

Castles as Past Culture 2: Adaptation and Identity in the Post-Life of Castles.

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Introduction

This paper builds upon a theme explored at the 2006 Château Gaillard Colloquium in Belgium and upon two particular issues, *adaptation* and *identity*, discussed in a lecture to the British Archaeological Association in 2008 (Speight 2008, 247-256). The starting premise is that historians and archaeologists have been narrow-minded in their definition of the scope of castle studies and that there is a need to explore and value castles as sites of community memory and non-elite activity. David Austen has taken this approach in his personalised account of the excavations at Barnard Castle between 1974 and 1981 (2007). He regrets the breaking of ties between local people and the castle occasioned by guardianship:

‘What had also been removed, and perhaps this is far more important, was the direct relationship between the local community and their monument. In very many cases the ruins had become sources of local memory, story and intimate relationship, most of which was sacrificed to sanitise and capture the walls as discrete objects of professional architectural history’ (Austen 2007, 7).

The process of consolidation and display at Barnard had taken precedence over, and had removed the post-medieval purpose of the castle to provide a site of local leisure, a site of private and public gardens, a venue for romantic trysts and a picturesque backdrop for early photographs (Austen 2007, 8). Archaeologists had failed to value adaptation, the process whereby the castle had become part of a changed environment. By this failure, they had ‘severed the linkages’ that justified the castle’s existence (Austen 2007, 8).

Whereas adaptation is about the processes of change, identity is concerned with the construction of our sense of ourselves. Explorations of the post-medieval lives of castles provide much evidence of their contribution to identity and to our romantic view of a shared European past. David Lowenthal has theorised this as a series of ‘validating comforts’ (1985, 44):

- **Familiarity:** monuments are familiar elements in our landscape. We recognise castles (particularly those in stone) and interpret them according to a series of signals with which we have grown up. We place them within a temporal sequence that makes sense to us.
- **Identity:** Recognition of castles links us to our national or local past, giving it reality and meaning.
- **Guidance:** castles represent a society and culture that can elucidate our present by informing us of for example, the nuances of space and the hierarchies to be constructed simply by the positioning of rooms in relation to each other.
- **Enrichment:** castles embody a medieval world that we can still touch, thereby connecting us with the continuum of human history despite our individually inconsequential parts in it.
- **Escapism:** since the ‘Gothic Revival’ of the late 18th and 19th centuries, we have used the middle ages to encapsulate values lost in the wake of rapid social and economic change. Castles indicate stable hierarchies and the paternal relationships of lords to men.

Lowenthal’s validating comforts are emotional rather than intellectual responses and reflect the seeming paradox that while academic interest in castles declines once they are complete, general interest grows once they are in ruins (O’Keefe 2001, 72). The professional focus upon architectural development has restricted interest in the lengthy post-life

of castles despite the reality that a majority of sites spend the bulk of the medieval period, let alone the early modern and modern periods, as redundant monuments. Their 'real life' as castles is fleeting, as reflected in the absence of documentary references for the numerous castles surviving as earthworks today. Innumerable sites are occupied for one or two generations only, many others remain unfinished. Certainly, many spend up to 800 years or more as *former* castles. This begs the substantive question of what has enabled a castle to survive in a recognisable format within a community that may, on initial inspection, have little continuing use for it.

Are adaptation and identity valid topics for research? The East Midlands Archaeological Research Framework sets out a post-medieval agenda calling for fieldwork to assess the 'adaptive re-use' of buildings, to evaluate perceptions and attitudes towards cultural heritage, and to explore issues of exclusion or inclusion experienced by different ethnic [and social] groups' (Cooper 2006, 221-222). Adaptive re-use commonly involves medieval buildings, most obviously ecclesiastical. In Nottinghamshire the great houses of Newstead Abbey, Rufford Abbey and Welbeck Abbey represent fine examples of monasteries re-worked for a new age and purpose, set amidst 'isolationist landscapes' that divorce communities from monuments that were once integral to their economies and identities (Cooper 2006, 221). The sundering of house and community may be medieval in origin but is re-emphasised in the post-medieval period, notably at Rufford in the relocation of the main road further away from the abbey gates (Barley 1957, 88-89). It works differently with castles. Their demise tends to be individual and not part of a specific movement (e.g. the 'Dissolution of the Monasteries'). The majority are well into their retirement before the Cromwellian slights of the 1650s. They are usually

embedded within settlements rather than on their fringes (as are the monasteries). Once embedded they are difficult to remove and their retirement from active service as castles may herald change in, rather than removal of, relationships with the local community.

