

Rumney Castle, a Ringwork and Manorial Centre in South Glamorgan

By K. W. B. LIGHTFOOT

with contributions by

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RUMNEY CASTLE, a small ringwork historically part of the marcher lordship of Gwynllŵg, was situated above a steep natural scarp overlooking the R. Rhymney. First mentioned in A.D. 1184–85, the castle guarded the W. boundary of the lordship and the river crossing. The defences consisted of a ditch and clay rampart constructed around three sides of the site. Initially incorporated into the defences along the fourth side was a large timber building and possibly a palisade. The entrance was originally defended by a large timber gate tower, later superseded by a smaller timber structure. Following this, the defences were strengthened with the widening of the rampart and the construction of a small tower or keep alongside the entrance. Several phases of timber building, including two large halls, were arranged around a courtyard. During a later period the entrance was relocated and a stone gate tower constructed.

During the second half of the 13th century the site was converted for use as a manorial centre. The rampart was levelled, the interior of the site infilled, and a range of buildings constructed along the edges of the mound. A well-sealed coin hoard of c. A.D. 1288–89 discovered in a destruction deposit provides a terminus post quem for the abandonment of the site.

Rumney Castle, South Glamorgan (Monmouthshire)¹ (GGAT PRN 618S) lies above a steep scarp on the NW. slope of Rumney Hill c. 4 km NE. of the centre of Cardiff and its castle, overlooking the R. Rhymney (Fig. 1). Historically part of the lordship of Gwynllŵg, the castle lay on what was the westernmost border of Monmouthshire, the boundary itself formed by the R. Rhymney, and was placed to guard the river crossing which was probably located in the same area as the modern bridge, approximately 300 m S. of the site. With the realignment of the Monmouthshire–Glamorgan border in 1938, when the boundary was moved eastwards to St Mellons, Rumney was placed within Glamorgan and was also incorporated into the City of Cardiff.

The castle was sited to utilize the protection of two steep natural scarps, one forming the NW. edge of the site created by the R. Rhymney which flows at its base and the other forming the NE. edge of the site created by a now dry small valley leading away at right angles from the Rhymney. The site was isolated from the rest of Rumney Hill by the digging of a ditch from the stream valley in a south-easterly direction then curving to the NW. and linking with the natural scarp above the Rhymney. This created a D-shaped mound c. 40 m by 45 m, similar in size and shape to Grosmont Castle in Gwent. Documentary evidence exists for a triangular-shaped outwork located immediately to the SW. of the castle and the greatly disturbed remnants of this feature lie in the rear of the car park of the Rumney Conservative Club, no. 633 Newport Road.

The site at the time of excavation was divided between two properties by a brick boundary wall, with approximately one quarter lying at the rear of no. 635 Newport Road (the Oaklands Hotel) and the other three-quarters behind no. 637 Newport Road (Tredelerch House).

Two separate excavations of the castle were conducted by the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust in advance of development, sponsored on both occasions by the I.A.M. (Welsh Office, now Cadw) and a Manpower Services Commission Special Temporary Employment Programme. The entire summit of the mound was excavated, except for a 3 m wide baulk along the modern property line, and a limited portion of the ditch was also examined. The first excavation was behind the Oaklands Hotel, directed by P. Stanley and K. W. B. Lightfoot between 6 April and 4 July 1978. The second excavation, directed by K. W. B. Lightfoot, took place from 8 May 1980 to 1 December 1981 on the NE. three-quarters of the mound and ditch behind no. 637 Newport Road. Both time and labour were far more limited in 1978 compared with 1980–81 and a more complete and reliable history of the castle was recovered from the latter excavation, particularly for the earlier periods of occupation which were not uncovered during the 1978 season. Certain finds reports are incomplete due to a fire in the Trust's Headquarters in 1983.

THE EXCAVATIONS (Fig. 1)

The Oaklands Hotel, 1978 (GGAT site 18)

The area examined during the 1978 excavation comprised c. 350 sq. m of the mound and a 1 m wide section across the ditch extending SE. from the edge of the mound near the S. corner of the site. The excavations were conducted manually except for three machine-cut sections placed through the defences on the summit of the mound. Before excavation the summit of the Oaklands site was covered with sparse undergrowth and a small grove of young trees. The NW. portion of the site had been levelled for a tennis court earlier this century. The sides of the mound were heavily disturbed by large trees, two modern access paths, and a pair of air-raid shelters terraced into the slope of the ditch on the SW.

