





Fig. 1. S & N Buck, 1740. Holt Castle from the east (detail). Nearest the river Dee are the remains of the Watergate Tower (with chapel above. Compare with figs. 3, 5-7).

Previous page: Holt Castle from the south-east. © Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

Holt Castle

This was one of King Edward I's 'lordship' castles, built by the John de Warenne, earl of Surrey, soon after 1282, but it may not have been completed until the early 1300s by Warenne's grandson. It saw action in the civil war of the 1640s, but was then systematically robbed for its building stone for Eaton Hall in 1675-83.

A footpath leads down to the boss of rock by the river Dee that supports the fragments of this once great castle. The curtain that survives represents the inner face of the inner walls that framed the courtyard, with a doorway evident. Gone are the five circular mural towers and entrance that we know from the plan and elevation of 1562 that is held by the British Library in London. There was also a square tower that was the water gate.

Members are reminded that one of the first awards made by the Castle Studies Trust was for a reconstruction by Chris Jones-Jenkins, working with Rick Turner and Steve Grenter. Work on this site, including other plans of the sixteenth century, has suggested that John Norden's well known 'bird's eye' view of the castle in 1620 (see fig. 2) is a misrepresentation of the original layout.

Excavations have been undertaken in the last three years led by Steve Grenter of Wrexham Borough Council, with members of the Holt Local History Society, and the lower courses of ashlar of one of the large mural towers being uncovered in 2014. The conference hear more about this castle during our visit, and a paper by Rick Turner and Steve Grenter is being prepared, re-evaluating our knowledge of this site.

Further Reading

L. Butler, 'Holt Castle: John de Warenne and Chastellion', in J. R. Kenyon and R. Avent (eds.), *Castles in Wales and the Marches*, 105-24. Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1987.

J. A. A. Goodall, 'The baronial castles of the Welsh conquest', in D. Williams and J. R. Kenyon (eds.), *The Impact of the Edwardian castles in Wales*, 155-65. Oxford: Ox-bow Books, 2010.

D. Pratt, 'Living like a lord - the 'Great House' at Holt, 1495', *Clwyd Historian* 66 (2012), 28-34.

E. Neaverson, *Mediaeval Castles in North Wales: A study of Sites, Water Supply, and Building Stones* (London), 1947, p. 24.

Wrexham Heritage Service, Holt - Pocket folder with a series of fold-out leaflets including: *Holt - The Lion's Castle*, and *Holt - From Frontier Town to Peaceful Village*, Wrexham County Borough Council, 2014.

