



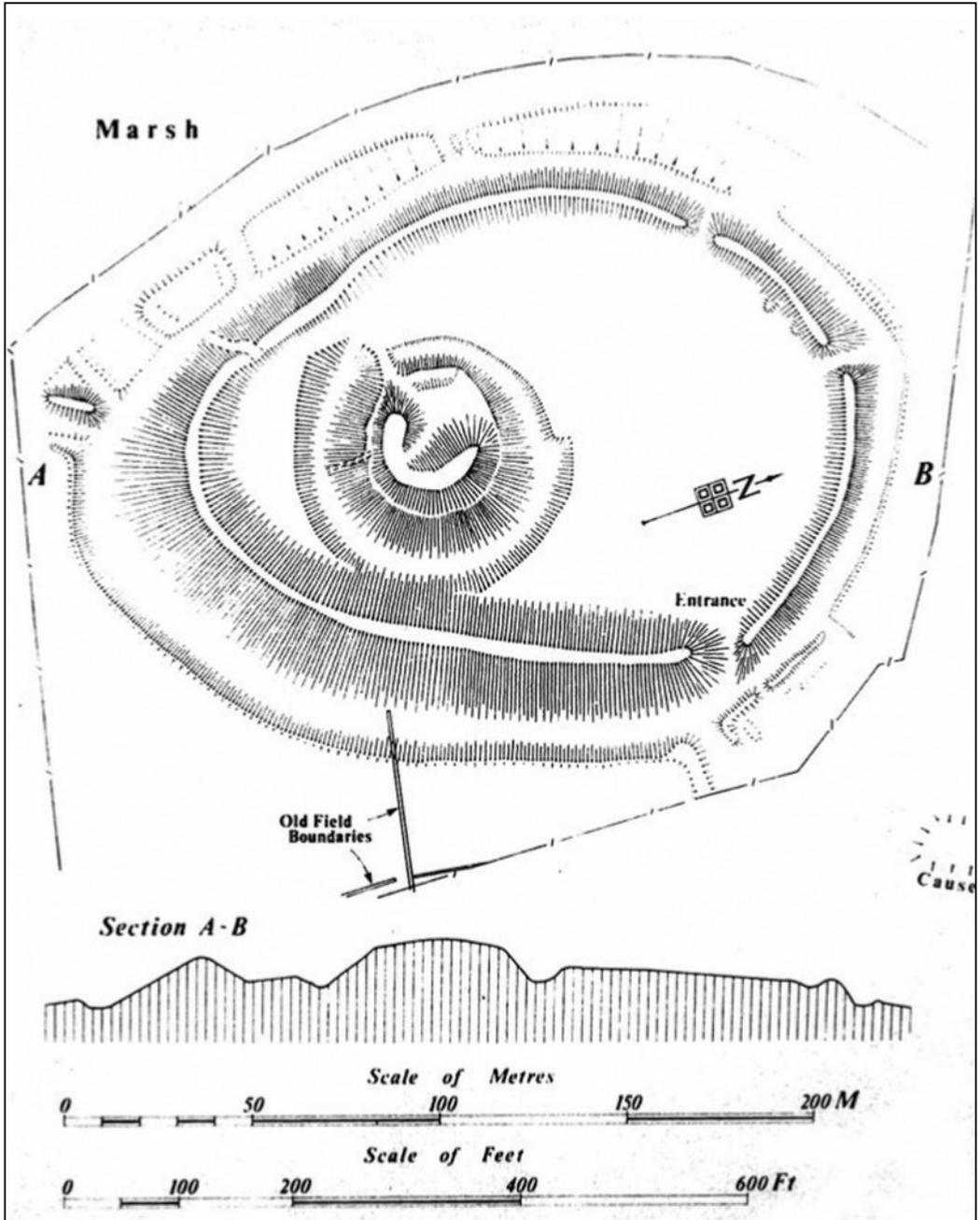
*Downpatrick Fortification. View from the east. Marshland to the east and north. Higher ground to the south and west towards the town. The outer enclosure is to the south-west, facing the town. This outer enclosure probably pre-dates the 'unfinished' motte.*

### **Downpatrick fortification, County Down.**

The present town of Downpatrick occupies a number of drumlin hills beside the Quoile River and an area of marshland associated with it. The cathedral was established in the early 12th century on the highest of these, on the site of an earlier monastery which had been surrounded by a bank and ditch. The fortification occupies a lower, oval hill, projecting out into the marshes to the north, west and east. The remains above ground consist of two earthworks: an oval enclosure and a mound within it. The enclosure has a bank rising nearly ten metres above the base of its ditch on the side facing the land; towards the marshes its height drops to half this facing the marshes. There is no sign of a break in the bank or ditch for an entrance. The mound is best explained as an unfinished

motte. Three quarters of the perimeter has a wide ditch and the earth within is piled *c.* 6 metres high. Along the fourth quadrant, the ditch is a third of the width and depth and the earth within lower. This would happen if the construction of a motte, being done by the "ring and fill" method, was interrupted. The method involves defining the base of a motte by a bank, built of material from a ditch, which retains the rest of the earth. This is tipped within the ring of the initial bank; in this case the earth is derived from a wider and deeper ditch. It is awkwardly set against the bank of the enclosure with every appearance of being later than it.

There is no record of the Earl of Ulster having property, let alone a castle within Downpatrick, which seems to have been completely



*Downpatrick.*

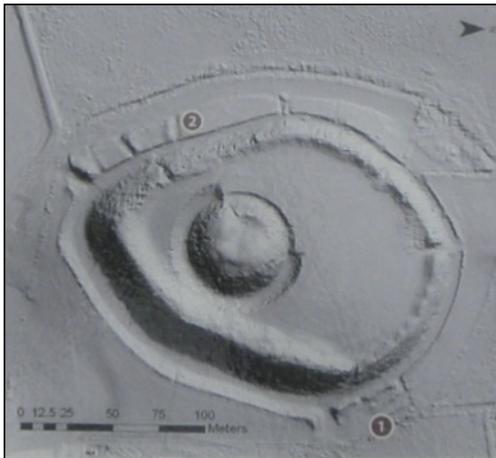


*Downpatrick fortification. ABOVE: Looking south from the motte top toward Downpatrick town and Down cathedral. BELOW: Looking north from the motte top toward the upper reaches of Strangford Lough.*





*Downpatrick fortification. The ditch and bank on the landside facing the town, looking north-west.*



*Several additional features have been highlighted by an aerial survey of the monument using LIDAR technology. These include irregularities on the outer edge of the ditch on the east (1). Several linear hollows through the outer bank on the west are also very clear and may represent attempts to control the water level in the surrounding ditch (2).*

within the control of the Bishop. While this may explain why the motte could be unfinished - John de Courcy ceding the town before the work he started was completed - it leaves us with the date and builder of the enclosure. We think of bailey enclosures as succeeding mottes, so that, if it is earlier than the motte, the enclosure is not a bailey but should pre-date John de Courcy's seizure of the kingdom of Ulaid. Before 1177, Downpatrick was the seat, not only of the Bishop but of the Mac Dunleavy kings; the place is referred to in 12th century Annals by two names, a secular one and a religious one and the pioneering Cistercian Abbey of Erenagh lies nearby. The enclosure is probably the secular centre for the King, a pre-Norman Irish castle.

#### ***Further reading***

Jope, E. M., (ed.) 1966. *An Archaeological Survey of Co. Down*, HMSO, Belfast, pp. 202-3  
McNeill, T. E., 1997. *Castles in Ireland*, London, pp. 12-13.