Ewyas Harold Castle

The Ewyas Harold History and Archaeology Group applied for a Local Heritage Initiative Grant and in 2006 Archaeological Investigations Ltd was commissioned to undertake the survey of Ewyas Harold Castle and its immediate environs as a result of the successful bid. The study, undertaken in partnership with the local community, used archaeological methods to try and achieve further resolution of the layout of the site and has provided a considerable amount of new information about the castle and its surrounding landscape. The site is located at SO 384288 and straddles the 80m contour. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (30079). The core of the site can be divided into three components from north to south: the motte, inner bailey and outer bailey, the latter two being separated by a ditch called King Street. A short History The history of Ewyas as a district can be traced back to the 5th - 6th century AD when the River Severn divided the Kingdom of Mercia from Wales and Clydawg was recorded as King in Ewyas & dash; he being a holy man. Ewyas lay beyond Offa's dyke and was finally occupied by the English in the 10th century. Archenfield, Ewyas and neighbour and an independent kingdom prior to Offa, was annexed to Mercia in the late 8th century. In 915 we hear of the ravages of the 'Black Pagans' or Danish Pirates harrying Ewyas and Archenfield and making off with the Bishop of Llandaff. In 1042, on the accession of Edward the Confessor, Herefordshire and its loosely annexed dependencies, Archenfield and Ewyas, were severed from the earldom of Mercia. This newly forged fifth earldom Godwin (King Harold's father) gave to his son Sweyn who was banished in 1046. Hereford was then given to Earl Ralph who gave Richard (son of Scrob) land in the north of the county (Richards Castle), while Osbern Pentecost was given Ewyas and they built castles at these locations. The castle at Ewyas was dismantled in 1052. After the Conquest, William Fitz-Osbern subdued the borders through castle building which included the one at Ewyas Harold which he built for Alured. It would appear that Alured's (or Alfred's) castlery included the Castle, inner bailey and borough below it. Based on details in the Domesday Book this had a population of about 500. It also appears that the current civil parish of Ewyas Harold was divided into two lost English settlements, Mulstone (where Osbern Pentecost built his castle), and Manitone (possibly where the modern village of Ewyas Harold now lies). The Harold from whom Ewyas takes its name acquired lands at there after 1086. Robert his son was responsible for issuing five grants to the monks of the priory at Ewyas including restiting them outside the castle, as well as founding the Cistercian Abbey at Dore and being benefactor to the alien Priory of Craswall. In 1358 Roger de la Warr made the agreement with the Abbot of Gloucester and Bishop of St David to suppress the Priory at Ewyas and it is unlikely that the castle was occupied for much more than a century after this.. The further history of the site can be obtained through the small booklet produced for the project.

The castle The keep The keep is now represented by a series of hollows which have in the past been interpreted as quarries for robbing the curtain wall. However, there is uniformity to the dimensions and depths of the group of five hollows on the north side of the motte (A1 & dash; D) that rather contradicts this. In fact, there is little doubt that these must represent the footprints of the bases of a range of buildings, their greater depth in relation to the central court implying a cellared range (F & G). The interpretation of the last two longer hollows on top of the motte is not so clear. Inner bailey The resistivity survey provides a good resolution of historic features. The most substantial structure within the bailey appears to be a building with a rectangular footprint measuring 30m by 10m. It looks like it may have been divided into two parts, with the southern half comprising a series of interlinking spaces on the ground floor. There are indications of increased wall thickenings that could be the bases of battlements or chimney stacks. The resolution of the data is sufficient to identify quite fine partitions (or maybe drains) within the building. The modern track (1) would appear to have been built on top of the line of one of the building's main walls (this line probably being selected because of the well-drained hard ground it already provided). Given the scale of this structure in relation to others within the bailey it is proposed that this was probably the lord's main residence at some period during the castle's occupation. What is also quite striking is an area devoid of structures around this building. So the already dominant position of the building would have been further emphasised by an undeveloped curtilage/garden with other smaller structures around it. Outer bailey This is historically known as the site of the early medieval village and also the relocated priory. In the north field there is some indication of what might be house platforms as well as some indication of stone structures in the field that reputedly held the priory. The priory Through studying the documents associated with the priory the survey might suggest that the priory started in the field adjacent to the Dulas Brook. Further work will be needed to elucidate this. There is certainly evidence for the presence of a priory in the form of carved masonry. Further information on the history, priory and survey results can be obtained through the booklet produced for the project. Reconstruction We wondered what the large building might have looked like that once stood in the middle of the inner bailey. So using the resistivity survey as a template for the foundations, the strength of response being taken to indicate the weight of the overlying building, we produced the following. Obviously it didn't look like this - but the illustrations does give an impression of the possible scale and perhaps one or two of the external features of the building.