Status, Display and Defence on the Welsh March, circa 1067 to 1087: Reflections on the Context and Functions of the Great Tower at Chepstow, Gwent

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Sited in a dominating position above the river Wye, the great tower at Chepstow in Gwent, Wales (Abb. 1), has traditionally been regarded as the work of William fitz Osbern, William the Conqueror's close companion and one of the greatest of the Norman lords. Created early in 1067, he acted as the king's vice-regent until his death in battle at Cassel in Flanders in February 1071[1]. Like Scolland's Hall at Richmond castle, Yorkshire (Abb. 2), constructed by Earl Alan of Brittany from circa 1071[2], the great tower at Chepstow has thus long been regarded as one of the earliest Norman stone fortifications in Britain, and as a baronial, not a royal construction. In an important new re-evaluation, however, Rick Turner has argued that the great tower was built on the orders of King William after 1075, when Chepstow came into royal hands following the failed rebellion and forfeiture of fitz Osbern's son, Roger of Breteuil. He suggests, moreover, that it was not designed as a residence, but as a ceremonial ›hall of audience‹[3]. In a conference exploring the forms and functions of castles, not least as expressions of lordship, in a comparative context, it seems appropriate to re-examine the context and possible purposes of this building, for as a case study it raises important questions concerning the nature and role of castles in early Norman

1 I would like to thank Mr Bill Zajac and Dr Steven Marritt for their valuable comments on a draft of this paper, and Mrs Christine Kenyon of CADW's Photographic Library and Mr Jonathan Butler of English Heritage Photographic Library for their kind assistance with the photographs. For William fitz Osbern, L. H. Nelson, *The Normans in South Wales, 1070–1171* (Austin, Texas, 1966), p. 24–33; T. Purser, ›William fitz Osbern, Earl of Hereford: Personality and Power on the Welsh Frontier, 1066–1071‹, *Armies, Chivalry and Warfare in Medieval Britain and France. Proceedings of the 1995 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. M. Strickland (Stamford, 1998), p. 133–146; C. P. Lewis, ›William fitz Osbern‹, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 59, p. 116–117; and D. Bates, ›William the Conqueror, William fitz Osbern and Chepstow Castle‹, *Chepstow Castle, its History and Buildings*, ed. R. Turner and A. Johnson (Logaston, 2006), p. 15–22.

2 C. Peers, *Richmond Castle* (London, 1953, reprinted 1981), p. 7, 19–22; J. Goodall, *Richmond Castle* (London, 2001, reprinted 2009), p. 9–12, 17–19; L. Butler, ›The Origins of the Honour of Richmond and its Castles‹ *Château Gaillard*, 16 (1992), p. 69–80, and reprinted in R. Liddiard, (ed), *Anglo-Norman Castles* (Woodbridge, 2003), p. 91–104. The hall was named after Scolland, a later constable who died between 1146 and 1150.

3 R. C. Turner, with contributions by J. R. L. Allen, N. Coldstream, C. Jones-Jenkins, R. K. Morriss, and S. G. Priestly, ›The Great Tower, Chepstow, Wales‹, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 84 (2004), p. 223–318; R. C. Turner, *Chepstow Castle* (Cadw, Welsh Historic Monuments, Cardiff, 2002, revised edition, 2006); R. Turner, C. Jones-Jenkins, and S. G. Priestly, ›The Norman Great Tower‹, *Chepstow Castle, its History and Buildings*, ed. Turner and Johnson, p. 23–42.

Abb. 1 Chepstow castle, Gwent, from the east, with the eleventh-century great tower in the centre. The niches and two oculi on the west wall are visible below the supporting arch added during Earl Roger Bigod's remodelling of the great tower between 1293 and 1300. In the lower bailey is the earl's new domestic range (to the lower right) (CADW, Welsh assembly Government, Crown copyright).

Britain[4]. Debate, moreover, concerning the design and purpose of keeps or great towers has played a significant role in much recent Anglo-Norman castle scholarship, highlighting problems of definition and the dangers of generalization[5]. Few would now indulge in what Charles Coulson has aptly termed ›military fundamentalism‹ in the analysis of such structures, but equally, in stressing the symbolic and the ceremonial, the pendulum of interpretation may have swung too far from the pragmatic considerations of defence necessitated by the recurrent threat of political instability and warfare within the Anglo-Norman realm. In Philip Dixon's words, ›the current trend of emphasizing display at the expense of the other factors [in the design of great towers] is in danger of creating, in ›the myth of display‹, yet another shibboleth‹[6]. The great tower at Chepstow, as Turner well demonstrates, does not admit a straightforward interpretation of its intended functions, but its interest is all the greater for that. Here I will suggest that while the great tower's use on certain occasions for

4 For a valuable summary of the role of castles in the Norman Conquest see N. J. G. Pounds, *The Medieval Castle in England and Wales* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 3–25; and R. A. Brown, *Castles, Conquest and Charters. Collected Papers* (Woodbridge, 1989), p. 65–74, 75–89.

5 A good survey and extensive bibliography is provided in *The White Tower*, ed. E. Impey (New Haven and London, 2008). For a brief but salutary overview of some of the pitfalls see P. Dixon, ›The Myth of the Keep‹, *The Seigneurial Residence in Western Europe, AD c. 800–1600*, ed. G. Merion-Jones, E. Impey, and M. Jones (British Archaeological Reports, International Series, 1088, Oxford, 2002), p. 9–14.

6 Dixon, ›The Myth of the Keep‹, p. 12.

Abb. 2 Richmond castle, Yorkshire, built by Earl Alan from c. 1071, from the south east, showing Scolland's Hall on the cliff above the River Swale. The later building abutting the hall to the left was probably a kitchen and services range (Matthew J. Strickland).

ceremonial or display purposes should by no means be discounted, the political, military and strategic circumstances of the period from the castle's initial establishment by William fitz Osbern in circa 1067 to the death of William I in 1087 strongly suggest that considerations of defence featured predominantly, though not exclusively, in the intentions of its builders, and that its patrons were more likely to have been fitz Osbern and his son Roger, earl of Hereford, than King William I.

Re-Reading the Great Tower at Chepstow

That the first castle at Chepstow was built by William fitz Osbern, as one of a series of castles that consolidated the Norman position on the borders with southern Wales, is attested by the great Domesday survey of 1086[7]. It has long been assumed that the imposing great tower, measuring nearly 120 feet by 45 feet (36 m by 14 m)[8], dated from this initial period of construction, and was intended as the earl's principal accommodation. Rick Turner, however, argues that such a large structure cannot have been built in the short period between fitz Osbern's appointment as earl in 1067 and his sudden death at Cassel in 1071, while his son Roger was disseised of his lands soon after for his part in the rebellion of 1075[9]. Nor can the tower itself have been residential: there are no latrines, no solar leading off the main hall for the lord's private use, and no chapel – elements which, by contrast,

7 *Domesday Book*, ed. A. Farley, 2 vols (London, 1783), I, p. 162. A valuable contextual discussion of the establishment of Chepstow is provided by D. Crouch, ›The Transformation of Medieval Gwent‹, in *The Gwent County History. Volume 2, The Age of the Marcher Lords, c. 1070–1536*, ed. R. A. Griffths, T. Hopkins and R. Howell (Cardiff, 2008), p. 1–46, especially p. 1–16, while also relevant is P. Courtney, ›The Marcher Lordships. Origins, Descent and Organization‹, in *ibid*, p. 47–69.

8 Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 27.

9 For discussion of the ›revolt of the earls‹ see D. C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror* (London, 1964), p. 231–233; A. Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 59–65. The two valuable studies by Lucy Marten focus primarily on the tenurial impact of the rebellion, particularly in East Anglia; L. Marten, ›The Impact of Rebellion on Little Domesday‹, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 27 (2004), p. 132–150; ›The Rebellion of 1075 and its Impact in East Anglia‹, *Medieval East Anglia*, ed. C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 168–82.

