



Gatehouse News

26 April 2016

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

A most enjoyable annual conference of the [Castle Studies Group](#) based at Hereford has resulted in a reconsideration and update of the records for the sites visited.

For me three general themes arose from the sites visited:

The west of Herefordshire, usually described as a frontier land in castle studies terms, is actually an area of very good agricultural land, with easily tillable soil. I was reminded of a talk given by Rebecca Roseff some years ago, at an autumn conference of the CSG, in which she showed the large cash value of wheat in the 11th and 12th centuries. Although [The Golden Valley](#) takes its name from the welsh word *dŵr*, meaning water, it could well have been golden with wheat in high summer and golden for the local landholders in the sense of income it produced.

A number of sites seem to have originated as rectangular round cornered enclosures. The fact these don't have Roman pottery finds shows these are not Roman in origin, although that has been suggested for



Richard's Castles dovecote (Top left); Snodhill Castle (Top right); Clifford Castle (Bottom)

some of these sites. It may be these actually represent pre-Conquest Saxon sites. Dating earthworks is difficult and the late Saxon manorial centre is not really well understood. [Dr Mark Gardiner](#) presented a paper to the [Society of Medieval Archaeology](#) a few years ago on the topic where, I felt, he present the evidence that the ideal Saxon hall was within a rectangular enclosure. Hopeful, when this is published, a better understanding of the pre-Conquest origin of many castle sites will come about. Although most of the sites are in private ownership and have suffered varying degrees of neglect (and are, or have recently been on, the Heritage at Risk Register) many local trusts are now actively working at conserving these castle and I left with an optimistic feeling about the future of these sites.

I've updated and, often, expanded the records for;

- [Goodrich Castle](#)
- [Longtown Castle](#)

- [Snodhill Castle](#)
- [Hay on Wye Castle](#)
- [Clifford Castle](#)
- [Richard's Castle](#)
- [Wigmore Castle](#)
- [Clun Castle](#)
- [Brampton Bryan Castle](#)
- [Lyonshall Castle](#)
- [Ludlow Castle](#)
- [Stokesay Castle](#)

and, not on the CSG itinerary but visited by me and mentioned in talks, [Kilpeck Castle](#).

Neil Guy has let me know of a number more texts and I've both expanded my library and improved a number references, although I need to do some more work with these.

In 2012 I was fortunate enough to attend the [Norman Connections Project](#) conference at Norwich Castle. The papers from this important conference have now been published as *Castles and the Anglo-*





Pontefract Castle (left); Scruffy 'erbert (right)

Norman World ([Oxbow Books](#)). This is an excellent text with high standards of production. I've added the citations to the relevant site pages (notably the [Tower of London](#) and [Norwich, Colchester and Rochester](#) castles), but the parochial focus of Gatehouse means I miss the Normandy sites, although the English castle can not be understood in isolation from Europe. Anyway this is certainly a book worth considering as an addition to a library.

I'm planning to post a list of sites, mostly in Yorkshire and t'north, that I will be visiting this summer. I tend to take with me on such visits whatever relevant texts I have and I can spend quite a time (sometime all day) at a site looking not just at the architecture but also the surrounding landscape.

I'd be very happy for anyone to join me on such a visit although I'm not organising anything and you would remain entirely responsible for your own arrangements etc.

Because I also tend to want to take photographs without people in them it is usually better to visit sites midweek, rather

than at weekends.

On Wednesday 4 May I will be at Pontefract Castle to see how the ongoing preservation works are going. If you haven't visited the castle in a while clearance of some trees has already made it more visible although some parts of the castle may be inaccessible because of the preservation work. The castle is open from 8.30 am although I intended to get there about 10ish. For those who haven't met me I tend to wear a flat cap but I don't have a whippet, or a genuine Yorkshire accent.

[Visitor information for Pontefract Castle.](#)

Philip Davis



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