*Fig. 1. Ruthin Castle - The West Gate, between the Upper and Lower Wards, equipped with portcullis, unique crenellated fighting/ viewing deck above (see figs. 2, 20) and the possible remains of a drawbridge platform to facilitate a span across the moat.*

Previous page: Aerial view of Ruthin Castle from the south. © Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

ABOVE: Fig. 2. S & N Buck. 1742. (Detail). Ruthin Castle from the south-west. Buck correctly shows three towers on the west side. The section of west curtain wall adjacent (to the right) to the entrance appears to have fallen, revealing the inside wall of a chamber with a two-light window facing onto the courtyard. The south curtain (far right) shows crenellations and the SW and SE tower still intact.

BELOW: Fig. 3. Drawing of Ruthin Castle from the north-west. From R. Newcombe, 'An Account of the Castle and Town of Ruthin', 1829. The depiction appears to be partly in error and unreliable in some areas, but it may have been copied from a missing Randle Holme bird's eye view (cf. Chester). It shows two distinct wards with the lower ward to the south (right), but whilst these two towers show stair turrets rising above the crenellations, all the other towers also had spiral stairs (Holme), and there is nothing to suggest that the turreted stairs in the lower bailey are strictly accurate depictions or that the others were not similarly disposed.
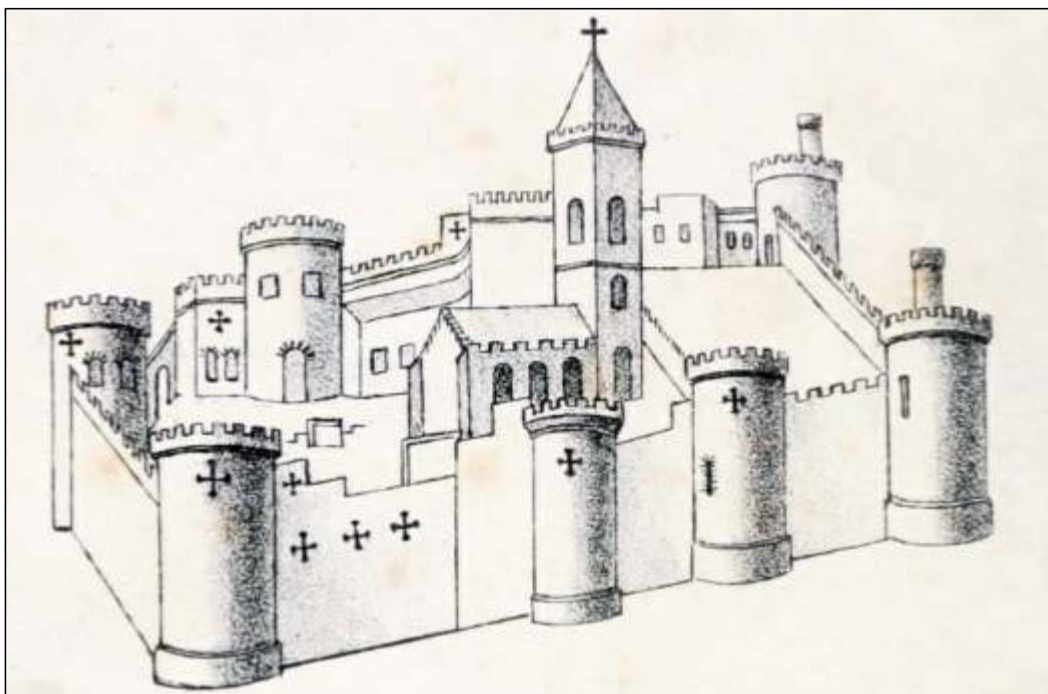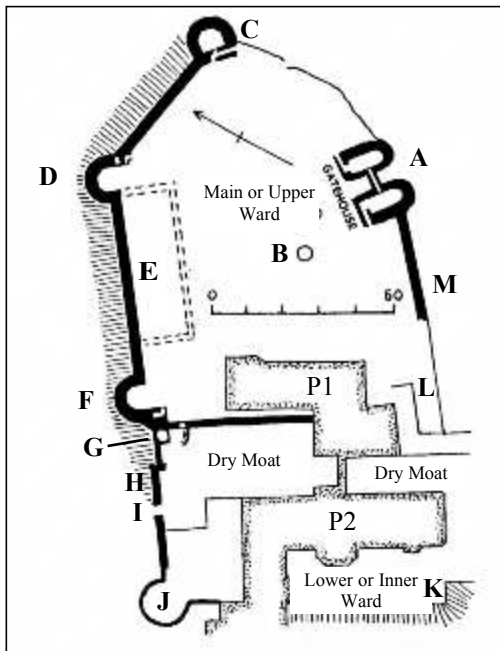
Fig. 4. Ruthin Castle plan. Ground plan (after Mike Salter). Labelling by the Journal editor.

