

Castles in Wales



Kidwelly Castle © Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales

LG
NLW

national
museum
wales
amgueddfa
cymru

CBHC
RCAHMW

Cadw



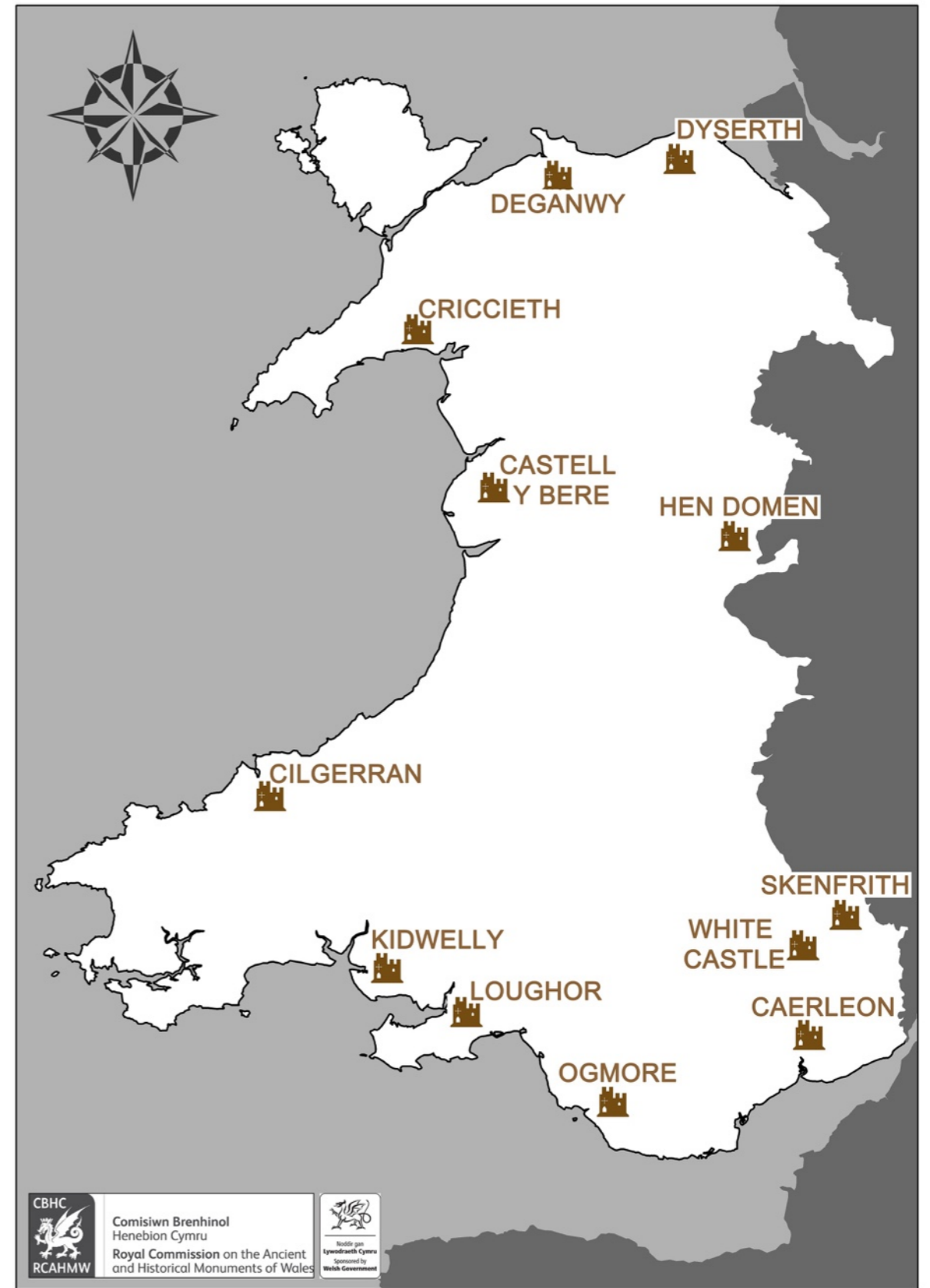
Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Introduction

In this book you will:

- Find out the history of castles in Wales.
- Discover castles from across Wales.
- Explore the collections of National Museum Wales, National Library Wales, Cadw and Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales.

The castles shown in this book are just a small sample of the castles around Wales.



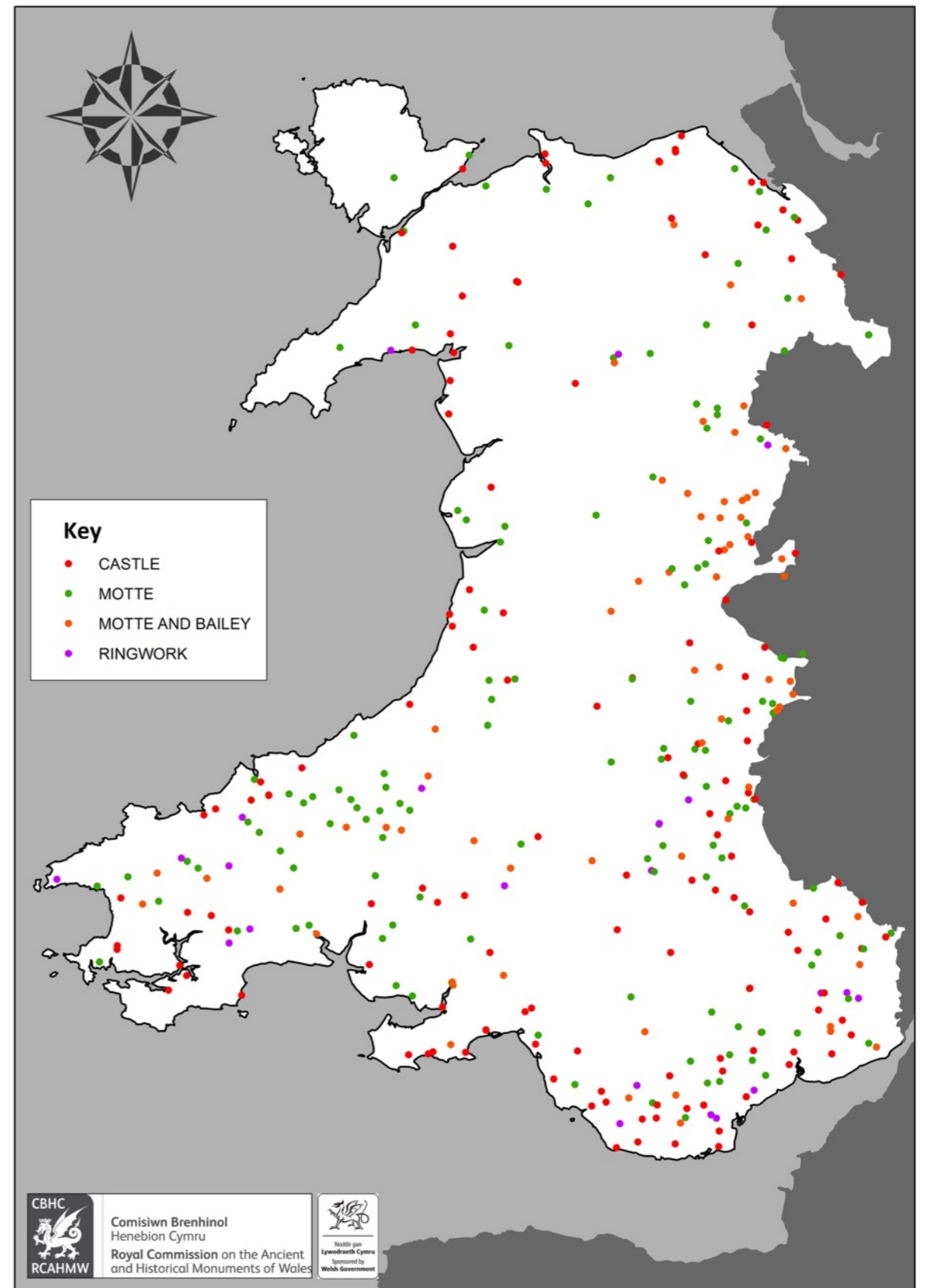
Map of Wales showing the castles in this book

Background

There are over **400 castles** in Wales. Castles first began appearing after the Norman conquest of England in the late 11th century. The first castles in Wales were built by the **Anglo-Normans (English)** on the border with England and in south Wales.

