



Fig. 1. Aerial view of the Totnes shell-keep, from the east. Image © David Mitchell. Reproduced with thanks.

Totnes

15. Totnes

The castle was established in the late 11th century by Judhael, a Breton follower of William the Conqueror, to whom the late Saxon town of Totnes had been mediatised before 1086. It passed soon to the de Nonant family, then (around 1200) to de Braose, then (around 1230) to de Cantilupe and finally (around 1270) to de la Zouche with whom it remained until the 15th century. An *Inquisition Post Mortem* of 1273 described the buildings and surrounding wall as dilapidated and the walls on the motte as partly collapsed. In 1326, king Edward II issued a writ “permitting” William de la Zouche to provision, garrison and re-fortify his castle of Totnes. This writ was no doubt obtained under duress, since at this time William was amongst the baronial party who had moved the king to Kenilworth. The family’s main residence was Harringworth (Northants) but perhaps Totnes retained some status value for them since its foundation went back to the Norman Conquest. By Leland’s day, the domestic buildings had gone (a hall, chamber and chapel were mentioned in the bailey in 1273) but the shell-keep and curtain wall survived.

The site is a motte and bailey (with possible traces of a second bailey) whose motte was excavated in 1950-53 in conjunction with study and conservation of the shell-keep (Rigold 1954). The motte is enormous and its lower part is natural rock. The first structure was a timber rectangular tower standing on deeply-laid dry-stone foundations near (but not at) the centre of the motte-top. What other structures accompanied this tower are not known. Evidence from around the footings of the present shell-keep suggested to the excavator that, perhaps in the early 13th century, a shell-keep (or, at least, a ring-wall) had been built between the demise of the central tower and the erection of the present shell-keep. It contained a building with a hearth and walls of rubble and cob construction. The distribution of the fallen roof-slates of this building suggested they had been retained by the putative earlier ring-wall, which itself had left no trace. A reference of 1244 to the obligations of tenants to maintain crenellations suggests that the motte and bailey were defensible at this time; whatever form this ring-wall or shell-keep took, it seems to have had battlements.



Fig. 2. Totnes shell-keep from the inner bailey, (from the north). The present diagonal path up to the entrance post-dates the infilling of the ditch. The entrance is sheltered by the eastern wing wall (left). The inner bailey gateway is to the left, out of view (see figs. 3 & 4).

The present shell-keep, whose construction adopted the alignment and core of its suggested predecessor, is rubble-built with limestone dressings and was joined to the bailey curtain with wing-walls (the upper portion of the western one is original, but the eastern one, and the little door at its top, is of uncertain date). The present pathway up the motte post-dates the in-filling of the motte ditch. The earlier, medieval steps presumably ascended under the protection of the eastern wing-wall, since the entrance to the shell-keep is situated where that wing-wall reaches the motte-top.

The shell-keep wall-walk is complete and has continuous crenellations. Variations in the merlons - their width and possession of simple arrow loops or cross-shaped loops - suggests repairs at various dates in the past (some are documented in the 1460s and 1470s). The round-headed entrance (with draw-bar sockets) to the shell-keep has been altered (narrowed) at some time. The shell wall contains two stairs to the wall-walk, one on either side of the entrance. Since this (north) side of the shell-wall is fairly straight (and continues thus eastwards of the entrance before returning to the curving perimeter in an angle), it perhaps represents the site of a structure containing the two stairs to the wall-walk.

Another passage in the shell-wall on the west side leads to a projecting garderobe (partly re-built after an episode of collapse) situated just inside the western wing-wall. In the arc of the shell-wall between this garderobe and the wall-stair, six corbels just beneath the wall-walk reveal the site of a domestic building against the wall: part of one radial wall belonging to it was discovered in excavation (and still visible, near the stair to the wall-walk). Three putlog holes in the opposite face of the shell wall may represent a second domestic structure, but they are low down in the wall and may equally be random survivals of no structural significance.

The dating of the present shell-keep rests primarily on documentary data. It cannot be the decayed structure referred to in 1273. That reference presumably relates to the earlier building and its suggested ring-wall. The reference of 1326 is the most likely context for the building of the present shell-keep. No architectural detail in the structure is at variance with this suggestion (Rigold 1954).

Internal Diameter: 70ft (21.3m).