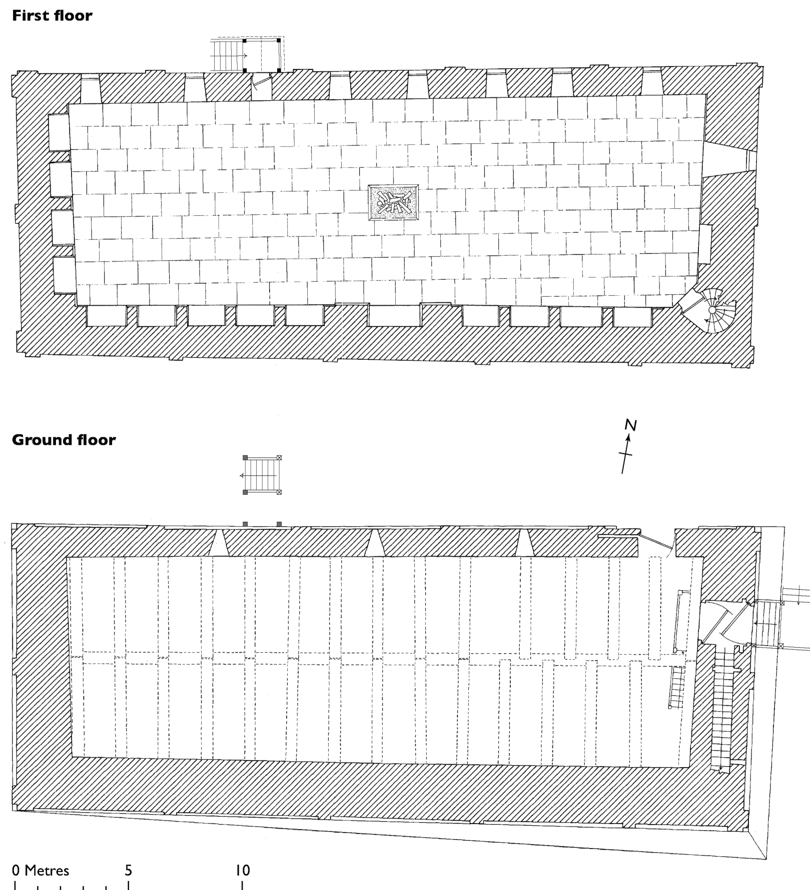

Abb. 3 Reconstruction of the original ground and first floor plans of the late eleventh-century great tower at Chepstow (Drawing: R. Turner. Cadw, Welsh Assembly Government, Crown Copyright).

are found at analogous great towers of the first half of the eleventh century such as Langeais or Ivry-la-Bataille, and subsequently at the White Tower at London[10]. Instead, his detailed survey of the construction and design suggests that in its eleventh century phase, there were only two elements: a large basement, probably used just for storage, and a great hall, apparently not subdivided, but which has a series of niches, akin to sedilia, running across the west and south wall, with the central arch on the south wall being distinctive by its greater size[11] (Abb. 3 and Abb. 4). In what Turner convincingly suggests is a conscious evocation of *Romanitas*, the tower itself makes use of Roman tiles from neighbouring Caerwent (*Venta Silurum*), only four miles away, as well as other building materials such as yellow sandstone blocks from this site[12]. The tiles are used to form a prominent decorative band around the tower, and to highlight the tympanum of what was probably the principal entrance in the east wall (Abb. 5). The combination of these features, together with a lack of

10 Turner *et al.*, ›The Great Tower‹, p. 257–258.
11 Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 28.
12 Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 27.

Abb. 4 Interior of the great tower at Chepstow, looking west through the doorway in the east wall, and showing the two oculi and arcade of niches decorating the first floor (Cadw, Welsh Assembly Government, Crown Copyright).

basic domestic provision, has led Turner to conclude that its function was probably ceremonial or judicial, not residential. The great tower can thus be read as an early example of a ›hall of audience‹, where King William could have received the submission of Welsh leaders or received other vassals. The decorative arcading inside the hall (Abb. 6), which has been compared to the depiction of Duke William's *palatium* on the Bayeux Tapestry, would thus serve to frame the king, seated in the largest niche, and his great men[13]. One might add that if the great tower was indeed the work of King William, it would have served as a powerful symbol of royal authority, stamped on a former *caput* of one of the leading rebels of the insurrection of 1075.

A Comital or Royal Building?

The principal objection to the great tower being the work of fitz Osbern is that of chronology; even if he had begun the great tower immediately in 1067, it seems unlikely that a building of such a size could have been completed before his death in 1071. The tower ›dis-

13 Turner *et al.*, ›The Great Tower‹, p. 258–259; Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 29, but with the caveat that ›it is impossible to be certain how the main chamber was used‹. For the *palatium*, which may represent the *aula turris* at Rouen, see L. Musset, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 124–7, and p. 118–119 for a probable representation of this great tower on the Tapestry.

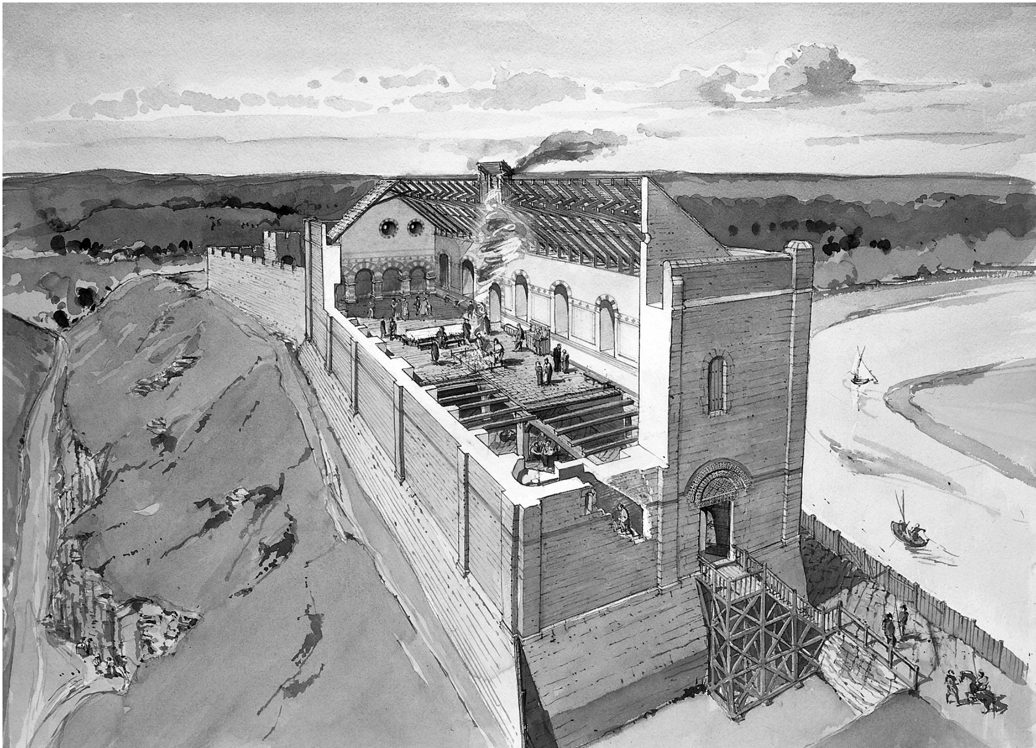

Abb. 5 Cut-away reconstruction of the great tower at Chepstow as it may have appeared in the late eleventh century. (Drawing: Terry Ball. Cadw, Welsh Assembly Government, Crown Copyright).

plays horizontal building breaks at about three metres intervals, and was clearly built over several seasons‹[14]. Estimates as to just how many seasons differ from between three to four to around eight[15]. Two points may be made in regard to this question. The first is to note the quite exceptional position held by fitz Osbern in these brief years, being ›vicar over the whole of southern England‹[16]. As one of the king's two viceregents, he was matched in power and authority only by William I's half-brother Odo of Bayeux[17]. Among the castles he is credited with building were Carisbrooke on the Isle of Wight, Chepstow, Monmouth,

14 P. Dixon, ›The Influence of the White Tower on the Great Towers of the Twelfth Century‹, *The White Tower*, ed. E. Impey (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 256.

