



Fig. 1. Tretower shell-keep & donjon. View from the north-west. The shell-keep is dated to the mid-to-late 12th century and the central tower an addition of c. 1230-50, when other internal buildings were gutted.

Tretower

17. Tretower

A motte with bailey was established in the late 11th century by Picard, a follower of Bernard de Neufmarché (Norman lord of Brecon). Picard's descendants held it until the early 14th century. It then passed to the de Bluet family and from them, at the end of the century, to the Berkeleys and thence to other families. An enclosed residence with gatehouse, some 200m away from the castle and known as Tretower Court, was developed by various owners from around 1300 onwards, with much enlargement and improvement from the 15th century onwards.

Understanding the dating and articulation of this early building presents significant challenges, whose details are not all resolved. What follows relies largely on the published accounts. The motte had a rough-stone revetment, but all the primary defences and buildings are assumed to have been of timber. In the mid-late 12th century (the date based loosely on architectural

style rather than on any specific evidence) a shell-keep was built on an irregular plan, perhaps by John Picard. Clark's view, that the remains represent a former rectangular keep, seems not sustainable by the evidence. It is possible that the low motte on which the structure stands resulted from truncation of an originally higher one in order to make a broader building platform for the shell-keep. Its plan included a projecting gatehouse (with drawbridge pit) on the east, a first-floor hall over a basement on the south (stairway in thickness of shell-wall), an adjacent kitchen (with fireplace, chimney and splayed loops in the shell-wall), and a first-floor chamber range (with fireplace and chimney) over a basement on the west. This domestic building, with an L-shaped plan, provided an approximately rectangular shape for the south and west sides of the shell-keep, which in its northern and eastern parts (now much collapsed) was polygonal. The gatehouse thus gave access to a



Fig. 2. The shell-keep from the south-west. The missing corner (it fell as late as 1947) is the section that contained the spiral staircase. Hall to the right (two blocked windows), with the kitchen & fireplace dog-legged out, and solar to the left. The solar has a blocked window to the right of the chimney stack at first floor level.

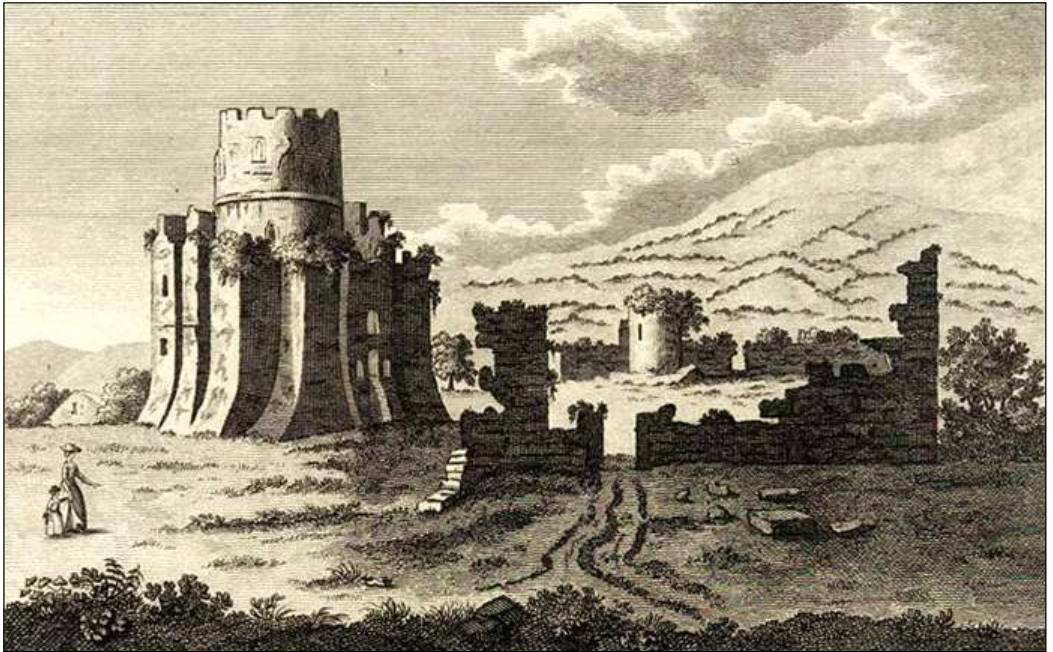
courtyard with hall on the left and chambers opposite. The shell-wall was high enough to protect this two-storey domestic building and its kitchen, but the gatehouse (only the lower portion survives) may have been a tower with a third storey. Access to the wall-walk was via a stair in the south-west angle, where hall and chamber range met. Wing-walls connecting the shell to the bailey have been suggested. It is notable that external windows of the first-floor hall and first-floor chamber range pierced the shell-wall, in which evidence of timber re-enforcement has been noted.

