

# Gatehouse News

21 November  
2013

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

Nearly 2 months since the last news and relatively little to report. Unfortunately I've been somewhat 'under the weather' which has slowed down my work rate. However, the following changes and developments have been made;

Most of that 2 months has been spent in a site by site revision of the [records for the historic county of Shropshire](#), some 262 records. This means these record now generally have much fuller descriptions more clearly attributed and are more precisely and accurately located. There are some improvements and updates of the bibliographies with some more links to online copies. Unfortunately there isn't an online scan of the 1908 Victoria County History with the earthworks chapter and other editions with the parish histories for Shropshire are either not online or cover only a very limited area of the county. Therefore I've tried to fill in the gaps in tenurial history by adding links to Eyton's *Antiquities of Shropshire*. This 12 volume work from the mid 19th century is certainly impressive in scope but not particularly easy to read and, in practice, somewhat limited in usefulness but does give



Clun Castle. A baronial castle original built by Picot de Say around 1086.

some idea of possible tenurial histories for the numerous small mottes (often without baileys) found, particularly in the western half of the county.

I've quite often added my own comments to the records for Shropshire, something I've tended to do more of in recent years as my own knowledge base and ideas have developed. (I will probably put these in a different field in the database in the near future). In particular for the small mottes I've often added comments on possible tenurial history and possible function.

Generally in the archaeological database record or in text these small mottes are suggested as the base of 'watch towers'. I find this explanation to be trite. Who was doing this watch? What were they watching for? What

would they do if they saw what they were watching for? Given that much of the area is pretty hilly the viewshed from such towers would be limited and even if a watch was mounted and a band of raiders was seen by some sharp eyed individual (without any optical aids) the time before mounted raiders were upon the site might allow people to get to the tower but would not allow livestock (the target of such raiders) to be secured. It might allow a knight time to get into his armour. The tenurial histories show these sites often mark the farmstead of military men (not always of knightly status many were 'serjeants' usually considered to be less well equipped) but the tenurial histories also show these men usually held these farmstead by the feudal tenure of military service to an overlord often in the form of castle-guard at one of the major royal and aristocratic castles of Shropshire



Clungunford motte. Held in 1165 by Simon de Haburdnig for service of a knight's fee castle guard (40 days service) at Clun Castle.

(Shrewsbury; Ludlow; Clun; Oswestry; Brockhurst; Montgomery; Caus; Bishops Castle; Bridgnorth; Holdgate<sup>1</sup>) often specifically in wartime so at the time any raid is most likely the knight would be away from his home (probably a basically undefended timber hall next to one of these mottes). I call these isolated small mottes 'knight's fee' motte because I believe in practice they functioned mainly as a sign of the social status of the tenant of the adjoining farmstead, although, as I say, some of these farmsteads were held by serjeants. Although the motte was a post-Conquest innovation the isolate tower as a symbol of lordship was not uncommon in Saxon England and I feel these towers drew on both traditions (For the Saxon lordship towers a recent PhD thesis by [Michael Shapland](#) *Buildings of Secular and Religious Lordship: Anglo-Saxon Tower-nave Churches* (2012 University College London) is most impressive although obtaining a copy is not easy). Anyway my comments are on the individual site pages and, as always, I welcome comment and feedback on any aspect of Gatehouse but particularly on my own ideas.

The [West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service](#) holds the Historic Environment Records for the 5 unitary authorities (Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield) which were formerly West Yorkshire (A county formed in 1974 which was not the same as the West Riding of Yorkshire). They have added to the [Heritage Gateway](#) database online versions of their records and I've added the appropriate links to site web pages. However, as I had



Montgomery Castle. Grade 1 listed

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actually visited their offices a couple of years ago, this has not added any new sites.

A part of the many databases included in Heritage Gateway is the National Heritage List for England which gives details of all the listed buildings in England. The equivalent for Wales, [Historic Wales Portal](#) is a much less useful resource consisting of a GIS map that I can not get to work in any fashion but which anyway would not allow searchable access to the databases directly. However, with the aid of a spreadsheet of basic details I found online and a bit of persistence I've been able to add a

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<sup>1</sup> These 10 military castles with garrisons do mean Shropshire was a highly fortified county compared to most counties of England which perhaps had two or three castles with garrison of fighting men. However, this is a very different picture from that sometimes suggested or implied from crude distribution maps (such as [my own](#)) which give almost equal status to a small 3m high mound possible mounted by a simple wooden tower and the massive earthworks and multiple baileys of Clun or Shrewsbury. The most obvious comparison is the northern marches of the 14th and 15th centuries where a clear difference is made between the major royal and aristocratic castles and pele towers of gentry status feudal tenants. For Castle Guard see Sidney Painter, 1935, 'Castle-Guard' *The American Historical Review* Vol. 40.3 pp. 450-59 and Frederick C. Suppe, 1989, 'Castle Guard and the Castlery of Clun' *Haskins Society Journal* Vol. 1 pp. 123-34 both reproduced in the excellent (as in must own!) Robert Liddiard (ed), 2003, [Anglo-Norman Castles](#) (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press)