Ruthin Castle - Key

Upper Ward

A: Twin-towered D-shaped gatehouse with underground tunnel link. 1290s?
B: Well - in centre of the large Upper Ward
C: North-East Tower - Upper Ward
D: North-West Tower - Upper Ward
E: Great Hall (remains of) - Upper Ward
F: West Tower - Upper Ward
G: Sally port into west moat
L: Position of missing East corner tower
M: Footings for Exchequer Tower

Lower Ward

H: Waterwheel? arch location
I: West Gate - carriage entrance (with portcullis) enabling entry into both Upper and Lower Wards via moated / bridge access.
J: South-West Tower - Lower Ward (rebuilt)
K: Missing S-E Corner Tower - Lower Ward
P1: Hotel Buildings, linked by a bridge to:
P2: Hotel Buildings

Note: In fig. 5. Randle Holme describes the Lower Ward as the Inner Ward. The Lower Ward could be a later build added after 1284, a few years after the Upper Ward started life in 1277.

Ruthin Castle - Introduction

The castle is set on a red sandstone ridge, with a pentagonal main ward with rounded towers and a great gatehouse, and a smaller, lower, outer ward. There is much to see here, but little time to disentangle the various features. If ever a castle called for detailed research and survey, it is this. It appears to have been commenced in 1277, following the first Welsh war, when the Four Cantrefs of north-east Wales, assigned to Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1267, were regained by the English. There is little recorded documentation on the construction. Work on the castle began in the summer of 1277, and in the autumn of that year it is recorded that 120 diggers were transferred from Ruthin to Rhuddlan, the work of the diggers being apparent today within the gardens of the Castle Hotel.

Around this time the castle came into the hands of Llywelyn's brother, Dafydd. Following Dafydd and Llywelyn's uprising, the castle was retaken by Reginald de Grey, justiciar of Chester, and work may have continued on the castle.

Records make mention of a Thomas the Mason; in the 1290s a Master Thomas the Mason appears in the court rolls of Ruthin as one of the burgesses of the town. The castle was held by the royalists in the civil war before surrendering in 1646. Before becoming an hotel, the castle was, from 1922, a private hospital clinic, using the private residence that had been built in the nineteenth century.

Further Reading

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

S. W. Patterson, 'Ruthin Castle', *The hundred and sixth annual meeting at Ruthin - programme* 1959. [S. L.]: Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1959, 7-13.