Detailed consideration of the post-life of castles does not feature in the recent general literature. We find it instead in the single monument case studies. This reflects the low status given to this area of research. Matthew Johnson and David Austen stand out as castle specialists with a serious interest in phenomenology (Johnson 2002; Austen 2007). But an examination of the work going on in the related domains of heritage studies, citizenship and rural education demonstrates that models and theories are emerging that allow us to offer a synthesis of the value and meanings attached to castles in the post-medieval period. Let us examine one castle's story of adaptation and then finish with a broader consideration of identity.

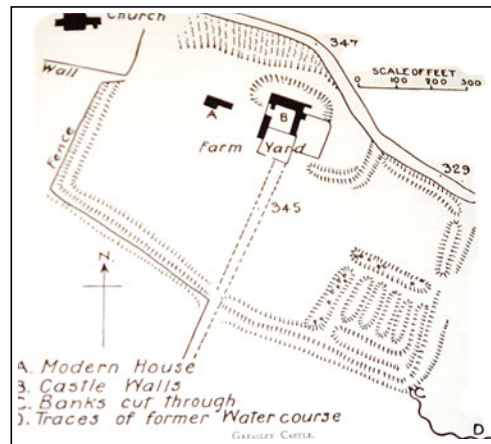


Figure 1. Greasley Castle from the Victoria County History (1905).

Adaptation: Greasley Castle

Greasley Castle sits on the coal measures forming the boundary between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (Bolton and Newbury 1967, 24) (Figure 1). Nicholas de Cantilupe obtained his licence to crenellate here in 1340

(Rickard 2002, 56). The resulting castle was a quadrangular structure bearing some resemblance in plan to the contemporaneous castles of Maxstoke and Stafford. However, by the end of the 14th century the castle had ceased to be a lordly residence and was instead being exploited for its mineral resources and agricultural wealth. By 1595, the Savage family had carved the Greasley castle estate into a number of tenancies and the castle itself was in poor repair:

'The castle is nowe in some decay for defaults of coveringe and other necessary reparacions and so was in decaye longe tyme before ye said Henry Poole or Bonaventure Eyton...Surrendred And cannot be repayred w'thowt great Chargs and expense. Henry Poole may alter and transforme anie parts of the said decayed buildings and to builde them in anie other Manner and forme so yt thereby the Compase and foundation of the said buildings be not abridged or altered' (Nottinghamshire Archives Office (NAO) DD-FM 80/1).

Tenant rights at Greasley were strictly limited. They had no rights of mineral exploitation (these being retained by the Lord Savage), although they were allowed to take timber. They were permitted to repair the castle buildings at their own expense if usage did not change. The estate was leased in portions throughout the 17th century for a range of agricultural and industrial purposes. On January 31st, 1641/2, John, Earl of Rutland, Lord Roos of Hamblacke, Trusbutt, and Belvoyre, contracted with Charles White of 'Bevall' (Beauvale), gentleman, to sink pits on the 'demesnes of Greasley Castle' (NAO DDFM 80/3). White's job was to establish the presence of coal. John, Earl of Rutland, agreed to provide the timber for the sinking of the pits with Charles White excavating the pits and keeping them 'drie and free from offence of water' at his own cost. Rutland would be entitled to one fifth of all the coal mined or the equivalent value.

In 1647 White was contracted to search for coal in the Kestoes pasturelands



Figure 2. Greasley Castle. Looking north towards the Georgian farmhouse (successor to the house occupied by Humphrey Jameson, with the south-west range of the castle to the right).

in the manor of Greasley. He was provided with timber to construct a 'horse engine', a water engine, engine house, stables and a house. In return the Earl of Rutland would receive 200 loads of coal each year for use at his Castle of Belvoir or other 'mansion house' (NAO DDFM 80/6). The growing operation required additional resources and, the same year, Rutland sought the right to draw water to supply the new engine from a spring on the lands of his neighbour Lord Capel. Meanwhile, the civil war affected upon local alliances. Charles White served as a Colonel of the Dragoons for Parliament. Rutland was a parliamentarian. Lord Capel was royalist. He was captured at Colchester in August 1648, was tried and condemned by a Parliamentary Commission and then beheaded on 9th March 1649 (Von Hube 1901, 94-5).

