, is easily dissolved by rainwater, leaving little parent material to form soils; the resulting substratum, unsuitable for motte construction, sometimes leading to the erection of ringworks. Meath’s underlying geology largely comprises carboniferous limestone, but in this instance it is drift covered and the soils are deep; thus, the landscape is arguably rich in mottes. There are two definite ringworks in Meath, Mulphedder [192] and Rodanstown [204], and two possibles, Dollardstown [147] and Trim [211], but these earthworks are situated where mottes could just as easily have been erected. Therefore, underlying geology does not appear to have been a significant or determining factor in the siting, or morphology, of Meath’s Anglo-Norman castles.

Directly related to the topic of geology, are soils and land-usage. The development of farming and the associated growth of settlement in Ireland were affected by regional variations in climate, soils and the resulting vegetation. Meath was intensively settled from an early date, as farming communities based in the area would have had little difficulty producing their livelihood in its lush fertile pastures. Based on similar reasoning, it is often assumed that the Anglo-Normans also chose to settle in the most fertile areas, erecting castles to protect their newly won prime agricultural lands. This in turn lead to the growth of settlements around the fortifications, which in some cases developed into manorial villages, towns or even boroughs. There is little doubt that the Anglo-Normans wished to ‘use the land which was most suitable for agriculture because the somewhat inadequate documentary record indicates that from the earliest period of the colonisation and settlement of Meath, they were engaged in a mixed-farming economy which probably had a semi-commercial basis’ (Graham, 1975, p.234). The Anglo-Normans exported agricultural and manufactured produce from Meath to Chester and Liverpool via the river port at Drogheda (Darby, 1936, pp.295-6), which subsequently developed into one of Ireland’s principal medieval ports. The question at hand however, is whether soil quality directly influenced the siting of castles in the landscape.

Barrett has demonstrated a close correlation between many Irish ring-forts - essentially farmsteads - and soil quality (1982, pp.250-1), and if the Anglo-Normans were primarily choosing to settle and erect castles in the best agricultural lands available, a similar correlation could be expected. Figure 88 shows land-use capability in Meath, based upon the findings of the Irish National Committee for Geography (1979). With reference to the map, it can be seen that in the majority of Meath, where well-drained grey-brown podzolics form the major soil types, there are no serious agricultural limitations, but in the extreme south-west corner of the county, and in the area to the south of the Hill of Tara, and in the north along the Cavan border (on the southern edge of the North Central Drumlin Belt where gleys predominate), the agricultural potential is much more limited. Theoretically then, the Anglo-Normans...
should have avoided these areas of poor quality soil, opting instead to settle and erect their castles in the more fertile regions shown. Figure 89 shows Meath's land-use capability and its Anglo-Norman castles, and it is clear from the map that far from avoiding the locales where poor soils prevailed, there was a veritable plethora of castles in those regions, with the exception of the south-western corner. Soil quality can therefore be discounted as a variable affecting castle distribution. It has been suggested that the variation of soil types in Meath were not sufficiently great enough to influence settlement, and thus castle location (Graham, 1975, p.237). This is unlikely however, as the soils in the north of the county are typically poorly drained, with only very minimal stoney-grey soil cover on the better drained flanks of the hill-slopes, making the region totally unsuited to arable cultivation. It is therefore likely that there were other, more influential, reasons behind the siting of castles, and the subsequent growth of settlement in those areas.

**Topography and Castle Locations**

Figure 90 shows Meath's topography and the locations of its Anglo-Norman castles. From the map four broad patterns are discernible: first, many of Meath's Anglo-Norman castles are situated in river valleys, close to and overlooking the watercourses; second, on the area of higher ground in the north of the county there is a highly visible curving band of castles running from the north-east to the south-west; third, there are no castles on the areas of highest ground; and fourth, in the south and, more especially, south-west of the county, there is a much lower density of castles. The topic of rivers will be dealt with separately below; the other three are discussed here, in turn.

The landscape of northern Meath is dominated by glacial drumlins, providing a ready abundance of naturally elevated sites ideal for castle construction. These glacial features were often exploited by the Anglo-Norman castle-builders, their castles in many instances being largely scarped away from the natural ridge, rather than built from the ground up (O'Keeffe, 1992, p.61). It was not, however, the ready-made castle foundations which led to a proliferation of castles in the region, or, as demonstrated above, a particularly fertile zone, it was something far more sinister.

To the north of Meath was the kingdom of Breifne (Figs. 74 & 75), whose ruler, Tiernan O'Rourke, continually harried and annexed lands in Meath until his death in 1172. There existed then a history of tension and strife between the two kingdoms, in which armed conflict was commonplace. Therefore, if Meath was ever to be properly stabilised, a line had to be drawn between it and Breifne, and the Anglo-Normans drew this line in characteristically spectacular fashion, with a chain of castles stretching from Dundalk Bay in the north-east to Lough Sheelin in the north-west (Figs. 91 & 92).

It has been suggested that the chain of castles upon the low undulating hills in the north of Meath represent a planned strategic line of defence (Orpen, 1906, p.418; Graham, 1972; O'Keeffe, 1992, pp.60-1; McNeill, 2000, pp.66-70), and Graham has further argued 'that there was some defensive concept or plan for the liberty as a whole' (Graham, 1980, p.45). In chapter three, one of the reasons given for a
castle to exist was to control and protect a border area. A border is a purely political construct, and as a term, it is custom-built for the intangible phenomenon of a space that exists primarily in the mind. O'Keeffe has clearly demonstrated however, that the northern periphery of Meath was definitely considered a frontier - or 'front tier' - by the Anglo-Normans, who perceived it as the interface between native and alien populations (1992, p.58). Thus, the castles in this region can discernibly be seen as the physical manifestations of a commonly conceived, but somewhat troubled, boundary.

The factors that positively demonstrate that the castles in Meath's northern region truly represent a planned strategic line of defence are the 'tactical considerations'. A landscape of glacial drumlins and kames gives rise to many corridors, add to this the fact that much of Ireland was extensively wooded in the medieval period, and it is clear that in Meath the Irish could utilise the leafy corridors to pass unnoticed into Anglo-Norman occupied territory (O'Keeffe, 1992, p.61). Therefore, in order to successfully command these passes and defiles it would have been necessary to construct fortifications close together, and in Meath this is exactly the pattern that occurs on the ground. The castles in the northern chain are on average only 1.55 miles (2.50km) apart, whereas in the rest of the county the average is 2.48 miles (4.00km) apart. The construction of these fortifications, close together, effectively served two purposes: first, in the event of conflict the castles could act in concert, rather than as individual units; second, the castle's environs could be adequately patrolled. Based upon the figures given in chapter three, a horseman 'walking' his horse between two castles in the northern chain could have traversed the distance in just under 23 minutes, but if 'trotting' the same journey could have been made in a little over 12 minutes. Castles spaced at this distance apart then, would have enabled even a limited garrison to successfully monitor and control their section of the frontier zone; this was important as 'no medieval lordship would have been able to keep permanent forces on the alert for long' (McNeill, 2000, p.68).

It is worth remembering that a castle was simply a fortified building, and as such could not guard a river crossing, control a route or block a passage through the hills (Pounds, 1990, p.54); it was the castle garrison that carried out these tasks. Turning again to the criteria in chapter three, another one of the reasons given for a castle to exist was to provide a secure base from which field armies could operate, or to provide a place of refuge in times of adversity. Thus, in a troubled frontier zone one would expect to see castles designed specifically to accommodate and protect a sizeable garrison. Figure 92 clearly shows that the majority of castles in northern Meath are motes with baileys: the bailey in each case housing a large garrison, along with its mounts. In fact, in Meath, out of 39 'mottes with baileys', 24 are found along the northern frontier, whilst the interior contains only 15. Also instructive is the fact that 'mottes without baileys' increase in size from east to west across the county, and northwards towards the periphery (Graham, 1980, p.50); the general rule being, the higher the motte the more important its defensive role and capabilities. The form and distribution of earthwork castles in the north is clearly no quirk of fate, but rather the result of a carefully planned response to a very real threat. This claim can be further substantiated with a brief look at two of the castles in the chain.
Figure 93 shows the location of the motte and bailey at Drumcondra [154], and the stratagem of optimum site selection is clearly apparent. Strategically, the castle was situated at a pivotal point in the landscape (Fig. 86) which enabled it to perform two functions: firstly, it guarded the ends of two passes through the hills, which entered Meath from the north-west and north-east; secondly, it had a clear vista down a valley to the south-east, allowing its garrison to monitor and control a section of the River Dee's environs. In addition, the castle readily embodied all of the factors listed under tactical considerations in chapter three. The defensibility of the castle was enhanced by the fact that it sat upon an area of higher ground with steep slopes on all sides, further surrounded on three sides by water. In terms of security, the castle was not overlooked by higher ground, and had good all-round visibility. In terms of accessibility, the castle could be quickly accessed by friendly-troops via a ridge to the south, which also provided an elevated escape route; whilst, conversely, the castle was well protected from hostile troops arriving from the north, via the watercourse. The watercourse also provided the castle with a potable supply of fresh water. Lastly, in terms of practicality, the make-up and morphology of the hill was ideal for castle construction, the area further containing the necessary castle building materials.

Figure 94 shows the location of the motte and bailey at Nobber [195], and again the stratagem of optimum site selection is clear. Strategically, the castle was situated at a pivotal point in the landscape (Fig. 86) guarding the Dee river-valley, and a gap in the hills to the north-west, down which, in all probability, an ancient route-way ran, fording the Dee to the north-west of the castle. Tactically speaking, the castle was adequately defensible, sitting on a pronounced ridge, surrounded on all sides by water. In terms of security, the castle had good all-round visibility, and although overlooked by higher ground, was well outside of bow-shot range. In terms of accessibility, the castle could be accessed quickly by friendly-troops via a ridge to the north-east, which also formed an elevated escape route, protected along its entire length by the River Dee. The river further provided the castle with a potable supply of fresh water. Lastly, in terms of practicality, the area contained the necessary building materials for castle construction.

Meath's northern border was then, a heavily militarised zone, governed by a chain of systematically positioned castles, the stratagems behind which, would, no-doubt, have greatly pleased Giraldus: 'For it is far, far better to begin by gradually connecting up a system of castles built in suitable places...than to build large numbers of castles at great distances from each other, sited haphazardly in various locations, without their forming any coherent system of mutual support or being able to relieve each other in times of crisis' (Giraldus; in Scott & Martin, 1978, p.249).

It was mentioned above that there are no castles situated upon the areas of highest ground within Meath (i.e. higher than 120.00m A.S.L.82), the majority of castles located between 60.00m and 120.00m A.S.L. (Fig. 91). Graham - discussing settlement - puts this factor down to the overwhelming draw exerted by the fertility of the Boyne and Blackwater valleys (1975, p.237). As demonstrated in chapter three, many tactical advantages can be gained by securing higher ground with fortifications, but these advantages only apply in cases where the high ground is close to that which the fortification is intended to protect, and when the area is served with a ready supply of potable water. In Meath, the areas of highest
ground are notoriously devoid of fresh-water sources and, in the majority of cases, are too secluded to be of much strategic or tactical value. It can therefore be argued that, in Meath, the Anglo-Normans selected the areas of higher-ground close to that which they were striving to gain or protect (i.e. the fertile lowland zones), but avoided the regions of 'highest ground', as these were too impractical to sustain prolonged habitation, and too secluded to be of much use militarily.

Lastly, it was stated that in the south and, more especially, south-west of the county, there is a much lower density of castles. Appropriately enough, the reason for this seems wholly topographical in nature. Figure 91 shows that the south-west region of Meath is criss-crossed via a network of rivers, which, in combination with a few well-positioned castles, could have provided an ideal defence against attacks from the south-west. However, the more likely reason for the lack of a large defensive chain of castles, such as that in the north, is that a naturally occurring geological feature, the Bog of Allen, adequately protected the region. The Bog of Allen was once Ireland's largest raised peat bog, covering an area of around 100,000 hectares, it stretched like a brown desert through Offaly, Laois and Kildare, extending westwards almost as far as the Shannon and eastwards to within 11 miles (17km) of Dublin. Although not a completely continuous bog, it almost certainly provided excellent protection for Meath from incursions from the south, and even today, despite much of the peat bog being gradually depleted for turf-burning electricity generating stations, a large part of north-western Co. Kildare is still taken up by the bog.

Castles, Rivers and the Irish Sea

'A fortress will be twice as useful if it lies on the coast, on a stream or great river'

Clausewitz; in Howard & Paret, 1984, p.403

'In Ireland mottes were used to guard navigable waterways and river crossing points.'

Glasscock, 1975, p.99

The physical difficulties of travel in Ireland were daunting to the traveller until relatively recently. The combination of mountains, drumlins, rivers, lakes, bogs and extensive woodland made progress difficult, and although there were roads, they were wholly inadequate in their coverage of the country and badly maintained. The rough roads that were constructed in early Ireland were not improved upon substantially until the Anglo-Norman invasion, and even then, the woods continued to bar effective progress until their virtual eradication during the seventeenth century. The most common method of travel in Ireland throughout the Middle Ages was consequently by water (Edwards, 1973, p.175). Out of 78 Anglo-Norman castles in Meath, 44 of them can be directly associated with rivers (Figs. 95 & 96). This is unsurprising however, as in Meath one is never very far from a river - approximately 5 miles (8km) in fact – and the river valleys are fertile, and were thus attractive to the Anglo-Norman settlers. The pattern of distribution is, therefore, very similar to that seen in Monmouthshire, and similarly it must
again be remembered that there are some very good military reasons for positioning castles close to
rivers.

It is known that the early Irish were fine sailors. Archaeological evidence provides proof of
trade and exchange between Ireland and the kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England, before the arrival of the
Vikings. Fragmentary glass vessels recovered in Ireland are evidence of direct or indirect trade contacts
with northern France, Belgium or the Rhineland and the importation of E ware demonstrates contacts
with western France. The ninth century *Life of St. Filibert* describes Irish ships arriving at the island of
Noirmoutier, at the mouth of the Loire, carrying cargoes of shoes and clothes and Giraldus mentions the
importation of wine from Poitou in return for hides and skins. Christian contacts between Ireland, Rome
and Spain are also in evidence (Edwards, 1999, pp.68-98). Before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in
Ireland there were fleets of both Hiberno-Norse and native Irish ships at sea, and boats upon the rivers;
Diarmait Mac Murchada providing Henry II with a number of ships to aid him in his foreign campaigns
(Martin, 1993, pp.43-66). Most importantly though, in both the annalistic records and the *Caiithrèim
Chellacháin Chaisil*, there are accounts of naval warfare conducted between native Irish maritime vessels
(Byrne, 1993, p.32).

As the rivers were Ireland’s main arteries for transport, communication and supply, in
combination with the Irish renown for producing fine sailors capable of fighting naval battles, it stands to
reason that the control and defence of the country’s river systems must have been of utmost priority in the
minds of the Anglo-Normans; a notion fully supported in Meath. Of the 44 castles associated with
Meath’s waterways, 18 are situated at strategic pivotal points in the landscape relating directly to riverine
control (Figs. 86, 95 & 96); 13 are situated upon navigable sections of those rivers (Figs. 96 & 97); and
7 are situated at both (Figs. 96 & 97).

The castles of Drogheda [151] and Trim [211] admirably illustrate the Anglo-Norman strategy in
regards to rivers. At the eastern end of the River Boyne, only 4 miles (7km) inland from the Irish Sea, is
the port of Drogheda. Drogheda’s strategic value was immediately recognised by the Anglo-Normans,
and possibly as early as 1172-4, Hugh de Lacy erected a motte and bailey on the southern side of the
river, overlooking the port (Fig. 98). The castle was constructed at a tactically impeccable site (Fig. 99),
upon a prehistoric mound (Plantagenet Somerset Fry, 1996, p.210), its presence ensuring Anglo-Norman
control of the Boyne estuary, thereby enabling provisions and supplies to be shipped directly from
England. The Boyne was navigable as far west as Trim, and here, in 1172, Hugh de Lacy erected a
second castle, today, arguably, the finest extant example of an Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland (Fig. 100).

Over the years the castle at Trim has been the subject of numerous studies, and recently its
martial aspects have been heavily scrutinised, current theory suggesting that the castle was more
‘symbolic statement’ than ‘military hardware’. O’Keeffe has argued that the Greek Cross plan of the
great tower ‘was more concerned with complex Christian symbolism and display than with defensibility’
(2000, p.37); and Stalley has suggested that the tower had serious limitations from a defensive standpoint,
since its unusual design provided no less than twelve potential points of attack (1992). McNeill has
highlighted weaknesses in the north curtain wall (2000, p.24), and has further suggested that the site, ‘set on roughly level ground on the south bank of the River Boyne’, was ‘unremarkable, either strategically or tactically’ (1990, p.308). It must be remembered however, that the stone castle was not the first fortification erected by Hugh de lacy upon the site. The Song of Dermot and the Earl records the building of a ‘spiked stockade’ with a ‘ditch around it’ [lines 3220-25] (Orpen, 1892; Mullally, 2002), and recent excavations have produced definitive evidence of a ringwork castle (Sweetman, 1999, p.5). Considering the hostility of the Irish in 1173, there can be little doubt that de Lacy intended his original castle to be defensible, and it may even have survived the Irish attack if Hugh Tyrrell had not simply abandoned it (Orpen, 1911-20, i, p.339). Strategically, the site was important, as it sat at the terminus of the navigable portion of the Boyne, at a fording point, adjacent to an Early Christian Monastery, now accepted as one of the oldest and largest religious settlements in Ireland (GMC, 2001, p.46). Tactically, the castle was ‘situated at the top of a gently sloping hill’ (Sweetman, 1978, p.130), protected on its northern side by a bend in the River Boyne, the local topography of the site giving the ‘added advantage of having the high ground immediately inside the walls and a dramatic fall outside’ (Sweetman, 1999, p.45). The choice of site then was anything but arbitrary.