A. J. Taylor, *The Welsh castles of Edward I*, London: Hambledon Press, 1986.

H. M. Colvin (ed.) *History of the King's Works*, Vol. 1 HMSO, London.

a- the cloisters? (arcaded gallery by the hall)
b- the hall
c- great kitchen

d -lesser kitchen
e- pantry or storehouse
f- the chapel
g- lodging houses (rooms?)
- two storeys high.
h- the inner ward
i- (or j) the guard house
k - cellar standing on arches
l- the gate (house)
m- deep & broad ditch be-
tween the two wards
n- all round towers
o- the well
p- the sally port
q- the exchequer chamber
r- stout stairs to ascend from
sally port to inner ward?
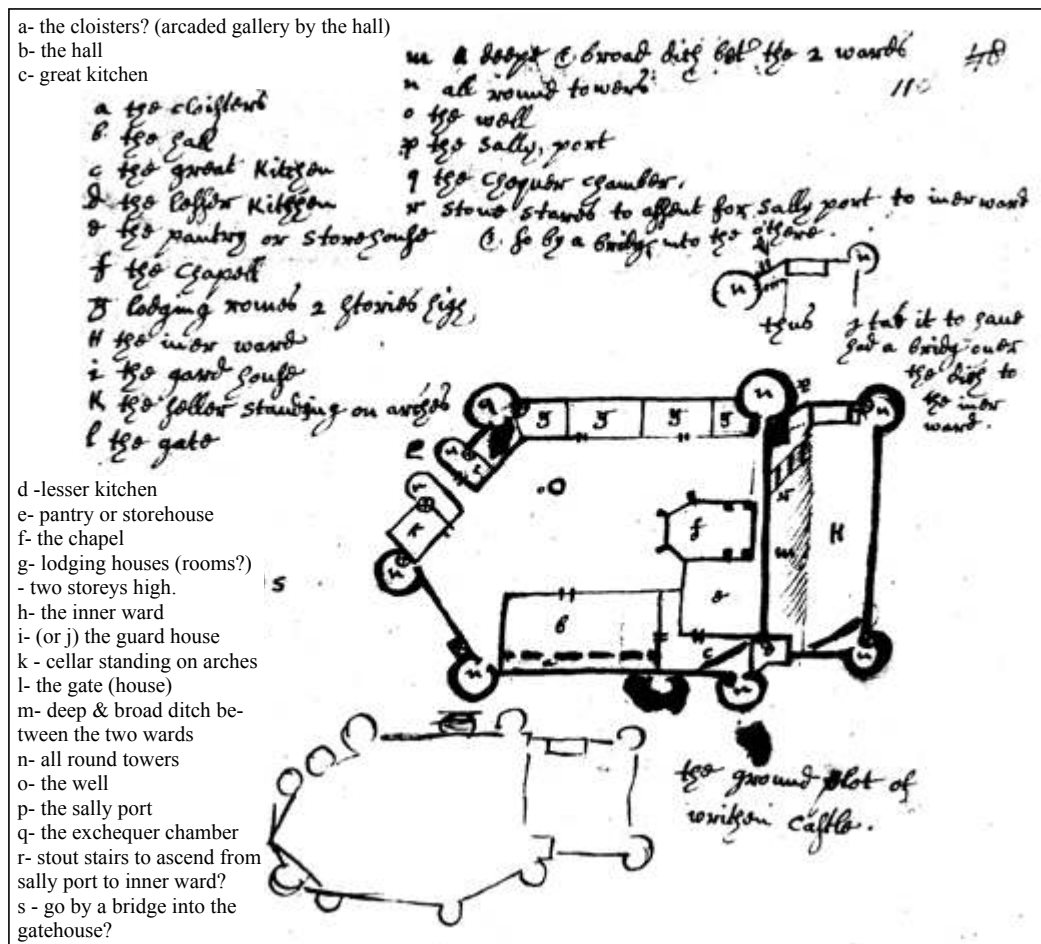s - go by a bridge into the
gatehouse?

Fig. 5. A survey (or ground plot) of Ruthin Castle made in the 17th century by Randle Holme (III) (d. 1700). © British Library Board, Harley Ms 2073, f. 101/1. The Holme key needs fully deciphering, but Holme saw 'H' as the inner ward, not the outer ward.

Ruthin Castle - Description

Built along the crest of a hill on a south-west/ north-east axis, in the form of an elongated penta-gon, with its centrally-pointed north-east end, it has an Upper Bailey to the north-west and a Lower Bailey to the south-east. The castle is built of substantial blocks of coursed red and grey sand-stone. It is sadly ruinous, and most of what little masonry remains above courtyard level takes the form of 19th century landscaping when the area was laid to garden, though the west moat area may have originally been part of a medieval designed landscape. Some impressive parts of the castle still remain and consist of the following main elements:

● A substantial curtain wall, battered towards the base and particularly high on the north-west and west (downhill) sides (figs. 18-23).

● Large round 'D'-shaped towers to the angles of each bailey.

● A twin-towered gatehouse with elongated D-shaped towers with linking tunnel under.

● Sally port at the base of a spiral stair in the north-west curtain wall of the upper bailey

● The undercroft remains of a large hall survive in the upper bailey, on the west side.

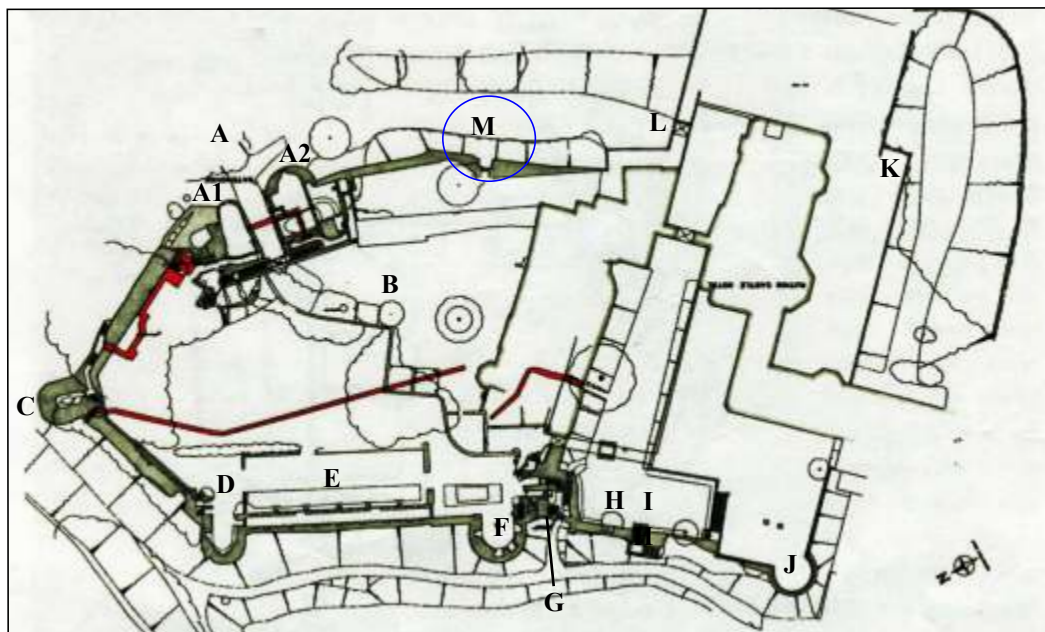● Interesting West Gate with portcullis slots.