15 Turner *et al.*, ›The Great Tower‹, p. 257; Dixon, ›The Influence of the White Tower‹, p. 256 n. 53. D. F. Renn, ›The Anglo-Norman Keep, 1066–1138‹, *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, third series, 23 (1960), p. 1–23 at p. 4, suggests a rough estimate of seven years for a structure over 60 ft high, and dates the great tower to before 1075.

16 *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* [Orderic], ed. M. Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford, 1969–1980), II, p. 196–197, noting that King William ›*vice sua toti regno versus Aquilonem praeesse constituit*‹. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* [*Gesta Regum*], ed. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbotton, 2 vols (Oxford, 1998–1999), I, p. 474–5, calls fitz Osbern ›the pillar of that great kingdom, wise counsellor of both England and Normandy‹. For his position, D. Bates, ›The Origins of the Justiciarship‹, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 4 (1981), p. 1–12.

17 Orderic, II, p. 202–203, refers to them as ›*vicarii regis*‹.

Abb. 6 Detail of the niches on the west and south wall of the great tower at Chepstow, which still retain traces of their original decoration (Matthew J. Strickland).

Clifford, Wigmore, and Berkeley, while he also refortified others such as Ewyas Harold and probably Richard's Castle[18]. Such activity clearly indicates that he had ready access to very considerable manpower, and to the fiscal resources need to pay for the building and garrisoning of these fortifications. William of Malmesbury noted that he retained ›a large number of knights to whom he paid generous fees‹, but that ›his generous spending earned very severe disapproval from the king, who considered that he was thoughtlessly wasting the royal resources‹[19]. Earl William was thus in a particularly powerful position to harness royal resources and revenue to his own building works. The great geographical scope of his command undoubtedly meant that he would have spent little time at Chepstow[20], but his continued presence was unnecessary for building to be pressed ahead with. Indeed, if at least one of the tower's primary functions was military, as will be suggested below, Chepstow's strategic position on a fluid and volatile frontier must undoubtedly have added urgency to its construction. Norman expansion into Gwent was neither inexorable nor uncontested,[21] and in the initial years of the Conquest, this part of the border with Wales and lands on either side of the Severn estuary remained of key strategic importance. In summer of 1067, the Welsh attacked Herefordshire. The sons of Harold with an Irish fleet had ravaged along the north coast of Somerset and attacked Bristol[22], and they subsequent-

18 D. Renn, ›The First Castles in England, 1051–1071‹, *Château Gaillard, I. Colloque des Andelys 1962* (Centre des Recherches Archéologiques Médiévales, Université de Caen, 1964), p. 127–132; idem, *Norman Castles*, p. 29; A. Boucher, *Ewyas Harold Castle* (Hereford, 2007), p. 5.

19 Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, I, p. 472–3. Orderic, II, p. 318–21 similarly noted that fitz Osbern ›supported a huge following, which caused the ruin and wretched death of many thousands‹.

20 Bates, ›William the Conqueror, William fitz Osbern and Chepstow Castle‹, p. 18, comments that fitz Osbern's ›vast range of responsibilities and activities is essential in the context of any estimate of his role at Chepstow‹.

21 P. Courtney, ›The Norman Invasion of Gwent: A Reassessment‹, *Journal of Medieval History*, 12 (1986), p. 297–313.

22 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [*ASC*], translated in *English Historical Documents, II, 1042–1189*, ed. D. C. Douglas and G. W. Greenaway (2nd edn, London, 1981), version D, *sub anno* 1067; *The Chronicle of John of Worcester* [JW], ed. R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, 3 vols (Oxford, 1995–), III, p. 4–9.

ly launched a further sea-borne attack on Cornwall and Devon[23]. It may very well be that the great tower was incomplete at fitz Osbern's sudden death in 1071, but there is no compelling reason why he could not have begun it. Analogies with the chip-carved saltire pattern used in the tympanum of the tower's main door allow a date range from the 1060s to as late as the 1120s, but an early date is suggested by the similarity of the door's form with that of St Leonard's church, Hatfield, in Herefordshire, a manor recorded in Domesday as being held by one of fitz Osbern's men, Hugh l'Asne[24]. It has been suggested that the remains of the early hall at Monmouth may also have been the work of fitz Osbern[25].

Secondly, fitz Obsbern was directly succeeded by his second son Roger, who held the earldom of Hereford until his disastrous revolt in 1075[26]. Work on the great tower could well have continued from circa 1067 to early 1075, a period which covers even the higher estimates of the number of building campaigns required for such a structure. Philip Dixon has suggested ›a building period of 1067–1071 for perhaps the lower two thirds of the keep, perhaps finished off more slowly‹[27]. This fits well with Roger's situation; he had sufficient income from his lands to allow him to continue work on the great tower, but lacked his father's pre-eminent authority (a factor probably underlying his subsequent revolt) and hence his greater resources. Roger's own fall, moreover, was as unforseen as his father's, and we need not assume that the great tower was completed even by 1075.

The question of status and ambition raises further considerations in regard to the great tower at Chepstow. In pre-Conquest Normandy, comital title appears to have been closely linked to the holding of a major stronghold, rather than a territorial county; Robert of Torigny noted, for example, that Duke Richard I gave his half-brother Rodulf the castle of Ivry, ›unde vocatus est comes‹[28]. Equally, recent scholarship on Anglo-Norman great towers of the twelfth century has stressed the link between construction of these costly, high status buildings and elevation in rank. Hence, for example, it has plausibly been suggested that the great tower at Hedingham in Essex was built by Aubrey de Vere III to mark his creation as earl of Oxford in 1142, while that of Castle Rising in Norfolk was constructed by William d'Albini following his marriage to King Henry I's widow, Adeliza of Louvain, in 1138[29]. The situation in the early years of the Conquest affords interesting comparisons and contrasts. As nephew of Duke Alan III of Brittany and second cousin to William the

23 *ASC*, D, *sub anno* 1068; JW, III, 8–9 (*sub anno* 1069).

24 Turner *et al.*, ›The Great Tower‹, p. 254–257. For context, see C. Lewis, ›The Norman Settlement of Herefordshire under William I‹, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 7 (1985), p. 203–210.

25 Renn, ›The Anglo-Norman Keep‹, p. 5, with a useful set of comparative hall plans, including Scolland's Hall (Richmond), Monmouth and Chepstow at p. 6; idem., *Norman Castles*, p. 29, 247–8. *The Book of Llan Dâv*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Oxford, 1893), p. 277–278, attributes the castle to fitz Osbern.

26 Whether Roger had served under his father in England or Wales, and thus had earlier associations with Chepstow before 1071, is unknown, though as a younger son he might well have expected to inherit his father's acquisitions in England, even if not so soon.

27 Dixon, ›The Influence of the White Tower‹, p. 256 n. 53. Also instructive here is B. Bachrach, ›The cost of Castle-Building: the case of the Tower at Langeais‹, *The Medieval Castle: Romance and Reality*, ed. K. Rayerson and F. Powe (Dubuque, 1984), p. 46–62.

28 *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni* [*GND*], ed. E. van Houts, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1992–1995), II, p. 174.

29 P. Dixon and P. Marshal, ›The Great Tower at Hedingham Castle: A Reassessment‹, *Fortress*, 18 (1993), p. 16–23; R. Liddiard, ›Castle Rising, Norfolk: A Landscape of Lordship?‹, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 22 (2000), p. 169–86. D'Albini was subsequently created earl of Sussex in 1141.

Abb. 7 Reconstruction of Richmond castle, seen from the north, as it might have appeared c. 1100. The eastern gate led beneath Scolland's Hall (top centre) into the bailey (Drawing: Terry Ball. © English Heritage Photo Library).