Hugh de Lacy, with the construction of the castles at Drogheda and Trim, essentially gained complete control of Meath’s navigable waterways; and his control of the port at Drogheda enabled him to supply and provision other castles further inland. In addition, ‘Trim was also a frontier town and the castle protected de Lacy’s newly acquired territory to the east’, and ‘kept the Irish under control immediately west as far as Athlone on the River Shannon’ (Sweetman, 1999, p.35). By positioning castles adjacent to Meath’s river systems, the Anglo-Normans acquired a ready means of transport, communication and supply, whilst conversely ensuring that they were able to monitor and control enemy movement along the rivers and their associated valleys. The rivers themselves further acted as physical barriers to movement.

Castles and Roads

As mentioned above, during the medieval period, Ireland’s road networks were wholly inadequate. Giraldus describes a well-wooded country with poor road communications (Scott & Martin, 1978, p.251). The exact routes traversed by Meath’s earliest major roads (Irish ‘slighe’) cannot be delineated with any certainty; figure 101 depicts their most likely courses however. The roads appear to have been paved in stone, with wooden causeways constructed over bogland (Edwards, 1973, p.177). The routes shown on the map are: An tSlighe Mhór, ‘the Great Road’, which stretched from Dublin to the west coast, atop a low ridge of esker; Slighe Assail, ‘the Road of Assal’, considered to be the route connecting Tara with Rathcroghan, the capital of Connacht from a very early period; and Slighe Mhidhluachra, ‘the Road of Mid-Luachair’, the main northern road from Tara to Armagh. There were also many minor routes, but their exact whereabouts are largely unknown.
The early Irish roads were of great strategic value to the military, as they were sound enough in their construction to facilitate the movement of armies about the country, and it has been suggested that the comparative speed of progress of the Anglo-Norman invasion was due, in a large extent, to the existing road systems (Edwards, 1973, p.177). The acquisition and control of these road networks was vitally important, and must have ranked highly on the Anglo-Norman agenda. Figure 102 shows Meath’s major road systems and associated Anglo-Norman castles, together with two examples relating to a section of minor road. 21 castles can be associated with Meath’s major roads (Fig. 96), the majority clustering along the Slighe Assail which cuts Meath in two. There is a castle on average every 6.70 miles (10.78km) along the routes, making the journey time between castles on horseback, at a trot, 54 minutes, and as a road provides firm footing for a horse, at a gallop, 30 minutes. This distribution would easily have afforded the Anglo-Normans mastery over the road networks, and in most cases, the castles on route were positioned at elevated, tactically defensible, locations, affording good views along the adjacent road in both directions.

Clonard Motte [136], in addition to being one of Meath’s most enigmatic Anglo-Norman castles, is a good example of a castle built to monitor and control an early Irish roadway (Fig. 103). Tactically speaking, the castle was situated on a low spur, to the north-east of, and directly overlooking, the River Kilwarden. The castle was further defended to the east by a tributary stream; the river and stream together providing the castle with an ample supply of fresh water. More importantly however, the chosen location enabled the castle to perform three strategic functions. First, it could monitor and control the river, which, although unnavigable for larger vessels, afforded easy passage for smaller watercraft. Second, the castle overlooked a north-south ford across the Kilwarden River, which in all probability formed a crossing point for an early Irish routeway that ran south from Drummond (N 6849 4798) to join the An tSlige Mhór. Third, the castle overlooked An tSlige Mhór itself: Anglo-Norman control of the routeway being further reinforced by Mulphedder Ringwork [192] on the southern side of the road.

Although the routes traversed by Meath’s early minor roads are uncertain, it is still possible to gain some indication of their relative importance. Figure 104 shows castles associated with major river crossings in Meath, and it is apparent from the map that many of the county’s castles are situated near, or immediately adjacent to, these crossing places. Indeed, previous work on this subject has shown a positive correlation between the distribution of Anglo-Norman settlements, and both the distribution of river crossing points and navigable rivers (Graham, 1975). In total, 36 of Meath’s castles are associated with river crossings, amounting to a staggering 46%. Although it cannot be guaranteed that at every river crossing there was a minor road, the likelihood is very high, and as such it can be stated that in all probability nearly half of Meath’s Anglo-Norman castles were positioned in the landscape in direct response to a network of minor roads. The strategic importance of rivers, roads and crossing places were outlined in chapter three, but it is worth repeating here the words of Vauban and Maigret: ‘rivers act as barriers and a skilful defender could derive much profit by combining the peculiar properties of fortresses and river barriers. He could secure the best bridges and fords and intercept the roads which follow the bank, thereby endangering the flank and rear of the enemy who was rash enough to have passed the river at some other place’ (Duffy, 1996, p.25).
Castles and Ecclesiastical Centres

At heart, Ireland is still a rural country, and until relatively recently it was widely believed that urbanisation was alien to the pastoral, tribal society of Celtic Ireland (Graham, 1985, p.9). An oft used quote stating that, 'the economy of this society was pastoral and agricultural. There were no cities or towns' (De Paor, 1958; cited in Graham, 1985, p.9). Over the past 25 years however, as a result of both survey and excavation, knowledge of Irish medieval ecclesiastical archaeology has greatly increased (Edwards, 1996, p.101), and it is now thought possible that at least some monastic centres, in essence, constituted early medieval towns.

The latter half of the sixth century saw a rapid spread of monasticism in Ireland, and by the beginning of the seventh century over 800 monasteries had been founded, many of them significant. Monastic ideals quickly took root, and with the growth of the monasteries, Ireland swiftly became a Christian country, 'and during the seventh and eighth centuries it is possible to trace in the secular and ecclesiastical legislation the gradual assimilation of the church into early Irish society' (Edwards, 1996, p.99). The monasteries housed schools and well-stocked libraries, and 'provided a great service in educating people' (Edwards, 1973, p.112). Moreover, monastic centres were not the exclusive preserve of men, the most famous house of nuns being St. Brigid's at Kildare (Duffy, 2000, p.20). Most importantly however, a great number of monasteries rapidly developed into important foci for economic activity.

Influential monasteries acquired large landholdings, often as gifts and bequests, sometimes by purchase, and occasionally by the subjugation of less powerful ecclesiastical neighbours (Edwards, 1999, p.114). These landholdings needed to be maintained and farmed, and although the monks undoubtedly participated in the manual labour, the sheer size of some of the estates meant that the majority of the work had to be done by tenants who lived, with their families, on church lands. This provided the monastic tenants with access to pastoral care, and the church with a means of exploiting the economic potential of its estates (Duffy, 2000, p.20). This symbiotic partnership resulted in many of the great ecclesiastical centres becoming essential hubs of economic activity; and from the tenth century onwards the larger monasteries developed into proto-urban complexes. These complexes housed considerable populations, not only of monks, but also of lay men and women, estate and craft workers. The monasteries were divided into different areas with streets, houses and public buildings in the form of churches. Whilst outside the enclosures, markets sprang up to take advantage of the opportunity for trade and exchange (Edwards, 1999, p.100).

It has been suggested that the Anglo-Normans frequently located castles at important ecclesiastical centres in an attempt to gain control over the existing structures of administration and power (Graham, 1991, 1985, 1980, 1975; Bradley, 1988). In Meath, twenty-eight monastic sites can be identified from the ecclesiastical histories (Graham, 1985), the most important of which were Ardbraannan, Clonard, Donaghpatrick, Duleek, Kells, Kilbeg, Skreen, Slane, and Trim (Fig. 105). At thirteen of these monastic sites, there are castles in direct association, all of the major proto-urban sites have a castle, and
the majority of the remaining sites have a castle within 5 miles (8.04km) (Figs. 96 & 105). In Meath then, there is a significant correlation between the distribution of Irish proto-urban ecclesiastical centres and Anglo-Norman castles. This is hardly surprising however, as ‘towns are a major strategic consideration in any military campaign’ (Vauban & Maigret; in Duffy, 1996, p.22).

Graham has also suggested that the majority of castles associated with monastic proto-urban complexes were ‘major mottes with baileys’ (1991, p.29): the baileys presumably constructed to house garrisons substantially large enough to keep the citizens of the proto-urban centres in check. This notion is not fully supported by the archaeological evidence however, as only 12 of the 25 associated castles have baileys, 11 are without, and 2 are ringworks (Figs. 83 & 96). Furthermore, at the nine major ecclesiastical sites, 5 castles have baileys, 3 are without, and 1 is a ring-work; and under Graham’s own categorisation system (1980, pp.55-6), only 2 of these castles are a ‘class one’ (Clonard [136] & Kilbeg [170]). Nevertheless, the building of castles at such locations undoubtedly represents an Anglo-Norman attempt to usurp the existing political and economic roles of these proto-urban centres; although the correlation is not as significant as for the county’s road and river systems, suggesting that Meath’s communications networks were of far greater importance.

Pre-Anglo-Norman Political Land Divisions, Castles and Caputs

The early political geography of Ireland is incredibly complex (Reeves, 1862; McErlean, 1983). In general though, from the seventh century onwards, the country was sub-divided into units of government, or small kingdoms, called tuatha. At the bottom end of the scale was the tuath, this was the land of an autonomous group of people of independent political jurisdiction - best described as a tribe - under a ‘local king’. Larger units, comprising several tuatha, were built up by ‘regional kings’ whose families maintained their traditional ascendancy, and at the upper end of the scale was the ‘king over kings’, or the ‘provincial king’ (Fig. 74). By the twelfth century however, the smallest unit, the tuath, had ceased to be a political entity as such, and was merely a district under a toisech (a term meaning ‘leader of a war-band’), whilst the ri, or ‘regional king’, ruled over an area known as a tricha céit (meaning ‘thirty hundreds’), roughly equivalent to the cantref (‘hundred homesteads’) found in Wales (Byrne, 1993, p.5).

It is often stated that the Anglo-Norman baronies in Ireland were based upon earlier Irish political land divisions: for example, ‘the divisions of Meath by Hugh de Lacy reflect the structures of government of his predecessors’ (Rice, 2001, p.15). In almost every case where this is written however, the evidence to substantiate the claim is sorely lacking, as very little work has been carried out upon the subject to date. In fact, the only map of Meath’s pre-Anglo-Norman administrative land boundaries currently available is a very poor quality, almost illegible affair in the back of Orpen’s translation of ‘La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande’ (published in 1892), which unfortunately contains many errors and omissions. Fortunately however, a recently published collection of works (2003), by the late Paul Walsh, contains translations of many of the manuscripts which detail the tricha céts and the free and tributary kingdoms of Midhe. These translations, although convoluted and fragmentary, have afforded the
construction of a new map showing the Irish - pre-Anglo-Norman - political land divisions of Midhe (Fig. 106).

Comparing the map of the Irish political land divisions of Midhe (Fig. 106), with a map of Hugh de Lacy's sub-infeudation of Meath (Fig. 107), it is apparent that the boundaries, in the majority of cases, are indeed similar. The only differences being: Upper Moyferragh (formerly An Brédach) absorbing part of Crich na Cétach; Demi-Fore (formerly Delbna Beg) absorbing part of Gregraige; and the lands of the Dëssé Breg being subdivided to form the baronies of Deece and Dunboyne. It seems then, that the Anglo-Normans - well used to Welsh cantrefs - simply adopted and adapted the existing political divisions in those parts of Ireland over which they had control (O'Keeffe, 1996, p.147). The provinces were subdivided into counties (comparable to the Anglo-Saxon shire), the counties were subdivided into baronies (comparable to the Anglo-Saxon hundred, or Welsh cantref), and the baronies were subdivided into townlands. The boundaries of the baronies, on the whole, corresponding to those of the earlier tricha cétis, whilst lower down the territorial hierarchy, the ballybetagh (one of the names given to the principal subdivisions of the tricha cét) manifested itself in the Anglo-Norman landscape as the manor, with the subdivisions of the ballybetagh (or its equivalent) manifesting themselves as small manorial and sub-manorial holdings (ibid.).

Following the sub-infeudation process in Meath, Hugh de Lacy is reputed to have constructed a number of castles upon the principal land grants, suggesting that there was some defensive concept or plan for the liberty as a whole (Graham, 1980, p.45). Aside from the castles destroyed at Trim [211] and Duleek [157] in 1174, at least four other castles are documented as founded before 1180. In 1176, the castle at Slane [207] was attacked and destroyed, and consequently, those at Galtrim [161], Kells [168] and Derry Patrick [144] were razed and left desolate (Hennessey & McCarthy, 1887-1901, ii, pp.183-5). Whilst in 1182, according to Giraldus, Hugh de Lacy was building a castle at Clonard [136], and another for Adam de Futepoi, who held the barony of Skreen [206] (Scott & Martin, 1978, p.195). Slane, Galtrim and Skreen castles were indeed the capite of principal land grants, whilst Trim, Duleek and Kells were all situated upon seignorial manors. Furthermore, a definite pattern emerges if this information is combined with the evidence for the castle builders and the dates of initial castle foundation presented in the gazetteer (Fig. 85). Between 1172 and 1200, across the nineteen baronies, castles were constructed to act as the caputs of the new lordships: the vast majority constructed before the death of Hugh de Lacy in 1186 (Fig. 108). Moreover, of the castles constructed, 13 are at 'pivotal points', 11 are associated with river crossings, 5 are associated with navigable river sections, 5 are associated with early roads, and 8 are associated with proto-urban ecclesiastical centres, suggesting that the locations for the caput castles were carefully selected with strategic considerations in mind.

It has also been argued that the majority of these early castles were large and had baileys attached, thereby reflecting their status and importance (O'Keeffe, 2000, p.17; Graham, 1980, p.46). In truth, the morphology of these castles is highly variable (Fig. 96), so size does not appear to accurately depict status, but 12 of the 19 castles do have attached baileys, representing 55% of all the mottes with baileys in the interior of Meath, and as such the presence of a bailey, in this instance, could be taken to
indicate status. 'Consequently, the link between both the principal land grants of the sub-infeudation and seignorial manors with...mottes and baileys can be clearly established. As the land grants were made to the trusted followers of the de Lacy's, it seems clear that these fortifications were the means by which the liberty was brought under military control, the necessary precursor of colonisation and settlement' (Graham, 1980, p.47).

Finally, Orpen has suggested that once the major castles were established as caput centres, the principal land grants were further subdivided into manors, and outlying subsidiary castles erected within them to add additional protection (1906, pp.417-8 & 1907, p.244). Figure 109 clearly indicates that in the majority of cases this was certainly the case, as each barony on average contained 3 additional castles, whilst along the more dangerous northern frontier the average rises to 6. Interestingly, Upper Navan contained no castles whatsoever, but it can be supposed that its central location within the county afforded it adequate protection, as it was surrounded by castles in the adjoining lordships.

Castles, Colonisation, Towns and Boroughs

Having successfully secured Meath’s northern border, gained control of the systems of transport communication and supply, usurped the political and economic power of the proto-urban monastic centres, and established caputs within the new lordships (although not necessarily in that order), the Anglo-Normans were in a position to begin the process of colonisation. As Empey states, ‘the establishment of Anglo-Norman military control represented in the landscape by the distribution of mottes and allied earthworks, formed the basis for the subsequent development of the colony’ (Empey, 1982, p.329).

Hugh de Lacy invited back the Irish who had fled from their lands as a result of the continual raids and counter-raids by the Anglo-Normans and Irish since 1170, re-established them with cattle and farms, and guaranteed them protection (Martin, 1993, p.117). Other settlers were introduced in ‘large numbers...of mainly English origin, with some Welsh and Flemings’ (O’Conor, 1998, p.41) attracted no-doubt by the lure of increased social status and lessened labour services (Otway-Ruthen, 1965, pp.75-84). The entire colonisation process was ultimately controlled via a new and distinctive settlement form in Ireland’s landscape - the manor. The manor was not simply a geographical unit, it was also a military, economic, social and judicial institution (Empey, 1982, pp.329-42), central to which, in most cases, was the castle (Fig. 96).