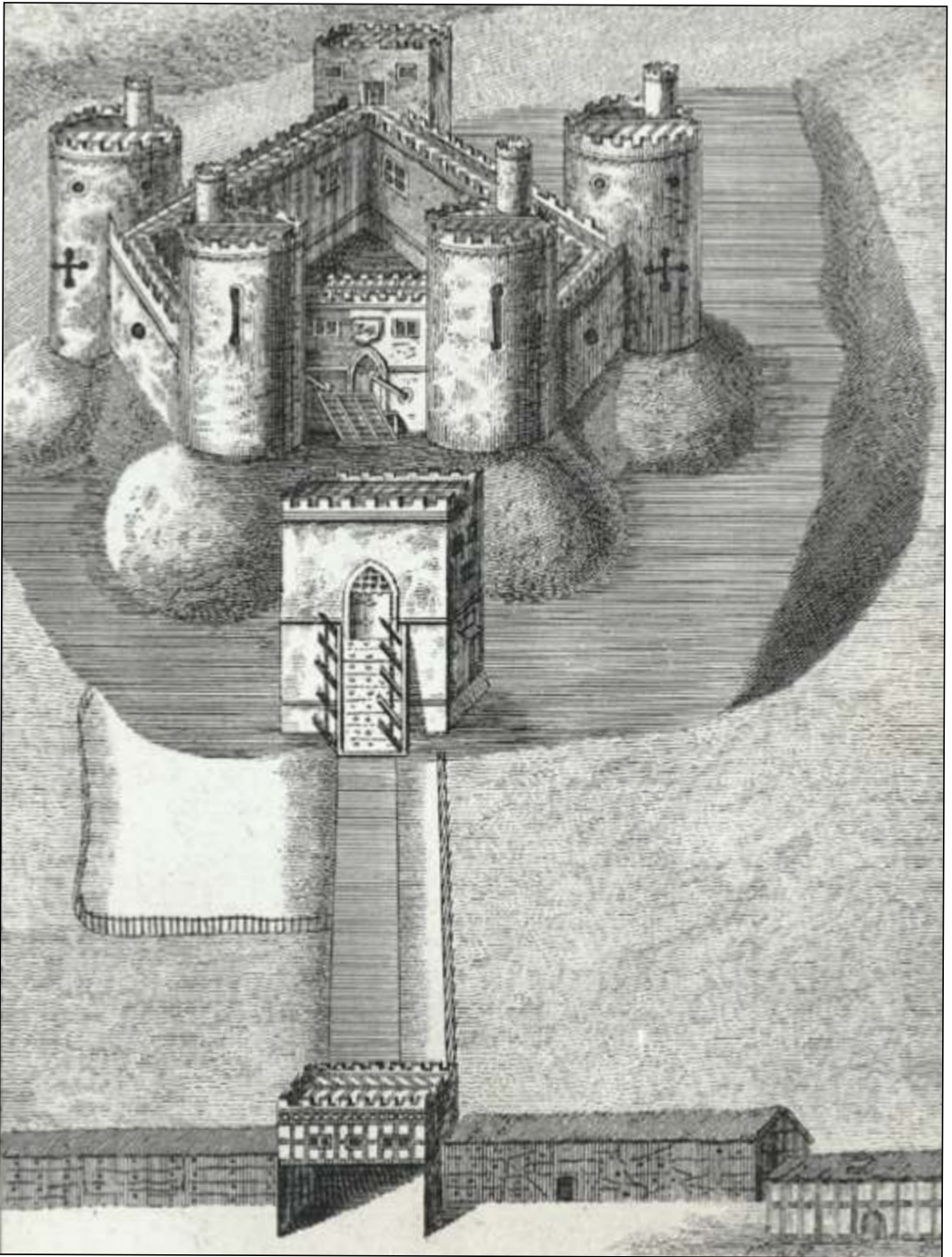


Fig. 2. Holt Castle. John Norden. © British Library Board, MS 3696, folio 5. 1620. Elevation from the north. The form of the square tower at the south apex is in error. This printed version of Norden is by Mazell, Peter, fl. 1761-179, engraver. Published in the London Magazine, January. 1779.

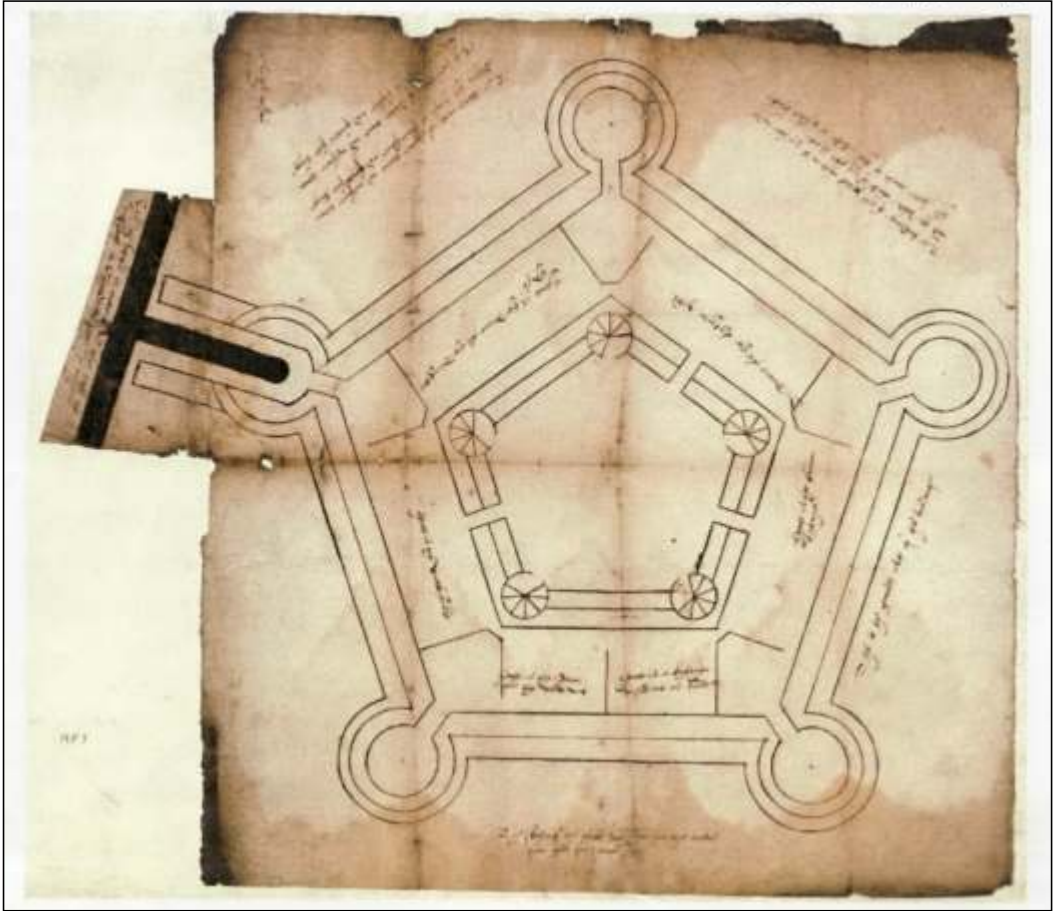
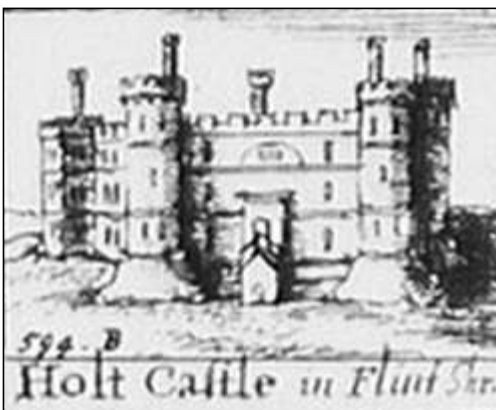