Fig. 6. Survey plan from the Cadw archives highlighting a number of tunnels (in red).

Anti-clockwise, starting with the gatehouse. (**A** on the plan, figs. 4, 6). This consists of two projecting D-shaped towers; that to the north (**A1**) surviving to one storey (fig. 7), with a pointed-arch doorway into the flat rear wall. The south tower (**A2**) survives up to two storeys with two arch openings to the front (fig. 9). Its east side and the central entrance have been heavily gothicised. Below the south tower are a series of basement chambers reached by a straight stone staircase, the vaulted roof of which is supported by transverse ribbed arches. Vaulted chambers also survive at ground level on the north side of the entrance tower (**A1**).

The north tower (**C**) is located at the pointed end of the upper ward and survives at a low level; a pointed-arch doorway leads into it at sub-ground level (the present ground at this end of the courtyard could be about 8ft higher than its original level).This tower has especially thick walls with a tight inner space. Continuing anti-clockwise, the north-west curtain (between **C** & **D**) is better preserved and contains (neo-gothic?) angled arrow-slits including red sandstone blocks with angled oval openings. Towards the south-west the high curtain wall has three towers (**D, F, J**) along its full length. The north-west tower (**D**) survives to about 3ft above courtyard ground level and contains the base of a spiral staircase.

The great hall, a very large rectangular building, 100ft x 40ft (**E**), the size of Caernarfon's great hall, (figs. 6, 26) is located between the north-west and central-west towers (**D** & **F**). The gable-end walls are not well-preserved. Between the north-west hall wall and the curtain wall is a narrow arcaded corridor, in effect linking towers D & F. It has tall round-arched doorways with red sandstone dressings to each end and pointed-arch window openings to the curtain wall. It could be compared to the mural wall passage at Caernarfon that runs between the Chamberlain and Queen's Towers, serving there as a fighting gallery. However the north-west part of the hall was gothicised, with crenellated parapets and stepped buttresses to the inner hall side. The corridor appears to have been re-used as a garden structure, perhaps a hot-house. It had two fireplaces with stone lintels to the inner wall, now in-filled with brick, recessed arches to both sides and evidence for a lean-to roof.

To the south, the wall of the central round tower (**F**) (figs. 8, 18-19) stands 4ft high at present courtyard level, and has embrasures for four window/arrow loop openings. Adjacent to the tower (**F**), the curtain wall contains a sally port (**G**) accessed by a descending spiral stair within a rectangular turret (the sally-port entrance is only visible from the outside). Beyond this to the south is the (physically)

Fig. 7. Ruthin - Gatehouse. Exterior to the line of the curtain wall. The north (A1) of the two D-shaped gate-towers with basement below hollowed out and gothicised gate and entry in the apex.
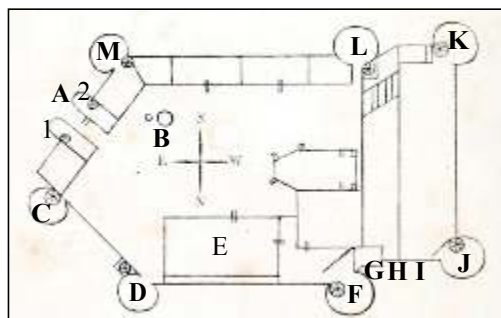

Fig. 8. The plan of Ruthin from Newcombe, 1829. Probably copied from Holme (fig. 5). Tower M should located further to the south (see fig. 6) which then agrees with the vignette by Daniel King (fig. 29).

lower bailey, 99ft (30m) wide x 197ft (60m) long, the ground level falling sharply and with straight stairs - on the long axis of the ditch - from the upper ward leading down into the 'dry' ditch that separates both. Also on axis with the moat adjacent to the sally port is a large arch (**H**), probably to accommodate an enclosed wheel-pit, which could have drawn water from the exterior moat by a horse-driven undershot waterwheel to lift water into the castle (and perhaps another wheel up into the kitchen / service area). This complex structure

could have been associated with either a mill within the castle or with sophisticated hydraulic engineering to move water through tunnels around the castle, perhaps even into the 'dry' moat; (note the caption comments (figs. 6, 23, 24). There is evidence of sluice gates and large cisterns within the castle wards. Such a system may be unparalleled in any other British castle.