Colonisation boosted the economy, which in turn led to the development of market villages, towns and boroughs. In Meath, 92 manorial villages and 18 boroughs93 have been identified (Graham, 1975), and 36 of the manorial villages and 14 of the boroughs are directly associated with castles (Figs. 96 & 110). Graham has divided the boroughs into three classes in order of importance: ‘first stratum boroughs’ are the five walled towns of Trim, Kells, Navan, Athboy and Drogheda, all of which are associated with castles, and all of which remain the most important central places in Meath today; ‘second
stratum boroughs' are the seven unwalled, strategically positioned, settlements of Slane, Nobber, Dunshaughlin, Dunboyne, Duleek, Skreen and Ratoath, all of which are associated with castles, and each of which acted as capite baroniae, and as monastic and market centres; and 'third stratum' or 'rural boroughs', are Syddan, Drumconrath, Greenoge, Mornington, Colpe and Newtown Trim, two of which are associated with castles, and each of which were never more than manorial villages (ibid.). The association between manorial village and castle, and borough and castle, highlight the castle's continuing role as a system for control, and as a centre for administration, justice and social organisation.

Hugh de Lacy's Campaign in Meath

To fully appreciate Hugh's strategies of castle building in Meath, it is necessary to integrate them into the historical framework of events\(^4\), and in order to do this, a little backtracking is required. In 1169, the king of Meath, Dermot O'Melaghlin - who in 1166 had aided Tiernan O'Rourke in the expulsion of Dermot MacMurrough - was killed by Donnell Bregach O'Melaghlin (Domnall) (Fig. 76), who immediately seized the kingdom for himself. This action greatly angered Rory O'Connor, king of Connacht, who marched into Meath, and in revenge expelled Donnell Bregach. Rory then divided Meath into two halves, allocating East Meath to Tiernan O'Rourke, king of Breifne, and keeping West Meath for himself; installing Art O'Melaghlin as king of West Meath, under him. This event is sometimes referred to as 'The Partition of Meath'. Donnell Bregach was not going to give up the kingdom without a fight however, and in 1170, he turned to Rory and Tiernan's old enemy, Dermot MacMurrough, for help. Dermot, with the backing of his Anglo-Norman allies, conquered East Meath, harried Tiernan O'Rourke's kingdom of Breifne, and reinstalled Donnell Bregach as king of East Meath, under him. Thus, 'Henry II was faced with at least two rival claimants for the kingship of Mide from within the Clann CholmAin royal dynasty [Art and Donnell], and an external challenge from Tigernán Ua Ruairc, king of Breifne, as well as a claim from Strongbow in light of Diarmait Mac Murchada's and his own military intervention in Mide' (Flanagan, 1989, p. 225). Considering the circumstances and the importance of Meath\(^5\), it is unsurprising that in 1172 Henry decided to grant the kingdom to Hugh de Lacy, to hold 'as Murrough O'Melaghlin or any other before or after him best held it' by the service of fifty knights (Gormanston Reg., f.5, p. 177).

Henry's grant was a double-edged sword however, as with the lands and titles, came the unenviable task of capturing, subduing and securing Meath. Internally, the kingdom was divided between two rival sibling would-be-kings of the Ua Mael Sechlainn line. To the south, sat Strongbow, effectively 'king of Leinster', who, although not obviously hostile, must have resented Hugh's appointment. Immediately to the south, in the midlands of Leinster, were the Ui Failge, who were unfriendly towards the Anglo-Normans, and refused to pay tribute to Strongbow. In 1172, Strongbow led an expedition into Ui Failge territory to extract tribute, and there plundered the land for cattle. There was no initial resistance to the attack, but on the return journey south the rearguard was ambushed by Diarmait Ua Dimmuasaig, king of Ui Failge, and Strongbow's son-in-law, Robert de Quency, constable of Leinster, was killed. To the west, was Muintir Gilgain (Fig. 106), whose ruler, Donnell O'Farrell, was adamantly
resistant to Hugh's claims over his territory; and to the west of Muintir Gilgain was Connacht, whose king, Rory O'Connor, had claims over Meath under the forced partition of 1169. To the north, sat Tiernan O'Rourke's kingdom of Breifne, which also had claims over Meath under the forced partition, posing the greatest threat to Anglo-Norman security in the region. Early in 1171, Tiernan O'Rourke made successive raids into Meath, drove off countless cattle, and burnt the round tower of Tullyard, with its fill of human beings (Brady, 1961, p.39).

Meath can thus be visualised as an area under constant threat from internal rebellion, and in danger of attacks from the north, south and west. Hugh de Lacy was however, an ambitious and determined man, from a family of seasoned campaigners (Fig. 111), and he was not about to let his potential enemies get the better of him, so he set a plan in motion which proved so successful that eventually even Henry II himself grew fearful of his power: 'he filled Meath, from the Shannon to the sea, with castles and foreigners' (Annals of Loch Cé, c.1186; ed. Hennessey, 1871). Meath's datable castles can be sensibly divided into four main periods: 1172-75, 1175-1180, 1180-1200, and 1200 onwards (Fig. 85). As Hugh de Lacy died in 1186 however, only the castles within the first three periods will be discussed below.

1172-1175

Hugh de Lacy’s first foray into Meath came shortly after Henry II’s departure for the Continent. In 1172, Hugh advanced into Meath, took Fore, and raided as far as the Shannon, in an attempt to take possession of his fief; but he met with strong resistance from Tiernan O'Rourke of Breifne, who resented Hugh’s claims over lands which he felt were rightfully his. Tiernan was one of those expressly named as having sworn fealty to Henry II, but it seems he had no intention of giving up his claims in Meath to Henry’s grantee, and there was an inevitable clash of interests between him and Hugh (Orpen, 1911-20, i, pp.319-20). A meeting was subsequently arranged between the rival claimants, at a place now known as the ‘Hill of Ward’, near Athboy, and upon this hill Hugh struck the first major blow of his campaign – he put Tiernan O'Rourke to the sword. Chroniclers and historians have long deliberated over this event, often apportioning equal blame on both sides, or suggesting that Tiernan was slain due to a general misunderstanding (Martin, 1993, p.99). It must be remembered however, that these were violent, bloody and disorderly times, and ‘we must think...of fearful men seeking to control a rebellious land under the threat of hostile invasion, men ruthless and rapacious, driven by repressions and barbarous cruelties’ (Pounds, 1990, p.10). The killing of Tiernan was almost certainly no accident, but a deliberate act on Hugh’s part. The fact that Tiernan’s head was taken and spiked over the gate of the fortress at Dublin (Martin, 1993, p.99) adds further weight to this argument.

With Teiman’s death, the O’Rourke kingship over Uí Briúin Bréifne and Conmaicne collapsed. Tiernan’s gains in Meath were lost, and his see at Kells was extinguished; absorbed into the Anglo-Norman diocese of Meath. Having dealt successfully with Teirnan, Hugh turned his attentions to Muintir Gilgain, mounting two successful raids into the area, during which its ruler, Donnell O'Farrell, was slain:
the Anglo-Normans carrying off many cows and prisoners. It is unlikely that any serious attempt was made to establish permanent settlement in Meath at this stage however, as the area was still extremely hostile; a fact reflected by the many castles constructed during this period (Fig. 85).

The earliest frontier in Meath appears to have been the River Boyne, as all of the datable castles built by the Anglo-Normans between 1172 and 1175 are situated on, or to the east of, the river (Fig. 112). Of the 10 castles erected, 6 were constructed at pivotal points in the landscape (Fig. 86), and all can be accounted for militarily (Fig. 96), the majority performing more than one strategic function. 5 castles formed the caputs of new lordships, and 4 were connected with the control of proto-urban ecclesiastical centres, but more importantly, 3 were connected with the monitoring and control of routeways, and 7 were connected with the monitoring and control of waterways - with 5 on navigable river sections, and 7 at river crossings. Hugh's strategy in this early period is clear: several castles were erected in the landscape to the east of the Boyne in an attempt to secure a small manageable area of land against internal revolt, whilst other castles were constructed adjacent to the River Boyne, the river and the castles, in combination, forming an effective defensive barrier against hostile Irish incursions. A strategy that also afforded the Anglo-Normans control over the area’s systems of communication and supply. Hugh’s most important holding was Dublin, and by securing the Boyne, along with land to the east of the river, he provided the city with a means of defence. As figure 92 shows, Hugh literally surrounded the city with a protective screen of castles.

In light of the fact that so many Irish kings submitted to Henry II, it has been questioned whether the castle building programme in Meath should be viewed as wholly military. Indeed, it has been stated that during Hugh de Lacy’s tenure of office ‘we hear of little or no fighting in Meath or in Leinster’ (Orpen, 1911-20, ii, p.53), and that there was much ‘peaceful penetration without warfare’ by the Anglo-Normans (Martin, 1993, p.Iv). These statements do not sit well with evidence however. Apart from the confrontations already mentioned, in 1173 Donnell Bregach O’Melaghlin, king of East Meath, was killed by his half-brother Art O’Melaghlin, king of West Meath, who was attempting to secure the entire kingdom for himself (Fig. 76). This attempt failed however, due no doubt to Anglo-Norman intervention, and East Meath passed to Manus O’Melaghlin, under Hugh de Lacy. Later in the same year, with Hugh and Strongbow both absent from Ireland (having been recalled by Henry II to aid in suppressing the great rebellion in Normandy), the Irish revolted. Giraldus states that when Strongbow returned to Ireland, after 10th August 1173, he found the majority of the princes in the country in revolt against the king and himself (Scott & Martin, 1978, p.135); and in 1174, after dealing Strongbow a crushing defeat at Thurles, ‘the entire population of Ireland...rose with one consent against the English’ (ibid., p.139).

Early in 1174, Rory O’Connor, king of Connacht, led a full-scale assault against the Anglo-Normans in Meath, probably in an attempt to win back West Meath, to which he had claims under the partition of 1169. Rory crossed the Shannon at the head of a great army, drawn not only from Connacht, but also from Leth Cuinn. The army included Irish leaders from Meath, Bréifne, Airgialla, Ulster, and (a rare phenomenon in Meath and Leinster) from the Cénél nÉogain and the Cénél Conaill. The force crossed Meath and reached the outskirts of Dublin, destroying Hugh de Lacy’s castles at Trim and Duleek.
on route. In desperate plight, Strongbow sent a message to Raymond le Gros in Wales. Raymond returned to Ireland with 30 knights, 100 mounted soldiers and 300 archers, and after rescuing Strongbow, who was under siege at Waterford, marched north to Dublin to deal with the allied Irish force. The Irish had faced Raymond le Gros before and were well aware of his reputation, and on hearing of his, and Strongbow’s, approach, they melted away. Raymond and Strongbow then began the work of restoring the usurped Anglo-Normans to their castles and outposts in Meath, and an uneasy peace returned to the county. Importantly though, Hugh’s castle building strategy had proved successful, as Dublin was no doubt saved from the Irish by his defensive screen of castles.

1175-1180

In 1175, the Anglo-Normans ‘appear to have been active in Meath in making reprisals on the chieftains who took part in the hosting of the previous year’ (Orpen, 1911, i, p.344). Manus O’Melaghlin was hanged at Trim for his part in the uprising, although Art O’Melaghlin seems to have been left undisturbed in West Meath. Clonard and Durrow were plundered, and raids were made into the territories of petty kings in West Meath who had joined in Rory’s uprising, the annals recording that the whole country from Drogheda to Athlone was laid waste (O’Donovan, 1848-51; Hennessey, 1871). The castles at Trim and Duleek were rebuilt and reoccupied, and other castles began to be erected in the landscape, and it is likely that these castles represent the beginning of the systematic occupation of Meath by the Anglo-Normans.

14 castles can be dated to this period (Fig. 85), each accounted for militarily (Fig. 96), with 6 constructed at pivotal points in the landscape (Fig. 86), the majority performing more than one strategic function (Fig. 112). 7 castles formed the caputs of new lordships, 7 were connected with the control of proto-urban ecclesiastical centres, 5 were connected with the monitoring and control of routeways, and 10 were connected with the monitoring and control of waterways - with 4 on navigable sections, and 8 at river crossings. The strategies associated with the construction of these new castles are again apparent. The chain of castles designed to protect Meath’s northern border was begun, shielding the newly acquired Anglo-Norman lands from further Irish invasions. Meath’s other navigable river, the Blackwater, was secured, giving the Anglo-Normans control over all of the county’s systems of transport, communication and supply. But most importantly, in terms of settlement, many of Meath’s ecclesiastical centres were furnished with a castle, the Anglo-Normans thereby usurping the existing political and economic roles of the proto-urban centres, enabling the process of colonisation to begin.

The expansion of Anglo-Norman occupied territory west of the Boyne, along with the accelerated programme of castle building, appears to have triggered three events. Firstly, early in 1176, Art O’Melaglin, king of West Meath, was deposed, and the remnants of the O’Melaglin family finally gave up hope of ruling Meath and retreated into the south-western part of present Co. Westmeath, settling in the modern barony of Clonlonan, where they remained until the time of Cromwell (Walsh, 2003, p.101). Secondly, again in 1176, Richard the Fleming’s motte at Slane was destroyed by Máel Seclainn
Mac Lochlainn, who was probably angered by the growing chain of castles along Meath's northern border. The Irish annals state that immediately after the destruction of Slane, the castles of Kells, Galtrim, and Derrypatrick...were razed or left desolate through fear of the Cénél nEógain (Hennessey & McCarthy, 1887-1901). Thirdly, in 1177, probably in direct response to the destruction of Slane castle, and the continued threat posed by the Cénél nEógain, John de Courcy invaded and conquered Ulaid (Figs. 74, 75 & 79). Lastly, it must be mentioned here, that on 1st June 1176 Strongbow died and was temporarily replaced by William fitz Audelin, who was himself replaced in 1177 by the returning Hugh de Lacy, having been made 'Procurator-general of Ireland' by Henry II, who again confirmed his grant of Meath, and the castle and city of Dublin.

1180-1200

Between 1180 and 1200, there are 9 datable castles erected in Meath by the Anglo-Normans (Fig. 85), and again each can be accounted for militarily (Fig. 96), with 3 being constructed at pivotal points in the landscape (Fig. 86), and the majority performing more than one strategic function (Fig. 112). 6 castles formed the caputs of new lordships, 6 were connected with the control of proto-urban ecclesiastical centres, 4 were connected with the monitoring and control of routeways, and 4 were connected with the monitoring and control of waterways - with 1 on a navigable section, and 4 at river crossings. The strategies associated with the construction of these new castles are also, again, apparent. Anglo-Norman control of the county's rivers and road systems was further reinforced via the erection of several new castles, and the chain of castles designed to protect Meath's northern border was strengthened around the River Dee area, probably in response to the attack on Slane castle in 1177. But more importantly, it is clear that during this period emphasis was gradually shifting away from the communications networks, the majority of castles constructed connected either to the winning of ecclesiastical proto-urban centres or - with castles forming the caputs of new lordships - with the control and governance of territory.

After 1180, the process of sub-infeudation in Meath began apace, with Hugh de Lacy constructing a number of castles upon the principal land grants of his favourite barons. In 1182, Hugh built the castles of Clonard [136] and Skreen [206] (Scott & Martin, 1978, p.195), and it is likely that he was also directly responsible for the construction of the castles at Killeen [173], Navan [189] and Nobber [195]. The majority of the castles were designed either to fill gaps in the network of castles forming the caputs of lordships - making the Anglo-Normans masters of Meath - or to gain control of the remaining Irish economic and administrative structures - in the form of the proto-urban ecclesiastical centres. The fortifications thus provided the means to bring the liberty under full military control: a necessary precursor to the process of colonisation and settlement.

With Meath captured, subdued and secured, Hugh implemented the next stage of his plan. Giraldus states that Hugh went to great trouble to conciliate those who had been conquered and forcibly ejected from their lands, by restoring the countryside to its rightful cultivators and bringing back cattle to
the pastures which had formerly been deserted; enticing the Irish still further to his side by mild rule, and by agreements on which they could rely (Scott & Martin, 1978, p.191). Thus, colonisation followed conquest, and the Anglo-Norman barons turned their lordships to profit. In the words of Giraldus, ‘when they [the Irish] had been hemmed in by castles and gradually subdued, he [Hugh de Lacy] compelled them to obey the laws. Thus he succeeded in reducing to an ordered condition all that his predecessors had either destroyed or thrown into confusion, and was the first to succeed in deriving any profit from that which had brought others nothing but trouble’ (ibid.). In 1180, Hugh sealed his pact with the Irish by marrying the daughter of Rory O'Conner, thereby winning their full support. Unfortunately his marriage, and his overwhelming success, brought him into conflict with Henry II, who suspected him of ‘wanting to throw off his allegiance and usurp the government of the kingdom, and with it the crown and sceptre’ (ibid.). Consequently, in 1181, Hugh was deprived of his custody of Dublin, and, although reinstated after a year, was finally superseded as governor of Dublin by Philip of Worcester, in 1184.