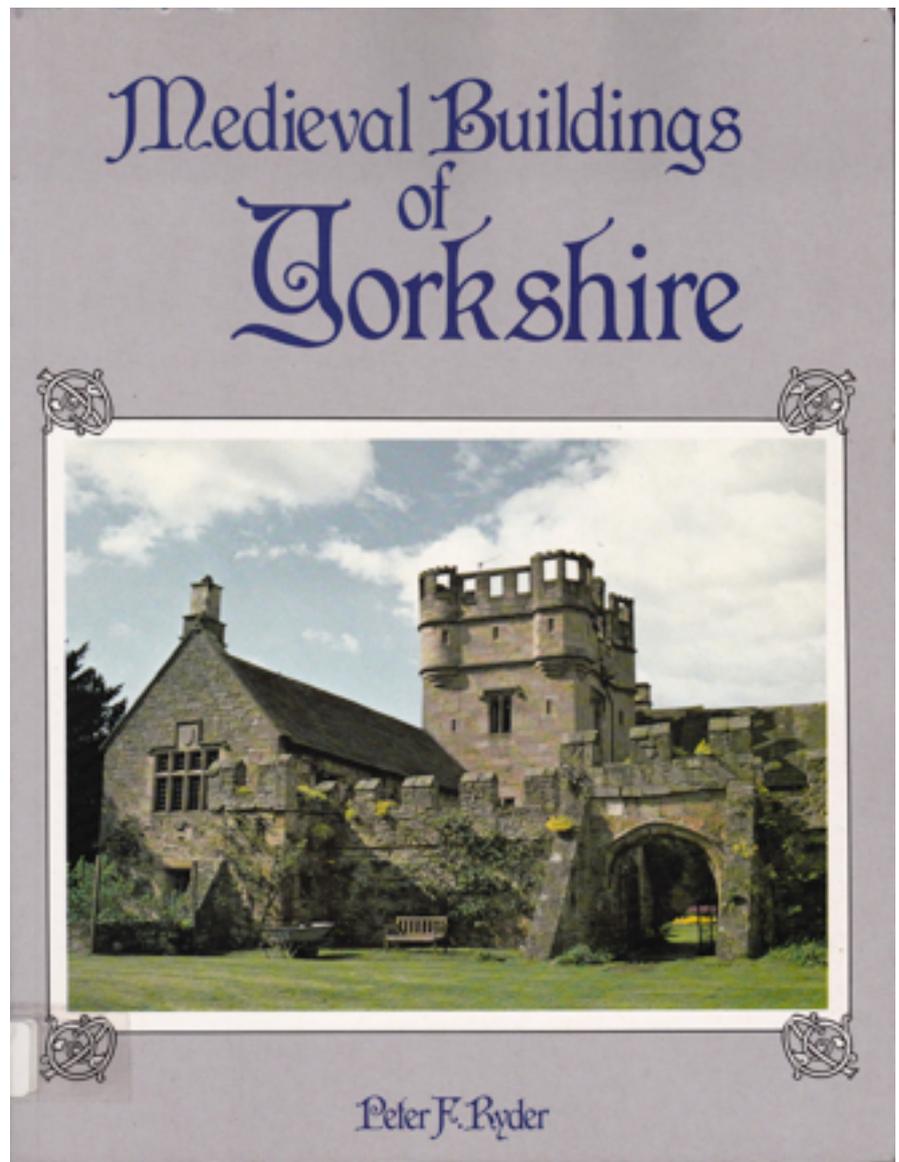
link to all the relevant listed buildings in Wales. The listing reports for Wales are worth looking at as they are often surprisingly full and detailed which is not often true for the English online reports. Some of the Welsh records have been updated with the information from the listed buildings report although more work needs to be done in this regard.

For those who like some stats 187 of 1140 Gatehouse records have one or more listed buildings. Although only a small proportion (2.5%) of all listed buildings are given a grade 1 rating the value given to medieval high status buildings can be seen from the fact 102 of these sites have a building of Grade 1 status and 60 have a building of Grade 2\* status.

[Peter Ryder](#) is a buildings historian of note, particular with regard to bastles. I've been aware of Peter Ryder's work in northern counties for some time and have now met him on a couple of occasions. However I've only just got around to looking at a copy of one of his earlier works *Medieval Buildings of Yorkshire* (I brought a copy of the 1992 paperback edition although the book was originally published in 1982). This is a pleasant enough general guide with chapters ending in gazetteers of building types

#### NEW SITES

- [Dalton-on-Tees moat](#). Listed by Peter Ryder as a fortified manor house although he appears to be describing the site recorded as fish ponds in the archaeological database (shows up nicely on Google air photo). The actual manor house moat lies a little to the north of these. There is nothing to suggest this



- manor house had any fortifications other than a domestic moat so added as a questionable/doubtful site.
- [Wombwell Old Hall](#) had a substantial 15th century tower but was demolished in the 19th century.
- [Worton Hall](#) has a tower at its east end although Ryder writes "most of the visible features of house and tower are 17th century date and later." He lists this as a fortified manor house and I've recorded it as such in Gatehouse although it may well be it better fits into the small tower house category.