A high-arched gateway (West Gate) follows next along the curtain to its south-west (**I**), but not marked on Newcombe. A wide arch of stone voussoirs with square (5½" wide x 5" deep) grooves for a portcullis; there is some evidence for a towered structure above this gate (figs. 18, 20, 25). The dating of the six-stepped corbelled turret above the arched entrance is probably *c*. 1295, but the form and style is interesting, *cf* Beaumaris (fig. 20). The curtain wall was partly damaged during the Civil War beyond this point. (See fig. 2, Buck print). Finally the South-West tower (**J**) was rebuilt in red sandstone in the 19th century and forms part of the formal C19 land-scaped gardens. A wall runs east from Tower (**J**) and then terminates (**K**), where the original tower is missing. The tall tower-keep (**L**) in the upper ward angle, with a staircase ear turret, also appears to be missing (or built over).

Fig. 9. The gatehouse. Exterior to the line of the castle curtain. The south tower of the two D-shaped gate-towers with gothicised elements. Only two storeys remain standing (inc. basement).

Commentary

David Cathcart King's chapter on the castles of Clwyd is certainly worth reading (*The Archaeology of Clwyd*, John Manly, Stephen Grenter, Fiona Gale (eds.), Clwyd County Council, 1991, 173-185), but he does not have much to say about Ruthin: '[Reginald de] Grey, in Dyffryn Clwyd, built the very substantial Ruthin Castle, well-supplied with round towers. At its top end there appears to be a fine twin-towered gatehouse but also an uncapped angle. The building of the modern house [now hotel] has obliterated at least three of the big round towers; at the lower end there is a subordinate ward'.

A closer look at the north and west curtains makes it clear that the castle, when commenced by Edward I in 1277 (Taylor), consisted of an irregular pentagonal upper bailey that had revetment walls built up against the quarried rock faces of the ridge platform it was sitting on. In this respect it had similarities to Flint, Holt (and Whittington) castles and explains why much of the outer parts of the castle have remained in place even though it has been reduced to ground level on the sand-

stone rock plateau that it sits on. The bailey was about 350 feet long by 250 feet wide and the ground level of the buildings in the bailey is much higher than the ground level outside the walls. This was particularly true on the wide-moated north-west side where the land sloped away towards the river. The opposite, south, side of the castle was defended by a deep and broad (dry?) moat. The castle was probably of the same red sandstone used when cutting the ditches (*cf.* Goodrich). When built, therefore, there will have been some synergy and appearance to match that of Holt Castle (the rock type is similar).

The 1284 campaign by Edward I saw additional work on the castle when in the hands of Reginald de Grey, and the lower bailey may have been added at that time, under the guidance or consultation of James of St George (Taylor).[1] James' influence, however, seems marginal, and if anything, relates perhaps only to a few individual features. Much of this latter 1280s-1300 work is now lost, but the ditch that separates the two baileys, postern/gate arrangements may date to

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[1] *HKW*, Vol. 1, pp. 327-8.

Fig. 10. The wide-stepped entrance into the vaulted basement / cellars under the south gatehouse tower supported by a sequence of pointed transverse ribs; the listing report suggests they are Tudor.

the late 13th or early 14th century, including the corbelled fighting platform above the West Gate (fig. 1). An idea of the potentially powerfully moated layout can be seen in John Northall's bird's-eye reconstruction (fig. 21).

