

= Stokesay Castle =

Stokesay Castle is a fortified manor house in Stokesay , Shropshire , England . It was built in the late 13th century by Laurence of Ludlow , then the leading wool merchant in England , who intended it to form a secure private house and generate income as a commercial estate . Laurence 's descendants continued to own the castle until the 16th century , when it passed through various private owners . By the time of the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1641 , Stokesay was owned by William Craven , the first Earl of Craven and a supporter of King Charles I. After the Royalist war effort collapsed in 1645 , Parliamentary forces besieged the castle in June and quickly forced its garrison to surrender . Parliament ordered the property to be slighted , but only minor damage was done to the walls , allowing Stokesay to continue to be used as a house by the Baldwyn family until the end of the 17th century .

In the 18th century the Baldwyns rented the castle out for a range of agricultural and manufacturing purposes . It fell into disrepair , and the antiquarian John Britton noted during his visit in 1813 that it had been " abandoned to neglect , and rapidly advancing to ruin " . Restoration work was carried out in the 1830s and 1850s by William Craven , the second Earl of Craven . In 1869 the Craven estate , now heavily in debt , was sold to the wealthy industrialist John Derby Allcroft who paid for another round of extensive restoration during the 1870s . Both of these owners attempted to limit any alterations to the existing buildings during their conservation work , which was unusual for this period . The castle became a popular location for tourists and artists , and was formally opened to paying visitors in 1908 .

Allcroft 's descendants fell into financial difficulties during the early 20th century , however , and it became increasingly difficult for them to cover the costs of maintaining Stokesay . In 1986 Jewell Magnus @-@ Allcroft finally agreed to place Stokesay Castle into the guardianship of English Heritage , and the castle was left to the organisation on her death in 1992 . English Heritage carried out extensive restoration of the castle in the late 1980s . In the 21st century , Stokesay Castle continues to be operated as a tourist attraction , receiving 39 @,@ 218 visitors in 2010 .

Architecturally , Stokesay Castle is " one of the best @-@ preserved medieval fortified manor houses in England " , according to historian Henry Summerson . The castle comprises a walled , moated enclosure , with an entrance way through a 17th @-@ century timber and plaster gatehouse . Inside , the courtyard faces a stone hall and solar block , protected by two stone towers . The hall features a 13th @-@ century wooden @-@ beamed ceiling , and 17th @-@ century carved figures ornament the gatehouse and the solar . The castle was never intended to be a serious military fortification , but its style was intended to echo the much larger castles being built by Edward I in North Wales . Originally designed as a prestigious , secure , comfortable home , the castle has changed very little since the 13th century , and is a rare , surviving example of a near complete set of medieval buildings . English Heritage has minimised the amount of interpretative material displayed at the property and kept the castle largely unfurnished .

= = History = =

= = = 13th - 15th centuries = = =

Stokesay Castle was built in the 1280s and 1290s in the village of Stokesay by Laurence of Ludlow , a very wealthy wool merchant . Stokesay took its name from the Anglo @-@ Saxon word stoches , meaning cattle farm , and the surname of the de Says family , who had held the land from the beginning of the 12th century onwards . In 1241 , Hugh de Say sold Stokesay to John de Verdon ; John then left for the Eighth Crusade in 1270 , mortgaging the land on a life @-@ time lease to Philip de Whichcote . John died in 1274 , leaving his rights to the property to his son , Theobald .

Laurence bought Stokesay from Theobald and Philip in 1281 , possibly for around £ 266 , which he could easily have afforded , as he had made a fortune from the wool trade . Laurence exported wool from the Welsh Marches , travelling across Europe to negotiate sales , and maintaining offices in

Shrewsbury and London . He had become the most important wool merchant in England , helping to set government trade policies and lending money to the major nobility . Stokesay Castle would form a secure personal home for Laurence , well @-@ positioned close to his other business operations in the region . It was also intended to be used as a commercial estate , as it was worth around £ 26 a year , with 120 acres (49 ha) of agricultural land , 6 acres (2 @.@ 4 ha) of meadows , an expanse of woodland , along with watermills and a dovecot .

Work began on the castle at some point after 1285 , and Laurence moved into his new property in the early 1290s . The castle was , as Nigel Pounds describes it , " both pretentious and comfortable " , initially comprising living accommodation and a tower to the north . In 1291 Laurence received permission from the King to fortify his castle - a document called a licence to crenellate - and he may have used this authority to construct the southern tower , which had a particularly martial appearance and was added onto the castle shortly afterwards .