On the SE. the ditch was open to a depth of 4 m from the top of the mound and had been used as an ornamental garden in the recent past. A bridge spanned the ditch on this side, connecting the garden of the Oaklands Hotel with the mound. On

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the SE. the ditch bottom had been levelled for the insertion of a tiled path and any counterscarp had been destroyed by the construction of stables and a trackway leading from them to Newport Road.

637 Newport Road, 1980-81 (GGAT site 37)

The total area excavated on the NE. three-quarters of the mound during the 1980-81 project amounted to c. 1300 sq. m and included the entire mound summit and a limited portion of the ditch. The excavation was conducted entirely by hand. Until a few years before the excavation the site had been used as a market garden. The initial stages of the excavation involved the clearance of extremely dense undergrowth and the removal of the foundations for three brick greenhouses associated with the market garden.

The section of ditch behind 637 Newport Road had been almost completely infilled during the late 19th century to allow access to the site and was traceable only as a broad shallow depression with a maximum depth of 1 m from the top of the mound.

CHRONOLOGY

The establishment of the castle and the later conversion to a fortified manor cannot be closely dated.² The main difficulty in establishing a chronological sequence arises from the layout of the site, where structures were arranged around a central courtyard and were not often stratigraphically linked. While the sequence of superimposed buildings can be determined, the limitations of rescue archaeology undoubtedly affected the recovery of evidence; many minor features cannot be convincingly interpreted and several, particularly those from early deposits, could not be fully excavated in the time. Moreover, the surviving documentary evidence provides almost no insight into the structural history of the site, though a discussion of the limited material in its regional context is provided in the appendix to this report. The conversion from castle to manor involved levelling the rampart and casting the resulting material into the interior of the site in order to create a new fortified mound. This caused the earlier deposits to be well sealed and created a clear distinction between castle and manor. Within this broad division distinct periods with various phases are evidenced by superimposed structures and features. In some cases architectural details, such as the type of stone or bonding agent used in construction, may permit certain buildings to be associated with a particular period. In other instances pottery sherds from the same vessel or vessels have established links between different features.

Apart from a few scattered sherds of Romano-British pottery (and a Roman earring, bronze object no. 9), and a glass bead of 7th- to 10th-century date, the earliest datable objects from the site were coins of Henry III (1216-72 and c. A.D. 1270). The abandonment of the site can be dated after c. A.D. 1288-89 by a well-sealed coin hoard, but nothing was recovered that could closely date any of the earlier periods. Any dates offered for features prior to the deposit of the coin hoard are therefore tentative.

- 53. Grey core and interior, grey and orange exterior.
- 54. Dark grey and orange-brown core, buff or grey-brown interior, grey exterior.
- 55. Grey and orange-brown core with grey-brown surfaces. Period VI (023).
- 56. Grey core, orange surfaces. Period VI (038).
- 57. Light grey-brown core and interior, orange-brown exterior. Period VI (173).
- 58. Dark grey core, brown-buff interior, grey and orange-brown exterior.
- 59. Dark grey core, brown-orange surfaces.
- 60. Grey core, brown-orange surfaces; fire damaged. Period VI (084).
- 61. Orange-brown with thin grey-brown core. Period VI (023).
- 62. Grey-brown core, reddish-orange interior and buff-brown exterior. Period VI (067).
- 63. Dark grey and orange core, orange-brown surfaces. Period VI (140).
- 64. Buff-brown core and surfaces; abraded. Period VI (023).
- 65. Grey core, dark grey interior, grey-brown exterior.
- 66. Dark grey core, orange-brown surfaces; abraded and fire damaged.
- 67. Grey core, brown-orange or grey-brown surfaces. Period VI (173).
- 68. Grey core, grey-brown surfaces; abraded and fire damaged.
- 69. Grey core, buff-brown interior, grey-brown exterior. Period VI (067).
- 70. Brown-orange core and darkened surfaces; abraded. Period VI (173).
- 71. Brown-orange core and surfaces, darkened externally. Period VI (178).
- 72. Variable grey-brown core, buff interior, grey-brown exterior, partially blackened probably through fire damage. Period VI (084).
- 73. Grey core, buff-brown surfaces, darker and more variable externally. Period VI (179).
- 74. Grey-brown core, dark red-orange interior, dark brown or blackish exterior, with lightly incised wavy-line decoration on rim upper surface; fire damaged.
- 75. Dark grey core and interior, brown-grey exterior, lightly incised wavy-line decoration on exterior and on upper surface of rim. Period VI (067).
- 76. Orange-brown with thin grey core, darker externally, with applied finger-impressed cordon below rim. Period VI (023).