Reginald de Grey (died 1308) had acquired the Wilton barony through his marriage to the heiress, Matilda Cantilupe before 1252. Later he became High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and the Royal Forests and Constable of Chester Castle, Constable of Nottingham Castle (1265) and Constable of Northampton Castle (1267). He was Justicier of Chester in 1270 and High Sheriff of Cheshire (1270–1274). In 1281 he was again Justicier of Chester. In 1282, he was one of the three commanders appointed by Edward I in his campaign against Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. This resulted in his being granted Dyffryn Clwyd with its castle of Ruthin. This great lordship passed to his descendants, until Richard Grey, 6th Baron Grey de Ruthyn, 3rd Earl of Kent sold the lordship to the crown in 1508. Grey's influence over the style of Ruthin after 1284 probably relates to his knowledge and experience whilst based at Chester Castle, a castle subject of much work by Henry III and Edward I, including both of the twin-towered inner

and outer gatehouses (see plan in *HWK* Vol 2, p. 607-612, plates 38, 39). Both of these gatehouses (now demolished) had elongated 'D'-shaped towers; they do not follow the classic 'Tonbridge' style keep-gatehouses and were built during Grey's tenure. The south inner gate-tower at Chester had an 'ear' staircase turret attached, and a number of the Ruthin curtain towers also had single ear turrets (D, K, L), according to the Holme plan. (For a discussion of these ear turrets originating at the Tower of London see Goodall, *The English Castle*, 2011, pp. 203-207).

The general interior plan of the upper bailey at Ruthin, (great hall etc) may follow the same pattern as Chester but the great hall design (fig. 26) may be emulating that of Caernarfon both in terms of size and the narrow vaulted gallery or corridor running parallel to the hall and linking the two substantial wall towers at either end between the hall and the curtain. The drawing of Ruthin Mill (fig. 23) might give a clue as to the reason for the wide segmental arch in the west curtain. The mill building is *c.* 1300 and is contemporary with the putative waterwheel arch (H) in the castle. A possible designed landscape on the western side combined with complex water management within Ruthin castle needs a proper survey and would be an interesting project.

ABOVE: Fig. 11. The large wagon vaulted (a rebuild?) basement in the south gate-tower. BELOW, left: Fig. 12. Steps from the bailey to the basement. BELOW: Right. Fig. 13. One of the basement rooms.

Figs. 14-17. Various rooms within the basement of the south gate-tower. Fig. 15 suggests the start of a blocked spiral stair. BELOW: Fig. 16. The entrance into the passageway that links the north and south basements via an underground tunnel. Fig. 17. The vaulted tunnel leading to the north tower under the roadway. There are some suggestions that much of this is post-medieval rework.

ABOVE: Fig. 18. The west façade. © Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. From L-R: The inner part of the round tower sally port - the outer tower now missing; wheel-arch drawing up water from/to the moat; The West Gate with portcullis and possible outer drawbridge platform but heavily modified to create a garden feature; gap in the wall. All as Buck depicts in 1740 (Inset & fig. 2).

LEFT: Fig. 19. Detail of the solid section of the NW Tower (D), on the west curtain, which rises about 20 ft from below the interior level of the courtyard. A battered coursing of large blocks of soft red sandstone - its colour caused the building to be known as Castell Coch - sits above a plinth of carboniferous limestone blocks.

Fig. 20. Detail of the West Gate, (calling it a fully-formed gatehouse is uncertain but it may have been enclosed) that leads into the dry moat area separating the upper and lower baileys. The inner arch mouldings containing the square portcullis grooves & chase are picked out in red sandstone. The top corbelling is shown in the Buck drawing as having crenellations, and is reminiscent of some aspects of the work at the 'Gate next the Sea' in the upper bow-fronted turrets at Beaumaris (c. 1300), implying that James of St George, known to have visited Ruthin, may have suggested adding this and other elements.
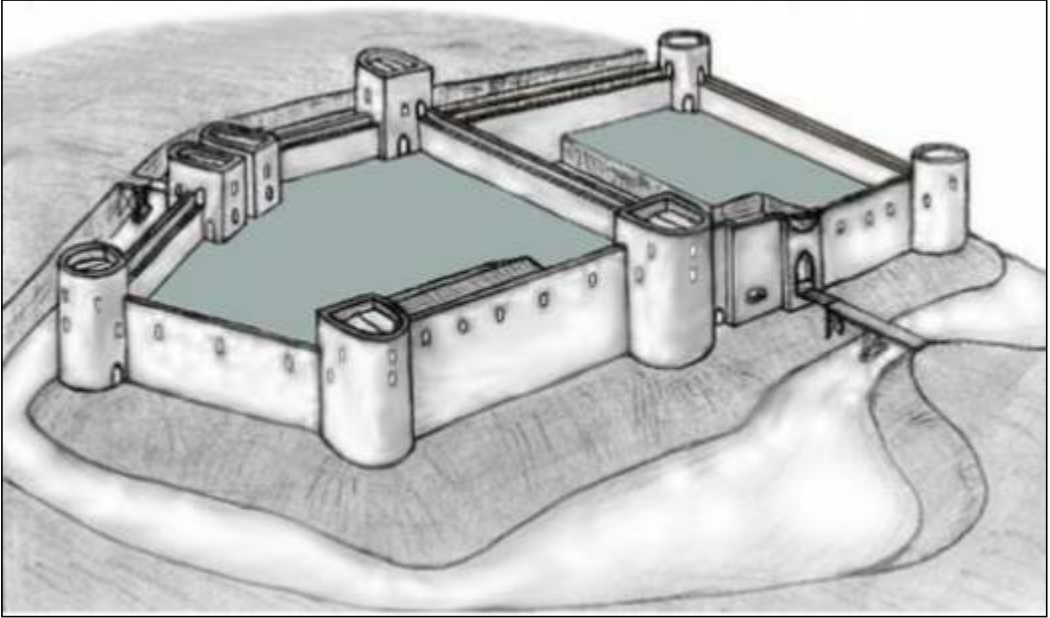
ABOVE: Fig. 21. Reconstruction by John Northall, of Ruthin from the NW, illustrating the possible configuration of the west curtain and towers and the relationship of the moat to the castle walls. The reconstruction was drawn before the benefit of the Holme plan and the King view came to light. © 2009 by John Northall and the Castles of Wales website. Reproduced with thanks.