In November 1294 Laurence was drowned at sea off the south of England , and his son , William , may have finished some of the final work on Stokesay . His descendants , who took the Ludlow surname , continued to control Stokesay Castle until the end of the 15th century , when it passed into the Vernon family by marriage .

= = = 16th - 17th centuries = = =

Stokesay Castle was passed by Thomas Vernon to his grandson Henry Vernon in 1563 . The family had hopes of becoming members of the peerage and , possibly as a consequence , the property began to be regularly called a " castle " for the first time during this period . Henry divided his time between London and Stokesay , probably staying in the north tower . Henry stood surety for an associate 's debts and when they defaulted , he was pursued for this money , resulting in a period of imprisonment in Fleet Prison ; by 1598 he sold the castle for £ 6 @,@ 000 to pay off his own substantial debts . The new owner , Sir George Mainwaring , sold the property on again in 1620 , via a consortium of investors , to the wealthy widow and former Mayoress of London , Dame Elizabeth Craven for £ 13 @,@ 500 . The estates around Stokesay were now valuable , bringing in over £ 300 a year in income .

Elizabeth 's son , William , spent little time at Stokesay and by the 1640s had leased it out to Charles Baldwyn , and his son Samuel . He rebuilt the gatehouse during 1640 and 1641 , however , at a cost of around £ 533 . In 1643 the English Civil War broke out between the supporters of King Charles I and Parliament . A Royalist supporter , William spent the war years at Elizabeth Stuart 's court at the Hague , and gave large sums of money to the King 's war effort . William installed a garrison in the castle , where the Baldwins were also strong Royalists , and , as the conflict progressed , the county of Shropshire became increasingly Royalist in sympathies . Despite this , by late 1644 bands of vigilante clubmen had risen up in Shropshire , complaining about the activities of Royalist forces in the region , and demanding , among other things , the removal of the garrison from Stokesay Castle .

By early 1645 the war had turned decisively against the King , and in February , Parliamentary forces seized the city of Shrewsbury . This exposed the rest of the region to attack , and in June a force of 800 Parliamentary soldiers pushed south towards Ludlow , attacking Stokesay en route . The Royalist garrison , led by Captain Daurett , was heavily outnumbered and it would have been impossible for them to effectively defend the new gatehouse , which was essentially ornamental . Nonetheless , both sides complied with the protocols of warfare at the time , resulting in a bloodless victory for the Parliamentary force : the besiegers demanded that the garrison surrender , the garrison refused , the attackers demanded a surrender for a second time , and this time the garrison were able to give up the castle with dignity .

Shortly afterwards on 9 June , a Royalist force led by Sir Michael Woodhouse attempted to recapture the castle , now garrisoned by Parliament . The counter @-@ attack was unsuccessful , ending in the rout of the Royalist forces in a skirmish at the nearby village of Wistanstow .

Unlike many castles in England which were deliberately seriously damaged , or slighted , to put them beyond military use , Stokesay escaped substantial harm after the war . Parliament

sequestered the property from William and ordered the slighting of the castle in 1647 , but only pulled down the castle 's curtain wall , leaving the rest of the complex intact . Samuel returned in 1649 to continue to rent the castle during the years of the Commonwealth , and put in wood panelling and new windows into parts of the property . With the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660 , William 's lands were returned to him , and the Baldwyns continued to lease Stokesay Castle from him .

== 18th - 19th centuries ==

During the 18th century , Stokesay Castle continued to be leased by the Baldwyn family , although they sublet the property to a range of tenants ; after this point it ceased to be used as a domestic dwelling . Two wood and plaster buildings , built against the side of the hall , were demolished around 1800 , and by the early 19th century the castle was being used for storing grain and manufacturing , including barrel @-@ making , coining and a smithy .

The castle began to deteriorate , and the antiquarian John Britton noted during his visit in 1813 that it had been " abandoned to neglect , and rapidly advancing to ruin : the glass is destroyed , the ceilings and floors are falling , and the rains streams through the opening roof on the damp and mouldering walls " . The smithy in the basement of the south tower resulted in a fire in 1830 , which caused considerable damage to the castle , gutting the south tower . Extensive decay in the bases of the cruck tresses in the castle 's roof posed a particular threat to the hall , as the decaying roof began to push the walls apart .