In 1186, as part of his plan to pacify West Meath, Hugh de Lacy was busy supervising the construction of a castle at Durrow. There, he was approached by an Irish youth, named Gilla-gan-inathair Ua Miadhaigh, who, ‘having his axe hidden under his cloak...gave de Lacy one blow, so that he cut off his head, and he fell, both head and body, into the ditch of the castle’ (Annals of Loch Cé, c.1186; ed. Hennessey, 1871). Thus, the ‘King of Midhe and Breifne and Airghiall’ (ibid.), and one time Constable of Dublin, and Justiciar and Procurator-general of Ireland, passed into shadow: dying before the final part of his plan could be completed. West Meath was never fully pacified, and with Hugh's death, the lordship was effectively divided into two, a land of peace and a land of war. Walter de Lacy eventually succeeded to his father's estates, when he came of age in 1194, but paled against his father’s achievements. In his lifetime, Hugh de Lacy proved himself a great warrior, competent campaigner, proficient strategist, and effective statesman and politician, and with his death, the last real hope for complete Anglo-Norman domination in Ireland died too. Consequently, for many centuries, the 'country was divided into two cultures and two 'nations' (Martin, 1993, p.xlviii).

Castles in Meath and Ireland: A Conclusion

Judging by the evidence, there can be little doubt that the Anglo-Normans, under the capable direction of Hugh de Lacy, implemented a deliberate and well thought out plan of action for the conquest, consolidation and colonisation of Meath, based upon the strategic use of castles. A plan no doubt hatched out of the various lessons learnt by at least three generations of Norman campaigners involved in the conquest and colonisation of first England, and later Wales. A plan that ultimately proved so successful that Meath became the most heavily Anglo-Normanised territory in the whole of Ireland. Indeed, it is tempting to state that, in Meath at least, we are witnessing the pinnacle of the Norman castle building achievement. This statement is somewhat controversial however, and in order to justify it, it is necessary to examine the conclusions of other historians and archaeologists.
Looking first at the nature of earthwork castles, it has been suggested that the motte and bailey was out of date and almost obsolete as a castle type by 1200 (O'Keeffe, 1992, p.59; McNeill, 2000, p.56 & 76). This may be true in terms of the motte and bailey as a comfortable lordly residence, but it is not true in terms of the motte and bailey as an item of ancillary military hardware: the role for which it was originally intended. A notion fully supported by Brown, who stated, 'in the expediency of conquest and settlement...[the motte and bailey’s] effectiveness and ease of construction were as indispensable to the Angevins in Ireland in the late 12th and 13th centuries as to Duke William in England in 1066' (1980i, p.139). It has also been suggested that many of Ireland’s earthwork castles appear to be militarily weak in comparison to their Anglo-French contemporaries (McNeill, 2000, p.76). Ignoring Ireland’s heavy annual rainfall and prolonged agricultural background - both of which must have caused heavy erosion on many sites - it must be remembered that it is nearly impossible to accurately judge the strength of a castle from the surviving earthworks. Mottes that now appear as isolated insignificant monuments in the landscape, may once have been surrounded by vast palisaded enclosures, features now undetectable without geophysical prospecting, excavation, or close scrutiny of aerial photographs (O’Keeffe, 1990 & 1992; Glasscock, 1975). Indeed, O’Conor has recently emphasised the fact that many Irish mottes could have displayed sophisticated, almost Hen Domen-like, earth and timber defences (2002, pp.173-82). In truth, the Anglo-Normans knew from experience that motte and baileys would adequately serve their purposes in Ireland, and were confident enough to base their conquest upon them.

Turning to the positioning of castles in Ireland’s landscape, it has been argued that in many areas there is little sign of an overall strategic pattern or plan against either external attack or internal revolt (McNeill, 1989-90; Flanagan, 1996). That the proliferation of castles along the borders of territories are not the result of strategic planning but a phenomenon occurring after the process of conquest was complete, concerned with the stabilisation of lordships, and further, that there was no systematic building of castles at points in the landscape which could be considered ‘strategic pressure points’ (McNeill, 2000, p.76). These arguments stand in direct contrast to what has been discovered in Meath however, where the castles form discernible strategic patterns in the landscape, seemingly resulting from an overall strategic plan, with 23 of the county’s castles located at ‘pivotal points’, and the castles on the northern border forming part of a steadily unfolding military strategy. It is perhaps fairer to state then, that in Ireland, individual territories exhibit differing castle strategies, resulting from either localised considerations or lordly planning.

Finally, McNeill had claimed that in order to hold down the countryside and suppress the native population within a lordship, a baron would have required a ‘blanket coverage’ of castles; further suggesting, that even knights in possession of less than half a fee should have been erecting castles, in case they too were attacked. As Ireland’s landscape does not contain this high density of castellation, McNeill concludes that the castles did not act together as part of lordly scheme, but served only to hold land already won, or to provide administrative headquarters for lords in their lordships (2000, pp.76-7). Based upon the findings from Meath, it can conversely be argued however, that if castles are properly positioned in the landscape, at locations with tactical or strategic value, the need for a ‘blanket coverage’ becomes redundant: as one well positioned castle is worth a dozen poorly positioned ones. Moreover, as
Meath contains at least 78 Anglo-Norman castles, with an average distance between them of 2.48 miles (4.00km), it could equally be argued that there is in fact a 'blanket coverage' anyhow. As for the poor castle-less knight with less than half a fee, it was not uncommon, in times of danger, for such men to seek refuge in the castle of the lord to whom they owed service (Pounds, 1990, pp.44-52).

The two essential requirements of any evolving civilisation are said to be a sound material base and adequate security (Luttwak, 1981, p.1). For the Anglo-Normans in Meath, the challenge was to provide this security without prejudicing the vitality of the county's economic base, and without compromising the stability of the rapidly evolving political order. The castles in Meath were clearly vital and integral components in a strategy designed to meet this challenge. A strategy which, in the end, probably proved more successful than any of its instigators would ever have thought possible.
CHAPTER 7: 'WINNING STRATEGIES' · NORMAN CASTLE BUILDING: A CONCLUSION

’If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.’

Henry David Thoreau
(1817 - 1862)

This thesis has studied the progress of Norman castle building across a span of 120 years, in three different countries, and the questions posed at the beginning of this study can now, to some extent, be answered.

When discussing the various Norman conquests it is all too easy to get caught up in the detail and overlook the impetus behind each successive campaign. Intrinsically, conquest is all about the acquisition of land. Admittedly, conquest brings status, power and wealth, but it should not be forgotten that these aspects are firmly rooted in the soil of the land, and the land must first be taken before any such benefits are gained. In chapter one, it was stated that the foremost strategic function of a castle was the winning and holding of territory: a function that the Normans used to their utmost advantage. Employing the castle’s supreme offensive capabilities, the Normans erected them deep within enemy territory, the fortifications afforded the Normans a safe base from which to mount their military operations, and they would sally forth to subdue local hostilities. Then, with the area secured, it could be permanently occupied as long as the castles held out. Moreover, as chapters four, five and six have shown, these castles were not randomly positioned in the landscape, but were instead shrewdly sited at locations chosen for either their tactical or strategic potential, and in many cases for both. The tactically significant, topographically or geologically strong, locations bolstered the castle’s defences, and the strategically significant locations, due to their geographical positions, afforded the Normans control over ‘key strategic elements’, such as rivers and roads.

In Somerset, the main strategic consideration that influenced castle siting was undoubtedly the rivers. At no point was a castle located more than 2.50 miles (4.02 km) away from one, whilst 13, out of the county’s 27 castles, were situated on, or less than a quarter of a mile (0.401 km) away from, a navigable stretch. The vast majority of castles, skilfully positioned at tactically significant sites, on higher ground overlooking the rivers, in many cases upstream: the prime locations for such fortifications. In addition, some castles appear to have been strategically sited adjacent to overland portage routes between rivers, although more work will need to be carried out on this topic to determine the validity of this argument. Castles were also strategically positioned in relation to Somerset’s Roman roads and Saxon herepâs, although the correlation was less significant than for rivers. This is unsurprising however, given that in the low-lying Somerset Levels transport was predominately by water. The network of Roman roads appears to have had less of an impact upon the siting of castles than the system of Saxon herepâs, the Normans placing castles at strategic locations alongside, or at the ends, of the herepâs radiating out from
the City of Bath: although more long distance herepads routes must be plotted nationally before the exact nature of the relationship between the two can be established.

Two other strategic considerations affected the positioning of Somerset's castles - the coastline and the county boundary. Many of Somerset's earliest castles were located at tactically defensible sites upon the rough semi-circle of hills that form a natural perimeter enclosing the county: the Normans thereby securing the border. Contemporaneously, the coastline was secured, west and north, with a chain of castles stretching from Portbury to Dunster. The county was vulnerable to sea-borne invasion, and these castles were set to defend against this threat: the barrier, in many respects, similar to the coastal defences of Alfred and Edward the Elder. Clearly then, the Normans erected castles at sites of great strategic and or tactical value, which rapidly afforded them command of Somerset's border, coastline, roads, rivers and major ports, and subsequent control over the systems of communication and supply, and the passage of goods and people in and out of the county. With the territory more or less secure, the Normans then pressed home their advantage: moving in towards the centre of the county, they erected castles to dominate commercial centres and rich agricultural lands, thereby seizing control of the region's assets.

Besides the fact that the relationship between castles, rivers and roads was more equally balanced, the situation was much the same in Monmouthshire. Many of Monmouthshire's castles lie adjacent to rivers, and there is a significant correlation between the county's most influential castles and the navigable stretches of its waterways. The principal castles of the lordships of Newport, Chepstow, Abergavenny, Monmouth, Caerleon and Usk were all situated at important river crossings, the last four at confluences, with only Abergavenny and Usk castles upon unnavigable sections. In addition, these castles were superbly positioned at tactically defensible locations, on areas of higher ground, chosen to exert maximum influence over the rivers. The Normans clearly intended to secure Monmouthshire's waterways, and their stratagem afforded them a means of transport, communication and supply, a safe river crossing at all times, and the capacity to shelter their ships, whilst conversely, they could control native river traffic, intercept and restrict movement along the roads which followed the river banks or crossed the rivers themselves, prevent enemy crossings within several miles of their castles, and observe and restrain movement along the river valleys. This effectively turned the rivers into impassable strategic barriers.

Between them, the Rivers Monnow and Wye form Monmouthshire's eastern border and 18 castles lined this boundary, protecting crossings into England. Along the coastline, there was a more or less continuous line of castles defending the county against sea-borne attack. Rumney castle and Caer castle, on Monmouthshire's western border, guarded a crossing of the River Rhymney into neighbouring Glamorgan, and the lofty mountain fortresses of Twyn-Bar-Lwm and St Illtyd's protected the county's north-western border against Welsh incursions. Monmouthshire's Roman roads were secured via 26 Norman castles, almost all in naturally strong, tactically defensible, locations, the significant correlation suggesting that the Roman road network was still very much in use and of vital importance. Furthermore, 10 castles appear to lie adjacent to ancient Welsh trackways, with 12 others within 2 miles (3.21km),
although future work on the routes of these trackways may significantly increase this number. The Normans also built castles above the rich coastal levels, and in the fertile rivers valleys, in an effort to secure the region’s assets; Monmouthshire’s castles, almost without exception, displaying the Norman talent for choosing strategic sites to maximum military and territorial advantage.

In Meath, the Anglo-Norman castle building programme also followed a similar pattern, but a greater number of strategic considerations were taken into account. Firstly, Dublin was surrounded with a protective screen of castles, and the county’s northern border was secured via a chain of systematically positioned castles stretching from Dundalk Bay in the north-east to Lough Sheelin in the north-west: each castle on the northern border large enough to house a substantial garrison, and each reliant upon a naturally strong tactical location to bolster its defences. Rivers were Ireland’s main arteries for transport, communication and supply, and in Meath 44 of its 78 castles were associated with waterways, with 13 upon navigable sections. The early Irish roads were also of great strategic value and although their exact routes cannot at present be delineated with any certainty, it is likely that 21 of Meath’s castles were directly associated with them, the majority in elevated, tactically defensible, locations affording good views along the adjacent road in both directions. In addition, 36 of Meath’s castles were associated with river crossings, amounting to a surprising 46%, and although it cannot be guaranteed that at every river crossing there was a minor road, the likelihood is very high. Therefore, in all probability, nearly half of Meath’s castles were positioned in the landscape in response to a network of minor roads. Again, however, there is scope for further work upon these early routeways, which may well increase this number.

From the ecclesiastical histories, 28 monastic sites were identified in Meath and at 13 there were castles in direct association; all of the major proto-urban sites had a castle and the majority of the remaining sites had a castle within 5 miles (8.04km). The building of castles at these proto-urban monastic centres, undoubtedly represents an Anglo-Norman attempt to usurp their existing political and economic roles, although the correlation was not as significant as for the county’s road and river systems, again suggesting that the communications networks were of far greater importance. Following the sub-infeudation process, a number of castles were founded upon the principal land grants. Between 1172 and 1200, across the nineteen baronies, castles were constructed to act as the 
caput
 of the new lordships, 12 of which had attached baileys, indicative of their high status. Having successfully secured Meath’s northern border, gained control of the systems of transport communication and supply, usurped the political and economic power of the proto-urban monastic centres, and established 
caputs
 within the new lordships, the process of colonisation began. The colonisation process was controlled via a new and distinctive settlement form in Ireland’s landscape - the manor. The manor was not simply a geographical unit, it was also a military, economic, social and judicial institution, central to which, in most cases, was the castle. The association between manorial village and castle, and borough and castle, highlighting the castle’s continuing role as a system for control, and as a centre for administration, justice and social organisation.
In chapter three, a study of historic military manuals, texts and treatises, produced a set of strategic and tactical principles directly relevant to the positioning of fortifications in the landscape. The two sets were broken down into four groups. The tactical considerations can be summarised as follows. Defensibility: the chosen position must be strongly fortified by nature, enhanced by the presence of natural obstacles, such as steep slopes, cliffs, rivers, marshes or shorelines. Security: the site should not be overlooked, or be within range of missile weapons or artillery, and ideally should provide good all-round visibility, hence higher ground is preferable. Accessibility: while it is essential to exclude hostile forces, it is also important to ensure relatively easy access for friendly troops and supplies, and, in case of emergency, an escape route. Practicality: there must be locally available construction materials, the site must have firm foundations upon which to build, be close to a potable water supply, and be well-drained and 'healthy'. Whilst the strategic considerations for a castle to exist may include one or more of the following. Borders: to control and protect a border, or border area. Communications: to command lines of communication, transport and supply, particularly rivers and river crossings, roads, defiles or passes. Assets: to dominate a locality or region of perceived value, such as a commercial centre, rich agricultural land, or a resource-producing area. Safety: to provide a secure base from which field armies may operate, or a place of refuge in times of adversity. Judging by the findings of this thesis, it is clear that these principles also constitute the tactical and strategic considerations that influenced the siting of castles in the landscapes of Somerset, Monmouthshire and Meath.

The Norman army was a well disciplined, highly trained, fighting force, schooled in the arts of war, and as such recognised that it was impossible to hold strategically significant places by troops alone, because such a practice entailed 'too much division and frittering away of the army' (Shaw & Pilkington, 1872, p.3). Strategically significant places had to be secured using the minimum number of troops, so as to leave as many men as possible available for active operations in the field, and the best way to do this was via the construction of well positioned, tactically strong, castles. Thus, factors of a tactical and strategic nature unquestionably provided the main incentives for the castle building programmes in Somerset, Monmouthshire and Meath. Moreover, the Normans were by no means the first to learn this valuable lesson. During a series of bitter campaigns intended to expand the borders of his lands, Fulk Nerra of Anjou (995-1031) evolved the stratagem of establishing wooden strongholds to exploit the strategic potential of each newly won patch of Angevin territory, the fortifications, in addition, serving as springboards for the acquisition of the next area of land on his programme (Brice, 1984, pp.74-5). Castles may predominantly be associated with the Normans, but they were not the first to use them in Northern France, that honour clearly goes to the Count of Anjou, who was, from the outset, utilising them for their ability to gain control of key strategic landscape elements. The Normans, therefore, not only adopted Fulk Nerra's use of castles, they also adopted his stratagems.

It is important to emphasise here the human element behind the successive castle building programmes. The Norman invasions of England and Wales, and the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland, thrust men into unfamiliar, difficult, hostile environments. Conquest could bring land, and with it status, wealth and power, but it was a risky business and was equally likely to result in violence and death. Greatly outnumbered by their enemies, men in such situations were forced to place their trust in strong
leadership, the ability and comradeship of their companions, and an infallible plan for victory, which, in
the case of the Normans, lay with the construction of castles. It is not difficult to imagine small scouting
parties of engineers covertly surveying enemy territory to establish the whereabouts of suitable optimum
sites upon which to erect their castles. Their choice of site governed ultimately by their knowledge of the
principals of strategic and tactical warfare. Strategic and tactical locations were of paramount importance
in terms of the final locations chosen for castle erection, as a well chosen tactical location meant that the
castle could be adequately defended, whilst its strategic position gave the Normans control over key
strategic elements such as rivers and roads. Without control of the essential strategic elements, the
Normans could never hope to effectively hold the region, and without a suitable tactical location, the
castle would be easily overrun, and its defenders killed.