In 1687 framework knitting was the principal industry at Greasley. Humphrey Jameson, a citizen and cloth worker of London, leased from the Earl the *capital mesuage* of Greasley Castle, excepting timber, coal, lead, ironstone and game for 21 years (NAO DDFM 80/12). Jameson had permission to take timber to keep the building in

repair, and was instructed to keep the land in good heart with lime and manure. The wording of the lease suggests that he was living in a new farmhouse (the ‘singular house edifice’) rather than in the castle (Figure 2):

‘Greasley castle with the appurtenances all and singular house edifice buildings barn and stables orchards gardens lands meadows and feeding pastures closes inclosures and parcels of land or ground thereunto belonging’ (NAO DDFM 80/12).

The inventory of Jameson’s property at his death in 1690 lists four stocking frames in the garret. It was common practice, particularly in the Midlands, for large houses to be adapted as a workshop with part of the house retained as living accommodation for the family (Chapman 2002, 19-20). This would have been easier in the new house with its high roof spaces and better light than in the crumbling castle ranges, although the rooms are familiar components of the medieval great house too:

Hall
Parlour
Kitchen
Buttery
Brewhouse
Chamber over the hall and parlour
Chamber over the kitchen
Little chamber and Maid’s chamber
Garret
Unidentified room

By 1827 Greasley Castle had become Greasley Castle Farm. This subtle change of nomenclature encapsulates the move from medieval castle to industrial estate, with an accompanying decline in status from resident lords to tenant craftsmen and farmers. However, the castle had not been forgotten. Its name was retained and its physical remains dictated the layout of the post-medieval buildings. The tenants, the Grammer family, strived to maintain membership of the county gentry, describing themselves in census returns as ‘gentlemen’ and sharing shooting rights with the more established

families locally (NAO DD/LM P/25 Map 11; NAO DD/LM 217/11). Throughout the second half of the 19th century the Grammers managed an estate of one hundred acres. Staffing numbers fluctuated from six men in 1851 to one servant / labourer in 1891. The mechanisation of farming, together with the seasonal nature of agricultural work, could explain this reduction. Alternatively, the Grammers were sub-leasing to tenants, another mechanism that may have helped them in their quest for gentry status.

In 1915 James Noon, innkeeper, moved to Greasley Castle Farm as tenant. In the early 1950s his sons managed to buy the estate and ran it as a mixed farm producing milk, beef, potatoes and wheat. When surveyed in 1964, its acreage had swelled to 300 acres, 50 acres for open cast mining, and a further 50 acres restored to agricultural quality by the National Coal Board (Bolton and Newbury 1967, 44).

Greasley has continued to be identified with its castle throughout that building’s post-life, a post-life that to date is over ten times the length of its primary ‘castle-life’. It has had a far longer life as an industrial and agricultural centre than it ever had as a castle. Yet the ‘castle’ badge endures. This is evidenced by its toponymic, by the presence of ‘castle’ surnames in the surrounding area, by the use of the castle as a locational marker in court cases, and by the iconic depiction of the castle on a tapestry map produced in 1632 (Speight 2008, 251), (Figure 3). Although the castle was falling into disrepair by the late 16th century, portions of it survived to be adapted and incorporated into successive phases of farm buildings. The remains of the medieval great hall are adjacent to the entrance of what was the milking parlour. The castle earthworks have provided a constant visual reminder to locals and passers-by on the B600 of the former grandeur of the site. It has been adapted to the needs of successive owners and tenants, moving its focus from industry to industry. It is clear that Greasley Castle has



Figure 3. Greasley Castle. Icon from the Rampton Tapestry Map of 1632.

made its greatest contribution to local topography, economy, identity and status as an adapted medieval castle. It has acted as a social glue to hold a dispersed community together either via lordship, agriculture and industry, or via ‘heritage’.

Identity

In 2004 the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) and Atkins Heritage completed an assessment of the cultural value of the historic environment for the National Trust (IFA/Atkins Report 2004). The report sought to move beyond ‘regeneration rhetoric’ to present objective evidence that the historic environment was of benefit to society not just economically, but in terms of community wellbeing and citizenship. Although no connection was made, the ‘cultural value’ for which evidence was collated can be linked to Lowenthal’s ‘validating comforts’ of familiarity, identity, guidance, enrichment and escapism. The starting premise was that the historic environment is good for us because it:

- * helps to create sustainable communities
- * tackles social exclusion by nurturing community identity
- * encourages active citizenship
- * helps us understand our long history of immigration and cultural diversity

- * combats crime and antisocial behaviour through developing pride of place
- * creates jobs through traditional crafts and conservation
- * encourages good new design to complement the old
- * supports tourism (IFA/Atkins Report 20-04, 7).