Conqueror, Alan Rufus had held the title of *comes* as an honorific one[30]. It was only in 1070, after the suppression of the major rebellions in northern England, that he was granted the great honour of Richmond, and it is hard not to see his construction soon thereafter of the great fortified hall at Richmond castle as both a major defence and as a symbol of his high status (Abb. 7). Similarly, before 1066 William fitz Osbern was hereditary steward (*dapifer*) to the duke, but he did not hold a territorial *comté*. This may in part explain his adoption during the 1060s of the title *comes palatii*, ›count of the palace‹, echoing the highest Carolingian court office, and reflecting his ›pre-eminence among the aristocracy‹ at Duke William's court[31]. Despite fitz Osbern's close family connections with Ivry, moreover, Duke William kept this great fortress in his own hands, instead entrusting him with his new castle of Breteuil, built circa 1054[32]. Having played a major role in the invasion of 1066, he was rewarded with extensive lands and the title of earl by King William in 1067. As Chris Lewis has pointed out, however, fitz Osbern's title in England was also not territorial, but honorific. He was not made earl of Hereford, but rather had comital authority over a much greater area comprising the southern shires formerly held by Harold when earl of Wessex,

30 K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, ›Alan Rufus (d. 1093)‹, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 1, p. 557f.

31 *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum: The Acts of William I (1066–1087)*, ed. D. Bates (Oxford, 1998), no. 232; Lewis, ›William fitz Osbern‹, p. 116; Bates, ›The Origins of the Justiciarship‹, p. 9–10; idem ,›William the Conqueror, William fitz Osbern and Chepstow Castle‹, p. 17.

32 *GND*, II, p. 146–147; Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, p. 70.

and with his principal base at Winchester[33]. The great dignity bestowed by this extraordinary comital status would provide a plausible context for fitz Osbern's construction of a prestigious great tower. If the niches around the hall were indeed intended to mark seating during judicial or ceremonial proceedings, this would be just as applicable to the earl, his honorial vassals and his officers as to the king and his representatives.

That his comital authority was not tied specifically to Hereford, moreover, helps explains why, as one might otherwise expect, he did not initially build his great tower at Hereford[34]. Rather, given initial Norman expansion into Gwent during the later 1060s, Chepstow itself must have appeared as a suitable *caput* of a great and swiftly growing lordship in Wales. If, as seems probable, Earl William had established a dependent priory of Almèneches at Chepstow, a great tower could have been conceived at an equally early date as its fitting counterpart, as well as serving in military terms as an integral element of ›a far-reaching, co-ordinated effort to organize and dominate the society of the southern marches‹[35]. Fitz Osbern was heir to Harold Godwineson's attempts as earl of Wessex to extend English power into Nertherwent as far as the rivers Usk and Wye, and to secure the northern bank of the Severn estuary[36]. Earl William's intention to further this expansion is indicated by his establishment of castles and nascent boroughs at Chepstow and Monmouth, as well as the construction of other castles, doubtless conceived as having an offensive as much as a defensive function[37]. Either in 1067 or 1068, Earl William had responded to Welsh raids by a major campaign against Gwent, Brycheiniog and southern Powys, and probably forged an alliance with Caradog ap Gruffydd, the king of upper Gwent[38]. Fitz Osbern's death may have temporarily interrupted the momentum of conquest, but his son Earl Roger could still be styled ›earl of Hereford and lord of Gwent‹ and appears to have consolidated his father's gains[39]. It was only in the period subsequent to his sudden fall in 1075 that the Norman

33 C.P. Lewis, ›The Early Earls of Norman England‹, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 14 (1991), p. 207–223, at p. 216–217.

34 The city, moreover, had been burned in Aelfgar's attack 1055 and had had more recently suffered further from the raids of Eadric ›the Wild‹ in 1067 (*ASC*, C and D, *sub anno* 1055; JW, II, p. 576–579, III, p. 4–5). It would hardly have been appropriate to construct such a building in the royal city of Winchester, where King William himself was to built a new great hall (*History of the King's Works*, I, p. 23, 43).

35 Bates, ›William the Conqueror, William fitz Osbern and Chepstow Castle‹, p. 19.

36 F. Barlow, *The Godwins: the Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (London, 2002), p. 83–5; Crouch, ›The Transformation of Medieval Gwent‹, p. 1–3.

37 In 1065, Harold had begun to construct a fortified burgh at Portskewett, at the mouth of the river Wye, an action regarded as so threatening that the Welsh king of upper Gwent, Caradog ap Gruffydd, had attacked and destroyed it within a month (Crouch, ›The Transformation of Medieval Gwent‹, p. 1–3; Bates, ›William the Conqueror, William fitz Osbern and Chepstow Castle‹, p. 19, with an aerial photograph of the earthworks built by Harold at Portskewett.

38 Orderic, II, p. 260; JW, III, p. 4; Crouch, ›The Transformation of Medieval Gwent‹, p. 2–3 and notes 7 and 8; Bates, ›William the Conqueror, William fitz Osbern and Chepstow Castle‹, p. 19, suggests a date of the second half on 1068 and notes the significance of these hostilities as ›a serious war against a substantial coalition of Welsh rulers‹.

39 *The Book of Llan Dâv*, p. 274, ›*verbo comitis herefordie et domini guenti Rogerii filii Willelmi filli Osberni*‹.; Lewis, ›The Norman Settlement of Herefordshire‹ p. 201. The dignity of the earldom of Hereford was perhaps enhanced by it having being previously held by Edward the Confessor's nephew, Ralph of Mantes between circa 1050 and 1057; F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (revised edn, Yale, 1997), p. 93–94. and A. Williams, ›The King's Nephew: the Family and Career of Ralph, Earl of Hereford‹, *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. A. Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. Holdsworth, and J. L, Nelson (Woodbridge, 1989), p. 327–343.

advance in the south-west of Wales suffered a major reversal[40]. Turner is undoubtedly right to emphasize the great tower's conscious invocation of the *auctoritas* of the earlier Roman conquerors, but such a building makes more sense as a confident expression of aggressive lordship before rather than after 1075, when further Norman penetration into Gwent had all but halted and Chepstow stood on the frontier itself[41].

Considerations of status are as significant in regard to Earl Roger as to his father. Though the reasons for Roger's rebellion in 1075 are not clear, he may well have felt that he was not accorded the same authority or intimate place in the king's counsels as his father had enjoyed, and Orderic refers to him as Roger ›*Contumax*‹ – ›the Stubborn‹ or ›the Defiant‹[42]. While serious doubt has now been cast over the existence of ›palatine earldoms‹ under William I[43], a letter written to Earl Roger by Archbishop Lanfranc in 1075, dissuading him from any potential rebellion, indicates that he was in dispute with the king over the judicial interference of royal sheriffs within his lands[44]. It is possible, moreover, that even at this early stage the prerogatives claimed by the great marcher lordships reflected the absorption of regalian rights of the Welsh commote lordship as much as grant by the English crown[45]. Orderic, born the year of the rebellion and thus writing with considerable hindsight, believed there were deeper reasons, noting that Roger and his ally Ralph de Gael, earl of Norfolk, despised King William as a bastard, usurper and a tyrant, unworthy to rule. As he has them tell their co-conspirator Earl Waltheof, once they had deposed William, »One of us shall be king and the other two dukes; and so all the honours of England shall be subject to the three of us«[46]. The severity of Roger's sentence – life imprisonment – suggests that that Orderic was close to the mark in regarding the rebellion's aim as the ruin of William and the seizure of his throne. If such were Earl Roger's vaulting ambitions, then perhaps he shared the same reservations in regard to the great tower at Chepstow that William Rufus is supposed to have expressed about the inadequate size of his new great hall at Westminster, complaining that ›it was too big for a chamber and not big enough for a hall‹[47].

40 As Lloyd, *A History of Wales*, II, p. 377, notes; ›a catastrophe of these dimensions must have had a chilling effect on the ardour of the colonisers of the South Welsh border…it may be conjectured that the sudden fall of the house of Breteuil was in large measure responsible for the arrest at this point of the advance upon South Wales which had promised so well under William‹.