The thesis has surveyed castle building in three counties, and it could be argued that many of its
findings are regionally specific. The only way to be certain of this is to apply the ‘Strategic Approach’ in
other counties in the future. In the meantime, a brief study of the results of other regional castle studies is
instructive. Figure 113, shows the results from fifteen regional castle studies. In each case, the results
show the percentage of castles in the region which were interpreted as social, economic, political or
military foundations. It is clear from figure 113 that in most regions military considerations predominate.
Figure 114, shows the total results from the regions, highlighting the fact that 48% of the castles
examined were seen as military foundations, whilst 20% were social, 18% were political and 14% were
economic. It is highly likely then, that in most counties, the majority of castles were strategically or
tactically positioned in the landscape to fulfil a military agenda.

In the past, all those who have taken the strategic approach to castles have tended to view them
as ‘part of an integrated scheme, planned and controlled from somewhere close to the king’ (Pounds,
1990, p.54). It has been argued, in this thesis, however, that the Normans could not have known the
geography of each region well enough to carry out such a plan, and that such an overall plan was, in truth,
unnecessary. The Norman castle building programme was ultimately successful because it was founded
upon a sound understanding of - and adherence to - the basic strategic and tactical principles of warfare.
This argument is supported via an analysis of the strategies and stratagems that the Normans employed in
regards to castle warfare, over time, across the three study regions.

In Somerset, the Normans first surrounded the county with castles. Castles were erected upon
the hills that form a natural perimeter enclosing the county, and the coastline was secured, west and north.
The Normans thereby defined their ‘ground of contention’, effectively fencing in the native Saxon
population, severing their routes for external support and supply. This afforded the Normans the luxury
of time, which was presumably used to survey the county’s waterlogged, reed-filled, treacherous, interior
for suitable strategic castle sites. With the interior surveyed, the Normans erected castles in the carefully
chosen strategic positions, that quickly afforded them command of Somerset’s most important rivers,
major ports, and road networks, and subsequent control over the region’s systems of transport,
communication and supply. Then, with the territory firmly in their grasp, the Normans founded castles to
dominate the county's commercial centres and rich agricultural lands, thereby securing the region's assets, turning their conquest into profit.

Perhaps the most surprising discovery in Somerset was that Normans chose to largely ignore the existing Saxon 'central places'. This was an unusual factor, considering that many of these central places were burhs, and burhs were located to take advantage of natural defensive features such as rivers and were surrounded by earthwork defences. This clearly formed part of the Norman stratagem within the county. The Normans redistributed the old Saxon estates to form new baronies and new Norman centres - focused upon castles - replaced the Saxon central places. In this way, the Normans created new administrative centres, transferring power away from the old Saxon central places, which led to the destruction of the Saxon hundred system. With the destruction of the Saxon 'political landscape', the Normans were free to institute a political landscape of their own, a 'landscape of feudalism', which effectively spelled the end for the traditional Anglo-Saxon way of life. Lastly here, mention must be made of the Norman use of the stratagem of psychological warfare within the county. The castle at Montacute was, apparently, intentionally erected over a Saxon holy site, and the surrounding landscape carefully manipulated to graphically portray the Norman lord's God-given right over the biblical facets of dominion, leading to the conclusion that the Normans were attempting to utilise symbolism to psychologically suppress the local Saxon population.

Between 1067 and 1202, the Normans founded 27 castles in Somerset, and this economic scheme, employing the use of a few well positioned castles, was incredibly successful as the relatively trouble-free pacification of the county, the suppression of the rebellion at Montacute, the defeat of Harold's marauding sons, the capture of Exeter, and the fall of Devon and Cornwall show.

In Monmouthshire, although the strategic considerations were the same, a very different strategy was employed. Between 1066 and 1262, the Normans founded 58 castles in the county, but overall, in comparison to Somerset, the scheme appeared to lack cohesion or direction. The first concern of the Normans in Monmouthshire was to secure England's western border, and to that end, they constructed a chain of castles on the banks of the Dore, Monnow and Wye Rivers. The castles on the Monnow were regularly spaced at intervals 5 miles (8.04km) apart, and as such were well placed to defend England's border. The Dore and Wye Rivers were, initially, inadequately defended however, and could easily have been crossed by the Welsh. It has been argued that the larger the castle, and the more numerous its garrison, the larger the area around it that could be protected (King, 1983, p.xvii). By this reckoning, a castle as large as Chepstow would hold a garrison substantially large enough to adequately defended the Wye. The argument is flawed however, as a garrison can only travel as far as their mounts will carry them in a day. In reality, many castles are required to adequately protect an area. Shortly after the initial attempts to protect England's western border, several castles were constructed overlooking the coastline, indicating that the Norman invasion came from both land and sea, and two castles were founded on Monmouthshire's western border, guarding a crossing of the River Rhymney into neighbouring Glamorgan. At this stage though, the north and west of the county remained virtually undefended.
Logically, the next step in the Norman campaign in Monmouthshire should have been to secure the largely undefended north and west of the county, but this is not what occurred. In the south, emphasis shifted towards securing the river and road systems, whilst in the north, castles were already being constructed to take advantage of the fertile narrow parallel valleys of the Olchon, Esley Brook, Upper Monnow, Dulas and Dore, which were ripe for economic exploitation. This clearly indicates that the campaign was fragmentary, and did not represent a concerted effort on the part of the Normans. The river and road systems were eventually secured in the south, and the few castles constructed in the Olchon and Esley valleys afforded the north a modicum of protection from the Welsh. The northern upland area of the Newport lordship was never adequately secured however, and remained under Welsh rule until the late thirteenth century. In Monmouthshire, the Normans did position many of their castles at tactically defensible sites, in carefully chosen strategic locations, in order to gain maximum military and territorial advantage, demonstrating just how well established the principles lying behind the Norman castle building programme were, but their overall campaign was protracted and, in terms of castle usage, inefficient. The largest proportion of their castles were located in the fertile river valleys, or upon the lands overlooking the profitable coastal regions, and it could be argued that greed overtook military necessity. Unsurprisingly, their attempts to secure the county were never wholly successful.

The failure of the Norman castle building strategy in Monmouthshire can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the conquest of Monmouthshire was not a single campaign planned and co-ordinated by a king, or powerful lord, but rather, many campaigns, carried out over the course of one hundred and twenty years, by numerous individuals, in various locations. The direct opposite, in fact, of the situations in both Somerset and Meath, as the campaign in Somerset appears to have been the brainchild of Robert of Mortain, and the campaign in Meath seems to have been devised by Hugh de Lacy. Secondly, all three campaigns appear to reflect the military climate of the day.

The decisive part of the campaign in Somerset took place during the reign of William the Conqueror, whose personal influence over his men was the keystone of his achievements. He successfully harnessed the energies of the Norman baronage to his purposes, held his army together through supply shortages and disease, fought one of the most demanding battles of the middle ages, and pacified a hostile nation. In the ten years following the conquest he tirelessly defended his realm, his strategy was generally brilliant, and he showed a keen appreciation of where the greatest threats to his security lay (Morillo, 1994, p.187). In contrast, the majority of the campaign in Monmouthshire took place during the reigns of William II, Henry I and Stephen. William II's offensive campaigns showed uniform caution and conservatism to the point of ineffectiveness, he had little daring, concentration of effort, or success, and displayed a complete lack of battle tactics. Henry I was a skilful diplomat, but a poor strategist, and his policies displayed the same caution that characterised William II's offensive strategies (ibid. pp.188-90). Stephen was a capable soldier, but made many political mistakes, and can be criticised for his continual lack of judgement (Crouch, 2002, pp.239-82), whereas the campaign in Meath took place during the reign of Henry II, who was one of England's most able and energetic medieval rulers. A brilliant diplomat, capable strategist and tactician, 'his rule extended over so many
territories and embraced so many fields of activity that it is hard to form an overall view of his reign' (Saul, 2000, p.96).

The failure of the Norman castle building strategy in Wales appears to have been translated into success by the Anglo-Normans in Ireland, as the lessons learnt were not quickly forgotten. In Meath, the strategy in the early period is clear. Several castles were erected in the landscape to the east of the River Boyne in an attempt to secure a small manageable area of land against internal revolt, whilst other castles were constructed adjacent to the river. This gave the Anglo-Normans a means of transport, communication and supply, and in addition, formed an effective defensive barrier against hostile Irish incursions. Dublin was the principal concern of the Anglo-Normans, and this strategy surrounded it with a protective screen of castles: a move that immediately proved invaluable, thwarting an Irish advance on the city.

With Dublin and the Boyne secured, the Anglo-Normans pressed on into the interior of Meath. A chain of castles designed to protect Meath’s northern border was begun, shielding the newly acquired Anglo-Norman lands from further Irish invasions. Meath’s other navigable river, the Blackwater, was taken, and castles were systematically positioned adjacent to the county’s road networks, giving the Anglo-Normans complete mastery over the region’s systems of transportation, communication and supply. Many of Meath’s ecclesiastical centres were also furnished with a castle, the Anglo-Normans thereby usurping the existing political and economic roles of the proto-urban centres, enabling the process of colonisation to begin.

Anglo-Norman control of the county’s rivers and road systems was then further reinforced via the erection of several new castles, and the chain of castles designed to protect Meath’s northern border was strengthened around the River Dee area. Finally, more castles were constructed in order to gain control of the remaining ecclesiastical proto-urban centres, whilst others were founded to serve as the caputs of new lordships, directly connected to the control and governance of territory. The castles thus provided the means to bring the Liberty under full military control. With Meath captured, subdued and secured, the Irish were restored to the countryside and cattle were returned to the pastures. Thus, colonisation followed conquest, and the Anglo-Norman barons turned their lordships to profit. Between 1172 and c.1275, the Anglo-Normans erected 78 castles in Meath, and although the strategy can hardly be considered economic in terms of the number of castles used, it was incredibly successful. As Giraldus states, ‘when they [the Irish] had been hemmed in by castles and gradually subdued, he [Hugh de Lacy] compelled them to obey the laws. Thus he succeeded in reducing to an ordered condition all that his predecessors had either destroyed or thrown into confusion, and was the first to succeed in deriving any profit from that which had brought others nothing but trouble’ (Scott & Martin, 1978, p.191).

It can be stated then, that in all probability, factors of tactical and strategic nature provided the main incentives for the Norman castle building programme, that such considerations were of paramount importance in terms of the final locations chosen for castle erection, that the castle building programme developed over time as a result of lessons learnt, and from region to region in response to localised
conditions and requirements, and that the castle building programme was, in most instances, ultimately successful because it was founded upon a sound understanding of - and adherence to - the basic strategic and tactical principles of warfare. These ‘winning strategies’ greatly aided the Normans in their conquests and served to establish their army as a ‘force-majeur par excellence’, but this raises two final questions: Where did the Normans acquire their in-depth knowledge of military principals and what inspired their usage?

The Normans and the Romans

'The continuing influence of Romanitas runs like a bright thread through the rich tapestry of the period AD 800-1600'.

Steane, 2001, p.7

In an attempt to destroy the ‘military orthodoxy’ that allegedly surrounds castle studies, Liddiard states, ‘the Norman Conquest [of England] was not an invasion akin to that of the Romans, but the second occasion in the eleventh century that a foreign king had taken the throne by force’ (2000i, p.5). It is conversely possible however that the Norman invasion of England was exactly akin to the Roman invasion of Britain because it was deliberately based upon it, and further, it is conceivable that the Normans actually drew their inspiration, and the bulk of their military knowledge, from the Romans themselves. This argument is somewhat speculative, but the evidence is overwhelmingly in its favour.

The Normans did not call themselves ‘Norman’, and did not know that they were ‘feudal’ or ‘medieval’. The term ‘The Middle Ages’ was not invented until the fifteenth century, and the ‘feudal system’ was not conceptualised until the seventeenth century. Rather, the Normans considered themselves ‘French’ and lived in tempore moderno. In the tenth century, Normandy was carved out of the western edge of the Frankish kingdom, and the Vikings who settled in Normandy were absorbed into the Frankish population, and by the eleventh century Normandy was more Frankish in its customs and culture than it was Viking (Bradbury, 1997, pp.23-4). Thus, the Normans formed the vanguard of a wider European movement of Frankish conquest.

The Frankish system of governance derived from two basic models. The first, which was thoroughly heterogeneous in its composition, came from classical antiquity: there were some classical sources gleaned from surviving texts, whilst others were mediated by and through the later Roman Empire and the Romano-German kingdoms of Gaul, and were merged with contemporary Byzantine, ecclesiastical, and western secular influences to create a corpus of information. The second was provided by the Holy Scriptures with the vast commentary which had been developing for almost a millennium (Bachrach, 1993, pp.xiii-xiv). The Franks thus inherited many of the characteristics of the Roman Empire, and in the eighth century were on the verge of reconstituting the pan-European empire of the Romans, particularly after Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III on Christmas day 800 (Rowley, 1999, p.14): an event which marked the beginning of the ‘Holy Roman Empire’. The Franks, in effect, claimed for themselves what they could of the Roman legacy, and by the
end of the tenth century Normandy had adopted many of these characteristics. Indeed, Barlow states that in England the Anglo-Norman kings instituted ‘governmental procedures that came from the Roman Empire by way of the Franks’ (1999, pp.90-1). William the Conqueror was therefore born within a well-established and essentially Frankish territorial principality that drew inspiration from the bygone glory of the Roman Empire.

Another principality that was greatly inspired by the Roman legacy was Anjou. In the first decades of the eleventh century, the history of northern France was characterised by incessant wars between rival princes; and foremost among them was Count Fulk Nerra of Anjou (995-1031). During his lifetime Fulk began an aggressive campaign to expand Anjou’s borders, a policy that continued under his son Count Geoffrey Martel (1040-60), the principality eventually stretching from the southern frontiers of Normandy in the north to Poitou and the Saintonge in the south, and from near Nantes in the west to Tours in the east (Bates, 2001, p.20). Fulk’s early use of castles has already been mentioned, but he is important for several additional reasons. Fulk employed Vegetian military maxims, adopted Roman, or Neo-Roman, rituals and ceremonies, erected Romanesque stone towers, studied Roman Law and made numerous visits to Rome; his use of a highly eclectic collection of techniques, images and ideas, which in a broad sense can be traced to the Roman past, were of the utmost importance in legitimising his exercise of political power within the Angevin state (Bachrach, 1993, pp.xi-xiv). Indeed, John of Marmoutier calls Fulk ‘The Neo-Roman Consul’ more than a century after his adventus. It is possible then that Fulk’s success inspired William the Conqueror, who decided to follow his example and employ Roman military science in combination with the use of castles in his conquest of England. As Bates suggests, Fulk Nerra was a dominant personality and ‘might well have provided a role-model for the young William to emulate’ (2001, pp.21-22).

If Fulk Nerra’s creative use of ‘Romanitas’ did not inspire the Norman adoption of Roman military principles, then it is equally possible that they were swayed by surviving Roman literature. Contemporary authors drew upon Vergil, Suetonius, Sallust, Statius, Lucan, Scipio, Pompey, Cato, Ovid, Tacitus and Julius Caesar, to shape Norman history (Bachrach, 2002, p.7; Albu, 2001, pp.12-13; Chibnall, 1999, p.126). Livy’s account of early Roman history was plundered at will by the authors of the Royal Frankish Annals (Reuter, in Keen, 1999, p.21), and the Normans were familiar with the Roman military authors Vegetius and Frontinus. Vegetius’ Epitoma rei Militaris, was one of the most influential military treatises in the western world from Roman times to the nineteenth century and was used by Charlemagne (742-814), Count Everard de Frejus (837), Fulk Nerra (995-1031), Henry II (1133-89) and Richard the Lionheart (1157-99) (Shrader, 1979). Hrabanus Maurus, a ninth-century archbishop of Mainz, produced a revised version with additions intended to adapt it to Frankish warfare, and Bishop Frechulf of Lisieux produced a copy for the library of Charles the Bald (Reuter, in Keen, 1999, pp.19-21). Norman knowledge of Roman history is probably most evident in William of Poitiers’ Gesta Guillelmi, in which William the Conqueror is continually compared with the great generals of antiquity, the account culminating in a sustained comparison between the Norman invasion of England and the Roman invasion of Britain, demonstrating that William had faced greater difficulties than Julius Caesar and yet had achieved a much more impressive degree of success (Gillingham, in Strickland, 2000, p.143).
If it is accepted that the Normans utilised a form of 'Romanitas', or that Roman literature informed Norman military policy, then several aspects of the Conquest acquire a whole new meaning. Before the invasion of England, William sent a mission to seek the support of Rome. Traditionally, it has been argued that this mission was sent to win the support of the Pope – and so of the wealthy and powerful Norman Church – for the enterprise (Cruickshank, 2001, p.11; Chibnall, 1999, p.9). The Pope endorsed the invasion and sent a blessed banner to Normandy, but instead of seeking funding, William may instead have been emulating Charlemagne and Fulk Nerra, attempting to establish himself in the role of 'Neo-Roman Consul'.

