

Ellesmere secondary modern school

Excavations at Myddle castle – June 1966

Map Ref: SJ469226

By senior pupils of Ellesmere Secondary Modern School under History Master Mr Jeremy Connell

Aims were to draw an accurate plan of the existing walls and to discover if possible any features at present covered.

Section A

The site was chosen to discover whether the wall from the existing tower continued to the south wall.

Layer I	Top soil
Layer II	Sandy soil
Layer III	Lime or mortar
Layer IV	Charcoal with mussel shells
Layer V	Concrete floor
Layer VI	Sandstone and clay hard core
Layer VII	Sand with charcoal and some rubble

Pottery: two fragments of 18th century pottery were found in Layer IV. Two fragments of Medieval pottery from layer VII and a medieval rim from Layer I.

Features

1. The floor, Layer V and VI was in reasonable condition, but the surface was much broken near the south wall. Below the floor at this point the possible remains of a fireplace were uncovered at Layer VII, a mortar level came out 1 foot from the East side of the section and then a level of charcoal emerged and the sand beneath this was extremely hard.
2. The object of digging the section was achieved and the wall in question does join the south wall.

Section B

The object was to ascertain the depth of the foundations at this point.

Layer I	Top soil
Layer II	Sandy soil
Layer III	Building rubble
Layer IV	White clay
Layer V	Sand
Layer VI	White clay
Layer VII	Shifting silt

Pottery: various floor tiles and fragments from the top layers. 2 medieval bases from Layer III.

Features:

A buttress or tower foundation appeared. 22 ft. 7 inches from the north west corner of the castle. It is eight feet long and 4ft 7inches out from the main wall.

We were forced to abandon this project at a depth of seven feet as water started entering the section and the silt at the bottom formed a quick sands.

Further work of a purely exploratory nature was carried out on the east side of the castle. With reference to the wall leading from the tower in this direction. This wall also reaches the outer wall. Completing an L shape with the tower at the angle of the L. However, in the course of this examination another wall was uncovered running parallel with the main east wall at a distance from it of nine feet. We only had time to follow this for a distance of twelve feet and we conducted no sectional investigation in this area, clearing topsoil only down to the present level of the tops of the wall.

Conclusions

The main living quarters of the castle would appear to have been L shaped running inside the north and west walls of the castle. The west wing being wider at about 32 ft. To the north's 27 feet. However, there was probably less difference in actual wall distances since both distances are conjectured from the foundations found at the north west corner. The actual walls were probably thinner. The open part of the L were enclosed by a wall of the same thickness as the other outer walls i.e. about six feet and the buildings existed inside this wall but whether they went all the way round has yet to be decided.

The dates of the pieces of pottery have yet to be ascertained. Those pieces marked MC66 A IV would date the kitchen refuse found above the floor in Section A and those marked A. VII might give an idea of when the floor was built since they occurred just beneath it. All the finds together with a plan and this report are to be forwarded to the Shropshire County Council Librarian for safe keeping and further enquiries can be made to that office.

Note

The pieces of pottery and tile which do not carry section marks are unstratified fragments from either the topsoil above the east walls or pieces picked up in the general area of the courtyard. These are not considered important as the hole of this area was, until recently used as a garden.

Excavations at Myddle Castle 1966

By Senior Pupils at Ellesmere Secondary Modern School under the supervision of Mr J Connell, History master at the School.

Myddle was originally part of the estate of the L'Estrange family who were Lords of Knockin. In order to strengthen the Lordship a licence was obtained from Edward III to 'embattle' the Manor House of Myddle. This term could mean anything from building a strong tower, and curtain wall, as at Stokesay to the wholesale rebuilding of the original into a regular castle which is what appears to have happened at Myddle. According to various accounts the castle was two stories high and four square enclosing a square courtyard.

The castle passed from the L'Estranges to the Derby's who placed castellans or caretakers in while they lived elsewhere. The last of these, Humphrey Kynaston allowed his personal debts to mount to so high a level that he had to flee the area and the castle was abandoned and began to deteriorate. Legend says this process was hastened by an 'earthquake' in 1688.

At present all that remains above ground is a single round tower inside the castle, presumably at the North West corner of the inside courtyard. Measurements and digging would tend to question the four squaredness of the original castle. Although time has not allowed an absolutely decisive study, the present investigations would suggest that an L-shaped structure with the open parts enclosed by a wall, rather than living quarters.

The remains of windows in the remaining tower show that these living quarters existed on the north and the west side of the castle, and a section by the south wall has brought to light a cement floor, a fireplace and the continuation of the inside wall from the tower.

A second section on the west wall has unearthed a square buttress of tower foundation and other investigations have shown the thickness of the outer walls.

Conclusions so far would be that the west wall of the castle was 6ft 6ins thick, the north wall 5ft 10ins. 22ft 7ins from the north west corner on the west wall are the foundations of either a buttress or a square tower 8 ft wide and 4ft 7inches deep from the wall. The floor of the rooms on the west side was made of a mixture of clay and sandstone laid upon small irregular stone slabs and covered with about half an inch of cement. In the corner made by the south wall and the inside N/S wall from the tower are the remains of a fireplace. Above this floor was a layer of kitchen rubbish made up mainly of mussel and oyster shells and small bones. Above this was a dump of lime mortar, which we assumed to have been left by those who repaired the tower in 1849, or from some later building programme. Pottery from the rubbish would suggest the eighteenth century which puts it into a period long after the castle fell into ruins.

Several pieces of medieval pottery have been uncovered but they are all of a fragmentary nature. A full report will be sent to the County Architect and the pottery will probably end up in the Shrewsbury museum.