41 Lloyd, *A History of Wales*, II, p. 396, ›at the death of William I the south Welsh border stood as much as it did in 1071, and that the Conquest of South Wales had not begun‹. Bates, *William the Conqueror*, p. 189, similarly comments that ›up until 1081 Chepstow and the River Wye had been effective limit of Norman power‹.

42 *GND*, II, p. 146–147.

43 J. W. Alexander, ›The Alleged Palatinates of Norman England‹, *Speculum*, 61 (1981), p. 17–21.

44 *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and tr. H. Clover and M. Gibson (Oxford, 1979), p. 118–21 and p. 120 n. 5, where the archbishop notes that ›the king has ordered his sheriffs not to hold any courts within your lands until he himself returns to England and can hear personally the matters in dispute between you and those sheriffs‹. For the earl's own officials, D. Walker, ›The Honours of the Earls of Hereford in the Twelfth Century‹, *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, LXXIX (1960), p. 174–211, at p. 178.

45 J. G. Edwards, ›The Normans and the Welsh March‹, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XLII (1956), p. 155–178; and R. R. Davies, ›Kings, Lords and Liberties in the March of Wales, 1066–1272‹, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 29 (1979), p. 41–61.

46 Orderic, II, p. 312–315.

47 *Histoire des ducs de Normandie et des rois d'Angleterre*, ed. F. Michel (Société de l'histoire de France, Paris, 1840), p. 65, ›elle est trop grans à chamber, et trop petite à sale‹. For Westminster hall, *The History of the King's Works*, I, *The Middle Ages*, ed. R. Brown, H.M. Colvin and A.J. Taylor (London, 1963), p. 45–47.

Chepstow and King William I: a royal hall of audience?

In the absence of any more exact dating, these arguments for favouring fitz Osbern and his son as the primary builders of the great tower can only remain conjectural[48]. Nevertheless, a number of circumstantial factors equally argue against the building being constructed by William I. As far as is known, William the Conqueror never visited Chepstow. Indeed, he only entered Wales on one occasion, during his campaign of 1081, which took him as far as St David's and probably led to the establishment of Cardiff castle[49]. This expedition has been suggested as a possible context for the building of the great tower[50]. *A priori*, it seems strange that the Conqueror would go to the trouble and very considerable expense of constructing a great tower, particularly if designed primarily for ceremonial purposes, at a site little known to him or at one which his itinerary suggests he did not regard as being of any great importance for the crown. King William's construction of a hall of audience at Chepstow, moreover, is made still more implausible by the fact that a major royal centre already existed at Gloucester, within easy reach[51]. King William had inherited, but also developed, the practice of holding a great crown-wearing ceremony at the three major feasts of the Christian calendar, Christmas, Easter and Whitsun, and Gloucester was a traditional site of the Christmas crown-wearing[52]. The city had been re-established as a burgh and important royal centre in the late ninth and early tenth century, and in 1058, Aldred, bishop of Worcester consecrated the great minster church of St Peter, which he had completely rebuilt[53]. A powerful royal castle was established some time before 1086, while some of the Roman walls and gates may still have been standing[54]. William is known to have celebrated the Christmas of 1079/80 here[55], and it was at Gloucester (not Chepstow, it might be noted)

48 Here Bates, ›William the Conqueror, William fitz Osbern and Chepstow Castle‹, p. 22, is surely correct in concluding that whatever the stylistic arguments for the dating of the great tower, it is beyond doubt that it was fitz Obern ›who was responsible for developing Chepstow as the site wheresuch a structure could be built and for creating the general conditions which made it possible‹.

49 *ASC*, E, *sub anno* 1081; *Annales de Margam*, *sub anno* 1081, in *Annales Monastici*, ed. H.R. Luard, 5 vols (Rolls Series, 1864–9), I; Lloyd, *A History of Wales*, II, p. 393–394; D. Bates, *William the Conqueror* (London, 1989), p. 164. The campaign was in response to the overthrow of Caradog ap Gruffydd by Rhys ap Tewdr, who submitted and was compelled to render tribute of £40 yearly for his lands. For Cardiff castle, King, *Castellarium Anglicanum*, I, p. 162 and n. 14.

50 Turner et al., ›The Great Tower‹, p. 260. In this context, it might be suggested that signs of haste in construction, such as in the crude decoration applied to the inside of the hall's niches (ibid., p. 250–251), may perhaps have reflected an attempt to place the existing, and very possibly unfinished, great tower into readiness in expectation of a royal visit in 1081.

51 William's royal hall at Gloucester and the importance of crown-wearings is noted by Turner et al., ›The Great Tower‹, p. 260; and Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 29. Gloucester's importance under Edward the Confessor is readily shown by his itinerary; see T. J. Oleson, *The Witenagemot in the Reign of Edward the Confessor* (Oxford, 1955), Appendix T, p. 170–171; and especially M. Hare, ›Kings, Crowns and Festivals : the Origins of Gloucester as a Royal Ceremonial Centre‹, *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 115 (1997), p. 41–78.

52 M. Biddle, ›Seasonal Festivals and Residence: Winchester, Westminster and Gloucester in the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries‹, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, VIII, (1985), p. 51–72.

53 N. Baker and R. Holt, *Urban Growth and the Medieval Church. Gloucester and Worcester* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 20–25, and for early medieval Gloucester in general, p. 15–97.

54 *History of the King's Works*, I, p. 37.

55 Simeon of Durham, *Opera Omnia*, ed. T. Arnold, (Rolls Series, London, 1882–185), I, p. 119; II, p. 211; Biddle, ›Seasonal Festivals and Residence‹, p. 64–65.

Abb. 8 The interior of the east wall of the great tower at Chepstow seen from ground level. The arched doorway, with a decorated tympanum on its external face, was probably the principal entrance to the tower, though it opens into the basement. Though altered, the door to the left at ground floor level appears to be an original eleventh-century feature (Matthew J. Strickland).

that at Christmas 1085, William famously ›had much thought and very deep discussion with his council about this country, how it was occupied or with what sort of people‹, thus setting in motion the great Domesday survey[56]. Domesday Book itself refers to the ›*aula de Gloucester*‹, probably located not in the castle but in the old Anglo-Saxon royal palace at Kingsholm, a little outside the burgh to the north[57].

Comparison between Chepstow and Gloucester also raises questions of space and accommodation posed by a great assembly of the king's *curia*, and the converging of a large number of retinues of lords, bishops and abbots. The Anglo-Saxon burgh of Gloucester was large, well defended, and for those not staying in the royal palace, high-status accommodation could have been provided by the great abbey of St Peter's. By contrast, space within the upper bailey at Chepstow was very restricted; even if in the later eleventh century a stockaded outer bailey followed the lines of the later stone curtain wall, many more would still have to be housed beyond this in tents or pavilions in a potentially dangerous and exposed location, and at the very time when Chepstow had become very much on the front line of defence in this area of the March. It is, moreover, unlikely that Anglo-Norman

56 *ASC*, E, *sub anno* 1085.

57 *History of the King's Works*, I, p. 43–45. It was apparently this site, rather than the hall of the castle, which continued to be used by Anglo-Norman and Angevin kings until at least the early thirteenth century.

Abb. 9 Scolland's Hall, Richmond castle, viewed from the north. To the right is the main entrance to the hall at first floor level, while the lower hall is entered through the arch to the left at ground floor level (Matthew J. Strickland).

rulers would have received the submission of the Welsh princes on the frontier, for such *hommage en marche* implied a serious qualification to the nature of overlordship. As dukes of Normandy, they themselves insisted on performing homage to their nominal overlords the kings of France not within the Ile de France, but on the frontiers of the Norman duchy as a powerful statement of their quasi autonomy[58]. This was not, however, a limitation of their own authority which King William or his successors were likely to have tolerated from any of their Welsh vassals, whose subject status was instead reinforced by the demand for homage at a court, such as at Gloucester, held well within the kingdom of England's boundaries.