In the 13th century (dating is unspecific, but the tenure of Roger Picard, around 1230-1250, has been suggested) the structure was transformed. The hall and chamber range were demolished and a circular *donjon*, with walls 9ft thick and a battered base, was built in the centre of the motte-top. It had three storeys over a basement, with a first-floor entrance on the north-east and stairs in the wall-thickness. It was clearly residential: with substantial fireplaces and windows in the first two storeys, windows only in the third, and a well in the basement. At the same time as the *donjon* was built, the shell-wall was heightened to give greater protection to this tall tower. Near the

former western chamber range, a portion of wall-walk and parapet (pierced by a deep arrow loop) of this heightened shell-wall still survives. The earlier wall-walk is thought to have run at a lower height coinciding with the chamber roof, now indicated by some change of masonry style. The external windows of the earlier hall and chamber range were now blocked. The overall impression is of a much more defensible castle design, but now of the *donjon* and ring-wall variety rather than a shell-keep. From the second storey of the *donjon* a covered wooden bridge gave access to the wall-walk of the ring-wall. On the western and southern sides, at a later date, are traces of other structures built in the space between the *donjon* and the outer wall. Clark (1876) wondered whether the whole space between the new structure and the remains of the old was roofed.

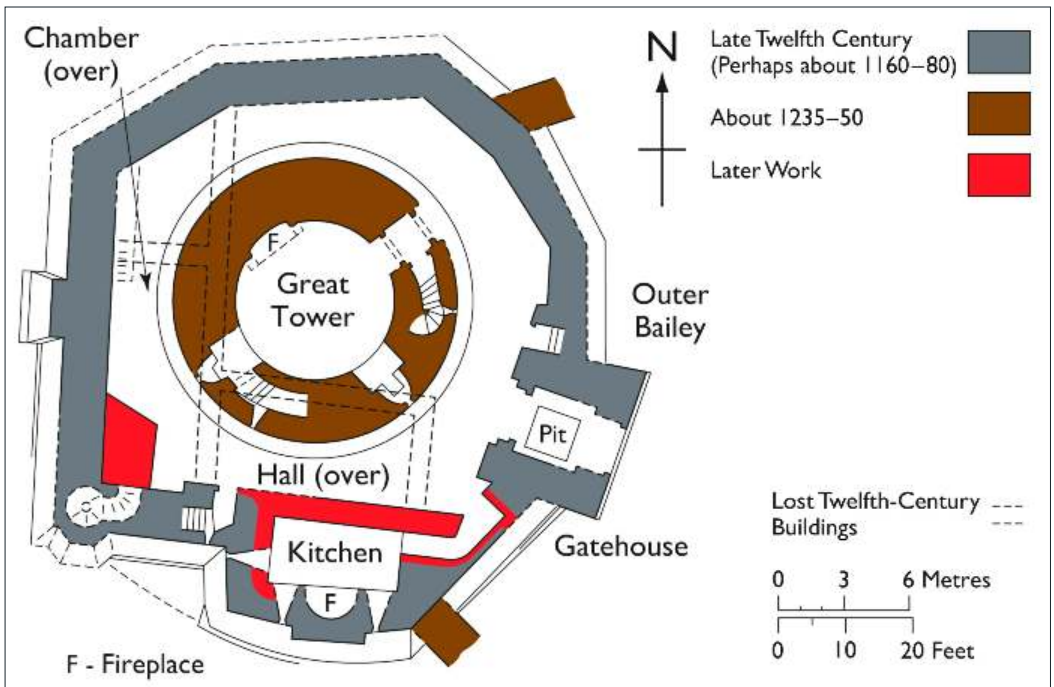
Internal diameter: c. 50ft (15.3m) but irregular shape.
Shell wall height 30ft (9.2m) to inner court (Clark).
Motte height: 12ft. (3.6m)