Fig. 3. Plan of Holt, c. 1600. South at the top. Watergate left showing the reach of water to the dock. © National Library of Wales. Library legend: 'Manuscript Plan of Holt castle. An important source for the history of a very interesting castle which has virtually disappeared. Scale: 12ft to 1 inch. 455 x 510 mm. (Ref MP1)'. It is from the Duchy of Cornwall records.



Left: Fig. 4. The Daniel King (d. 1664) vignette of Holt. (See CSG Bulletin Vol. 20 Summer 2015). View from the north. It confirms the details as seen in the sketch (fig. 6), but currently it is not clear whether this vignette predates the sketch or vice versa. Nonetheless, the depiction of the barbican gate is quite different which might suggest one is not a copy of the other. All other details seem to tally, and it is possibly a pre-civil war drawing c. 1640. The Lion emblem appears above the entrance in the lunette frame, and gave the castle its name 'Chastellion' or 'Castrum Leonis - castle of the lion.'



ABOVE: Fig. 8. View of the Castle Studies Trust funded CAD model of Holt from the north-west. (Modelling by CJJ). All the 3D models are dated to c. 1495.

BELOW: Fig. 9. Present day Holt castle. View of the boss of rock from the same position as above. Excavation work, led by Steve Greuter, Wrexham County Borough Council, is continuing.





Reconstructing Holt Castle - Denbighshire

After his final conquest of Wales in 1282, Edward I created five new Marcher lordships in the north-east of the country, and gave them to some of his most trusted supporters. The lordship of Bromfield and Yale was granted to John de Warenne, sixth earl of Surrey and he is thought to have built Holt Castle there, which was first referred to in 1311. Holt Castle had a unique, symmetrical pentagonal design. What survives today is disappointing, following systematic robbing of the masonry after the English Civil War, which has left only a stump of rock below the inner courtyard and some low sandstone revetment walls.

In an article published in 1987, the late Lawrence Butler assembled all the documentary and pictorial evidence then available, and undertook the first modern survey of the overgrown remains. He was unable to reconcile much of this information with the famous birds-eye view and plan of Holt Castle produced by John Norden in 1620, which are nearly always used to illustrate this important castle. Since 1987, much important new evidence has come to light:

1. Documentary evidence for building works at Holt Castle in the last two years of Richard II's reign, which seem to precede his use of the castle as a treasury.
2. The publication by Jean Gidman of a transcription of the very detailed inventory of Holt Castle taken after the arrest of Sir William Stanley in 1495, used independently by Derrick Pratt, Rick Turner and Paul Hinchcliffe to

reconstruct the layout and access around the castle at that date.

3. The discovery of a new, large-scale, and probably the most accurate plan of the site, dating from about 1600, in the Duchy of Cornwall records in the National Library of Wales (fig. 3).
4. An extended programme of consolidation, archaeological evaluation and geophysical survey of the site led by Steve Greuter, Wrexham County Borough Council, in partnership with members of the Holt Local History Society.
5. The analysis of the Environment Agency LiDAR data for Holt by Paul Hinchcliffe.

What this evidence has shown is that Norden's view and plan are wrong in several respects. There was no rectangular tower opposite the main entrance, the courtyard buildings were substantial and of two storeys, and the towers were four storeys high. The objective of this project was to use the development of a 3D digital model to reconcile all the available data, to produce the best reconstruction of the external appearance and internal layout as possible. Additional detailing has been drawn from surviving examples at other Edwardian castles. The model thus created has been used to generate images to supersede the famous Norden paintings as the basis for the interpretation and presentation of this remarkable castle.