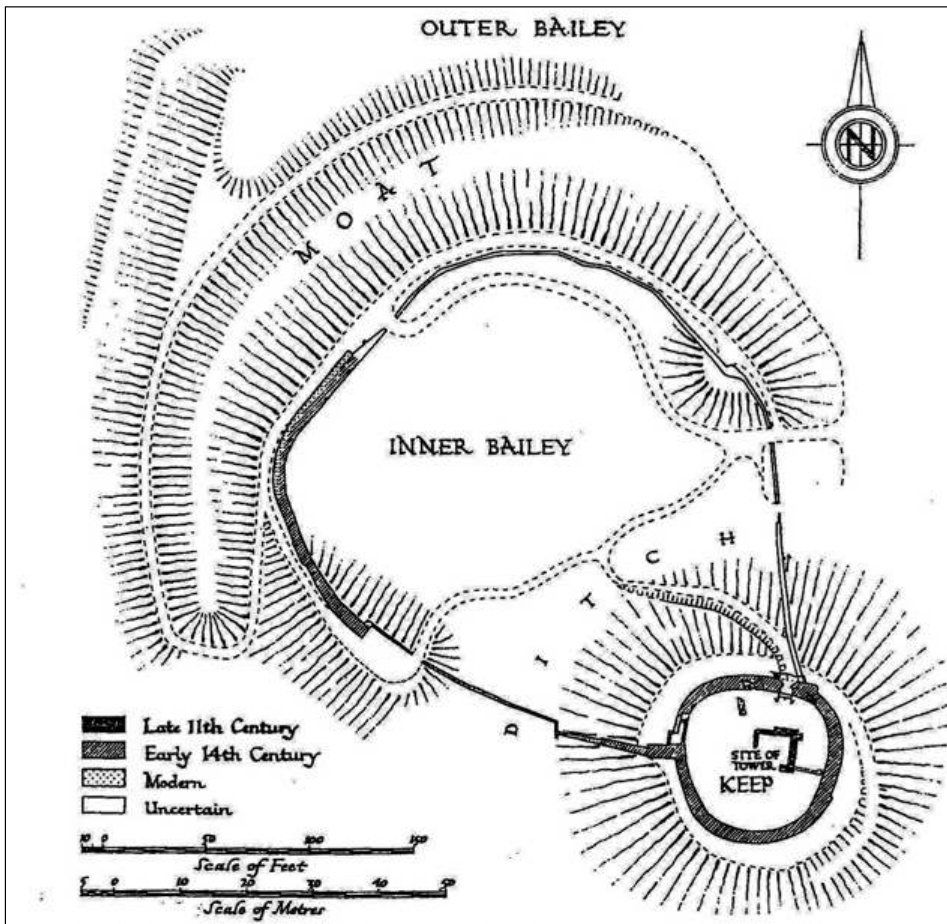
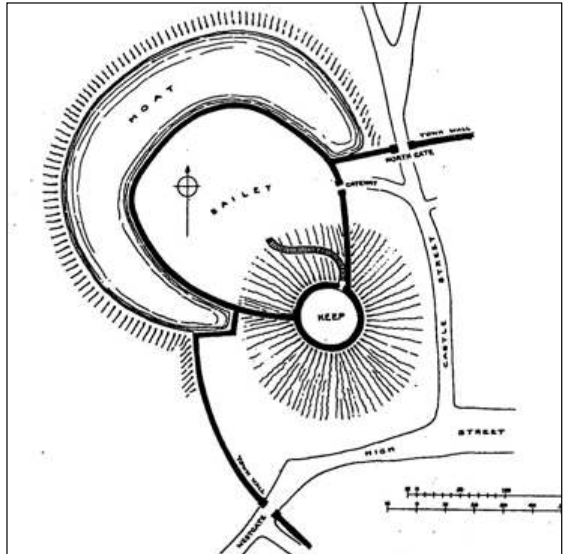
Shell wall height : 20ft (6.09m)

Motte height: 54ft (16.5m)

Published refs: Toy 1933; Rigold 1954; Renn 1968, 326; Rigold 1979; King 1983, I, 119.

RIGHT. Fig. 3. Castle plan by Toy, 1933, PL LIV. © The Sidney Toy Estate, Reproduced with thanks.