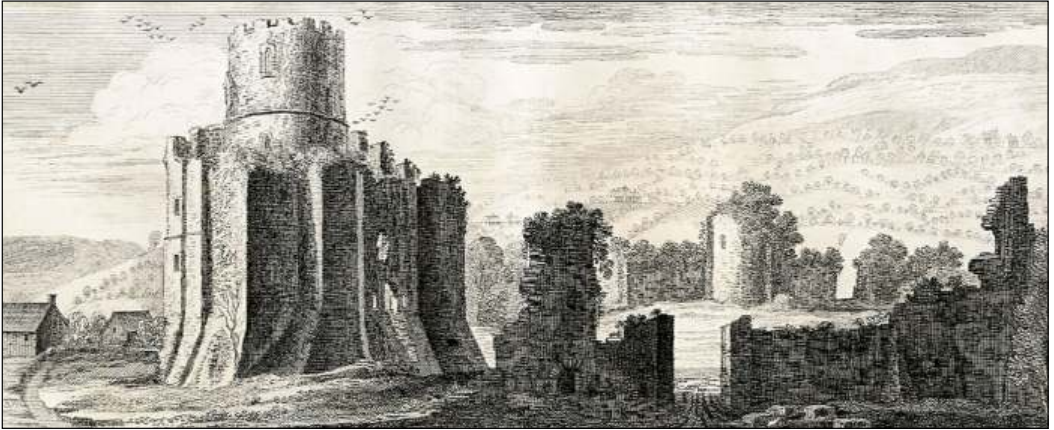
Published refs: Clark 1876; Radford 1969; Renn 1968, 332; Wilcox 1981, 30-31; King 1983, I, 21; Robinson 2010.



ABOVE: Fig. 3. 'Trtior Castle in Brecknockshire', copperplate published by Alexander Hogg, c. 1780s. Engraving is based on an original illustration by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck (1741)(fig. 5). Gatehouse tower stands nearly to full height.

BELOW: Fig. 4. Most recent ground plan from Cadw. © Crown Copyright (2015) Cadw. See also fig. 8.





ABOVE: Fig. 5. Samuel & Nathaniel's view of Tretower Castle from the south (1741). The mid-12th century two/three storey gatehouse remains intact.

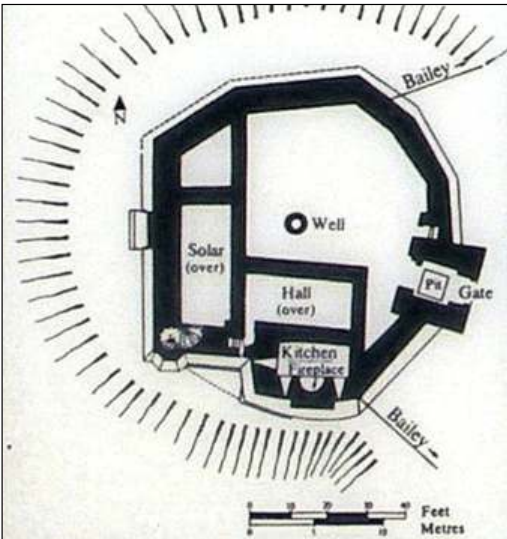
BELOW: Fig. 6. The shell-keep section with the hall (blocked windows) and the flue for the kitchen fireplace, with triangular and rectangular smoke vents (cf. Ogmere).





ABOVE: Fig. 7. A cut-away reconstruction of the shell keep as it may have appeared in the late 12th century. The chamber (or solar) with fireplace is to the right; the hall to the left, accessed, presumably by a wooden stair from the courtyard. (Illustration by Chris Jones-Jenkins). From Robinson (Cadw), 2010. Reproduced by kind permission of the illustrator.

BELOW: Left: Fig. 8. The plan of the shell keep prior to the building of the round tower (Photo of the Cadw on-site information panel. Crown copyright. (2015) Cadw. Right: Fig. 9. Detail of the solar on the west with a 13th-century displaced-traversed arrow slit at the crown of the chimney stack and wall-walk (cf. White Castle).





ABOVE: Fig. 10. Entrance to the shell-keep/gatehouse. The pit between two sets of doors. BELOW: Left: Fig. 11. The north-west corner where the outer wall has fallen, once the location of the solar. Right: Fig. 12. The fallen (1947) south-west corner, location of the spiral stair and link between the hall (above) and the solar.





ABOVE: Fig. 13. Shell-keep looking south-west to the entrance (low rubble pile), and the location of the kitchen and hall beyond. BELOW: Fig. 14. Looking east at the fallen south-west corner and (right) the kitchen block with the blocked triangular-headed light.