The fact that William did not land at Dover, but chose instead to stage his landing at Pevensey, Sussex, has long been debated. The Romans clearly recognised the strategic value of Pevensey and erected a Saxon shore fort in the area, but more importantly, Bird has recently suggested that ‘Romanists’ may be incorrect in their assumption that the landing site for the Roman invasion of Britain was in Kent. Bird argues 'there is no mention of Kent in...[the] sources and there is no need to assume that any part of the invasion force landed there' (2000, p.92), suggesting instead that 'the Roman invasion of AD 43 took place in Sussex' (ibid. p.91). William may thus have been privy to knowledge and information that is now lost, choosing his landing site in Sussex, in order to follow in the footsteps of the Claudian invasion force.

The advanced structure of the Norman army101, comprising knights - trained to fight as cavalry with lance and sword - heavy and light infantry, and the arrière-ban, or general levy of freemen - all skilled in the use of spear, bow and crossbow - has been a moot point for generations of historians. In light of the above arguments however, its structure can perhaps be seen as a Norman attempt to mirror the make-up of the Roman army, which also comprised cavalry, heavy and light infantry, and auxiliaries (Luttwak, 1981, pp.40-6). Indeed, it is even possible that the number of troops in William's invasion force, estimated at between 5,000-6,000 men (Beeler, 1966, p.266), is directly comparable to a Roman Legion, which consisted of approximately 6,000 men (Luttwak, 1981, pp.14-16). In addition, the 'feigned flight' used by the Normans at Hastings is a classic Vegetian manoeuvre.

In chapter four, it was stated that the initial phase of Norman castle building in England, between 1066 and 1071, appeared to follow a pattern similar to the spread of the Roman Conquest of Britain. Castles were constructed along the south coast from Exeter to Dover. A scatter of fortifications in the Midlands stretched up as far as Lincoln and York. There was a concentration in the West Midlands and in the Welsh Marches, where Chester formed the north-western point of attack and, at the estuary of the River Wye, Chepstow the southernmost. The north-western chain of defences roughly coinciding with the line of Icknield Street, which the Romans originally intended as the north-western boundary for their occupied territory in Britain (Rowley, 1999, pp.88-9). It is feasible that this distribution was intentional, the Normans positioning castles strategically along Roman lines.
The strongest evidence for the Norman adoption of Romanitas comes however, from their use of symbolism. At Colchester (Camv1odvnvm), in the first century AD, the Romans constructed a large classical style temple to the Emperor Claudius (41-54 AD). The podium for the temple measured 32.00m by 24.40m, and survives today beneath the donjon of a Norman castle. The donjon at Colchester was the first to be built in England (c. 1075-80), is by far the largest, and in plan is similar to the White Tower of London. Its dimensions are 46.20m north-south, 33.50m east-west, and 27.40m in height, with corner turrets rising to between 32.00m and 33.50m. The reason generally given for the construction of this colossal donjon is that it was built in response to a serious Danish raid on the town. This is highly unlikely however, as a much smaller castle would easily have sufficed. It is far more likely that this vast and imposing castle was built upon the site of the Roman Temple to serve as a symbol of Norman power and dominion.

In Roman Britain, Colchester was the first site to be permanently settled. A Colonia was established by 49 AD, and this rapidly developed into the first Roman town, which became the headquarters of the imperial cult. 'As the only site, before the [Roman] conquest, which might with justification be called the "capital" of Britain, it was the obvious choice for the cult centre, for there the cult would have made the greatest impact on the native Britons' (Wacher, 1978, p. 79). The temple subsequently became a symbol of oppression for the Britons, and unsurprisingly, during the Boudiccan revolt in 60 AD, the town was attacked and burnt to the ground. The Normans, by constructing a massive donjon, in what was once the heart of Roman Britain, over the remains of the headquarters of the imperial cult were therefore symbolically oppressing the nation's population all over again; an act perhaps designed to establish William's position as 'Neo-Roman Consul of Britain'. The Normans continued this pattern across England, building 12 royal castles in towns of Roman origin, and on into Wales, where in Monmouthshire alone 5 castles were founded at important Roman sites. The protection afforded by the surviving Roman defences is generally cited as the reason for this, but it is equally feasible that the Normans were styling their conquests after the Romans.

Following the completion of the conquest, the Normans sought to impress their religious fervour upon England, and in an unparalleled spate of ecclesiastical building, nearly every cathedral and abbey church was rebuilt. This heralded the introduction of a new architectural style, further strengthening the case for the Norman adoption of Romanitas; the style was known as 'Roman in France and Norman or Romanesque in England' (Rowley, 1999, p. 18). The term 'Romanesque' was applied to the architecture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries because it revived classical precedents established by the Romans, chief among which was the emergence of the rib vault, which was later adopted in Normandy and across the Continent by the early thirteenth century (Cole, 2002, pp. 184-99). Furthermore, at Chepstow, Norman builders stripped Roman floor tiles from nearby Caerwent and incorporated them into the fabric of the keep as architectural decoration. This practise was also adopted at Colchester, and in both instances it seems that conscious references were being made to the past for reasons of symbolism (Creighton & Higham, 2003, p. 54).
In conclusion then it appears likely that Norman familiarity with Roman history, and Roman military maxims, helped to shape their army, strengthen their combat skills, aid them in their planning and logistics for the Conquest, inform their strategies and tactics, inspire their image-making and eventually assist them in their political governance. In light of the overwhelming success of their conquests, the triumph of their castle building programme and their promulgation of Romanitas, perhaps the statement that best sums up the Normans is "venimus, vidimus, vincimus".
ENDNOTES

1. This was the basis for much of the literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See: Clark, 1884; Mackenzie, 1897; D'Auvergne, 1907; Thompson, 1912; Armitage, 1912; Oman, 1926; Braun, 1936; Toy, 1953; O'Neil, 1954; Toy, 1955.


4. This idea is developed and discussed in chapters 4 and 6.


6. This idea is developed and discussed in chapter 4.

7. The fieldwork in Somerset took place during the autumn of 2000 and the spring of 2001. The fieldwork in Co. Meath was carried out during the summer of 2001. The fieldwork in Monmouthshire took place in the autumn of 2002. In each county 65-70% of all known castle sites were visited, and at each, a monument recording form was filled in, notes and photographs were taken (35mm colour prints & slides) and, where necessary, the earthwork was measured.

8. The use of the term 'engineer' is deliberate here, as the Norman army seems to have included amongst it ranks many highly skilled specialists, who were trained in the various disciplines of military engineering. In *Exon Domesday Book* it states, 'Gerard the ditcher (fossarius) holds Lopen from Roger of Corelle' (21:38). It is probable that 'Gerard the ditch digger' was Robert of Mortain's chief engineer, the use of the word 'ditcher' seemingly indicating that he was a specialist in the construction of earthworks. It is likely that Gerard was responsible for the construction of the impressive motte and bailey at Montacute, and was given the nearby holding of Lopen by Roger of Corelle as a reward for his efforts - Roger being one of Robert of Mortain's most trusted knights. *Domesday Book* itself also mentions a certain 'Waldimus Ingeniator' who holds 10 properties in the county of Lincolnshire (*the lands of Waldin Engaine*) (47). Waldinus is a personal name, but Ingeniator (or Engaine) translates as engineer. The *Domesday* survey alone then contains reference to at least two types of engineer. Norman military engineering skills were also in demand in other countries. By the mid eleventh century, for instance, there were many Normans in the employ of the
Byzantine Empire, where they are recorded in the role of siege engineers (Janin, 1930, pp.64; Nicolle, 1999, p.21).

9. From the time of Sun Tzu, in the first half of the fifth century BC, up to advent of powered flight, and its adoption by the military around 1916, there truly is very little change in terms of the information presented in each of the successive military manuals. The uniforms of the soldiers pictured in the various illustrations change - in keeping with the fashions of the day - and the calculations concerning the ranges of bows and siege weapons are replaced by ones for musket, rifle and cannon fire; but the basic strategic and tactical considerations remain consistent throughout. In fact, in many instances, it could be argued that each military manual is simply a rewritten copy of an earlier work with up-to-date additions. With the introduction of powered flight however, the strategies and tactics employed by the military alter dramatically. Given the fact that the air could be traversed in all directions with equal ease, it became impossible to predict where and when the enemy would strike next; aircraft being capable of over-flying all fronts, and natural obstacles, and possessing a comparatively long range.


13. The word ‘artillery’ was first used to cover all types of war gear (Gravett, 2000, p.47).

14. The term ‘fire’, as in ‘fire an arrow’, should never be used in relation to early projectile weapons, as fire applies only to later gunpowder weapons. Thus ‘you fire a gun, but shoot an arrow’.

15. It is traditional, and correct, to give the ranges of projectile weapons in yards.

16. It is often suggested that the crossbow was not introduced into England until the later twelfth century (Pounds, 1990, p.107; Payne-Gallwey, 1903, pp.14-32). Bradbury has argued convincingly however, that they were in fact used at the Battle of Hastings (1997, pp.8 & pp.17-38).

17. Liddiard mistakenly calls this a mangonel (2000, p.7).

18. The ‘considerations’ utilised in this section are drawn from the work of Halsall, in Rose & Nathanail, 2000, pp.3-5.

19. In chapter 2.

21. A good example of a rejected site in Somerset was the 'supposed' castle at Wellow [35], near Bath (ST 7260 5654). In the SMR the site was listed as a possible motte and bailey, but a visit to the site, in combination with a study of historic maps, soon proved the site to be a ditch and bank misinterpreted as a motte and bailey. The ditch was actually part of the disused Somerset Coal Canal, and the bank, up-cast from a railway cutting that severed it.

22. Based upon the hypothetically determined chronological divisions - 'Initial Conquest, Subjugation and Colonisation Periods' - outlined in chapter 1.

23. The identities of the castle builders and the dates of initial castle foundation derive from entries in Domesday Book, Pipe and Court Rolls, the works of contemporary writers such as William of Poitiers (d. c.1080), Orderic Vitalis (d. c.1141), and William of Malmesbury (d. c.1143), and from data contained in various archaeological excavation reports (See: 'A Gazetteer of Castle Sites in Somerset'; Vol. 2 of this work).

24. The word 'invasion' is used slightly metaphorically here, as there is little information concerning the amount of resistance the Normans encountered immediately after the Battle of Hastings.


27. There is no mention in any of the contemporary sources of Robert being elsewhere in the country during this time, and in neighbouring west Dorset there are no recorded early earthwork castles and no obvious signs that any ever existed.

28. Davidson, discussing Neroche, makes the military advantages gained via the construction of the castle very clear: "Tactically the site is immensely strong, and strategically it is well placed to command the approaches to the south-west peninsula along the Langport Ridge or following the edge of the high ground further south...Neroche occupies a strategic position in the jaws of the south-west peninsula...To the north, movement into and out of the south-west peninsula was restricted by the low-lying Somerset Levels. The Langport Ridge, which must have formed one of the earliest routes across the levels, terminates at the foot of the escarpment dominated by Castle Neroche. To the south, the whole country as far as the coast is within a day's riding. A troop of horse based on Neroche would thus effectively "bottle up" the whole of the south-west...suggest[ing] that this was the base of a striking force, rather than a garrison-point or fortified manor. The immense number of
cooking pots which seem to have been in use at this time points in the same direction (Davidson, 1972, pp.16-24).


30. A good example of the continuation of this type of boat actually comes from Somerset. The aptly named 'Bridgwater Flattie' or 'River Parrett Barge', was usually built in the shipyards of Bridgwater, and remained in active service on the Somerset Levels until the end of peat-cutting by hand in c.1914. The boats were clinker built, with a flat base, and were thus of very shallow-draft, pointed at both ends with curving stem posts, over 66ft (20.11m) long with a beam (maximum width) of 13ft (3.96m) and capable of carrying some 25 tons. Smaller examples were also constructed, to carry loads of up to 15 tons and for voyaging up the Tone to Taunton. The holds were open, with small decked areas fore and aft and there was also a stove and a place for the boatman to sit. A large tiller was used in the river, which could be removed and replaced by a sculling oar when the barge was being used in the tidal waters of the Parrett estuary. Three naturally forked timbers attached to the forward bulkhead, and were used to shorten drag chains (used to control the barge in the estuary) and as a mounting for the plank carrying the name and number of the boatman. There were three crew: two mature boatmen plus a juvenile “barge boy” to fetch and carry (Haskell, 1994, pp.63-4).

31. Based upon data sets, and hydrographic and navigational charts, provided by 'The United Kingdom Hydrographic Office', Taunton, Somerset (See: http://www.hydro.gov.uk).

32. In chapter 3.

33. Excluding Cary [7] (a ringwork which later developed into a ringwork and bailey), Walter of Douai constructed Edithmead [27] (a motte and bailey), Batch [1] (a ringwork which later developed into a ringwork and bailey), and Cockroad Wood [10] (a ringwork which later developed into a motte with two baileys), and was probably also responsible for the construction of Stowey [34] (a ringwork which later developed into a motte and bailey) and Hales [30] (a ringwork and bailey).

34. Study carried out 15/8/00, by Charlie Hollinrake, Consultant Archaeologist, at the Somerset County Museum, Taunton.

35. S.A.M. = Scheduled Ancient Monument.


37. South-west of Newton Park are the remains of the much remodelled castle of the St Loes, which is commonly believed to date from the thirteenth century. However, there is a mound at ST 6937 6401 and two others to the east and north-east that may be the remains of an earlier castle. Domesday Book states that Newton St Loe (Niwetone) was given to Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances at the
Conquest (Williams & Martin, 2002, p.239). Geoffrey is known to have been active in Somerset as early as 1069, when he was involved in crushing the Saxon rebellion at Montacute (Trask, 1898, p.30), and it is possible that he erected an early castle at Newton St Loe. Upon his death, the estate passed to his nephew Roger of St Loe; remaining in the male line for 300 years.

38. From Kelston Tump, Roundhill (ST 711 677), the cities of Bath and Bristol, the interconnecting routes, and the River Avon, are all clearly visible, and Rowe has suggested the possibility of an early Norman castle here (Rowe, 2004).

39. See 28 above.

40. In 1973, Dinah Dean published a translation of De Inventione Sanctae Crucis Nostrae for the Waltham Abbey Historical Society which was entitled The Legend of the Miraculous Cross of Waltham. Dean's translation was apparently based upon an earlier translation made by Baker, F.S. & Bascombe, K.N., but this author was unable to locate, or find any other reference to, the earlier translation.

41. The surviving descriptions of the cross include a cross of flint, a fragment of the true cross of Christ and a fragment of the true cross encased in stone (Adkins, 1992, p.25).

42. The foundations of this early church were traced in 1989 (See: Huggins, 1989, p.140).


44. See: 'A System of Governance' in chapter 2.

45. The claim that Stogursey was built by 1090 is incorrect. The result of confusion between it and the castle at Curci-sur-Dives in Calvados (Dunning, 1995, p.46).

46. It is often argued that Monmouthshire was not part of Wales. This notion originated in a provision of the 'Second Act of Union' of 1543, where, for legal purposes, twelve of the Welsh counties were apportioned to four Welsh circuits, but Monmouthshire, the thirteenth county, was placed into the Oxfordshire circuit. Monmouthshire was also better represented in the Westminster Parliament than any other Welsh county, and because of these two factors, it became common to find official references to South Wales and Monmouthshire. This was a late development however, and today, as in the medieval period, Monmouthshire is indisputably a part of Wales; modern perceptions altering after the Local Government Acts of 1972 and 1974. Monmouthshire will therefore be treated as Welsh territory throughout this study, although the county did not exist as an entity, either politically or cognitively, in the late eleventh century; the area being sub-divided into several Princedoms.
47. The historic county of Monmouthshire remained unchanged until 1974, at which point, to take into account the drastic differences in population growth that had occurred in different parts of Wales as a result of industrialisation since the early nineteenth century, eight new counties were created out of the previous thirteen. In the reshuffle Monmouthshire lost the Rhymney valley to Mid-Glamorgan and gained Brynmawr and Llanelly from Powys; and due to the social and political climate of the time, with its strong emphasis on 'Welshness', it was renamed Gwent. In the newly created county five new subdivisions were introduced: the county borough of Newport, and four districts. Three of the districts, Islwyn, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent, were relatively small in area, covering the populous industrial valleys, and one, Monmouthshire, was large, covering the rural eastern two-thirds of the old county. Following this, in 1996, the five districts created in 1974 became the basis for a single tier of local government via the creation of five unitary authorities, with Islwyn subsequently being redrawn as the borough of Caerphilly, incorporating a part of Glamorgan. To further add to the confusion, the 'Monmouth District' was renamed as the county of Monmouthshire and the county of Gwent was abolished. ‘So today Gwent does not officially exist and Monmouthshire has shrunk to two-thirds its former size' (Newman, 2000, p.2).

48. In the district of Ystrad Hafren, ringworks greatly outnumber mottes. This further supports the argument that ringworks were hastily erected temporary campaign fortifications. The ringworks of Ystrad Hafren did not develop into more substantial castle types as the Normans passed quickly through the region and on into Wales.

49. Climatologically, Wales lies across a westerly wind-belt resulting in a high annual rainfall. The Marches conform largely to the West Midlands pattern, experiencing some 76-102cm of rainfall a year. Whilst westwards, precipitation increases markedly, with the summits of the Black Mountains and Long Mynd experiencing over 140cm a year, and Snowdonia and the Brecon Beacons over 230cm a year (Rowley, 2001, p.22). By contrast, the annual rainfall in England, generally considered heavy, is much lower, averaging just over 76cm a year. In addition, parts of the Welsh uplands have a sub-arctic climate, and many of the inland valleys are subject to constant fog and frost.