How to measure these benefits was not however clear. The Team used a mix of desk-based research, observational research, interviews and questionnaires to assemble a list of indicators and assess the usage and valuation of the historic environment in two study areas within the Stoke-on-Trent conurbation. The initial indicators included visible historic environments (1), historic environments marked in some way by residents (2), topics of conversation/interaction (3), development of networks (4), improved self-confidence (5) and better health or well-being (6) (IFA/Atkins Report 2004, 23). To what extent can these indicators be applied to castles and to their communities past and present? For example, Egmonton Castle in Nottinghamshire is redundant by the 14th century but remains a dominant feature in the landscape and affects subsequent settlement morphology (Figure 4). It survives (1) and influences upon the developing village (2). It features in local myths and folklore evidenced in the 19th century (3) and is used to create links with the neighbouring larger settlement of Laxton (4) via shared histories and more recently, village trails (Speight and Franklin 2004). Greasley Castle is visible (1), is marked by residents by its name, by its incorporation into a local heritage trail and signage, by forming part of a Local Heritage Initiative funded project (2) and by its use as a field visit and work location by local groups, a regional archaeological society and by a local University in partnership (4). Better health and well-being (6) may be evidenced because of guided walks taking in the castle and other features of the local historic environment. The links can be made,

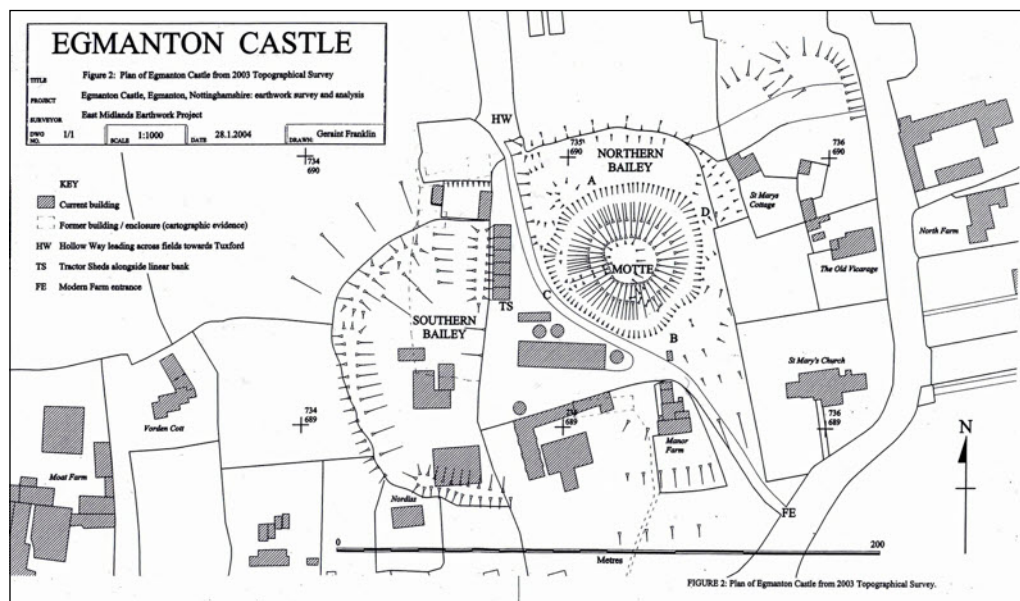


Figure 4. Egmanton Castle. Plan showing influence of the castle upon field boundaries and roads. Reproduced by kind permission of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire.

although it is clear that the IFA/Atkins indicators rely upon familiarity and the other 'validating comforts' to give them significance of meaning.

The Report noted the potential mismatch between buildings considered important by a community and those actually listed, thereby indicating different sets of values (IFA/Atkins Report 2004, 36). Although it does not say this, it is in effect articulating the great divide between 'the general public' (or, the 'community'), and the 'built environment professionals' (or, the elite). It is into the gulf between these two groups that have fallen the important research questions around adaptation and identity. To what extent have the elite fashioned our view of the historic environment and is there a less managed view to be recovered and valued? Is value for academic posterity at odds with value for a past and present community? What is most significant in terms of building 'pride of place' in modern Britain, if that is an agreed aspiration? Is it the architectural value of the me-

dieval castle/ archaeological site, or is it (in a Nottingham context) the legend of Robin Hood with its potential to attract visitor revenues and to sell a cleansed image of wealth redistribution in an idealised past?