BELOW: Fig 4. Castle plan from Rigold. HMSO, 1979 (Totnes Guidebook). Rigold dates the shell and bailey walls to early 14th century. Marked on the plan there are also the footings of a stone tower inside the shell-keep in the 1950s (fig. 7).



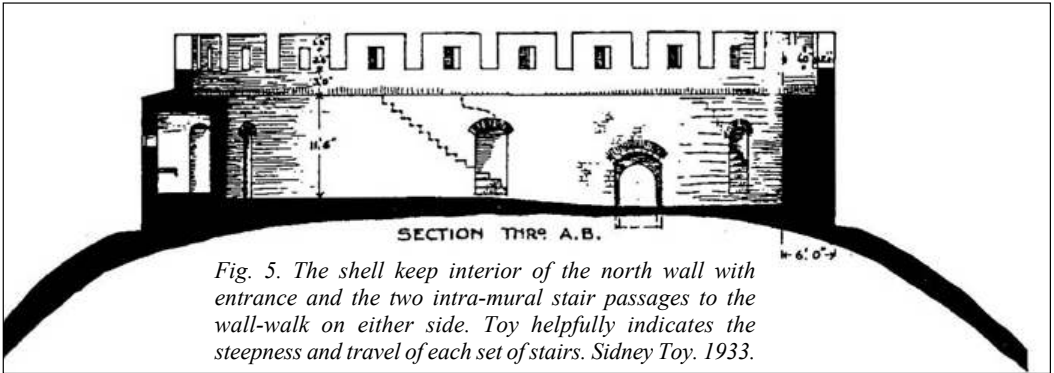
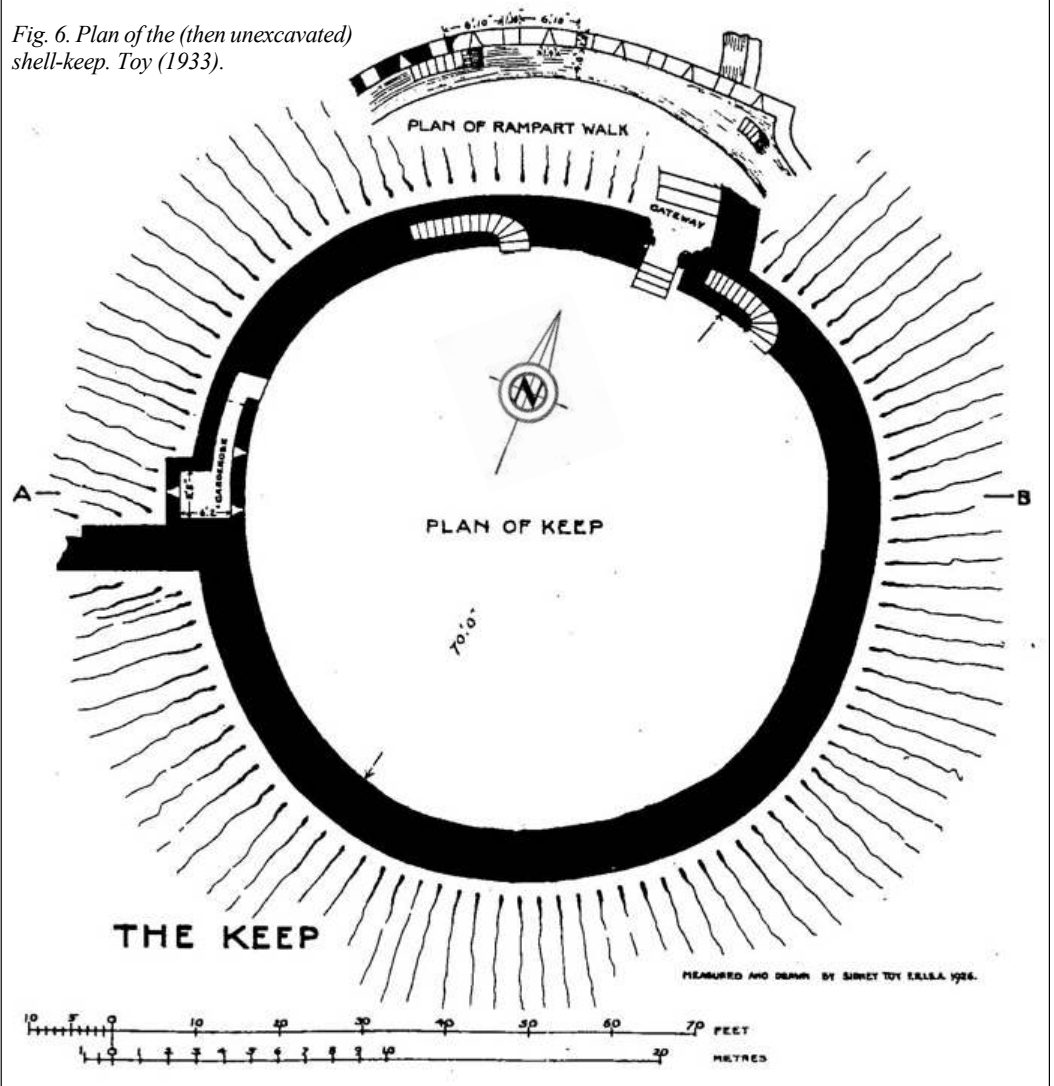