Form and Function

The building itself, as Turner notes, presents a number of difficulties in regarding it as primarily designed as a ›tower of audience‹, whether royal or comital. The main approach was from the east, with the impressive arched doorway approached via an external wooden

58 This practice and its symbolism is fully explored by J-F. Lemarignier, *Recherches sur l'hommage en Marche et les Frontières Féodales* (Paris, 1945).

Abb. 10 Scolland's Hall, Richmond castle, viewed from the north, showing the main first floor entrance (right) and the ground floor doorway (left) to the basement (Matthew J. Strickland).

stair[59]. Yet this doorway did not lead directly into the great hall on the upper floor, but rather was at basement level, leading into what seems to have been cellarage (Abb. 8)[60]. The hall itself was only reached after turning to ascend a narrow stair in the thickness of the wall – hardly the means for an impressive or ceremonial entrance. This arrangement stands in marked contrast to Scolland's Hall in Richmond castle, where the great hall was entered directly through a decorated doorway, reached by means of an external stair, which led into the west end of the hall, opposite the lord's dais. The ground floor, interpreted as being a lower hall for servants or lesser retainers, was entered through a separate doorway at ground level[61] (Abb. 9, Abb. 10). And whereas at Richmond both main walls of the hall's upper floor were pierced by windows, at Chepstow, the entire length of the south wall lacked any form of window or even splayed slits. This must have made the hall dark, while the absence of fireplaces required a smoky and incommodious central hearth, neither of which features can have enhanced effective displays of ceremony[62]. In this respect, it may also be significant that the great tower at Chepstow bears no relation in design to the great towers at London and Colchester constructed by King William I, where the provision of an imposing space for audience was evidently a key consideration[63], nor to their precursor at Ivry, even though the latter building was well known to fitz Osbern.

Yet if such considerations make it less probable that Chepstow was constructed as a royal hall of audience, what then might have been its intended uses? Turner's judicious analysis stresses both the enigmatic nature of the great tower and the difficulties in reaching any certain conclusions as to its intended functions[64] (Abb. 11). For the absence of a separate

59 Turner *et al*, ›The Great Tower‹, p. 245–249; Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 27.

60 This striking anomaly may perhaps be explained by a change in design at an early stage of construction. This is suggested by the fact that, in the building's current configuration, the beams supporting the first floor would have partly obscured the top of the doorway's inner face, which can hardly have been the designer's original intention (Abb. 8) .

61 Goodall, *Richmond Castle*, p. 9–12.

62 Turner et al, ›The Great Tower‹, p. 250, ›the room must have been dark (even in the middle of the day), cold, draughty and partly smoke-filled when any open hearth was lit‹.

63 J. Ashbee, ›The Function of the White Tower under the Normans‹ ›*The White Tower*‹, p. 125–140.

64 Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 29, ›it is impossible to be certain how the main chamber was used, but a ceremonial or judicial function seems likely‹.

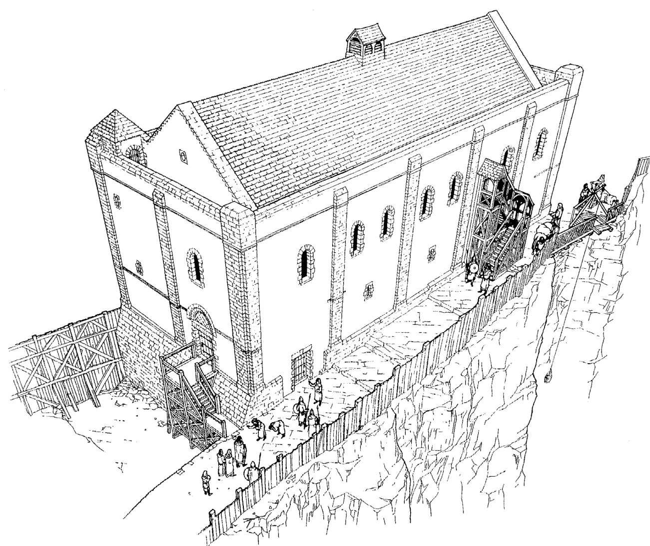

Abb. 11 Reconstruction of the great tower at Chepstow, seen from the north-east, as it may have appeared in the late eleventh century (Drawing: C. Jones-Jenkins. Cadw, Welsh Assembly Government, Crown Copyright).

solar, chapel and latrines present equal difficulties in regarding the great tower as the personal residence of the lord[65]. It may be that the great hall was somehow internally partitioned with wooden walls or screens[66], and this would offer a possible explanation for the existence of a separate external stair which might have served the smaller chamber created by such a partition. No signs of such a screen are visible, however, and the decorative niches run unbroken on the tower's south and western walls. This apparent absence of a solar contrasts markedly with Scolland's Hall, where a spacious solar leading off the main upper hall was equipped with a fireplace, a latrine and even what appears to be a balcony[67]. At Chepstow, footings to the west of the great tower suggest a kitchen range, found in an analogous position at Scolland's Hall[68]. But the lord's private chamber, as well as the chapel and other service buildings, must presumably have been located in the more secure upper bailey, separated from the ridge to the west by a rock cut ditch and probably walled in stone from an early date[69] (Abb. 12). Here it is instructive to note that even after extensive upgrading of the great tower to contain a chapel and upper room, Earl Roger Bigod (who inherited Chepstow in 1270) also built a separate and luxurious domestic range of hall, solar and services complex for his personal use in the more spacious, but by then also heavily

65 Turner *et al*, ›The Great Tower‹, p. 309, ›at no time during its three phases did the Great Tower provide a complete and comfortable suite of domestic accommodation. If successive lords of Chepstow used it as their great hall, it never provided latrines, easy access for food and drink, or small, well-heated and lit private chambers in which to retreat‹.

66 As, for example, at the hall at Christchurch castle, circa 1160 (M. Wood, *Christchurch Castle* (HMSO, Edinbugh, reprinted 1974), p. 4–5). For an alternate reconstruction by Terry Ball of Chepstow's great tower in the eleventh century, showing just such a partition, see Goodall, *Richmond Castle*, p. 10.

67 Peers, *Richmond Castle*, p. 19–22.

68 Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 32; Weaver, *Richmond Castle*, p. 7.

69 Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 32.

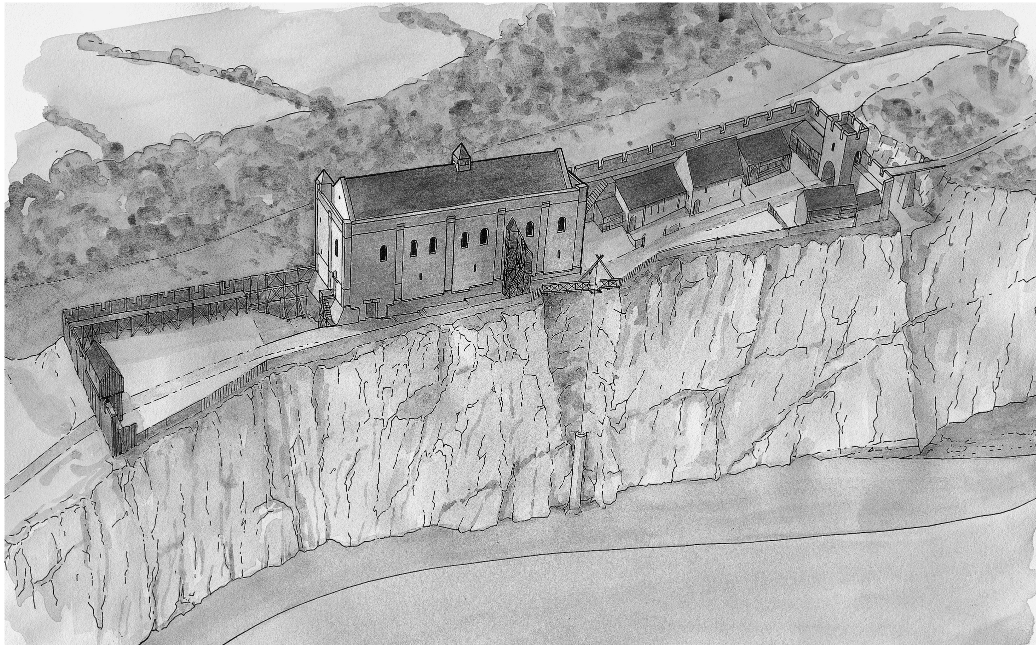

Abb. 12 Reconstruction of the castle at Chepstow, seen from the north, as it may have appeared in the late eleventh century. The upper bailey (to the right of the great tower) may have had a stone curtain wall, but little is known about the buildings in it, or in the conjectured lower bailey (Drawing: C. Jones-Jenkins. Cadw, Welsh Assembly Government, Crown Copyright).

defended, lower bailey[70]. Similarly at Dover, despite the grandeur of Henry II's great tower, Henry III constructed a hall, chamber and domestic complex within the inner ward, suggesting the use of the great tower itself was limited or intermittent[71].