The manuscript Brut y Tywysogion mentions the building of Cymer Castle in 1116. This was the first historical evidence of a castle to be built by a Welsh lord.

Many of the castles passed between Welsh and English ownership as the English invaded and the Welsh fought back.



Map of castles across Wales

Wooden Castles

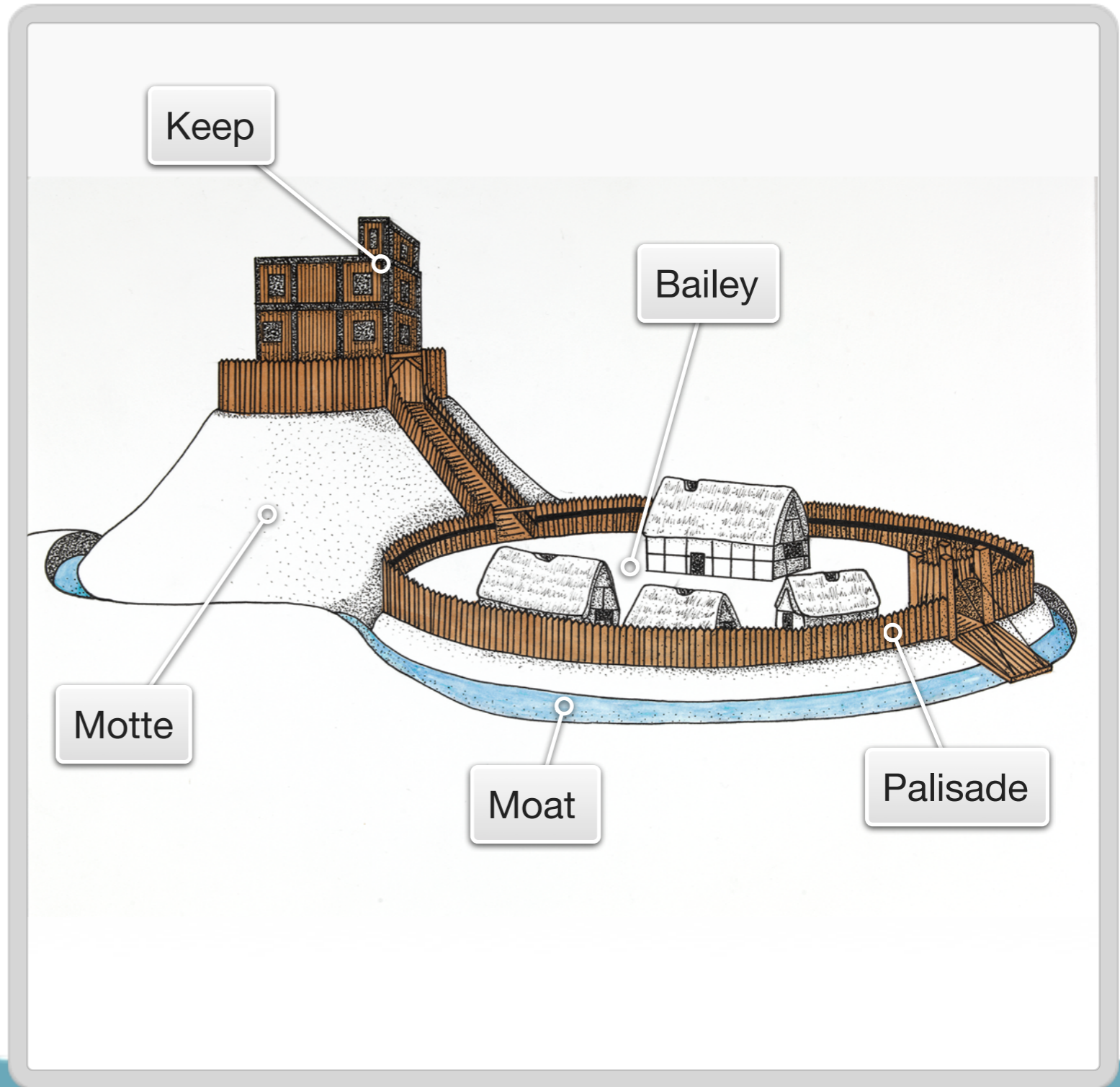
Most early wooden castles were made up of a **motte**, **bailey** or **ringwork**. Some were a mix of all 3.

A **motte** was a mound of earth with a tower in the middle called a **keep**.

A **bailey** was a courtyard with defences around it.

A **ringwork** was a bank with a wooden fence called a **palisade**.

Some castles were surrounded by a ditch filled with water called a **moat**.



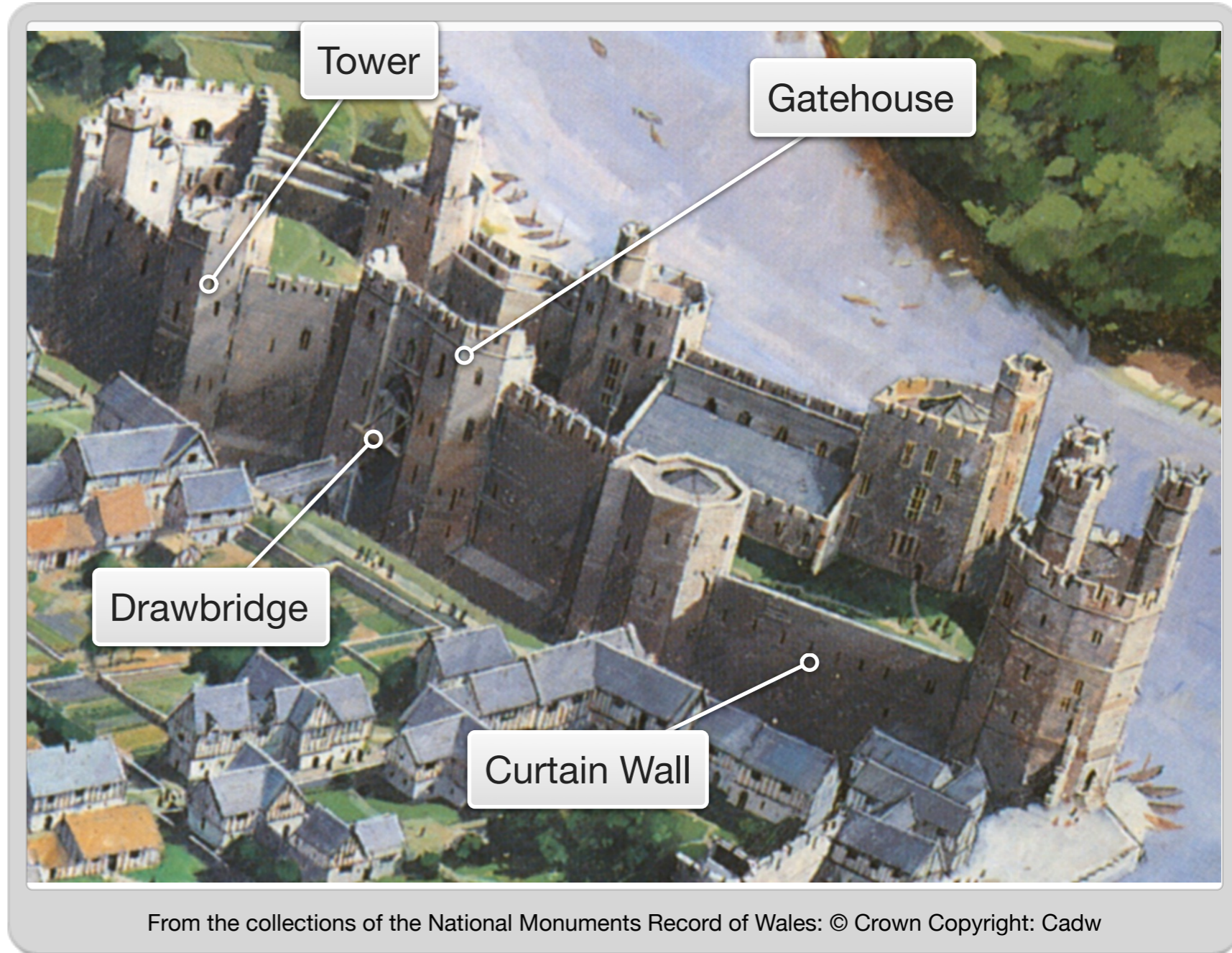
Stone Castles

When castles were rebuilt out of stone they would sometimes follow the same design as the wooden castle. The wooden buildings and palisades would be rebuilt out of stone.