Rumney Hard Ware (Fig. 24)

- 77. Dark orange core and surfaces; fire damaged. Period VI (038).
- 78. Grey or dark orange core, dark orange surfaces. Period VI (173).
- 79. Grey core, orange-brown surfaces; fire damaged. Period VI (023).
- 80. Grey core and interior, buff-orange exterior; fire damaged. Period VI (023).
- 81. Dark orange-brown core, orange or orange-brown surfaces; fire damaged. Period III (373).
- 82. Dark orange-brown core, orange-grey surfaces. Period VI (173).
- 83. Dark grey core, orange-brown surfaces; fire damaged.
- 84. Dark orange core, ?brown-orange interior, grey-brown exterior; fire damaged. Period VI (023).
- 85. Dark grey-brown core, orange-brown or grey-brown surfaces; fire damaged. Period VI (021).
- 86. ?Grey core, variable dark orange-brown exterior; fire damaged. Part of a thick base with holes pierced into, but not through, the fabric, presumably an attempt to reduce breakage during firing. Period VI (174).
- 87. Grey core, orange-brown surfaces, darker externally probably through fire damage; a body sherd with two zones of lightly stamped open triangles. Period VI (067).

Other glazed wares (Fig. 24)

- 88. (HGT) ?Dark grey core and surfaces with wavy-line internal, rilled external incised decoration; fire damaged.
- 89. (HGT) Dark grey core, brown-grey and red-brown interior, grey exterior with incised wavy-line decoration. Period VI (084).
- 90. (CGW) Light grey core, orange-buff interior, grey-brown exterior; grits leached out.
- 91. (CGW, glazed) Grey core, light grey-buff surfaces; patches of pale green or brown external glaze, thinly applied, survive in places. Part of a Cotswold tripod pitcher. Body sherds with incised wavy-line decoration and part of the base with worn tripod foot survive in various contexts.
- 92. (Glazed) Fragment of a plaque or other applied decorative fragment, with a dark green glazed face with indented surface. ?Dark grey fabric; fire damaged.
- 93. (Glazed) Part of the rim and spout, originally (and seen before the fire) part of a vessel where the spout and upper part of the jug took the form of a stylized ram's head. An apparent grey fabric has a mid-green glaze, but the surviving pieces are badly fire damaged. Period VI (082) (Fig. 25).

THE ANIMAL BONE. *By* GILLIAN G. JONES

The bone was derived from occupation layers and features within the castle, it was fragmentary and very friable, only 33% being identifiable. Recovery from excavated features was partial.

Careful attention was given to the identification of cattle and red deer since both small cattle and large red deer were present.⁶⁴ It is possible that some red deer small fragments have been assigned to cattle, as also roe deer to sheep.

