



Gatehouse News

1 January 2016

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

The Gloucestershire Historic Environment record coming online in [May 2015](#) has seen the effective completion of the catalogue of medieval fortified sites on Gatehouse, although there remains a possibility of new sites being found and the work of updating the bibliographies for the various site continues.

In 2015, according to [Google Analytics](#), there were just under 180,000 sessions of use of Gatehouse, with 80% of these sessions being for users in the UK, 10% the USA, and 10% elsewhere. However of these 180,000 session over 150,000 lasted less than a minute. What I hope this means is the 27,460 sessions that lasted over a minute, including some 2,036 that last more than half an hour, where useful sessions that helped, what is intended to be quite a select audience, do some useful study related to the castles of England and Wales. I'd like to thank Oliver Creighton for his feedback on how useful his students at Exeter University find Gatehouse and for those students and others elsewhere who have let me know they



are using the site. I also hope that the design of the site is letting people who are not looking for academic content know what the site is about so they move on to something else without me wasting their time.

I still haven't worked out how to best achieve a version of the site that will work effectively on the small screen of a mobile phone and the statistics do show a higher bounce rate for mobile devices (84% as opposed to 78%). I hope to do something about this in 2016.

It is perhaps not surprising to find the most popular individual site page visited was that for the [Tower of London](#) (546 unique page views). Given the relatively short description (For major, well known, sites I tend to give only short descriptions leaving longer descriptions for less well known sites) it is no surprise to see a high bounce rate of 87% but an average visit time of over 3 minutes must mean those who did find the page useful, who must have stayed on the page for in excess of 10 minutes, found it very useful. Quite why the obscure [Tickenhill Manor](#) in Worcestershire was the

● Sessions

1,000

500



April 2015

July 2015

October 2015

Graph of daily session of visitors to the Gatehouse website in 2015

second most popular site with 473 page views and an average visit time of nearly 4 minutes is rather a mystery to me.

Of those parts of Gatehouse which are not derived from official archaeological databases etc. My paper on [Licences to Crenellate](#) (a somewhat updated version of the paper published in 2007 in the [Castle Studies Group Journal](#)) was the most popular with 381 unique page views, a low bounce rate of 64% and an average time on page of 3 minutes.



2016 will be the 950th anniversary of the Norman Conquest of England so it might be expected that in the autumn we might get the usual histories of that Conquest presented in the popular media, including the erroneous myth that the Norman's introduced the castle to England!

Although there are a number of good examples of Saxon castles all are surmounted by later large Norman castles and their history hidden by castellogists uncritically following the views of R. H. Round and Ella Armitage. I hope in 2016 to add a page to Gatehouse that presents the evidence for Saxon castles and criticises the story that the castle was introduced to England by the Normans.

An example shown here on the right is [Hastings Castle](#), which before the conquest had the name Hesteng Ceastra

This had a pre-existing Iron Age defence in 1066 (The bank of this Iron Age site is all one can see of the castle approaching from the landward side - upper photo). The suggestion that a motte was built here in 1066 is mainly based on the illustration on the Bayeux Tapestry (middle image). There is a mound of sandy soil at the castle, which was suggested as being hurriedly erected, although this can not be securely dated. It is certainly likely the pre-existing earthworks were strengthened, possibly using forced local labour, although the Bayeux Tapestry seems to show people with the Norman haircut doing the work. One has a pick, something not needed for a sandy motte but which would be needed to make or repair the rock cut ditch. The likely intent being to protect the valuable horses and equipment of several hundred knights (Something a motte would not do). The recorded amount of time for the occupation of Hastings and the following battle is less than 18 days and it seems probable to me that the Tapestry actual portrays a bank surmounted with a palisade rather than a motte surmounted by a watch tower.

If there is anything you would like to see added to Gatehouse in 2016 please do let me know.

Happy New Year to everyone.

Philip Davis