

Putting the hump back in

THE TUMP!

Caerwent's famous "Tump" - or to give it its proper name, the "motte", once provided the foundation for a wooden "castle" as long ago as the 12th century.

It is a distinctive feature of Caerwent's antiquities, and is situated at the south-east corner of the walls. Over the centuries the 'tump' has suffered gradual erosion, culminating in full-scale slippage in more modern times.



In order to rectify this, the Welsh heritage organisation CADW set about restoring the motte to what was thought to be its original size.

There was very little to go on - a few measurements from past archaeological surveys, the appearance of similar mottes elsewhere, and a solitary old photograph (left), which was taken about fifty years ago. It was found in the "Caerwent Scrapbook", which was compiled in the late 1950s by what was then known as the Caerwent Local History Group. The scrapbook is now in the care of Caerwent Historic Trust secretary, John Nettleship.

The process involved marking out what was estimated to be the area occupied by the motte in its original size, and building up the steeply sided mound using carefully chosen topsoil to match the surrounding earth. The operation commenced in April 2002, and was completed by the beginning of May 2002.

As the rebuilding progressed, stout plastic netting was laid, and pinned in position with stainless steel pegs. This netting will sit just below the surface and prevent any slipping in the future.



The construction involved many loads of topsoil and some rather scary looking gymnastics with an earthmover, which eventually ended up triumphantly on top of the finished restoration!



The extent of the rebuilding required can be seen on the left - compare it with the finished task below.

The final operation was to spray the newly restored area with a mixture of liquid fertiliser and grass seed. Turf had been considered but it was thought that the sloping sides would be too steep for the individual turves to remain in position.

CADW thoughtfully put up notices at various points in the locality to warn the villagers that the grassing was to take place, and that the process might generate an interesting perfume for a couple of days...

In fact the fertiliser spraying was achieved with no inconvenience to the residents.

However there was one rather startling side effect - albeit a temporary one.

The fertiliser and grass seed mixture was the most vivid shade of emerald green imaginable!

After a few days this faded to a neutral earth colour, and when the grass seed eventually germinates the end result will look very impressive indeed.

Finally, we must mention the four ever-cheerful lads who did all the work - from left to right, Martin, Vince Billy and Graham.