An additional feature in stone castles was the **curtain wall**. A curtain wall was a protective wall with stone towers along it.

Sometimes the castle would be split into different areas called **wards** often with an inner and outer ward.

Some castles had walls surrounded by other walls and were called **concentric castles**.



From the collections of the National Monuments Record of Wales: © Crown Copyright: Cadw



**Did
you know...**

- **Toilets** in castles were called garderobes. These small rooms had a seat with a hole in the middle. All the toilet waste would fall down a shoot and end up outside the walls or in the moat!
- **Murder holes** were holes above gateways. If enemies managed to get into the gatehouse they could be attacked from above. All sorts of horrible things could be thrown onto the soldiers below such as rocks and scalding hot liquids.
- **Dungeons** were built underneath some castles so they had somewhere to put their prisoners.
- **Spiral staircases** in towers usually turned clockwise. This was designed to make it difficult for enemies attacking the castle. Most soldiers used their right hand to fight with their sword. The defending side would have much more room to use their sword.

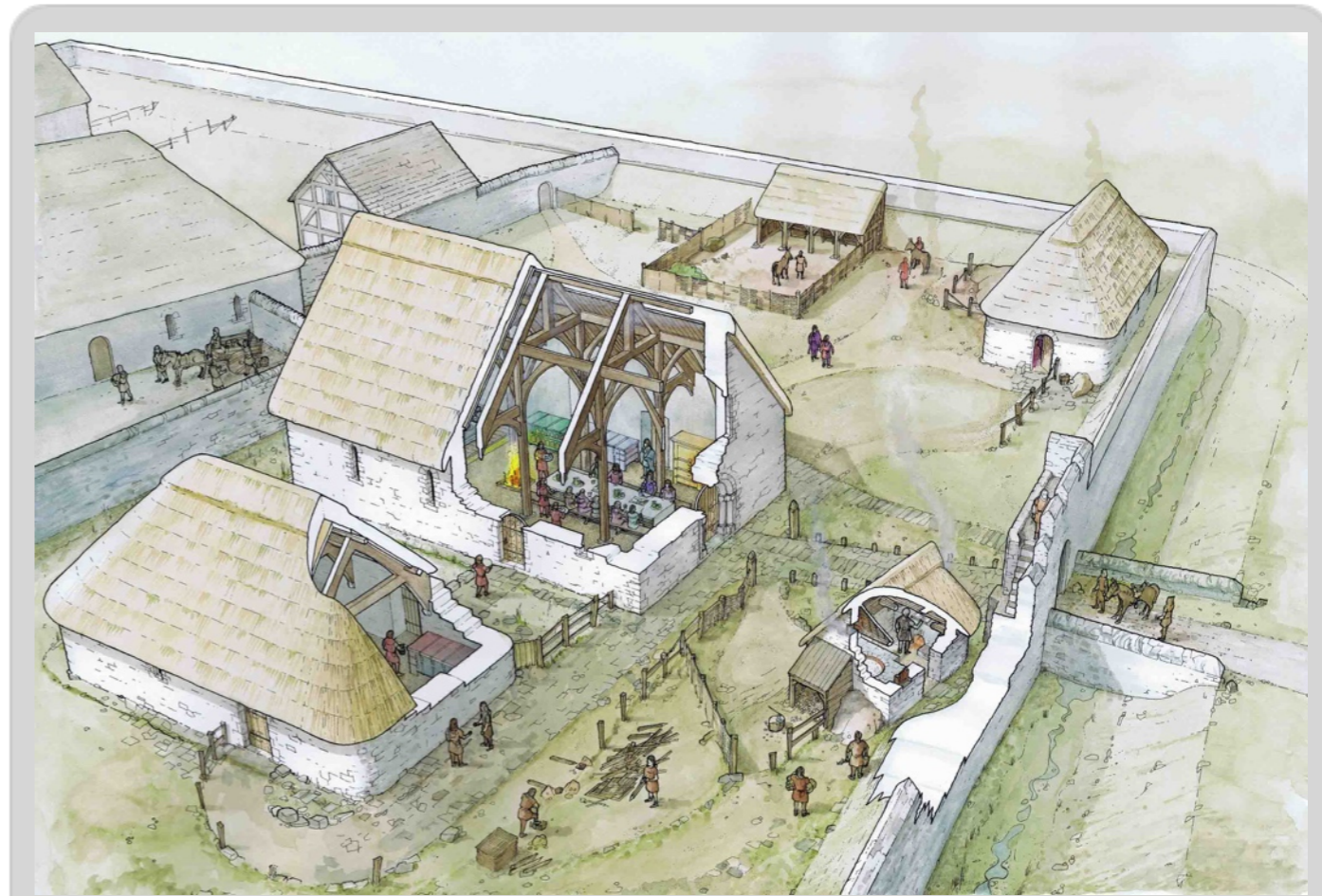
Llysoedd

Castles were not the only structures used during the Age of the Princes.

Before the Welsh lords began building castles, Welsh princes would use **Llysoedd**. Llysoedd is the Welsh word for the **Royal Courts**. The **Llys** would have an enclosure containing a hall, a kitchen, stables, a barn, privy (toilet) and kennels.

The Welsh princes would travel from Llys to Llys to carry out the business of ruling over their kingdom. The people of the court and even the objects in the halls would travel with the prince.

Once Castles began to be built the Welsh princes still continued to use Llysoedd.



Reconstruction of Llys Rhosr on Anglesey

© Menter Môn

Caerleon

Caerleon Castle was an **English motte and bailey** castle first built in the **11th century**.

The only parts of the castle still standing are the 11th century motte and a round defensive tower built in the early 13th century.



Ivory chess piece discovered in Caerleon, dated to 12th or 13th Century.

© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



Caerleon Castle Motte is in the circled area.

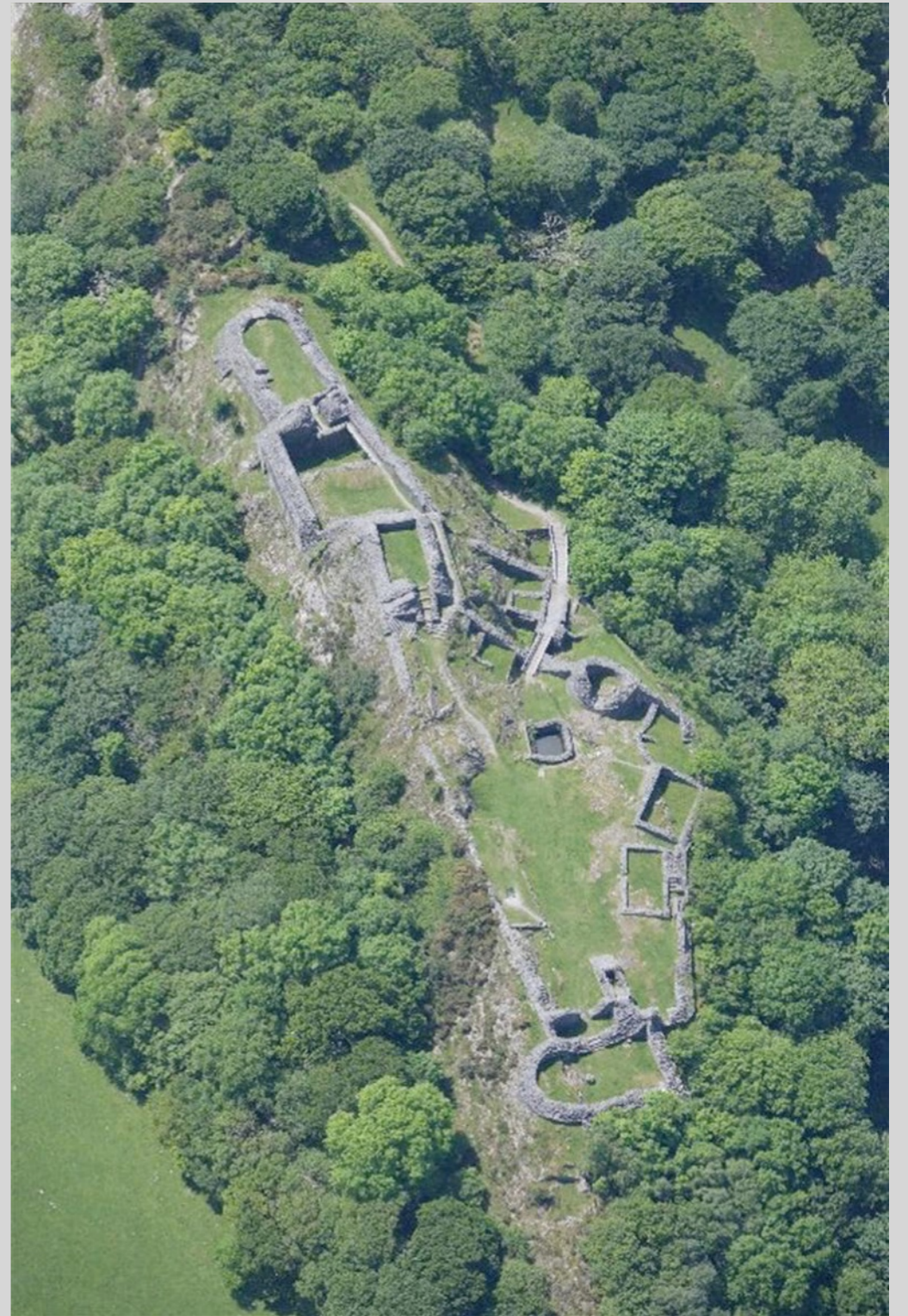
© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales

Castell y Bere

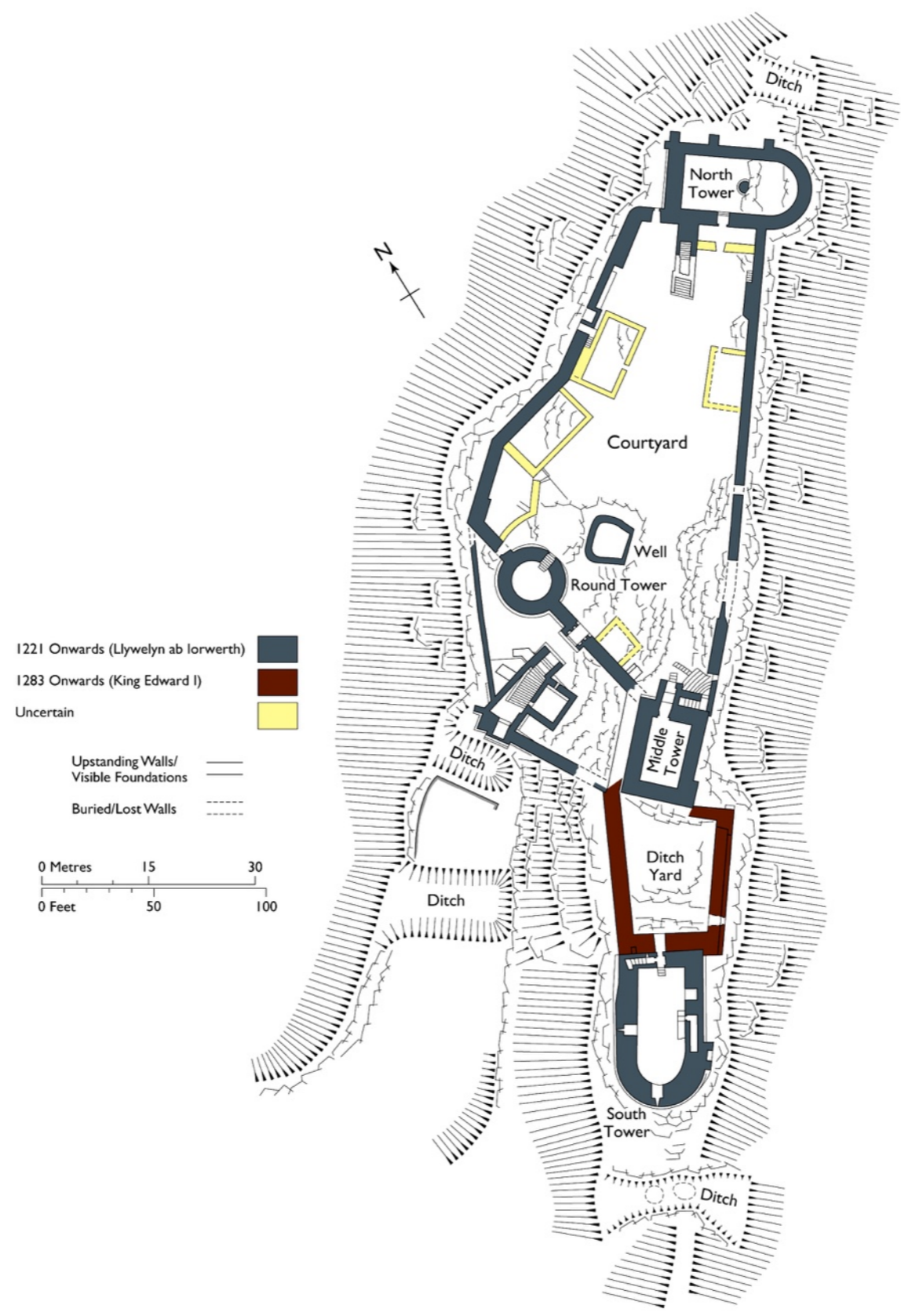
Castell y Bere was a **Welsh castle** built by Llywelyn Fawr in **1221**. The design has a **curtain wall with D-shaped towers** and it is one of the largest Welsh castles. The **English** captured it on 25th April 1283. The English carried out repairs in the 1280s and 90s. It was **destroyed** during the Welsh uprising of 1294-95.



Wooden bucket with an iron handle discovered at Castell y Bere, dated to 13th century. © Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



Aerial view of Castell y Bere. © Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales



Plan of Castell y Bere. © Crown Copyright: Cadw

Cilgerran

Cilgerran Castle was an **English castle**. It started as a **ringwork** and was replaced with a small **curtain wall with 2 large stone towers**. The date of the first build is uncertain, but it was first mentioned in **1165** when it was captured by the **Welsh**. It was retaken by the **English** in 1204. It was taken again by the **Welsh** during Llywelyn Fawr's campaigns in 1215. It was retaken for the final time for the **English** in 1223.



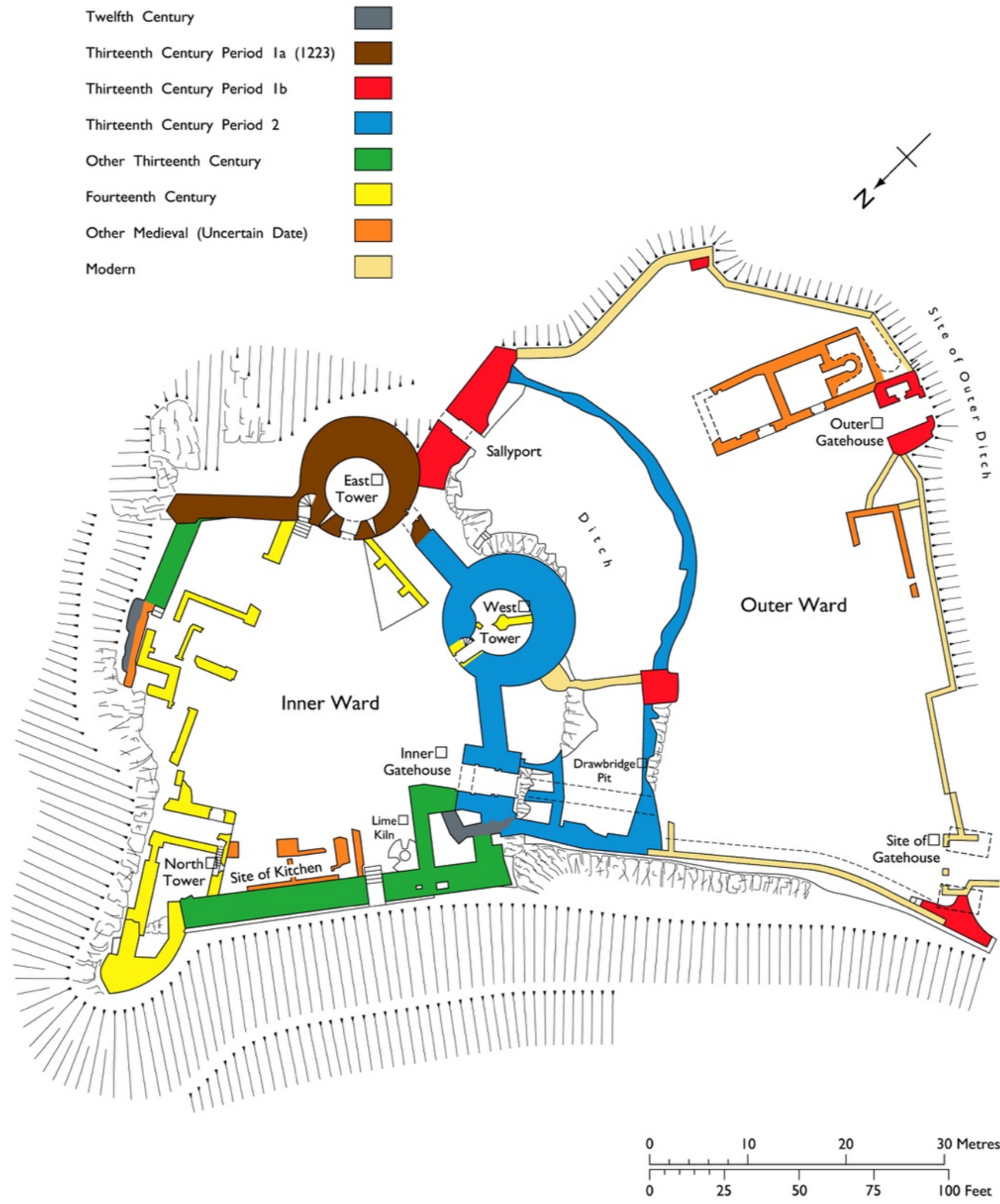
Aerial view of Cilgerran Castle.

© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales



Cooking pot discovered Cilgerran Castle, dated to 13th or 14th century.

© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



Plan of Cilgerran Castle. © Crown Copyright: Cadw

Criccieth

Criccieth was a **Welsh castle** built by Llywelyn Fawr in the **1230s**. The design is a **curtain wall with rectangular towers**. The inner ward was protected by 2 large round gatehouse towers. The castle was captured by the **English** during King Edward I's conquest of north Wales in 1282 - 83.



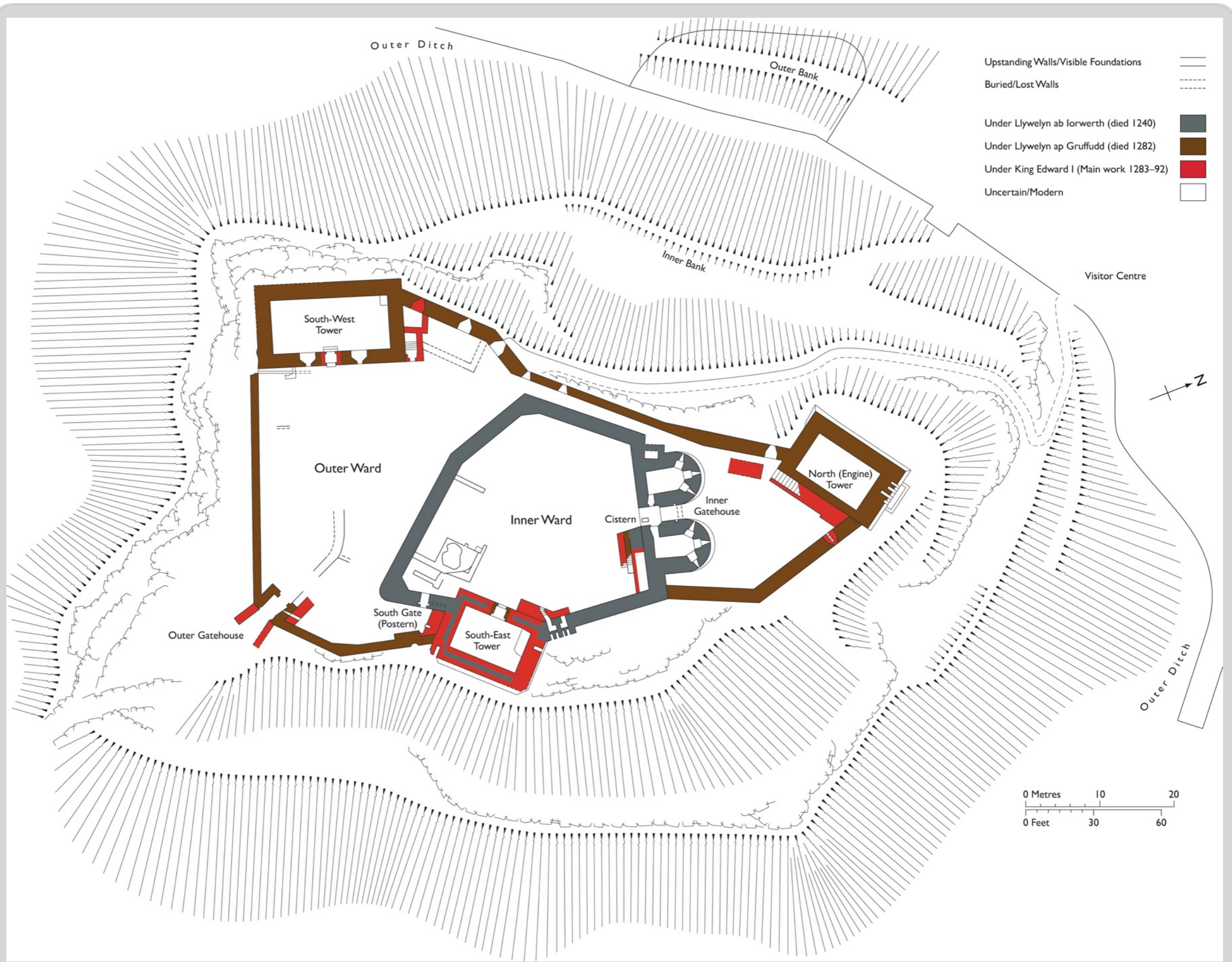
Aerial view of Criccieth Castle.

© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales



Enamel Christ from a cross discovered at Criccieth Castle, dated to 1200s.

© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



Plan of Criccieth Castle. © Crown Copyright: Cadw

Deganwy

Deganwy Castle was first built by the **English** in **1088**. The design used two hills as two **Mottes**. The castle was **destroyed** by the **Welsh** in the early 13th century and rebuilt by Llywelyn Fawr from 1213. The castle was **destroyed** again by the Welsh before it could be surrendered to the English. It was rebuilt again by the **English** King Henry III in 1244-54. The castle was **destroyed** one final time by the Welsh prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1263.



Aerial view of Deganwy Castle.

© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales



Royal head on a stone carving possibly of Llywelyn Fawr discovered at Deganwy Castle, dated to 1213 - 1230. © Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

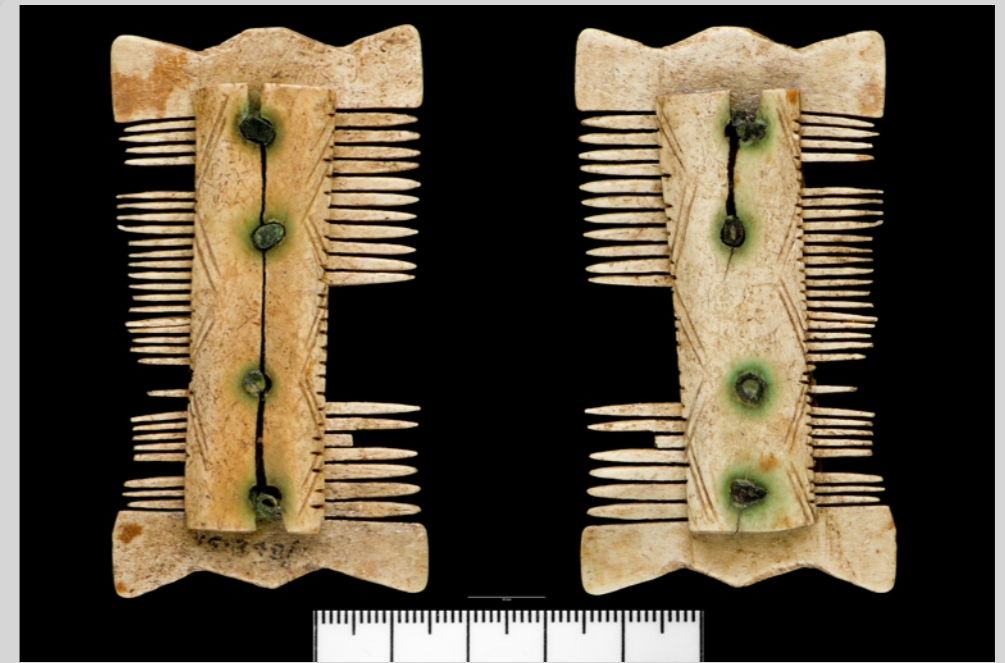
Dyserth

Dyserth was an **English castle** originally built by Henry III around **1241**. It was attacked by the Welsh in 1245 and again in 1263, when it was **destroyed** after a 6 week siege by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.