The relationship between great towers and such external domestic buildings is a crucial but still imperfectly understood aspect of the study of these structures and their workings. But if the hall of the great tower was used only intermittently for feasting or communal gatherings, and the lord's own residence centred on other more practical or comfortable buildings, it is still possible that elements of his household or the garrison may have slept in the hall[72]? At Richmond castle, Scolland's Hall itself was the station assigned to the Fitzalans of Bedale when performing castle guard, strongly implying that the knights slept there as a matter of course[73]. To posit a similar use for the great tower at Chepstow is not deny its possible ceremonial or judicial roles; the great tower, like other great halls, was

70 Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 39–45; R. Turner, S. Priestly, N. Coldstream and B. Sale, ›The ›Gloriette‹ in the Lower Bailey‹, in *Chepstow Castle, Its History and Buildings*, ed. Turner and Johnson, p. 135–150.

71 *History of the King's Works*, II, p. 636–637; A. Broadie, ›Arthur's Hall and the Inner Bailey‹, *Research News. Newsletter of the English Heritage Research Department*, p. 12 (Summer, 2009), p. 12–14.

72 Latrine facilities must have been provided outside, though it is not impossible that dry closets were used. At Scolland's Hall, the garderobe in the lord's solar was presumably for private use, and the majority of those in the hall must, as at Chepstow, used garderobes in the bailey.

73 Peers, *Richmond Castle,* p. 19; and on Richmond's castle guard, N. G. J. Pounds, *The Medieval Castle in England and Wales* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 47–49.

multifunctional. It is best understood as combining a number of roles, and of these, defence was arguably among the most important.

The ready combination of military and social functions of such a structure is strongly suggested by William of Poitiers' famous description of the castle of Brionne, besieged by Duke William in 1047, in which he directly equates *aula* with *arx*. The castle, he noted, situated on an island in the river Risle, ›seemed impregnable, both from the nature of the ground and the construction‹, for its defences included ›a stone hall which serves as a citadel for the combatants‹ (*aulam lapideam arcis usum pugnantibus praebentem*)[74]. This intimate connection is reflected in the genesis of some of the earliest stone castles such as Doué la Fontaine and Mayenne, where stone halls were increasingly fortified during the tenth century, and at the stone *domicilium* at Langeais[75]. Here too it is worth recalling the rebellion against Duke Robert I, William's father, by Bishop Hugh of Bayeux, sometime between 1028 and 1032, during which he ›amply fortified the fortress of Ivry with arms and food‹[76]. Recent scholarship has highlighted the significance of the great tower at Ivry in the architectural development of Anglo-Norman great towers and as a key antecedent to the White Tower at London, with which it shares a number of close similarities and dimensions[77]. But whatever its residential and symbolic functions, Hugh clearly considered the great tower of Ivry also to be a highly defensible military base. After installing a garrison, he went to France to raise knights to help him defend the castle[78]. The same combination of defensive potential with ceremonial function has been noted at the White Tower[79], while Scolland's Hall also indicates the close possible juxtaposition of residential and defensive considerations. Here, the east gate of the castle, flanked by a tower, opens into a section of the hall's basement, partitioned off from the main under-hall by a transverse wall to form a ›lobby‹, with a large arch opening through its north wall into the bailey[80]. Though the principal entrance into the castle was through the gate in the north curtain wall, the hall itself formed the most defensible stone structure in the whole castle.

It is, moreover, hard to regard as coincidental the fact that two of the earliest secular stone buildings constructed in the wake of the Conquest were on the frontiers of the kingdom – in newly re-invaded Gwent in the case of Chepstow, and in the case of Richmond, in north Yorkshire, beyond which in the 1070s was a devastated ›debateable land‹ contested with Malcolm III of Scotland. Both are sited on highly defensible cliff-top sites. Indeed, the location of Chepstow's great tower, on the central point of the long but narrow ridge above the Wye, strongly suggests the dictates of defence was a major consideration. The hall's position at the narrowest point of this ridge leaves only a narrow strip of ground some six metres wide between its north wall and the cliff edge, allowing just enough room for an

74 *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers* [WP], ed. and trans. R. H. C. Davis and M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1998), p. 10–11. On chroniclers' terminology, J. Flori, ›Châteaux et fortresses au XIe et XIIe siècles: étude du vocabulaire des historiens des ducs de Normandie‹, *Le Moyen Age*, CIII (1977), p. 261–73.

75 M. W. Thompson, *The Rise of the Castle* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 35–37, 73.

76 *GND*, II, p. 52–53.

77 E. Impey, ›The »*Turris famosa*« at Ivry-la-Bataille, Normandy‹, *The Seigneurial Residence in Western Europe, AD c. 800–1600*, ed. G. Meirion-Jones, E. Impey and M. Jones (British Archaeological Reports, International Series, 1088, Oxford, 2002) p. 189–210.

78 *GND*, II, p. 52–53.

79 Ashbee, ›The Function of the White Tower under the Normans‹, p. 126–128.

80 Peers, *Richmond Castle,* p. 19; Goodall, *Richmond Castle*, p. 12, ›the east end of Scolland's Hall is designed as a massive gatehouse with a flanking tower‹.

external stair and a path linking the baileys on either side. The narrowness of this space must certainly have helped defend the upper bailey from the most vulnerable eastern approach, but it both constrained the design of the hall and dictated that any ancillary buildings were placed in the upper or lower baileys. To the south, the ground falls away steeply, but on this landward face, as already noted, the great hall has no windows or lights, even at basement level. The walls are very thick, and the exposed southern wall is considerably thicker than the northern wall, protected by the cliffs dropping precipitately to the river Wye.

The absence of arrow loops from the great tower has been noted as a factor limiting its defensive capacity[81]. Yet purpose-built arrow loops, with splayed embrasures, are rarely if ever found in eleventh or even twelfth century great towers, and are equally absent from most of the earliest stone enceintes. At Ludlow, for example, neither the curtain wall nor the mural towers, dating from the later eleventh century, have loops, with the defence coming only from the wall head itself [82], and the same is true of the closely contemporary enceinte and towers at Richmond. The increasing primacy of residential features at later great towers such as Orford and Dover cannot be divorced from the increasing sophistication of outer defences, with flanking mural towers and more scientific provision of loops to give flanking fire. Nevertheless, the excavations at the great motte and bailey castle of Hen Domen, built on the Welsh border by Roger de Montgomery in the 1070s, have suggested just how powerful and sophisticated timber defences could be[83]. At Chepstow, the upper bailey appears to have had a stone curtain wall from an early date, but it is reasonable to suppose that the lower bailey possessed the kind of loops and shuttered embrasures on the timber defences suggested in reconstructions of Hen Domen and the great motte and bailey castle at Stafford[84]. The parapet of the great tower was apparently solid rather than crenellated, though that of Scolland's Hall is depicted as battlemented in an early fifteenth-century drawing of Richmond castle[85]. Whatever the case at Chepstow, it is likely given the castle's frontier location that if necessary, some form of wooden hoarding or brattices could be erected to provide cover for the defenders. In 1298–1299, Earl Roger Bigod is known to have mounted a number of springalds on the top of the remodelled great tower[86], and it is not impossible that similar frame mounted crossbows could have been operated from the roof of the eleventh-century building. In 1098, the Norman garrison of the keep (*arx*) at Le Mans fired molten dross from engines (*balistarii*) to set fire to the houses within the city, whose citizens had attacked them[87].