BELOW: Fig. 22. The half-buried sally port between the centre tower (F) and the lower ward curtain section. The sally-port is reached solely via a narrow spiral stair adjacent to Tower F.
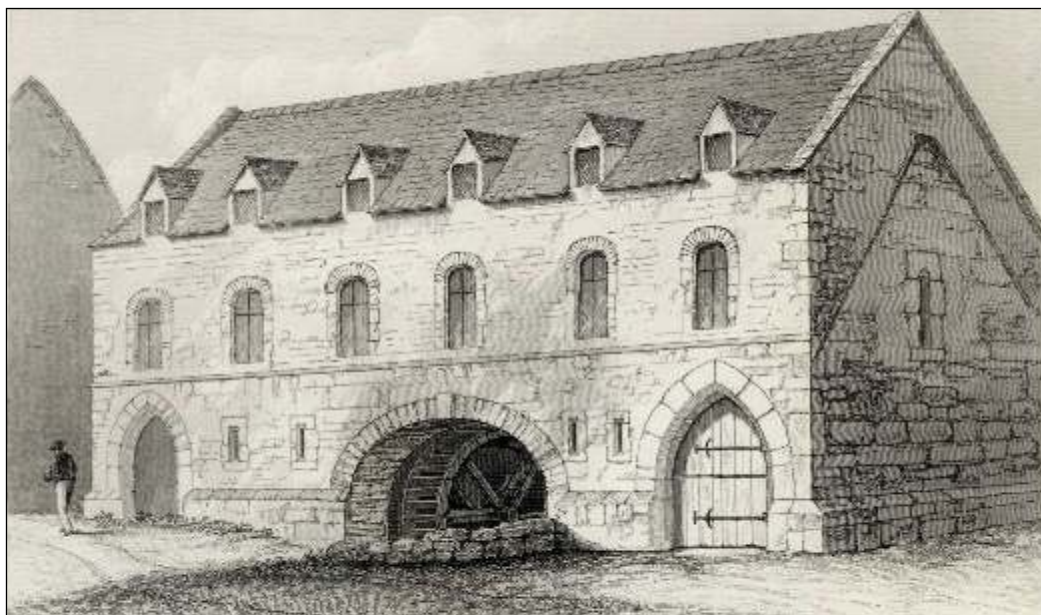
ABOVE: Fig. 23. The Ruthin Mill (in Mill St). Originally built c. 1300 and since substantially rebuilt, but the depressed wheel-arch and the left pointed arch opening, is still in place and may be partly original. The right-hand side door-arch has gone. From a drawing by H. Longueville Jones, 1856.

BELOW: Fig. 24. Probable (now blocked) wheel-arch in the west curtain adjacent to the West Gate (into the ditch that divides the N & S baileys). It may be part of a sophisticated hydraulic engineering system and could account for a number of tunnels under the castle (see survey plan, fig. 6) that facilitated the flow of water from / to the moat to power the wheel. It may also have lifted the water up into the 'dry moat, provided that this was originally damned at one end (east).

ABOVE: Fig. 25. The inside of the West Gate from within the inner moat. The remains of an arched recess that once housed the portcullis machinery can be seen above the entrance arch. The stonework of this wall is not red sandstone as used for the earlier revetment walls and may represent the final stage of building under Reginald de Grey in 1295 and/or later. However, the red sandstone mouldings around the arch of the doorway provided a continuity of style. Ground levels have radically changed in this area, and it is difficult to visualize its original form.