50. Permanent settlement on the open uplands did not occur until the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, when an increase in the native population bolstered by Anglo-Norman plantation led to some shortages of agricultural land with a consequent need for more marginal areas to be brought into cultivation. A climatic upturn heralding movement onto the uplands, where oats were grown and livestock reared (Edwards, 1997, p.1).

51. The sources include: N.M.R. & S.M.R. listings for the county; King, 1983; Hogg & King, 1963 & 1967; Courtney, 1983; Salter, 1991; Pettifer, 2000; and many others listed in 'A Gazetteer of Castle Sites in Monmouthshire' (Vol. 2 of this work).

52. To avoid confusion, the castles in the Monmouthshire chapter are numbered 37 through 119, following on consecutively from the numbers allocated to castles in the Somerset chapter. In effect
this means that each castle can be readily identified by its unique number, and each can be easily located upon the various spreadsheets and maps, and in the gazetteer.

53. The second column on figure 47, 'Earliest Construction Phase', which lists the type of castle first constructed at the site, demonstrates that, in Monmouthshire, as in Somerset, the Normans were forced to utilise all of the various types of castle at their disposal. This seems to suggest, again as in Somerset, that in order to conquer, hold and subdue Monmouthshire, the Normans had to implement a full program of castle building within the county.

54. Monmouthshire’s castles can be sensibly divided into three phases. The first phase has been termed the Initial Invasion period (1066-1093), representative of the era of initial Norman advance into Wales and, more locally, Monmouthshire. The second phase has been termed the Attempted Subjugation period (1094-1134), representative of the time in which the Normans attempted to gain overall control in Monmouthshire, and subjugate Wales as a whole. The third phase has been termed The Welsh Offensive (1135-1165), covering an era in which the Welsh rebelled and ‘were everywhere on the offensive’ (Nelson, 1966, p.127). It is important to note here however, that these ‘periods’ are not as arbitrary as the ones utilised when discussing Somerset’s castles, as the divisions are based upon actual historical occurrences, and have been utilised previously by many well known historians writing upon the subject of Welsh history.

Probably the first, and definitely the most notable, historian to utilise these chronological divisions was Sir John Edward Lloyd in his book ‘A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest’ (1954, 2 Vols., 3rd Edition, London). Lloyd termed the first phase The Norman Conquest - First Stage, the second phase The Norman Conquest - Second Stage, and the third phase The National Revival. The first phase (1066-1093) was characterised by the initial Norman advance into Wales, led by William Fitz Osbern, Hugh d'Avranches and Roger of Montgomery; to the advances made by Bernard de Neufmarché and Arnulf of Montgomery, upon the death of Rhys ap Tewdwr in 1093. The second phase (1094-1134) was characterised by a Welsh uprising in 1095/6, following the escape from Chester prison of Gruffydd ap Cynan (a hereditary chief of Gwynedd), which was gradually, although not wholly successfully, suppressed by King Rufus, via a vastly expanded program of castle building; to the death of Rufus in 1100, and the slow and steady consolidation of Norman power in Wales under Henry I. Whilst the third phase (1135-1165) began with the death of Henry I (d.1135), and was characterised by a massive Welsh rebellion during the ‘Anarchy’ of Stephen (d.1154) and Matilda (d.1167); ending in 1165, when Henry II invaded Wales but was defeated by heavy Welsh resistance and the weather. This forced Henry II to change his tactics from direct conquest and empowerment of Anglo-Norman rulers to employing a pair of native Welsh princes to serve as his lieutenants, thereby making royal supremacy far more effective and stabilising the land.

55. In chapter 1.
56. In chapter 1.
58. ‘Port Way’ is the medieval name for the main east-west Roman road across South Wales.
59. Interestingly, the two most elevated castles, St. Illtyd’s [37] at 350.00m A.O.D. and Twyn-Bar-Lwm [65] at 404.00m A.O.D., lie adjacent to the commote of Machen, which formed the northern upland area of the Newport Lordship; the commote remaining under Welsh rule until the late thirteenth century. These two castles were undoubtedly constructed in their elevated, and incredibly remote, positions out of military necessity, as the area was extremely hostile, and the locations would have offered maximum defensive potential in the face of adversity.
60. It is difficult to assess the density of this alien migration, but place-name evidence provides a valuable indication. In Wales, place-names with the suffix ‘-ton’ occur approximately 350 times; of which 155 are in Pembroke, 74 are in Glamorgan, 25 are in Flintshire, and 35 are in Monmouthshire. This, in combination with field-name and place-name evidence, suggests that the Norman Conquest of Wales was accompanied and underpinned by extensive peasant colonisation, much of it dating initially to the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries (Davies, 2000, pp.99-100).
61. The Usk is actually navigable as far as Newbridge, which is approximately three miles up-river from Caerleon.
62. The navigable section of the River Ebbw is not being confused here with the Crumlin Canal.
63. For example, Monmouth Castle [59] lies adjacent to a navigable stretch of the Monnow; Chepstow Castle [83] lies adjacent to a navigable stretch of the Wye; Rumney Castle [62] lies adjacent to a navigable stretch of the Rhymney; and Caerleon Motte [72] lies adjacent to a navigable stretch of the Usk.
64. As discussed in chapter 4, it should be borne in mind that, additionally, many of these rivers may have been navigable by smaller vessels much further upstream. A factor which, if proven, would significantly increase the importance of the correlation between early Norman castles and river systems.
65. As discussed in chapter 3, rivers were often used in a tactical capacity to aid in the defence of the fortifications themselves. As Saxe explains, ‘we shall find it most prudent and advantageous to have them [fortresses] erected at the junction of two rivers, because in such situations the enemy will be obliged to divide his army into three distinct bodies, before he can be able to invest them, one of which may be repulsed and discomforted, before it can be succoured by the others: two sides of your fortress will likewise always remain open, till the blockade is complete, which cannot possibly be
done in a single day; neither can the necessary communication between the divisions of his army be kept up, without the use of three bridges, which will be exposed to the hazard of those sudden storms and inundation's which usually happen in campaign season (1787, p.84).

66. The routes of the Roman roads, and the associated Roman sites, shown on figure 58, are based upon information contained in: Boon, 1972; Codrington, 1928; Margary, 1955 & 1957; Nash-Williams, 1954; and O'Dwyer, 1934 & 1937.

67. Traditionally, the date given for the earliest Norman settlement of Gwynllg is c.1093, when Robert fitz Hamon is reputed to have annexed the area after conquering the majority of the neighbouring Welsh Kingdom of Morganwg, following the death of its ruler Rhys ap Tewdwr. However, this version of events has recently been challenged by Lightfoot in an excavation report on Rumney Castle. Lightfoot argues that Gwynllg and the lowland plain may have come under Norman control well before fitz Hamon assumed authority. That the area was first occupied by a Norman enclave established under William the Conqueror, on territory ceded to the Normans by Rhys ap Tewdwr. Machen alone being 'retained by Owain Wan after his father Caradog ap Gruffudd had been deposed by Rhys ap Tewdwr in 1081' (1992, vol. XXXVI). Further adding, that Rumney castle may have been built as early as 1081, as 'the suitability of the site as a place from which control of the river crossing could...have been noticed by the Normans as early as 1072, when they would have had good reason to survey the vicinity during the period of military alliance with Caradog' (http://www.castleswales.com/glwn_nun.html, p.2).

68. The Welsh stone castles are: Twyn Tudor (Mynydd-islwyn) [61] which was constructed in the twelfth century; Castle Meredydd (Machen) [65] which was constructed between 1217 and 1236; and Castell Taliorum (Llanhilleth) [91] which was probably constructed in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

69. St Illtyd’s Motte [37] is often placed in the Abergavenny lordship, but it is more likely that it lay in the Newport lordship. Courtney states that the bounds of the Abergavenny lordship ‘to the west...can be determined from the seventh century bounds for the manor of Abercan’ (1983, p.111). However, the document that details these bounds (MAN/B/1/0045 - Gwent C.R.O.) does not give the location of the boundary with any clarity, and it is probable that the boundary actually ran along the ridge of high ground between the Afon Lwyd and Ebbw rivers, placing St Illtyd’s Motte firmly within the Newport lordship, or within the commote of Machen, depending on your point of view.

70. In chapter 3.

71. It has recently become unfashionable to use such words as ‘invasion’, ‘conquest’ and ‘colonisation’ when discussing the Anglo-Norman occupation of Ireland (McNeill, 2000, p.75). As this chapter will demonstrate however, when discussing Hugh de Lacy’s campaign in Meath, all other words seem inadequate.
72. Ireland's forests remained reasonably intact until their commercial exploitation in the seventeenth century (Edwards, 1973, p.33), despite the gradual clearance of oak woods during the early medieval period (Edwards, 1999, p.52).

73. Climatologically, Ireland has a mild climate, since the sea acts as a moderating influence preventing excesses of heat and cold, but there is a great deal of rain. Rainbearing winds blow predominately from the west and rainfall averages between 80cm and 120cm annually over most of the country, with rain on at least 150 days each year (Edwards, 1973, p.21 & Edwards, 1999, p.50). Furthermore, during the medieval period, Ireland seems to have experienced some adverse and unusual weather patterns, the annals recording examples of extremes in conditions (Edwards, 1999, p.50).

74. The sources include: N.M.R. listings for the county; Moore, 1987; Orpen, 1907 & 1911-20; Scott & Martin, 1978; Glasscock & McNeill, 1972; Graham, 1980; and many others listed in 'A Gazetteer of Castle Sites in East Meath' (Vol.2 of this work).

75. To avoid confusion, the castles in the Meath chapter are numbered 120 through 212, following on consecutively from the numbers allocated to castles in the Monmouthshire chapter. In effect this means that each castle can be readily identified by its unique number, and each can be easily located upon the various spreadsheets and maps, and in the gazetteer.

76. On a positive note, the medieval documentation that has survived is accurate and reliable, meaning that any castle dated is accurately dated.

77. The most notable studies covering the subject are: Graham, 1974, 1975, 1980 & 1985; Bradley, 1988; and Ifillaby, 1992/3.

78. There are more points plotted in Meath than Monmouthshire, as Meath's elaborate river systems make it necessary to occupy more points in the landscape in order to gain effective military control over the territory.

79. As studies of palaeoecological data, seventeenth century maps, documentary sources, and place name elements proved too fragmentary to construct an accurate map of soils in the county before the nineteenth century, the next best available resource was found to be soil maps dating from the 1960's and 1970's. Maps after these decades reflecting land and soil improvements made with funding granted to Ireland by the European Community.

80. It has been argued (Waterman, 1963, p.77; Jope, 1966, p.105; Graham, 1980, p.52) that earthwork castles up to 10 miles apart could form an effective 'defensive barrier'. This is highly unlikely however, as even at 'trotting' pace a mounted rider would take up to 80 minutes to cover the distance between castles. As McNeill states, 'intercepting a raiding force between bases ten miles apart
would have needed constant patrolling by groups of men large enough to take on the raiding force themselves: sending five miles for help, without radios or helicopters, would be futile (2000, p.68). This said though, in certain instances earthwork castles spaced up to 10 miles apart can still reasonably form a 'strategic barrier', as their strategic potential can be bolstered by such naturally occurring physical obstacles as rivers or defiles.

81. An 1176 entry in The Annals of Ulster records the destruction of Richard the Flemings' motte at Slane by the Irish of the northern districts (Hennessey & McCarthy, 1887-1901). This is one of several contemporary accounts detailing Irish incursions into the area. In addition to which, Graham has successfully demonstrated that Meath’s northern region contained lower numbers of towns and villages due to the inherent Irish threat (1975, p.238). In the east and south of Meath the density of settlement was one to every 9.75 square miles (15.7sq.km), but in the north and west the corresponding figure was only one settlement to every 16.90 square miles (27.2sq.km).

82. A.S.L. = Above Sea Level.

83. The navigable sections of Meath’s rivers in the medieval period were determined from data supplied by ‘Waterways Ireland’, a ‘North/South Implementation Body’ for the inland navigable waterway systems of Ireland, established on 2nd December 1999, under the 'British-Irish Agreement' of 1999.


85. A section of early road has been recorded near Tara. It is listed under entries 1823 and 1824 in the Archaeological Inventory of County Meath (Moore, 1987, p.181).

86. At a gallop a horse can typically average 13mph (21kmph).

87. The locations of the early bridges derive from entries in the Archaeological Inventory of County Meath (Moore, 1987, p.182, entries 1825 to 1834); and the river crossing points derive from documentary and map evidence in Graham, 1975.

88. The standard work of reference for the subject is still Reeves’ ‘On the Townland Distribution of Ireland’ which was published in 1862 (PRIA, Vol. 7, pp.473-90).

89. Tricha cét, originally ‘thirty hundred men’, but later applied to a measure of land.

90. The Song of Dermot and the Earl (Orpen, 1892 & Mullally, 2002) records Hugh de Lacy’s sub-infeudation of Meath. Hugh divided East Meath into seven major land sub-divisions, and several minor ones, and retained large areas, as seignorial manors, for himself. The major sub-divisions - which were roughly equivalent to a future barony in extent - were recorded as: Skreen to Adam de Futepoi; Morgallion to Gilbert de Angulo; (Upper) Slane to Richard the Fleming; (Lower) Deece to
Hugh de Hussey; Lune to William de Muset; Demi-Fore to Richard and Matthew de Tuit; and Dunboyne to William le Petit. Some smaller grants were also recorded: the lands of (Lower) Navan and Ardbraccan to Jocelin de Angulo; Emlagh Beccon (Lower Kells) to Thomas de Craville; and lands around Dollardstown and Painestown (in the barony of Skreen) to Adam Dullard. If the record of the land grants in the Song is complete, Hugh de Lacy retained the baronies of Moyfenragh (Upper and Lower) and Ratoath, plus large areas of the baronies of Kells (Upper), Navan (Lower), and Duleek (Upper and Lower) as seignorial manors.

91. A castle was often positioned in the landscape at a location adjacent to several key strategic elements, enabling it to serve more than one strategic function.

92. This figure excludes the mottes with baileys found along Meath's northern frontier, as these castles were predominantly military in nature, and as such never formed the caputs of lordships.

93. Including Drogheda, now in Co. Louth.

94. Much has been written about the castles in Meath, but to date no real attempt has been made to reconcile this information with the actual historical events: with perhaps one notable exception, Orpen's, Ireland Under the Normans: 1169-1333 (4 vols., 1911-20).

95. As mentioned in chapter 1, Meath was important because it was near Dublin, and Dublin was important for several reasons. Tactically, without holding Dublin, the Anglo-Normans could never hope to effectively hold Leinster. Strategically, Dublin was of great importance because of its geographical position vis-à-vis Ulster, Man, Wales, and England. Economically, Dublin was an internationally famous trading centre; and from a religious standpoint, Dublin was of increasing ecclesiastical importance as a metropolitan see.

96. The Irish youth's nickname, 'Gilla-gan-inathair', literally translated, means 'the youth without bowels', and as he fled into nearby woods after killing Hugh de Lacy, it is often assumed that the name refers to his extreme slimness, which allowed him to outstrip his pursuers (Scott & Martin, 1978, p.353). Nicknames, however, are generally not supposed to be taken literally, and it is more likely that the name was originally intended to function in a similar capacity to that of an Old Norse poetic keening, and as such it could be taken to mean 'gutless one', referring to the act of cowardice on the part of the youth.


98. See chapter 3.
99. Fulk Nerra’s military strategies and tactics were informed by Roman military science, most likely Vegetian in inspiration, which he modified according to his needs. As Bachrach states, ‘there is a body of evidence indicating that Fulk employed tactics and strategies advocated by Vegetius’ (2002, p.254).

100. Shrader (1979) has located 324 copies of Vegetius’ *Epitoma rei Militaris*, dating from the seventh century to the seventeenth. 1 of these dates from before 800AD, 5 from the ninth century, 9 from the tenth, 4 from the eleventh, 13 from the twelfth, 17 from the thirteenth, 96 from the fourteenth, 158 from the fifteenth, and 21 from after 1500.