Aerial view of Dyserth Castle.

© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales



Medieval bone comb discovered in Dyserth Castle

© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



Iron socketed arrowhead discovered in Dyserth Castle, dated to 1240-1270.

© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

Hen Domen

Hen Domen was an **English motte and bailey** castle built soon after the Norman conquest in the **11th century**. It remained in use into the 13th century. It was an earth-and-timber castle, never rebuilt out of stone as it was replaced by the stone Montgomery Castle.



Bone gaming counter discovered in Hen Domen, dated to late 11th to late 13th centuries.

© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



The circle of trees shows the motte of Hen Domen.

© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales

Kidwelly

Kidwelly was an **English castle** first built in the early **11th century**. It began as a **d-shaped ringwork**. The earliest stone buildings date to 1200. Kidwelly is an example of a **concentric castle** with a square inner ward with **four large round towers** surrounded by a semi circular **curtain wall**. It swapped between **English** and **Welsh** ownership several times, but from 1201 it stayed English.

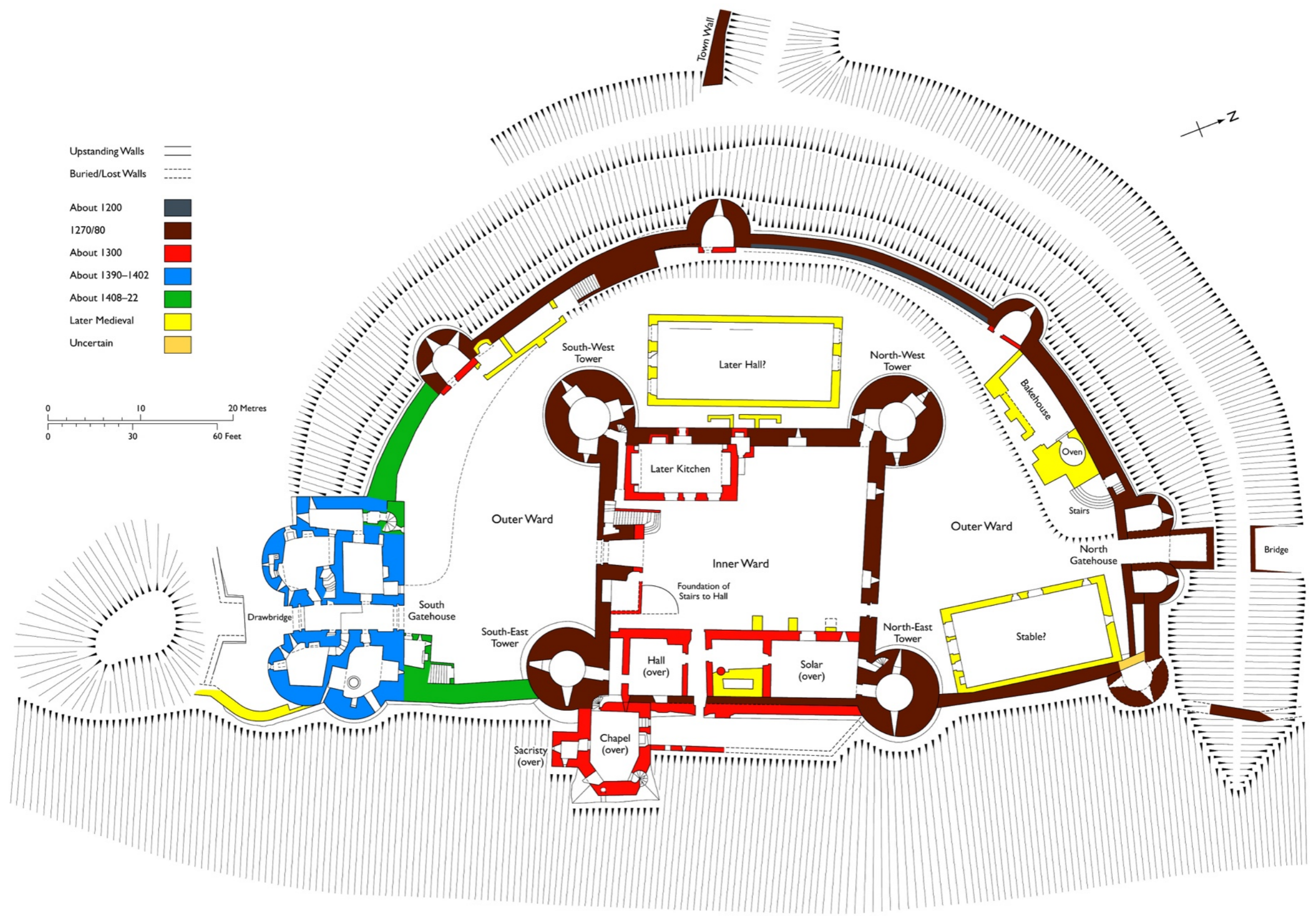


Aerial view of Kidwelly Castle.

© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales



Copper alloy annular brooch discovered in Kidwelly Castle, dated to 13th or 14th century. © Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



Plan of Kidwelly castle. © Crown Copyright: Cadw

Loughor

Loughor Castle was an **English ringwork** built in the early **12th century**. In 1151 the Welsh **destroyed** the wooden castle. Soon afterwards it was rebuilt by the English. A **curtain wall** was built around 1200 and a rectangular **stone tower** was added in the late 13th century.



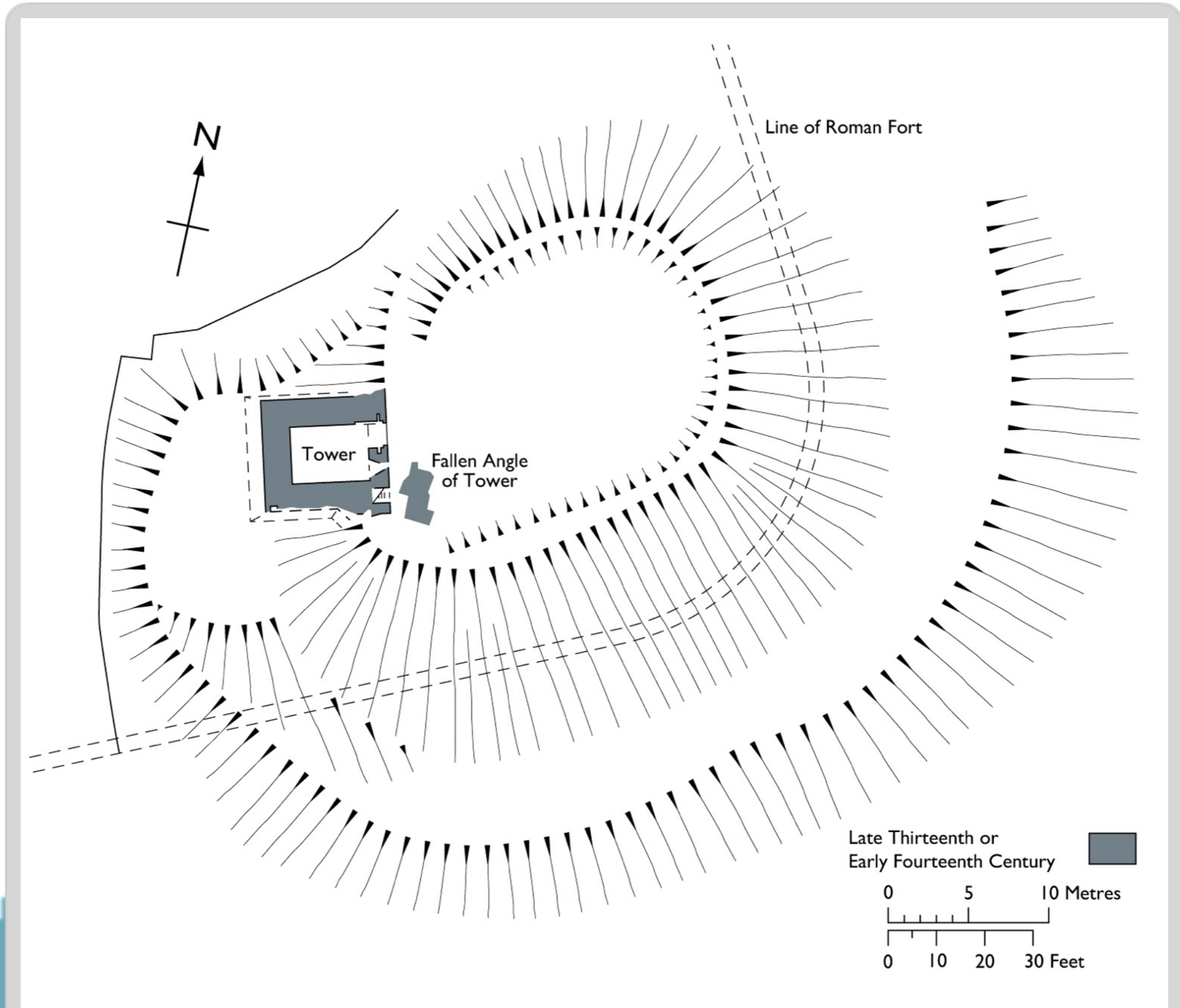
Bone gaming counter discovered in Loughor Castle, dated to 11th or 12th century.

© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



The remains of the tower of Loughor Castle.

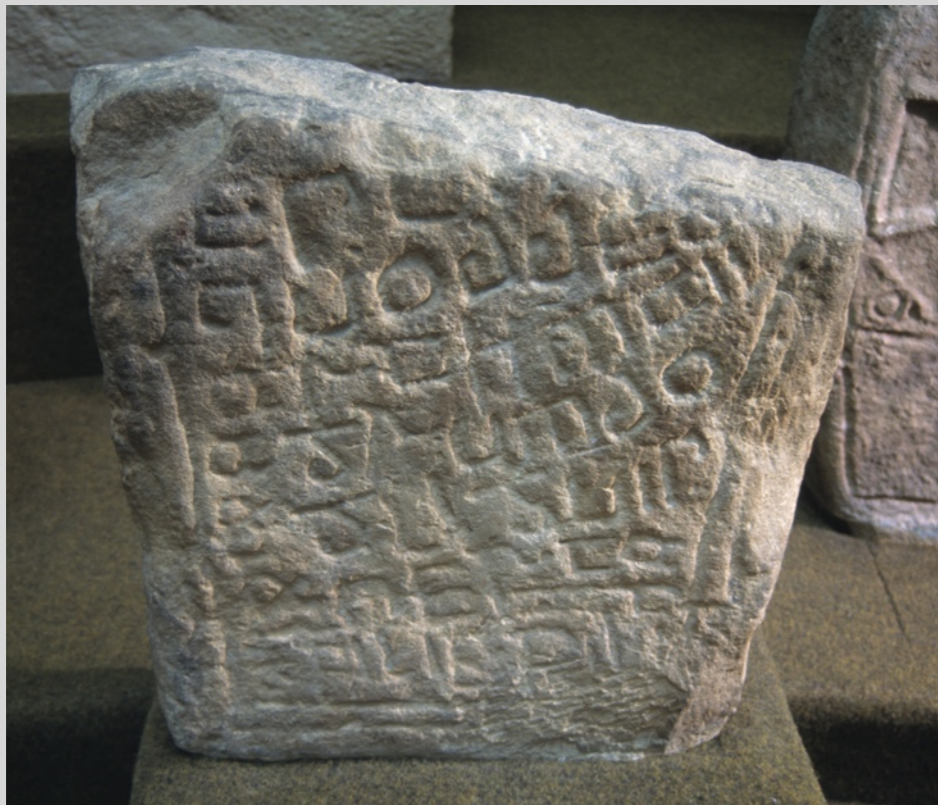
© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales



Plan of Loughor Castle. © Crown Copyright: Cadw

Ogmore

Ogmore Castle was an **English ringwork and bailey** built around **1100**. The **keep** dates to the 12th century and the **curtain wall** dates to the early 13th century. At high tide the moat would fill as openings in the wing walls allowed water in to surround the inner ward.



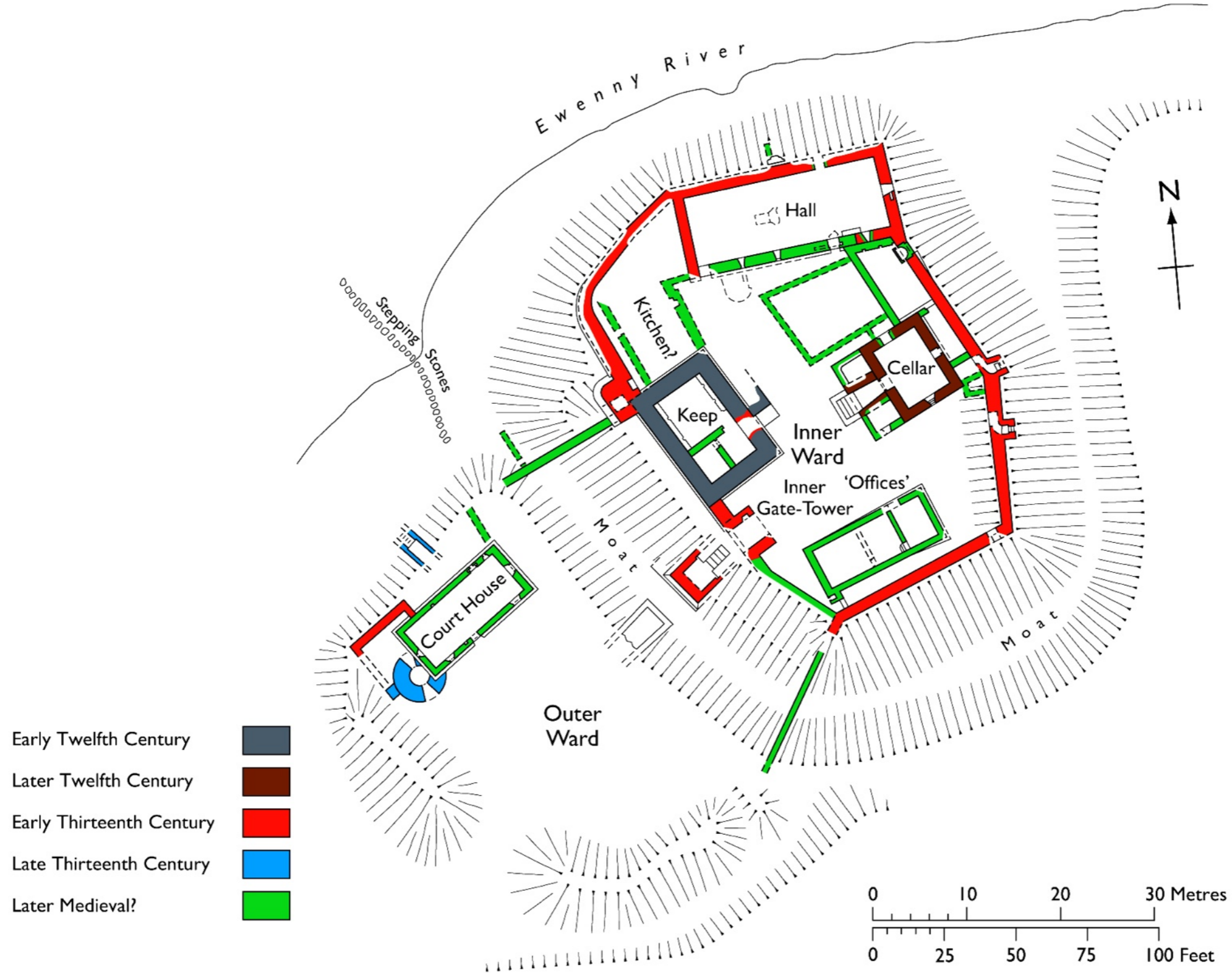
Broken base of a stone carved cross discovered in Ogmore Castle, dated to 11th Century.

© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



Aerial view of Ogmore Castle.

© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales



Plan of Ogmores castle. © Crown Copyright: Cadw

Skenfrith

Skenfrith was an **English castle**, first built in the **12th century**. There is written evidence for building work in 1186, costing £43, which paid for repairs to the palisade. The castle was rebuilt in stone sometime after 1219. It had a **rectangular curtain wall** with **4 round towers** on each corner and a **round keep** in the middle. It was surrounded by a **moat**. Skenfrith and White Castle were at important locations for controlling the English-Welsh border.