Conclusion

There are as many pasts as there are people and we complete our past in the light of our own experiences. However, are there fundamental differences between the pre and post industrial/modern/global worlds? David Lowenthal suggests that many more people are now interested in the past than *in* the past, due to the impact of mass migrations and our search for roots, both old and new:

'Earlier folk largely fused past with present. Stability and cyclical recurrence muted marks of change and averted the breaches that now sunder old from new, useful from obsolete, the dead from the living.....the only vestiges of the past medieval Europeans systematically conserved were princely talismans and spiritual icons – the vestments and bodily traces of saints and sovereigns. Ancient edifices were allowed to decay or were demolished with little sense of the past' (Lowenthal 1998, 13).

I concur with the fusion but not with the lack of sense of the past. As the adaptation of medieval monuments demonstrates, the past could be a living and present experience that affected daily life. Redundant castles for example were boundary markers. The 'old' castle of Annesley (Nottinghamshire), just within the boundaries of the royal forest of Sherwood, was a marker in a forest perambulation of 1232, having been superseded for over a decade by a new manor house (Patent Rolls 4 Henry III, 238). Former mottes were meeting places, ditches sources of grazing, moats of eels, former curtain walls sources of stone for village houses. Adaptive re-use was a medieval and post-medieval norm, but in a context that retained memory or lore of former use, as expressed in place and field names.

The past has a sense of its past created according to its cultural context. When similar cultural contexts occur, similar responses can be seen. For example, Arthur Marwick notes that 'amid the catastrophe of war there is a turning of minds towards the previous element of civilization' (1990, 85). Marwick is writing of the post second world war period but his observation can be projected backwards to the flowering of antiquarian activity after the Dissolution of the Monasteries (Leland), after the English Civil Wars (Aubrey, Stukeley) and during the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century (Speight 2003). Robert Hewison explains what is so attractive about this crisis-compelled nostalgia in a paragraph that can be easily adapted for the castles of the late-18th-19th century Gothic Revival:

'The country house [or castle] stands for a pre-war society of established values and social relations; its very fabric is the product of a uniquely English artistic tradition, and its occupants, in their family relationships, employment of servants, and ownership and rule over the surrounding countryside, reflect a secure social order' (Hewison 1981, 65).

This is a top-down view of course (an Englishman's Home is his castle), and hardly reflective of the alternative views of those servants/villeins/serfs of these and former generations. We cannot assume that castles are always positive elements in individual and community identities; just as the medieval forest may lurch from romance to crime, so the castle may move from icon of stability and order to icon of oppression and petty bureaucracy. Tom McNeill has commented upon the negative legacy of the castle as cultural icon in an Irish context (McNeill 1997, 2). This can go much further. Castles can be agents of 'identicide', a concept developed from within the discipline of cultural geography (Meharg, 2005).

Chris Atkin has added a further nuance to the debate: 'in times of national crisis such as war.....combatants are often reminded of the picture of rural life they are fighting to preserve'. Johnson talks about 'emotional ruralism' as an essential component of 'Englishness' (Johnson 1996, 45). The England to be protected in a crisis is a rural England. For the majority of castle earthworks surviving today in rural settings, is this another aspect of the collective psyche that contributes towards a view of the romantic ruin as emblematic of a cultural past?

Alongside rurality as a facet of our construction of identity sits Christianity; again providing a context into which castles fit comfortably. See how William Hoskins configures the historic landscape:

It was pleasing 'to know which of these farms is recorded in Domesday Book, and which came later in the great colonisation movement of the 13th century; to see on the opposite slopes, with its Georgian stucco shining in the afternoon sun, the house of some impoverished squire whose ancestors settled on that hillside in the time of King John and took their name from it; to know that behind one there lies an ancient estate of a long-vanished abbey where St. Boniface had his earliest schooling, and that in front stretches the demesne farm of Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings; to be aware...that one is part of an immense unbroken

stream that has flowed over this scene for more than a thousand years' (Hoskins 1984, 228).

We have arrived at an essentially romantic view of the medieval past, fused with rurality and Christianity and built upon the elite edifices of castle and church. Despite and because of adaptation, the strength of this view has endured and has contributed towards our constructed heritage-conscious identities. If we accept the subjectivity of academic enquiry, then it seems obvious that the post-life of castles requires quite as much scholarly attention as does the medieval life. Perhaps we need to return to the techniques of Leland in the 16th century and to ensure that we do as much listening as we do reading and recording.

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