BELOW: Fig. 26. Part of the Great Hall in the upper bailey with its puzzling arcaded corridor (along the undercroft?). The hall was 100ft in length and 40ft wide. For some possible explanations of the arcades see p. 107.

ABOVE: Fig. 27. The continuation of the dry moat that separates the Upper (north) (left) & Lower (south - right) baileys. View looking east, up to the arched bridge that joins the two parts of the hotel (P1, P2) (see fig. 5). The bridge may follow the line of an original bridge.

BELOW: Fig. 28. The dry moat on the other side of the link-bridge looking west - with gravel road. The lower courses may constitute the revetment wall to the lower bailey.
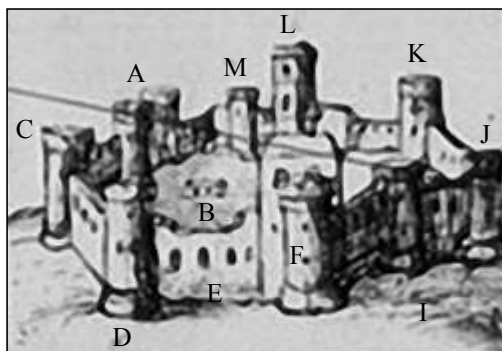
Fig. 29. Ruthin Castle - Daniel King. c. 1640

Fig. 30. Newcombe's plan - (copy of fig. 8). Labels for towers and other features added.

Postscript

Daniel King's view of Ruthin (from the north-west), probably of the 1640s and possibly pre-dating Holme, is puzzling in some respects. It is a very small vignette, taken from the 'contact sheet' of over 100 views illustrated recently in the CSG *Bulletin* (Vol. 20).[1] The curtain-wall tower at the far left is probably Tower 'C' at the apex of the pentagon. Then, following the anti-clockwise circuit, Tower 'D', the Great Hall 'E' (with four windows) , closed by Tower 'F'. What is immediately behind Tower 'F' - a large rectangular block (?) - is a mystery. The Holme survey (fig. 5) labels this space as the 'great kitchen', so it could have been a high vaulted kitchen tower linked to the outer round tower, thereby inferring that Tower 'D' at the far end of the hall could have been a solar tower. This area could certainly do with vegetation clearance, survey and analysis.

Behind this (kitchen) block is a high tower that appears to be placed on the east curtain although it may be central to the bailey. It could possibly be the tower to the chapel (as seen in the Newcombe illustration figs. 3, 8), but that does seem excessively tall for a castle chapel, if any castle chapels had towers of this nature at all. If it was a curtain tower it must be Tower 'L' (see below). Continuing anti-clockwise
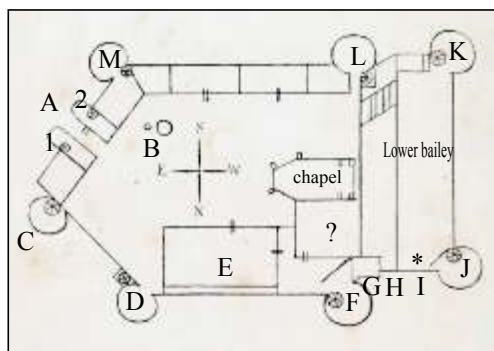
along the west curtain the next tower *(I) might be a representation of the West Gate, (not a tower as such, but it may have risen higher than the curtain on either side); the final tower is the angle-tower 'J' before the curtain turns to the east to joint Tower 'K'. The curtain then runs northwards to meet the high Tower 'L' which may have been some kind of tower keep in the corner of the upper ward. To its left (north) is the smaller tower 'M' (called by Holme the 'Chequer (or Exchequer) Tower' - ideally placed as such near the main gate - and next to this, to complete the circuit is the elongated D-shaped twin-towered gatehouse 'A'. The footings for Tower 'M' are intact and they are hinted at in the survey plan (fig. 6), 'M' circled in blue. This is another area that could benefit from further investigation.

The four rudimentary, yet enlightening historical plans and views presented in this brief survey (the Holme, Newcombe, Buck, and King) are highlighting some potential errors in their and our current interpretation, but compared collectively resolve some issues. Probably King's bird's eye view is the most helpful and reliable. Holme's survey plan with its room descriptions is also extremely valuable. Ruthin Castle is a highly significant, important building in terms of Edwardian castle studies and the CSG really hope that work can be done shortly to save and consolidate what is left and undertake a detailed condition / photogrammetric survey and architectural analysis before further deterioration takes place.