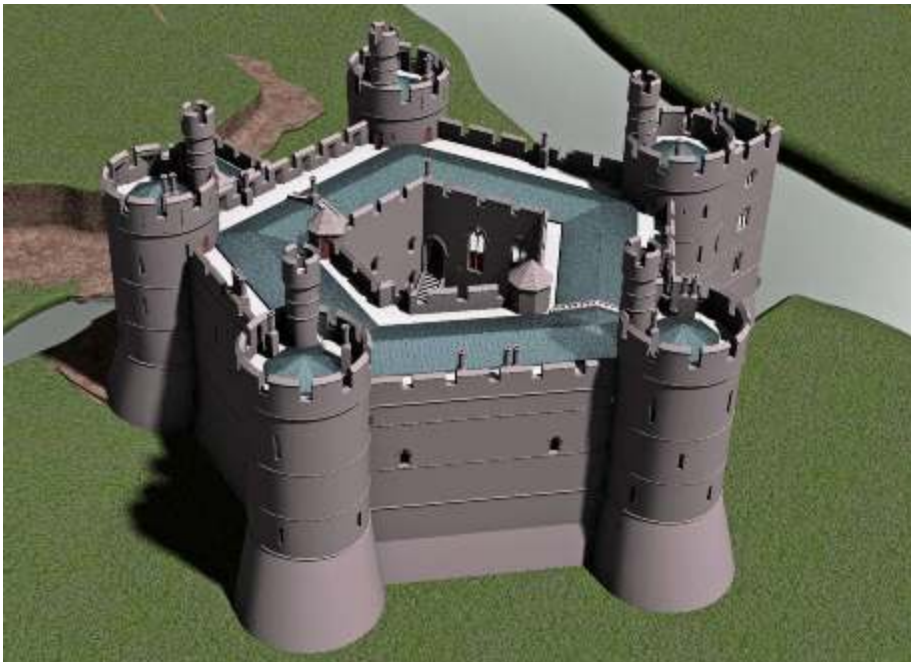
Rick Turner, Swansea University, Steve Greuter, Wrexham Museum and Paul Hinchcliffe, Holt Local History Society.

Editor's note: There is now a link to the short video of Holt Castle: <https://vimeo.com/131002957>



ABOVE: Fig. 10. View of the completed model from the north-east, showing access to the stables via the moat.

BELOW: Fig. 11. From the south-west, showing the hall access stairs in the courtyard.

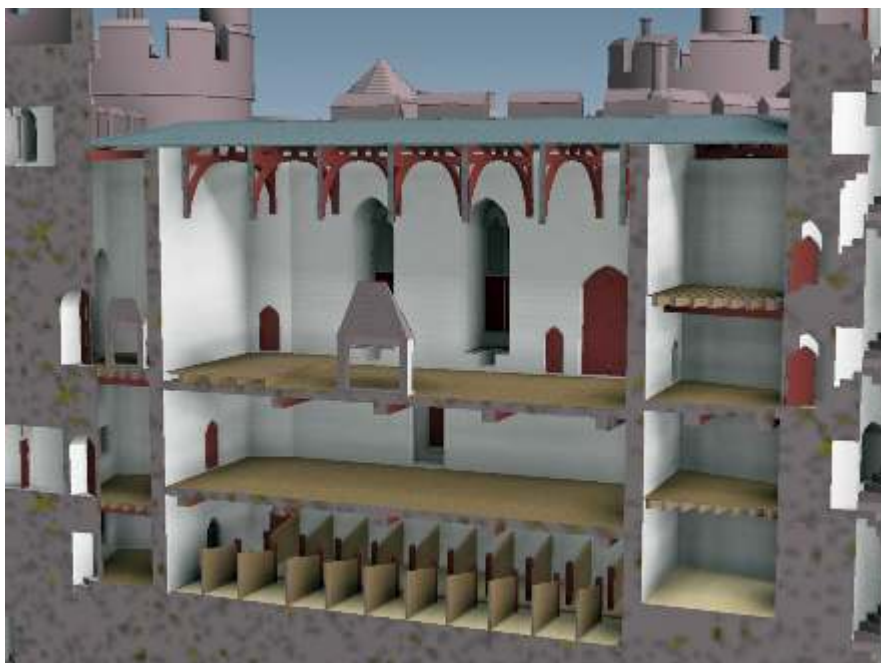




ABOVE: Fig. 12. Horizontal section at first floor level above courtyard; hall and chapel in the foreground, kitchen to rear right

BELOW: Fig. 13. High level view of the model from the north east showing the three spiral staircases in the courtyard, only two of them complete to wall-walk level





ABOVE: Fig. 14. Vertical section through the the north-east range, showing the hall above, low wardrobe beneath and stables in the basement.

BELOW: Fig. 15. Vertical section through Chapel Tower, showing watergate access to Pottrell's Pit with vaulted chapel above