81 Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 29.

82 D. Renn, ›The Norman Military Works‹, *Ludlow Castle*, p. 125–38, at p. 126.

83 P.A. Barker and R.A. Higham, *Hen Domen, Montgomery: A Timber Castle on the English-Welsh border* (Royal Archaeological Institute Monograph, 1982); P.A. Barker and R.A. Higham, *Timber Castles* (1992), p. 326–347.

84 Higham and Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 337, 289–291.

85 Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 7; Goodhall, *Richmond Castle*, p. 10, 18.

86 Turner et al, ›The Great Tower‹, p. 306–309; Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, p. 17; R. Turner, C. Jones-Jenkins, and S. Priestly, ›Roger Bigod's Great Tower‹, in *Chepstow Castle, Its History and Buildings*, ed. Turner and Johnson, p. 166–176. M. Morris, ›The Life of Roger Bigod, Fifth Earl of Norfolk‹, in ibid, p. 127–134, at p. 133, suggests that if these springalds were installed as an act of defiance against Edward I, it can only have been a symbolic gesture given the king's overwhelming military resources.

87 Orderic, V, p. 254–255, and see also. ibid, V, p. 302–303, where Orderic refers to this fortification as a *turris*.

Even though the principal defence of the great tower would have been from its wall head, it is important to bear in mind that a major stone structure would have been highly effective in defence, particularly against the Welsh, who at the period of Chepstow's initial construction, lacked any siege technology beyond escalade. Even in warfare between Anglo-Normans, the seizure of churches with stone towers, abbeys or even cathedrals readily demonstrate the immediate tactical advantage of solidly built stone structures. The stone towers of castles made still more formidable defences. Throughout the eleventh century, and indeed well into the twelfth century, the art of attack, especially in terms of siege artillery, lagged far behind that of defence. In 1026 or 1027, Duke Richard III had besieged his brother Robert in Falaise castle ›using battering rams and siege engines (*cum arietum et balistarum*)[88], but in pre-Conquest Normandy examples of major castles being taken by storm or rendered indefensible by engines are rare. Instead, such fortifications were most often reduced by blockade, forcing the defenders eventually to surrender on negotiated terms due to lack of supplies. But even in such cases, the siege of a powerful castle could be measured in years rather than weeks or months, as Duke William's experience at Brionne from 1047 and Arques in 1053 graphically revealed[89]. Nor were such lengthy blockades invariably successful: despite a long investment beginning in 1084 and perhaps lasting over a year, William the Conqueror's forces were unable to reduce the powerful castle of St Suzanne, on the frontier of Maine and Anjou, or prevent it from being continually re-inforced[90]. Similarly, all attempts by Count Helias of Maine and his allies to wrest the citadel of Le Mans from its Norman garrison failed, and he was only able to obtain it in 1100 by a settlement highly favourable to its defenders[91].

In this context, it is regrettable that so little is known of the role of Chepstow or the other castles held by Earl Roger, including Monmouth, Clifford, Wigmore and Hereford, during his ill-fated rebellion of 1075 against King William. That Chepstow did not play the same crucial role as Earl Ralph's castle at Norwich was due to the rebels' strategy. Despite having Welsh allies in Gwent, Earl Roger attempted to march east to join forces with Earl Ralph, but was successfully prevented from crossing the river Severn by a powerful concentration of royal forces[92]. Earl Ralph's own attempts to break out of East Anglia met with a heavy defeat in battle near Cambridge, and a sustained siege of Norwich castle by royalist forces led to the rapid collapse of the rebellion. It would seem probable that King William's commanders in the south-west similarly moved to besiege Roger's castles in Herefordshire and Gwent, but unlike Guy of Burgundy at Brionne in 1047, however, Earl Roger did not attempt protracted resistance. With his excommunication by Archbishop Lanfranc and King William's return to England, he acknowledged his position as hopeless, and obeyed the royal summons to court to stand trial[93]. Roger was imprisoned, the earldom of Here-

88 *GND*, II, p. 44–45 and n. 3.

89 WP, p. 11 n. 3, and p. 32–43; Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, p. 62–67. For a perceptive study of the nature of this warfare, J. Gillingham, ›William the Bastard at War‹, *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Reginald Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. Holdsworth and J. Nelson (Woodbridge, 1989), p. 141–158.

90 Orderic, IV, p. 46–49.

91 Orderic, V, p. 302–307.

92 *ASC*, D, *sub anno* 1076; JW, III, p. 24–25.

93 *Letters of Lanfranc*, p. 122–123; Orderic, II, p. 318–319, ›*ad curiam regis vocatus venit*‹. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* merely notes laconically that after the fall of Norwich, ›the king afterwards came to England, and captured Earl Roger, his kinsman‹ (*ASC*, D, *sub anno* 1075).

ford was suppressed, and his lands and castles – including Chepstow – were taken into royal hands.

Conclusion

William of Malmesbury noted disdainfully of the Anglo-Saxons prior to the Conquest that ›in small, mean houses (*parvis et abiectis domibus*) they wasted their entire substance, unlike the French and the Normans, who in proud great buildings (*amplis et superbis edifitiis*) live a life of moderate expense‹[94]. The great tower at Chepstow undoubtedly represents just such a ›proud great building‹, intended to project the power and authority of its builder. Its evocation of *Romanitas*, moreover, is a further important reminder of the deep influence the Roman past had on the Normans, whether in terms of physical remains or of the classical literature which so evidently informs William of Poitiers' description of William's invasion of England[95]. To note but one example germane to either of the possible builders of Chepstow's great tower, the crucial council meeting between Duke William and his magnates in 1066 to discuss the invasion of England was said by William of Malmesbury to have been held at the ducal castle at Lillebonne, the former Roman city of Juliobona, where extensive remains, including the massive Gallo-Roman theatre, were still prominent[96]. And according to the later tradition recorded by Wace, it was at this assembly that William fitz Osbern played a leading role in gaining the nobles' support for the enterprise[97]. Though the patron and date of the construction of the great keep at Chepstow cannot be precisely determined, the exceptional power and status of William fitz Osbern argue strongly for his inception of it and its continued construction by his fatally over-ambitious son. Nevertheless, whether the great tower was built before or after the dramatic events of 1075, Chepstow's exposed position on the Welsh frontier must surely have meant that while its great hall may well have served on occasion for ceremonial functions or for judicial purposes, defence was a primary consideration. Indeed, with the removal of the driving force of William fitz Osbern and the suppression of Roger's marcher earldom of Hereford, Chepstow was turned from a jumping-off base for further conquest into a front-line border castle. As subsequent owners of the castle, the Marshals and Earl Roger Bigod, knew well, development of Chepstow's residential provision needed to go hand in hand with continued strengthening of its defences. Had William of Poitiers ever cast eyes on the great tower of Chepstow, he may well have judged it to be not just an *aula*, but also an *arx*.

94 *Gesta Regum*, I, p. 458–459.

95 Similarly Orderic, II, p. 140–141, could liken the assembly of William's great men in 1066 to the Roman senate, while William of Malmesbury commented that ›the soul of Julius Caesar passed into King William Rufus‹ (*Gesta Regum*, I, p. 566–567).

96 *Gesta Regum*, I, p. 448–449; J. Mesqui, *Le château de Lillebonne des ducs de Normandie aux ducs d'Harcourt* (Caen, 2008), p. 5–14. Might this great arena have still be used for large open-air assemblies in the eleventh century?

97 Wace, *The Roman de Rou*, ed. A. Holden, tr. G. S. Burgess and with notes by E. M. C. van Houts (St Helier, 2002), p. 230–233.