Fig. 6. Plan of the (then unexcavated) shell-keep. Toy (1933).



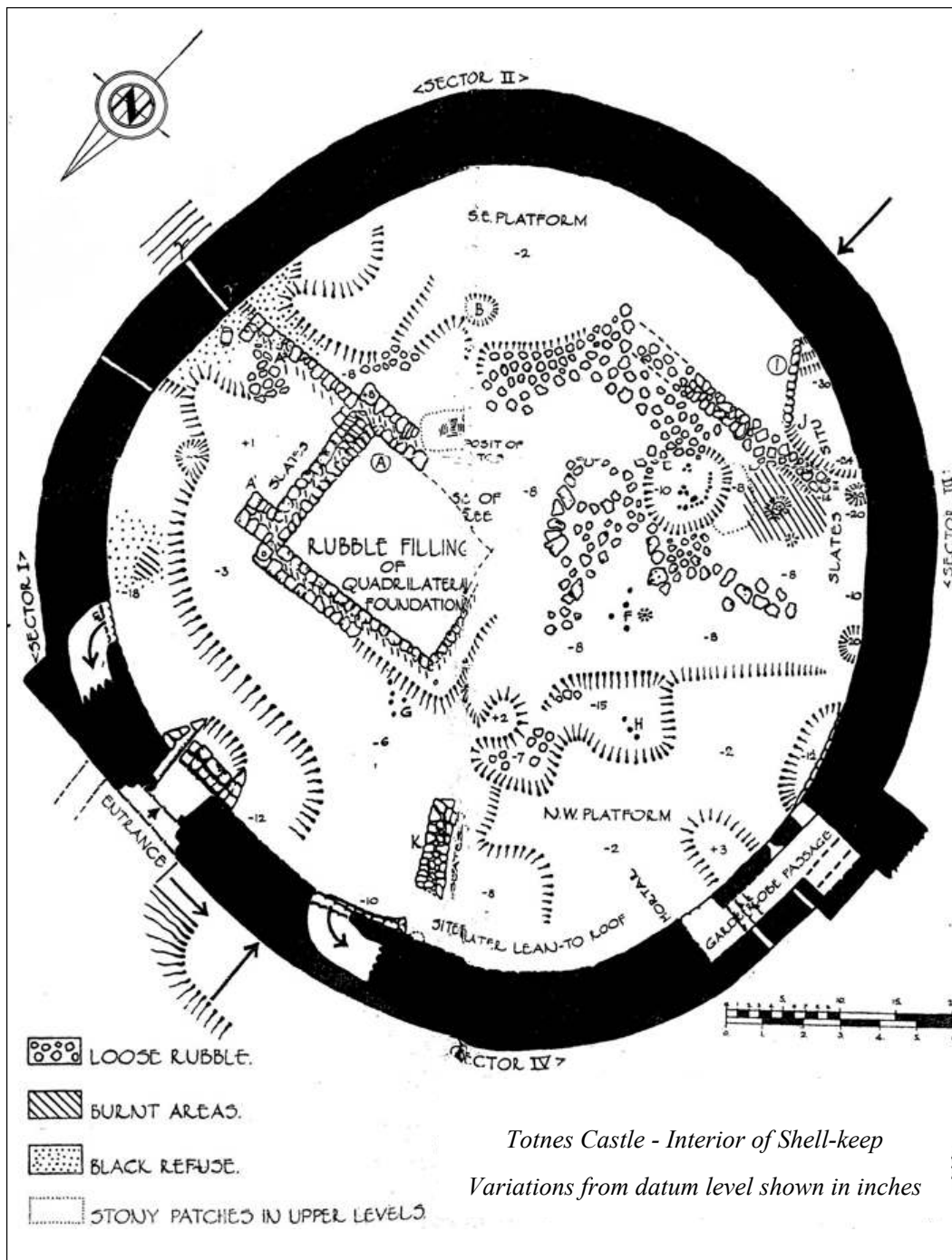


Fig. 7. Totnes shell-keep excavated plan. Rigold, 1954.

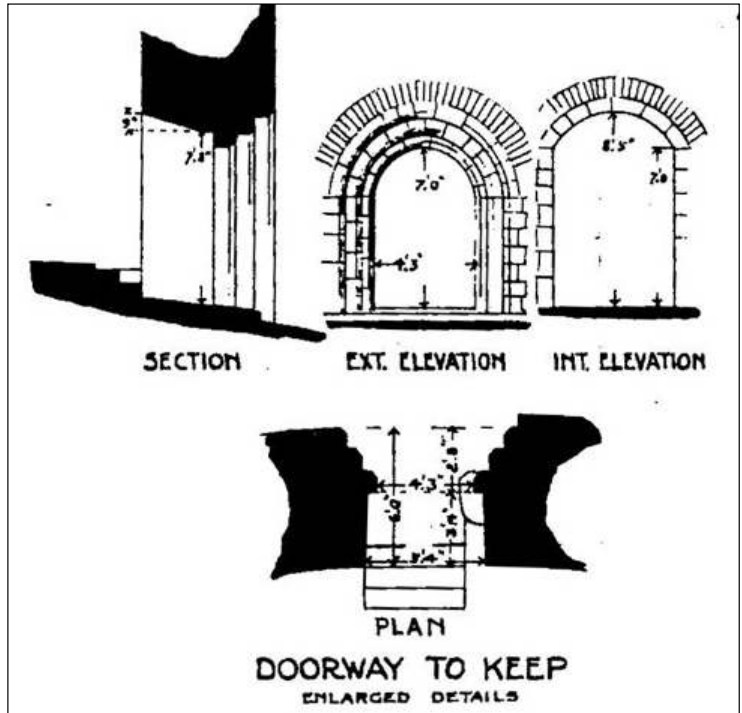


Fig. 8. The gateway into the shell-keep adjacent to the east wing-wall. At some stage the gate width has been narrowed by the insertion of two jambs.

Right. Fig. 9. Details of the shell-keep entrance, of three chamfered orders, on the north side of the keep. The width is quite narrow - 4ft 3". From Sidney Toy. 1933. © The Sidney Toy Estate, Reproduced with thanks.

BELOW: Left. Fig. 10. Immediately left (east) of the main entrance is a small door through the wing wall. Of uncertain date.

BELOW: Right. Fig. 11. Detail of the entrance. An additional jamb has been inserted on the left, probably to narrow the entrance. A fragment of the inner order remains on the right. Toy indicates this on plan.





Figs. 12 & 13. Interior of the shell-keep looking north towards the entrance and the two sets of stairs to the wall-walk. Footings for the square stone & timber building (predating the shell-keep) are marked out (see fig. 7).





Figs. 14 & 15. Shell-keep interior looking west. Square-headed entrance into the garderobe chamber, which turns left and the passage continues lit by two internal loops. There are a series of corbels (see below) between the two doorways. The garderobe chamber is slightly built out to the exterior.





Figs. 16 & 17. The wall circuit continuing along the plain-walled south interior - perhaps an open courtyard area - to the east (fig. 17) where (below left) there are a series of sockets, perhaps for a lean-to type building.





ABOVE: Fig. 18. Long distance view of the shell-keep from the west, with remains of the west wing wall.

BELOW: Right: Fig. 19. West wing wall (upper portion medieval) from within the bailey. Left: Fig. 20. East wing wall (date uncertain).

