Gatehouse News

15 January 2014

Developments of the Gatehouse Website. The comprehensive bibliography and gazetteer of the castles, fortifications and palaces of medieval England and Wales.

The ongoing update of the Gatehouse records continues and the records for Westmorland and Wiltshire have been reviewed, updated and improved.

For Westmorland their was a Royal Commission for Historic Monuments *Inventory* published in 1936 which is now transcribed and published online at British History Online. While this is now pretty elderly it is a detailed and useful resource and many quotes from the *Inventory* have been added to the records and links given to the various descriptions, plans and photographs in the BHO version.

This completes the updates for the modern county of Cumbria (made from Cumberland, Westmorland Lancashire North of the Sands). However, the major modern source for the fortified medieval buildings of Cumbria is Denis Perriam and John Robinson *The Medieval Fortified Buildings of Cumbria* (1998) which I looked at some years ago when I had a somewhat different view of 'fortification' so, at that time, I excluded a number of sites they recorded from Gatehouse.

Appleby Castle

I will, therefore, be reviewing that book again in the near future which will be adding some more records.

Cumbria is well served by a number of online resources, although the online county HER is not one of these. Most notable are Visit Cumbria which has some excellent photographs of many castles and towers including many excellent air photographs by Simon Ledingham.
Even more useful is Matthew Emmott's The castles, towers and fortified buildings of Cumbria which contains many excellent photographs, includes a number of lesser and even 'reject' sites as well as a fair bit of useful information and comment.

For Wiltshire most volumes of the county archaeological journal of record - *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* (now called *Wiltshire Heritage*) up to 2006, including a survey of the early castles of Wiltshire by Oliver Creighton, are online as part of the Biodiversity Heritage Library. Links have been added to the relevant references.

Regarding online information on journals I've updated the Gatehouse listing of journals. It is, in fact, a year since I last did this update and I was rather surprised how few broken links there were - organisations do now seem to be maintaining their website more effectively and seem a little more conscious of the benefit of maintaining stable urls, however I do also notice a number of sites where, although the site is still running, there is no evidence of upkeep with many pages one, two or even three years out of date.
More generally two groups of organisations are poor at maintaining stable urls - local county councils and universities. For local councils links to pages about local owned or managed sites frequently change url and sometime disappear all together as do pages giving information on the county archaeology services and Historic Environment Record. For universities reports of archaeological projects usually last only a year or so online before disappearing altogether with there, seemingly, being no thought for online archiving of what are sometimes useful resources. This seems to

be the modern version of some archaeologists giving far to low a consideration to site recording and many of us will know of sites damaged by unrecorded excavations.

For the current round of site record upgrades only those of Northumberland remains to be revised. There are some 600+ records for Northumberland and quite a number of available sources that need to be examined so it may well some time before that revision is completed (each site revision takes an hour or mores work) and, therefore, it may be several months until the next newsletter is published.

Regarding the records for Northumbria I will, of course, be looking at bastles and pele-houses. In a recent paper 'Border Towers, a Cartographic Approach' in *Newcastle and Northumberland - Roman and Medieval Architecture and Art* (BAA Conference Transactions 36) Philip Dixon again called for writers to differentiate between gentry status sixteenth century bastles like Doddington Bastle which is three storey and clearly come from a tower house traditions and the two storey 'pele-houses' of tenant farmers of late sixteenth century and seventeenth century date (like Black Middens) which, arguable, derive more from the longhouse tradition. I will be looking at how to best make this differentiation in the Gatehouse records but I apologise that at the moment I'm still lumping these buildings together under the 'bastle' label.
In my review of Philip's paper published the Castle Studies Group Journal (2013/14 Vol. 27 p. 323) I make a similar call to writers to differential between the earlier tower houses, in particular between baronial status tower houses and gentry status 'pele' towers. Gatehouse does make such a differentiation with separate listings of Tower Houses and Pele Towers. This is a differentiation which used to be made (although there was tendency to call all tower ousel peles) but, for various, rather pedantic, and mainly linguistic reasons the term 'pele' (alternatively peel or piel) became seen as 'incorrect' despite the clear long standing historic use of the term for such towers and was dropped by many professionals and all forms of 'tower house' became lumped under the same label. Clearly all these buildings do

Arnside Tower - A Tower House
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Clifton Hall - A Pele Tower
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share similar dates (mainly fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) and come from the same castle building tradition but, as well as the usually clear difference in the social status of the various inhabitants of these buildings there do tend to be significant design and functional differences. Tower House, like Arnside Tower, as well as being larger and sometimes of more than three storeys, contain the significant domestic chambers, particularly the hall, within the one building (although they often had ranges of ancillary buildings and a fortified courtyard). Pele Towers, such as Clifton Hall, were solar blocks, usually of no more than three storeys, containing just the private family chambers with the significant hall, often of timber and not fortified, being an attached building. A number of smaller pele towers, particularly those which were the dwellings of clerics, were freestanding towers containing all the chambers of that dwelling but not a hall since the resident owner did not have a significant family and servant/farmworker retinue.

A number of smaller changes have been made (usually adding links to online copies of bibliographic references or updates of weblinks) and these will continue to happen and will remain unannounced.

NEW SITE ADDED

Chippenham Bridge. Seemingly Jeremy Haslam suggested that the Anglo-Saxon town of Chippenham had a fortified bridge (strictly speaking he suggests a fortified bridge head) but this suggestion appears to come from analogue alone. There is nothing to suggest the medieval bridge was fortified nor does its repair seem to have been systemically accounted for and it does not seem to have had even a toll-bar. A causeway to the south of the town was maintained by voluntary offerings given to a hermit but the bridge and associated causeway north of the town is not recorded as having any similar arrangement.
Bruce Watson informs me that Jeremy has made similar suggestions for other Saxon towns but I've not looked further into these suggestions.

Bridges are, by their nature, a potential place for defence and almost any bridge can be readily made defensible with wicker gabions, slip trenches, timber barricades etc. in quick order so the expense of building and maintaining fixed fortifications might well not be worth the effort and I consider most bridge defences are mainly about civic prestige and about providing somewhere dry and reasonable safe (from thieves and discontented travellers) for a toll collector to sit and for the tolls collected to be stored even if the justification for the expense of building them was expressed in terms of local and national defence.
For Saxon bridges there was arguably even less need to bother with the expense of fixed fortifications since these really are about protecting people from projectile weapons (arrows) which didn't feature much in Anglo-Danish warfare. The melee weapons of normal use meant the narrow confines of a bridge allowed defence without fortification to be pretty easy as was shown at the Battle of Stamford Bridge.
"The English advance was then delayed by the need to pass through the choke-point presented by the bridge. A later folk story has it that a giant Norse axeman (possibly armed with a Dane Axe) blocked the narrow crossing, and single-handedly held up the entire English army. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that this axeman cut down up to 40 Englishmen. He was only defeated when an English soldier floated under the bridge in a half-barrel and thrust his spear through the laths in the bridge, mortally wounding the axeman." (Wikipedia citing p. 198 of the Swanton 2nd edition of the *ASC*.)

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