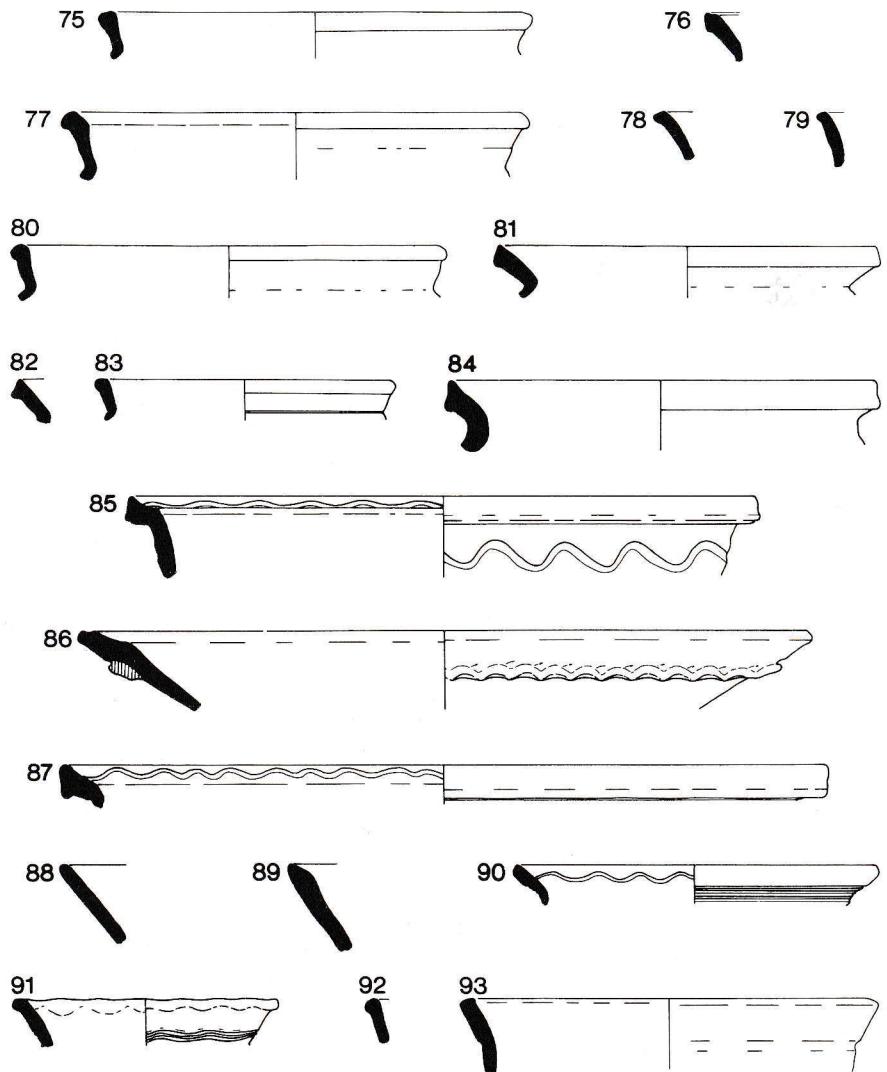


FIG. 24
Pottery. Scale 1:4

Periods I-V

A few bones from Period I were recovered, from cattle, pig, plus some sheep, and also bones of red deer, roe deer and hare. The occupation layer sealed under the rampart (161) contained remains of cattle, pig, roe deer and hare. Presence of hunted species in so small a bone sample is consistent with high status occupation. The roe deer was more than two years old when killed.⁶⁵

In Periods II and III the bones were chiefly from cattle, with some pig and few sheep. No other species were found in Period II. Bone from (471), the layer of burning associated with Building C, comprised 21 cattle, three sheep and eight pig bones besides numerous

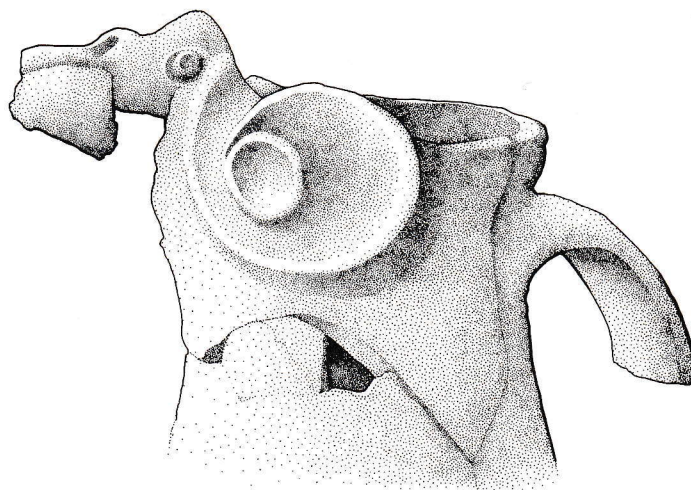


FIG. 25
Ram's head jug. Not to scale

unidentified fragments. Horse, red deer and fowl were present in Period III, all from a layer of rampart make-up. There were knife-marks around the distal shaft of a red deer humerus. Whether the meat was removed from the bone before cooking or the marks are from carving after cooking is uncertain. In Period IV the rank order of frequency of the three main species remained the same.

The bones from Period V were nearly all from the area of burning, tentatively interpreted as the site of a kitchen (264 and 265). The bones from this area were entirely from pig, three skull fragments and 27 teeth. They came from at least three individuals, probably far more, since no two teeth definitely belonged together; most were broken.

Period VI

A larger quantity of bone was recovered from Period VI. Most came from occupation layers within the fortified manor. The bone was fragmentary, only 35% being identified. Most meat eaten was beef but again with more pig than is usual on medieval sites. Identified bone from the main species in Period VI comprised cattle 43%, sheep (goat) 15%, pig 27%, horse 10% and deer 2.5%.

