

Gatehouse News

29 March 2014

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

It is well over two months since the last update and I'm making slow but steady progress on updating the records for Northumberland which, I hope, will all eventually be much better. I have to thank Andrew Elliot of the Northumberland County Archaeology service for sending me much useful information which is taking time to digest.

One paper I've read recently by Rolin Christopherson on bastles had an index of sites which added a few new possible bastle sites and a

handful of other sites have been added as my various researches have uncover references or made me rethink and re-edit earlier records. About a third of the Northumberland records have been updated but the rest will get done (the old records can be noted by having latitudes given only to 4 decimal places while updated records have 5 decimal places).

Of course, as with all Gatehouse records, even the updated records may be changed and renewed as I get new information or find new sources.

Shortly after the last Newsletter was posted John Tayleur sent me an email about a building on the island of Alderney called 'The Nunnery', formerly 'Les Murs de Bas' (Lower Walls). This was originally a Roman signal station, comparable to that in Scarborough Castle, and still stands to the full height of the Roman walls.

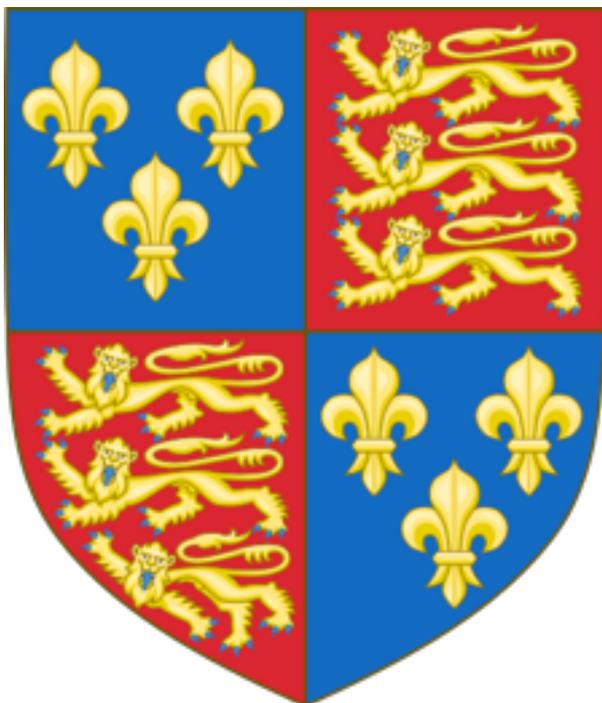
Originally this was a fort, about 40m square with rounded corners with a central tower, probably a *pharos* (lighthouse). As a Roman site this is a fortification well outside the scope of Gatehouse. However in a piece in *Current Archaeology* the Channel Island archaeologist



The Nunnery, Alderney. Photo from www.visitalderney.com

Jason Monaghan wrote 'First recorded as a military blockhouse in the 14th century, by the late 16th century it had become home to the Chamberlain family, governors of Alderney.' David King wrote that 'There appears to have been no mediaeval castle on Alderney'. *The History of the Kings Works* notes "The Tudor forts appear to have been those known as Essex Fort, overlooking the harbour in Longis Bay, and the 'Chateau de Longis', or 'the Nunnery' (as it was later called), on the shore of the same bay. The latter incorporated the shell of an earlier fortification possibly of Roman date, and was converted into a dwelling in 1584-6." The Roman signal station would have had a tall central tower and it may be that this was 'the highest tower' on which John Sperston was to 'display the arms of England, 'to remind and inform all who pass by that the island is held of the crown of England forever'. (Thornton) but this tower has been lost at a later date (alternatively the 'highest tower' may have been a watch tower on the hill above the bay later to be the site of [Essex Castle](#)).

A little research, helped by John Tayleur and Jason Monaghan, has found a few other possible medieval references to the site as a castle or administrative centre although all three of us would certainly welcome any further information. I've recorded it as a fortified manor house but, despite its relatively small size, it may have, arguably, functioned politically more as a castle.



See the new record for the details and decide for yourself whether this small crenellated building was used a medieval castle.

Having looked at quite a bit of the history of the Channel Islands when researching The Nunnery I've taken the time to upgrade all the records for the [Channel Islands and the Isle of Man](#).

This revision (including many hours of chasing broken links to island government web sites) has added a few new doubtful sites and I've regraded a few more sites as doubtful. Mostly these sites are pre-historic fortifications which may well have been used as popular refuges used for short periods in the middle ages but which had no permanent occupation and which were not places of high status residences. It may well be I need to create a new category of 'popular refuge' for such sites of which there are a number of possible examples in Wales although I have difficulty thinking of an example in England.

For all records I've improved and extended the descriptions, most have extended bibliographies and the web resources are much improved.

I've also made a slight design change to the records for the islands introducing a 'comments' section for my own thoughts and comments to separate these from the 'description' taken from authoritative reports. I intend to extend this to all records in due course.

NEW SITES ADDED

From Christopherson the following possible and doubtful bastles.

- [Beltingham House](#).
- [Headshope](#).
- [Plenmeller](#).

From other researches in Northumberland

- [Barty's Pele](#). Although this name is usually given to the [Bog Head](#) bastle an article of 1945 identifies it with a now lost site shown on the OS map of the 1860.
- [Wingates Pele Cottage](#). A possible pele-house type bastle identified in a survey done for the Wingates Community History Group in 2007.

- [Bryness Tower](#). A lost 'tower' marked on 19th century OS maps is added as a dubious entry.
- [Nunnykirk](#). My earlier records for [East Ritton Grange](#) and [Ritton White House](#) had rather confabulated the historical records of a tower at Nunnykirk and this, combined with some possible site misidentification by the various authorities meant I'd missed one probable site location (the East Ritton Grange has been degraded to doubtful).
- [Morpeth Old Bridge, Northumberland](#). There is some evidence the bridge at Morpeth had a gate on its south end although it is probable this was just a toll gate rather than having any defensive function.

The Islands

- [The Nunnery, Alderney](#).
- [Castel de Lecq, Jersey](#).
- [Castel Rozel, Jersey](#). These two pre-historic forts were suggested as possible candidates for two of the 'five fortified castles' on the isle of Jersey recorded in a chronicle of 1406.

- [South Barrule hill-fort, Isle of Man](#). This rather extraordinary pre-historic hill fort, which had massive dry stone walling, is suggested as a popular refuge used in 1316.

Refs:

- Christopherson, R., 2011, 'Northumberland bastles: origin and distribution' *Medieval Settlement Research* Vol. 26 p. 21-33 (a paper somewhat marred by drawing conclusions based on a limited dataset.)
- Colvin, H.M., Ransome, D.R. and Summerson, John, 1982, *The history of the King's Works, Vol. 4: 1485-1660* (part 2) (London) p. 454
- King, D.J.C., 1983, *Castellarium Anglicanum* (London: Kraus) Vol. 2 p. 547
- Monaghan, Jason, 2011 Nov 4, 'Aldernay: A New Roman Fort?' *Current Archaeology* Issue 261
- Thornton, Tim, 2012, *The Channel Islands, 1370-1640: Between England and Normandy* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press) p. 22 citing *Calendar of Signet Letters of Henry IV and Henry V (1399-1422)* no. 519

Philip Charles Davis



The Old Bridge, Morpeth by unknown artist

Oil on canvas, 62 x 83 cm (estimated) Collection: Castle Morpeth Borough Council