101. See chapter 2.

102. There is little doubt that the Normans knew of Colchester’s former importance in Roman Britain. They were familiar with the works of Tacitus, and he mentions Colchester three times in *Agricola*: ‘the Britons...hunted down the Roman troops in their scattered posts, stormed the forts, and assaulted the colony itself, which they saw as the citadel of their servitude’ (Tacitus; Handford, 1970, p.66). An extract from the Colchester Chronicle for 1076 states ‘Eudo Dapifer built the Castle of Colchester on the foundation of the Palace of Coel, once king, and restored the chapel of St Helen which she built herself, it is said, and gave it to St John’ (Crummy, 1999, p.143). Crummy comments ‘the entry clearly has some basis in fact since it talks of the castle being erected on the site of a Roman building. The description of the castle as having been built on the site of the palace of Coel is uncannily near the truth. Even the way that we are told that the castle was built on the ‘foundation’ echoes the temple podium too much to be other than factually based. The identification of the temple as the Palace of Coel should not put us off as this could presumably have been what the Norman builders believed’. Finally, Hull’s 1958 excavations proved that the Norman castle encased the temple precinct wall, which was located within the Norman bailey bank and was found to stand to a height of just over 3 metres from the Roman ground level (See Hull, 1958, figs. 91 & 92, and plates XXVII to XXIX).
APPENDIX 1

Hadrian’s Wall – Changing Perspectives

In 1936, Collingwood and Myres published ‘Roman Britain and the English Settlements’, which quickly became a watershed in the study of Roman Britain. In the book, Hadrian’s Wall was viewed in purely militaristic terms as a huge defensible structure marking the edge of the Empire, separating Roman from savage and provincial from non-provincial, for the better maintenance of order. A vast peacekeeping structure involving large numbers of men who would be constantly occupied building, repairing, furnishing, and when they were not doing that, drilling, patrolling and policing (Plantagenet Somerset Fry, 1984). The wall maximising troop mobility, resulting in speedy interceptions, giving the Roman army the higher initiative at every turn, enabling a firm grip to be maintained over a very wide area. The wall further providing a vital line for communications, along with a first-class supply route.

In the 1980’s however, based upon the results of excavations carried out by The National Trust, The Vindolanda Trust, English Heritage, The Tyne and Wear Museums Service, and the Carlisle Archaeological Unit, archaeologists began to question the ‘traditional military interpretation’ of Hadrian’s Wall, arguing that the structure may have had more to do with commemorating Hadrian himself, rather than serving any practical military function. Birley, writing upon Hadrian, stated, ‘the prestige would have weighted heavily...a way of gaining renown, a monument to stand for all time in his name’ (1981, p.22). This argument was based upon three factors: first, there were large gates in the wall which compromised the structure militarily; second, the wall may have been coated in white plaster, making it an impressive, ‘visually spectacular’, monument; third, the wall did not form the edge of the civilised Roman Empire, as there were several ‘out-post’ forts beyond it. Imperial territory went beyond the line of the wall in Hadrian’s day and for a long time afterwards.

In recent years, the exploration of Hadrian’s Wall has increasingly been conducted through non-intrusive geophysical survey techniques, such as resistivity, magnetometry and ground penetrating radar. These new methods for investigation have led to the discovery of many previously unknown archaeological features, among which are several fine examples of ancillary military structures. These include a basilican building, which functioned as a drill-hall where soldiers could be given weapons training whatever the weather, several new barrack blocks, a vallum ditch, stables for a cavalry unit and a parade ground (www.hadrians-wall.org). The discovery of these additional military features have inspired Roman archaeologists to rethink their theories on Hadrian’s wall. This has resulted in a backward swing towards an even greater militaristic interpretation of the structure.
Ringworks were relatively quick and easy to erect and provided adequate protection in a campaign situation, but such fortifications were hardly luxurious, and generally, once the initial danger had passed they were revamped to provide the lord with a dwelling befitting his status. The ringwork at Cary underwent such changes (Fig. 27 - Period 2ii). The work was carried out by either Robert of Bampton, or more likely by his successor Ralph Lovell who held Cary after Robert of Bampton had been exiled by Stephen in 1136 (Potter, 1955, pp. 44-5; Dunning, 1995, p. 32). The first stage of these alterations was probably the erection of the great tower, or donjon, inside the existing fortifications of the ringwork. The large quantity of construction debris present (formed from Doulting stone chippings), the thickness of the walls, and the fact that the tower remains include a cross-wall, indicate that it was a fairly substantial and impressive structure. The ‘concrete like’ deposit of chippings recorded in 1890 would have been formed as a result of working stone on site to build the tower (Gregory, 1890, p. 172), and is directly paralleled at Ascot-under-Wychwood (Ascot Doilly), Oxfordshire (Jope & Threlfall, 1946-7 & 1959). Following the construction of the great tower, recent excavation evidence suggests (Leach & Ellis, forthcoming) that the existing ringwork defences were slighted, and the western half of the ringwork went out of use, its ditch being backfilled.

Contemporaneously with the slighting of the ringwork defences, the area immediately surrounding the great tower appears to have been landscaped and a new set of defences constructed. Nineteenth century excavations revealed that the area around the great tower had been covered with many tons of soil, ‘of a sandy nature... mixed very largely with dust of Doulting stone, with here and there amongst it small bits of charcoal’ (Gregory, 1890, p. 173). The vast majority of this soil was probably dug out of the natural topographical hollow to the north-east of the tower. This landscaping seemingly served two purposes: first, on a practical level, it covered the mass of construction debris, thereby removing the necessity to transport the waste material away from the site; second, on an aesthetic level, it appears highly likely that the landscaping was intended to make the inner bailey look like a motte by digging away soil from the hollow, raising the height of the ground around the tower, and reducing the size of the perimeter. Once the landscaping was complete, the digging of the hollow continued on a north-west to south-east alignment at a shallower level, forming the V-sectioned cross-ditch separating the inner and outer baileys. The earth dug out of this ditch formed a rampart on its south side that would have continued right around the perimeter of the inner bailey (visible today as the crescent-shaped bank to the east). The soil for the rampart derived from ditches cut to further define and enhance the inner bailey earthwork (a section of this ditch is still visible today beyond the crescent-shaped bank). The inner bailey was most likely further defined by the addition of the revetment wall seen running parallel to the defensive ditch (Leach & Ellis, forthcoming).
There is no mention made of a castle at Cary after the 12th century, and it is possible that it was demolished following the Anarchy. Norman military use of the site can therefore be suggested to have comprised first a ringwork (Fig. 27 - Period 2i), constructed immediately after the conquest. After which, in the early 12th century, the ringwork ditches were entirely remodelled: the earlier ditches were backfilled, a new circuit cut, and an outer bailey constructed. Within the new circuit a stone tower had been erected, and its immediate surroundings were landscaped to sharpen the natural slopes beneath it to give the outward impression of a motte, and to further enhance the appearance of the stone tower (Fig. 27 - Period 2ii). Following the sieges of the Anarchy the stone tower was either abandoned or demolished, the defensive ditches were infilled, and the lord's dwelling was shifted to a new location down-slope from the tower (Fig. 27 - Period 3): back onto the site of the original ringwork.
APPENDIX 3

The problems and difficulties of studying in Wales and Monmouthshire

It has been written of medieval Welsh history, that 'there are so few working in this field and so much basic work still to be done that...much opportunity remains for individual historians to make significant and original contributions. With so much fresh ground still to be broken there has been little scope for the kind of debates which have developed in other fields' (Carr, 1995, p.24); Turvey adding 'clearly the field is a fertile one' (2002, p.ix). The fact that so few historians and archaeologists have chosen to enter this field is telling however, as the breaking of fresh ground is very hard graft, and nowhere more so than in Wales. Anyone attempting to work in Wales will almost certainly be faced with a unique set of problems and difficulties that have to be overcome or by-passed in some fashion if the project is to be a success. Any work on Wales would therefore not be complete, and indeed could not be completed, without first identifying and clarifying those problems.

The first difficulty obviously lies with the study or rather lack of study, of Welsh history itself. Most historians agree that the 'Celtic fringes' of Britain have been largely neglected. Welsh history has been marginalised, as to a greater or lesser extent have the histories of Scotland and Ireland, within British historical syllabuses, at schools and universities alike, even within Wales itself (Davis, 2000, p.vi). Courtney argues that the reason for this marginalisation comes down to poorer communications and fewer universities (1983, p.1), whilst Davis suggests that the history of Wales has been regarded simply 'as a matter for Welsh people and even among them as a subject not deserving of too serious a study' (2000, p.vi). There is however, another possible cause for the neglect of Welsh history as a subject for serious academic study, namely problematic documentary sources and difficulties over access to those sources.

The sources available for the study of medieval Wales are few, fragmentary, notoriously difficult to use, and frequently inaccessible. Such difficulties may have caused any number of good historians and archaeologists to shy away from the subject, leaving it isolated and in grave danger of becoming ingrown and introspective. For proof of this avoidance one only has to look at the topics that have traditionally formed the basis for study in Wales's various history departments. Research has generally revolved around nationalism, non-conformist religion and modern working-class history, subjects totally unreliant upon any form of historical documentation. It appears that in Wales then, historians are guilty of committing an act of 'academic amputation' (Davis, 2000, p.vi), possibly because of the difficulties associated with the study of its historical documents and records.
The Problems with the Sources

"If England is rich in twelfth and thirteenth century chronicles, Wales is not... Chronologically, geographically and familially, the sources simply do not have a great deal to say... much before the thirteenth century... [and] we can but envy the rich source material available to our English colleagues."

Turvey, 2002, pp.7-8

There are three main problems associated with the use of Welsh historical sources, the first of which is poor survival. There is actually very little written material pertaining to the study of early medieval Wales still in existence, and that which has survived is generally disjointed and fragmentary. Courtney blames the loss of archives as the major cause of poor Welsh documentation (1983, p.9). For instance, Quarter Sessions records must have been kept from the 'Act of Union' in 1536, but none survive for Gwent before 1719, and the Diocese of Llandaff almost certainly kept extensive records, but the vast majority of these are now missing. This regrettable loss of essential material means that it is virtually impossible to write holistically on events occurring in early medieval Wales; the available sources being wholly inadequate and thus unable to resolve even the simplest of questions.

The second, and definitely most frustrating, problem is that the sources that have survived are generally corrupt, often incidental, and wholly uneven in their coverage of events; producing patterns and emphasis that can greatly mislead the modern researcher (Davis, 1982). Turvey states that even though 'few historians would question the value of these chronicles as sources for... Welsh history... they were written and translated in the second half of the thirteenth century by monks far removed from the time they were describing...[and as such] we cannot be sure of the accuracy of their transcriptions or where hindsight has influenced the text' (2002, p.9). In addition, mistakes and omissions were often made in the copying process, and extra material was sometimes added, or a manuscript's content altered. The sources then - as discussed in chapter 2 - are at best selective, and at worst inaccurate or even biased, often being reworked in the interests of a later, politically dominant, dynasty or institution, thereby yielding a somewhat distorted view of past events. Lastly here it is worth noting that we cannot even be sure of the date of composition of many of these sources, as often a precise indication of date is lacking, and deductions have to be made from the type of script, type of spelling, or type of language, in which the piece is written, or from internal references and allusions (Davis, 1982).

The final problem with the sources is one of inaccessibility. Strangely enough, in this instance, it is not, as one would expect, the inaccessibility of language, as much translation work has been carried out, but rather a problem with actual physical access to the manuscripts. Courtney succinctly sums up the situation:

"It comes as a great shock to anyone accustomed to using the English County Records Offices to make use of their Welsh counterparts. The number of people using a records office such as that in Leicestershire on an average day would find it even difficult to gain standing room in the Glamorgan County Office. The same record office's catalogues can only be described as a shambles. The collections in the Welsh County Records Offices are sadly lacking in estate archives. In addition to the problems of
survival, important estate collections, such as the Bute and Badminton archives, are housed in Aberystwyth at the National Library of Wales. Gwent Record Office has only a poor selection of Tithe Maps for the county and this is a major handicap in making effective use of other sources housed there. The inaccessibility of the National Library of Wales is another major handicap' (1983, p. 9).

With these difficulties so prevalent then, two questions have to be asked: 'What is achievable?' and 'How can it be achieved?' History, as a discipline, is wholly reliant upon written records and documents to achieve its goals. In Wales, it is now widely recognised that it is impossible to write a history of the early medieval period, capable of standing up to the requirements of modern scholarship, based solely upon its written records, as the sources are simply too poor. In addition, it is also no longer acceptable to take material written at a late date and project its implications backwards over several centuries, as it has become obvious that any history written in this way becomes more an exercise in speculative imagination than a sober, well documented analysis, however rigorous the writer might attempt to be (Davis, 1982, p.1). With the discipline of history failing early medieval Wales then, the how must now fall to archaeology, with its multidisciplinary approach and plethora of reliable, tried and tested, techniques for study. To date, archaeological fieldwork and excavation has tended to lag somewhat behind in Wales, but there can now be little doubt that it is through this medium that the fragmentary knowledge of the early medieval period in Wales will be extend. As for, 'What is achievable?' it is still early days, although this dissertation is but one of a number of archaeological projects currently focusing upon early medieval Welsh topics.
The problems and difficulties of studying in Ireland and Co. Meath

There are three main problems associated with the study of the Anglo-Normans and their castles in Ireland, two of them are similar in nature to the problems encountered in Wales, whilst the third is unique to Ireland. The nature of the first problem is wide-reaching, complex and somewhat difficult to address, requiring a respectful approach, namely Irish nationalism. The Irish nationalist and the British historian are apt to see the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland through very different eyes. On the one hand, Irish nationalist historians tend to see the Anglo-Normans as 'English' (Richter, 1985), and view them as the second wave of invaders who, over the centuries, attempted to subdue Ireland by force, without any legitimate right to be in country - the Vikings being the first. On the other hand, British historians, tend to view the Anglo-Norman arrival in Ireland in a wider context, 'as part of a vast migratory movement of peoples seeking outlets beyond the immediate boundaries of settled feudal Europe' (Martin, 1993, p.iii), arguing conversely that the Anglo-Normans did not invade, but were instead invited.

The Irish nationalist narrative, which focuses upon the Anglo-Normans, generally consists of a harrowing tale of Irish tribulations, beginning with the arrival of the Vikings in the ninth century, and continuing with the Anglo-Norman invasion in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Anglo-Norman's are given a dominant role in the story as suppressers of the Irish, via the introduction of the feudal system. After which, in the later medieval period, it is argued that a steady stream of grasping English officials besieged Ireland. As Martin points out however, the nationalistic myth conveniently overlooks the previously massive invasion by the Celts, and disregards the positive stimulus which the Vikings and their Hiberno-Norse descendants made to almost every aspect of Irish Society (1993, p.43). These opposing viewpoints, which make the study of certain topics in Ireland's history somewhat controversial, have also influenced Irish castle studies.

The study of Anglo-Norman earthwork castles in Ireland is a relatively recent development, as traditionally Irish historians and archaeologists have tended to focus their attentions upon the country's Early Christian and prehistoric monuments. As these monuments are regarded as Irish cultural and spiritual achievements, dating to eras free from Anglo-Norman and English oppression. This trend is further perpetuated by the fact that Irish nationalistic ideology permeated every level of society, thereby affecting the choices made by academics regarding their specialisation's (O'Conor, 1992). The widespread study of mottes in Ireland began after a series of excavations in Co. Down during the 1950's and 1960's; the Northern Irish scholars, with their closer cultural links to Britain, being the driving force. If the disciplines of history and archaeology are to sensibly progress in Ireland in the future then, it is desirable that common ground be found between the two sides at variance.
The second problem faced by scholars studying medieval Irish history is a lack of contemporary documentation. "In Ireland there exists an information vacuum: there are relatively few reliable sources, hardly any relevant documents, and there is certainly no sense of continuity" (McNeill, 2001, pers. comm.). The dearth of medieval documentation in Ireland is due to the fact that many original archives were lost in 1922 with the destruction of the Public Record Office in the Four Courts, Dublin, during the Irish Civil War. The loss of these archives forces undue dependence upon calendared summaries, which are often of dubious accuracy and limited detail (Graham, 1985). As Leask states, 'Documentary records...in state papers and the like, are scarce - in many instances lacking altogether - and are not often helpful' (1936, p.144). Thus, as in Wales, the onus again falls upon archaeologists to attempt to fill in the proverbial blanks.

Finally, coming to the problem unique to Ireland, one of the main difficulties facing the castellologist in Ireland is the actual physical identification of Anglo-Norman earthwork castles in the landscape. The landscape of Ireland is littered with passage-tombs, cairns, court-cairns and promontory forts of the prehistoric period, Gaelic fortifications comprising ring-forts, lios, duns, crannogs, raths, raised-raths and cashels, and naturally occurring geological features such as drumlins and kames, all of which can be easily mistaken for either Anglo-Norman mottes or ringworks. A problem worsened by the fact that, on occasion, these features were actually converted into mottes or ringworks. Unsurprisingly then, the main debate in the formative years of castle studies in Ireland - during the first two decades of the last century - was concerned with the identification of mottes as Anglo-Norman castles (Orpen, 1907, 1906; Westropp, 1904, 1905). Suffice to say that books and documents are useless in relation to this problem, there being no substitute for solid archaeological fieldwork.
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(Volumes referred to = 91, 1936; 105, 1956; 112, 1963; 116, 1967; 126, 1977)

BAA = *Bristol and Avon Archaeology Journal*  
(Volumes referred to = 1, 1982; 2, 1983; 3, 1984)

JRSAI = *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries in Ireland*  
(Volumes referred to = 22, 1892; 34, 1904; 37, 1907; 108, 1978; 123, 1993)

PBFC = *Proceedings of the Bath Field Club*  
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PSANHS = *The Proceeding of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society*  
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