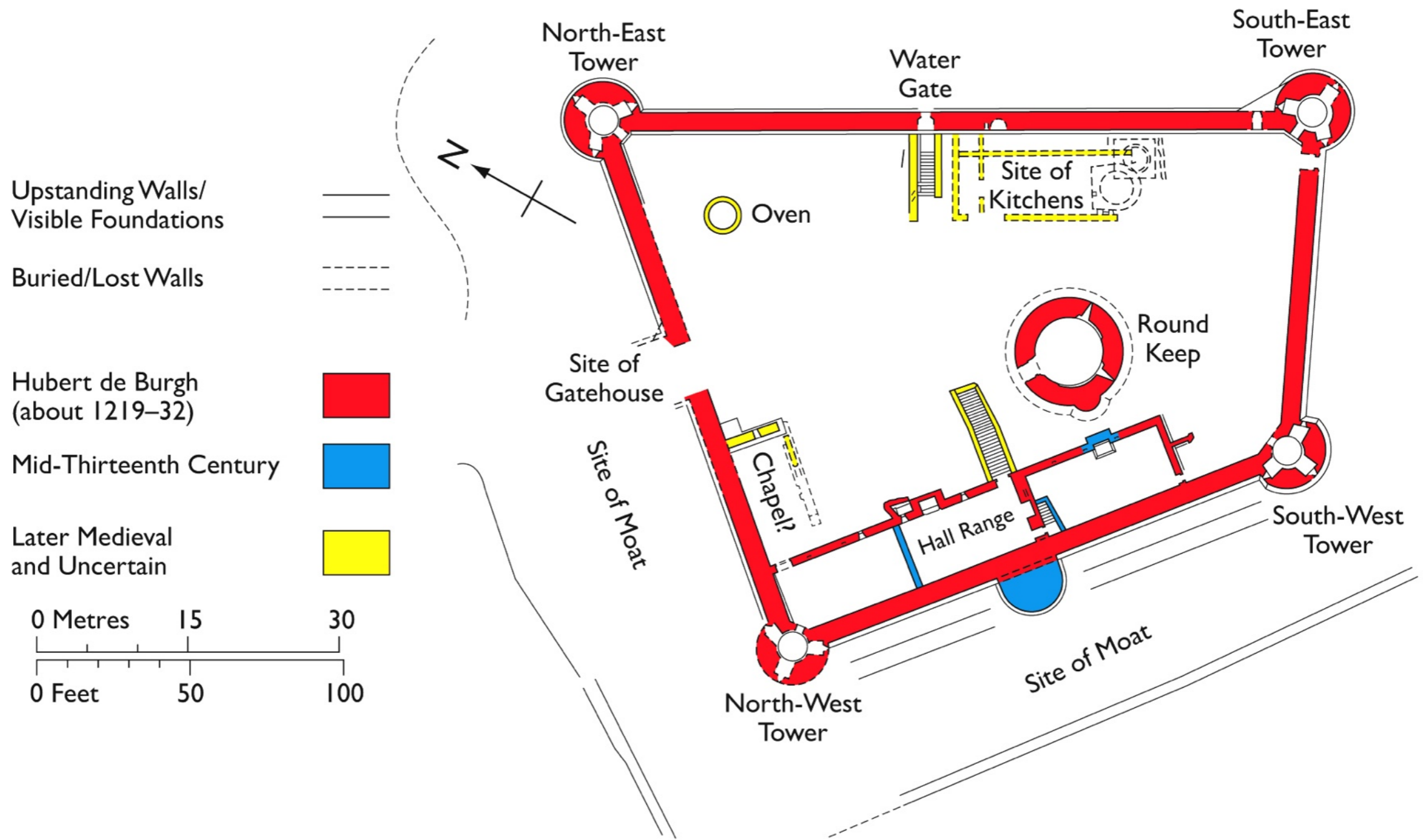


Aerial view of Skenfrith Castle.

© Crown Copyright: Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales



Bone chess piece decorated with a face discovered in Skenfrith Castle, dated to 12th or 13th century. © Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



Plan of Skenfrith Castle. © Crown Copyright: Cadw

White Castle

White Castle was an **English castle**, first built in the **12th century**. The design had two wards, both of which had **curtain walls with round towers**. The outer ward is surrounded by a **ditch** and the inner ward is surrounded by a **moat**. It was used to store weapons and ammunition in the 12th and 13th centuries. There is written evidence for building work in 1184-1186, costing £128 16s.



Medieval bone flute.

© Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales



Aerial view of White Castle. © Crown Copyright:
Royal Commission of Ancient Historical Monuments Wales

Upstanding Walls/
Visible Foundations



Buried/Lost Walls



Twelfth Century



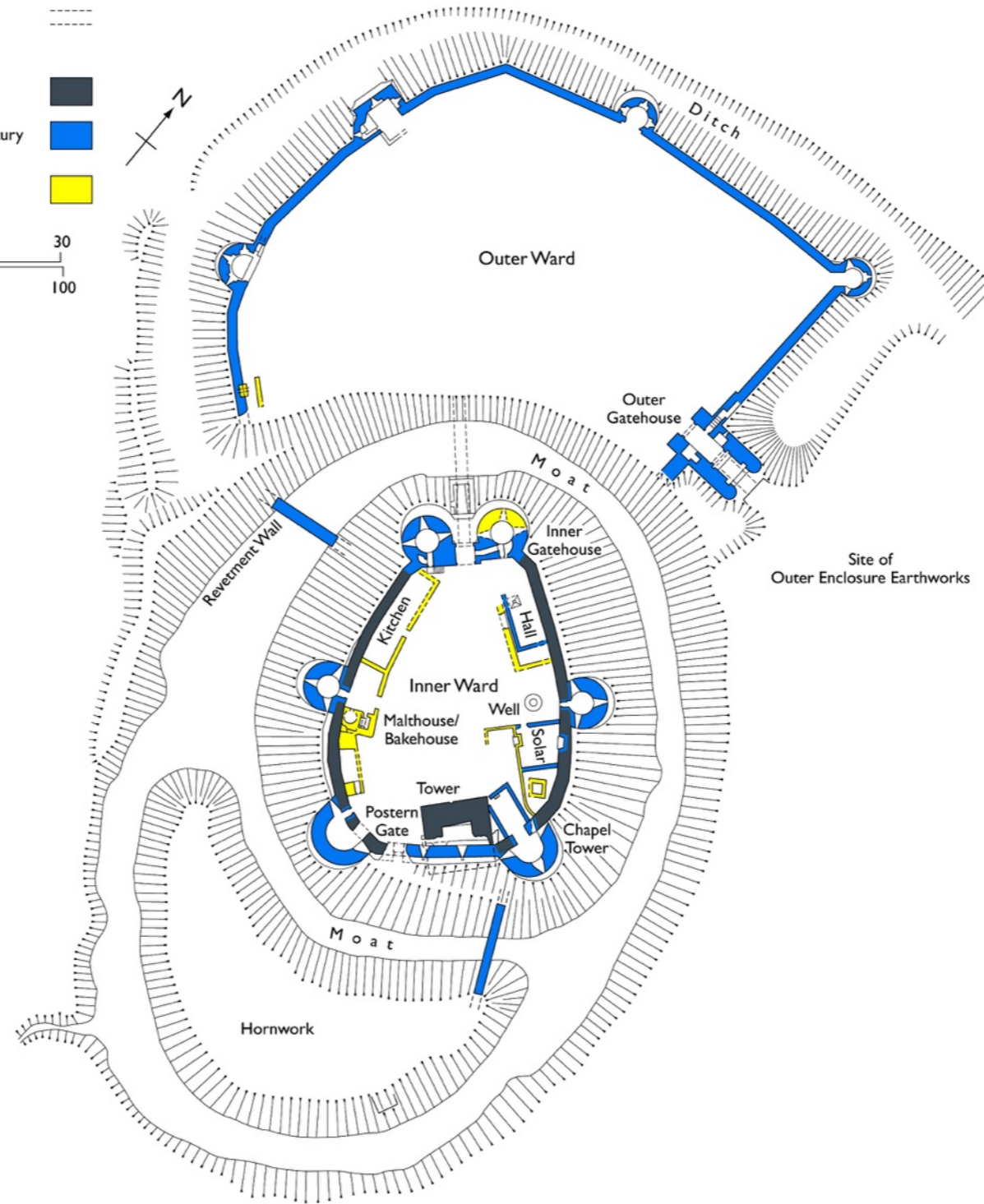
Mid-Thirteenth Century



Later Medieval
and Uncertain



0 Metres 15 30
0 Feet 50 100



Plan of White Castle. © Crown Copyright: Cadw