A high number of horse bones, from at least ten individuals, was unexpected.⁶⁶ Horse bones were found in ten different layers, but most were from the infilling of the large drain (172 and 181). These could be interpreted as general rubbish layers not specifically linked to a kitchen or hall. No butchery marks were observed on the horse bones. They consisted mostly of jaws and teeth, from one immature and at least nine adult horses, two of these being old.

Red deer, roe and also fallow deer were present. Fallow, absent from earlier periods, was represented by a single piece of antler. An adult red deer mandible was affected by periodontal disease; the alveolus for M₁ is partly filled with bone and the mandible is enlarged on the lingual side. The animal was about seven years old at death.⁶⁷ One other red deer mandible was found, aged about eight years, and a roe deer mandible can be aged at two-three years.⁶⁸ The red deer were large, and can be compared with those found at Loughor Castle.⁶⁹ The hare was also, presumably, a hunted animal. A water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*) was also identified, but its context is insecure because of the animal's burrowing habits.

Bird bones were very scarce (1.25% in this period), possibly due to the poor state of preservation of the bone. Fowl, goose (*Anser* ?domestic) and duck were present. The duck may be domestic but is within the size range of mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). No remains from birds of prey were found, in contrast with the finds at Loughor Castle and Llantrithyd.⁷⁰ One bone from a skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) was found, which may be a natural occurrence. The only butchery mark was a knife-mark on one fowl femur. The partial skeleton of an exceptionally large fowl was found in a layer of mixed occupational rubbish and destruction debris of 13th-century date. But as it was one of the uppermost layers and contamination is possible, one suspects from the specimen's size that it is likely to be an intrusive modern fowl. It is known that the site was arable land in the mid 19th century⁷¹ and that there was infilling on the site in the latter part of the century. The specimen is larger than any found at Exeter,⁷² Lincoln⁷³ or the London sites, including 18th-century levels.⁷⁴ The earliest fowl of similar size known to the writer is a Kulm fowl.⁷⁵ This specimen is of mid 19th-century date (probably 1845-50, certainly earlier than 1859).

The cattle, sheep and pigs

The skeletal analysis indicates the high proportion of loose teeth, a sign of the degradation suffered by the material; an absence of horn cores of cattle and sheep, which may mean these were removed for use of the horn elsewhere; and a sufficient quantity of skull and foot bones to show that the whole carcass was being processed at the castle. No bones certainly from goat were identified. The bones appeared to be general domestic rubbish. Many bore chopmarks and some gnawmarks from dogs. Most were isolated fragments, though there was a partial calf skeleton, apparently not butchered, from Period VI. It comprised some long bones, vertebrae and ribs; all epiphyses including scapula and proximal radius were unfused.

Aging data was based on quantification of mandibles, maxillae and loose teeth, using the minimum number of beasts from each period and each main area of the site. Of the cattle, about half were slaughtered at less than about two years old in modern terms. Wear stages of the lower teeth show that the castle occupants ate much beef from fully adult animals and included those slaughtered at the end of a working life.

Only with the pig teeth was more detailed information possible. There were no teeth from sucking pig (though there was one piglet tibia) and only one killed before about eighteen months old. Six were fully adult (more than about three years old). The mandibles were too broken to be sexed. Of the loose teeth, nine female and twelve male canine teeth were found. Overcrowding of teeth was seen in one Period VI mandible, where P4 was *c.* 30 out of line.

The few measurable bones show the cattle to have been generally very small. Two metapodials give shoulder height estimates of 0.986 m and 0.997 m and most of the measurements fall at or below the low end of the range found on both Romano-British and medieval sites. One immature distal radius which was very large, however, may be from wild aurochs. Two large pig atlas vertebrae were found but it is not known if they are from domestic males or wild boar.

Pathological changes were noted in one cattle bone, a metacarpal with periosteal and endosteal new bone formation on the shaft. A more detailed breakdown of the data on which these conclusions are drawn can be found in the site archive.

FISH. *By* A. K. G. JONES

Halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus* L.) and cod (*Gadus Morhua* L.) bones were present in Period VI contexts.

HUMAN BONE. *By* J. L. WILKINSON

The skull fragment recovered from a layer of burning within Building H (Period VI hall) measures 34 by 28 mm and 4 mm thick. The external surface is blackened over much of the