**PLESHEY CASTLE, ESSEX. PROPOSAL FOR PUBLICATION**

**Summary**

This is a proposal to publish a report on the excavations at Pleshey Castle by S.R. Bassett between 1972 and 1981 in *Essex Archaeology and History*. The report will describe and interpret the excavation in terms of the wider historical and topographical evidence for the castle and its market town. It is estimated that the report will be 60 pages long, including around 30 figures and plates. The report will add to earlier reports on the early 20th-century excavations of the keep and the excavations by P.A. Rahtz in 1959-63 in the southern bailey.

**Short history of Pleshey Castle**

Pleshey Castle was built by the de Mandevilles in the early 12th century as a simple motte-and-bailey castle, although the surviving earthworks mostly date to the refortification by William de Mandeville in 1167-80. The motte and the inner moat are certainly primary, and the original bailey probably lay to the north (it has not survived but its outline is fossilised in the street plan of the modern village). The surviving southern bailey was added as part of the later 12th-century refortification, with the northern bailey becoming the site of a market some time before 1244. The earthwork of an outer town enclosure to the north also still survives.

Accommodation improvements began under the de Bohuns, who held the castle from 1227/8. In 1380 it passed by marriage to Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, youngest son of Edward III, when Pleshey was described as “a residence of royal magnificence”. In 1419 Pleshey became part of the Duchy of Lancaster estate. Building accounts record extensive rebuilding works in the 1450s by Margaret of Anjou, and the brick bridge across the motte moat, one of the earliest of its type in Europe, dates to this period. The castle continued to be occupied until 1528, but a survey of 1559 described it as derelict.

**Excavation results**

Bassett’s excavation trench was situated immediately to the east of the surviving brick bridge leading to the motte, and extended from the southern bailey across the motte moat. The excavation identified the following elements of the castle:

Phase 1 (12th century): The primary motte moat.

Phase 2 (late 12th-13th century): The secondary motte moat and first timber bridge.

Phase 3 (14th-mid 15th century): The second timber bridge, built on stone piers.

Phase 4 (mid 15th-mid 16th century): A terrace with stone retaining walls built out into the moat, new buildings, and the rebuilding of a bridge pier as a garderobe.

Phase 5 (16th century and later): Decay and demolition.

**Significance of the excavation results**

The primary motte moat is one of the few elements of the castle to survive its refortification in 1167-80, and this evidence supports the interpretation of its original layout. The recutting of the motte moat and the construction of successive timber bridges links the development of the motte and the southern bailey in the 13th and 14th centuries. The bridges are themselves of intrinsic interest as this type of evidence often does not survive or is not investigated. Significantly, although the buildings were all built of timber, the building materials recovered from the excavations include early bricks, painted wall plaster and chimney bricks and decorated chimney pots, all consistent with a high standard of accommodation.

**Wider significance**

The excavation results, survey and recent study of the building accounts make possible a more cogent interpretation of the castle’s overall layout and development. Trenching and survey carried out within the town enclosure adds to the wider understanding of the castle in relation to the town, and the report will include a review of fieldwork since the previous publication in 1977.

**Report**

The individual site phases will be described concisely, concentrating on structural details and relationships. Phase plans will be at 1:100, with structural details, sections and elevations at 1:50, and wider topographical maps at 1:500. Each phase will conclude with a discussion of interpretation and its links with the development of the castle, and will be supported by detailed finds reports. The report will conclude with an overview discussion of the castle’s development.