Restoration work was carried out in the 1830s by William Craven , the Earl of Craven . This was a deliberate attempt at conserving the existing building , rather than rebuilding it , and was a very unusual approach at this time . By 1845 , stone buttresses and pillars had been added to support parts of the hall and its roof . Research by Thomas Turner was published in 1851 , outlining the history of the castle . Frances Stackhouse Acton , a local landowner , took a particular interest in the castle , and in 1853 convinced William to carry out further repair work on the castle , under her supervision , at a cost of £ 103 .

In 1869 the Craven estate , 5 @,@ 200 acres (2 @,@ 100 ha) in size but by now heavily mortgaged , were purchased by John Derby Allcroft for £ 215 @,@ 000 . Allcroft was the head of Dents , a major glove manufacturer , through which he had become extremely wealthy . The estate included Stokesay Castle , where from around 1875 onwards Allcroft undertook extensive restoration work over several years . Stokesay was in serious need of repairs : the visiting writer Henry James noted in 1877 that the property was in " a state of extreme decay " .

Allcroft attempted what the archaeologist Gill Chitty has described as a " simple and unaffected " programme of work , which generally attempted to avoid excessive intervention . He may have been influenced by the contemporary writings of the local vicar , the Reverend James La Touche , who took a somewhat romanticised approach to the analysis of the castle 's history and architecture . The castle had become a popular sight for tourists and artists by the 1870s and the gatehouse was fitted out to form a house for a caretaker to oversee the property . Following the work , the castle was in good condition once again by the late 1880s .

== 20th - 21st centuries ==

Further repairs to Stokesay Castle were required in 1902 , carried out by Allcroft 's heir , Hebert , with help from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings . The Allcroft family faced increasing financial difficulty in the 20th century and the castle was formally opened for visitors in 1908 , with much of the revenue reinvested in the property , but funds for repairs remained in short supply . By the 1930s the Allcroft estate was in serious financial difficulties , and the payment of two sets of death duties in 1946 and 1950 added to the family 's problems .

Despite receiving considerable numbers of visitors - over 16 @,@ 000 in 1955 - it was becoming increasingly impractical to maintain the castle , and calls were made for the State to take over the property . For several decades the owners , Philip and Jewell Magnus @-@ Allcroft , declined these

proposals and continued to run the castle privately . In 1986 Jewell finally agreed to place Stokesay Castle into the guardianship of English Heritage , and the castle was left to the organisation on her death in 1992 .

The castle was passed to English Heritage largely unfurnished , with minimal interpretative material in place , and it needed fresh restoration . There were various options for taking forward the work , including restoring the castle to resemble a particular period in its history ; using interactive approaches such as " living history " to communicate the context to visitors ; or using the site to demonstrate restoration techniques appropriate to different periods . These were rejected in favour of a policy of minimising any physical intervention during the restoration and preserving the building in the condition it was passed to English Heritage , including its unfurnished interior . The archaeologist Gill Chitty has described this as encouraging visitors to undergo a " personal discovery of a sense of historical relationship and event " around the castle . Against this background , an extensive programme of restoration work was carried out between August 1986 and December 1989 .

In the 21st century , Stokesay Castle continues to be operated by English Heritage as a tourist attraction , receiving 39 @, @ 218 visitors in 2010 . British Airways , in conjunction with English Heritage , named their last Boeing 757 aircraft Stokesay Castle in 2010 for its final month of flying . The castle is protected under UK law as a Grade I listed building and as a scheduled monument .

= = Architecture = =

= = = Structure = = =

Stokesay Castle was built on a patch of slightly rising ground in the basin of the River Onny . It took the form of a solar block and hall attached to a northern and southern tower ; this combination of hall and tower was not uncommon in England in the 13th century , particularly in northern England . A crenellated curtain wall , destroyed in the 17th century , enclosed a courtyard , with a gatehouse - probably originally constructed from stone , rebuilt in timber and plaster around 1640 - controlling the entrance . The wall would have reached 34 feet (10 m) high measured from the base of the moat . The courtyard , around 150 feet (46 m) by 125 feet (38 m) , contained additional buildings during the castle 's history , probably including a kitchen , bakehouse and storerooms , which were pulled down around 1800 .

The castle was surrounded by a moat , between 15 feet (4 @. @ 6 m) and 25 feet (7 @. @ 6 m) across , although it is uncertain whether this was originally a dry moat , as it is in the 21st century , or water @- @ filled from the pond and nearby stream . The spoil from digging out the moat was used to raise the height of the courtyard . Beyond the moat were a lake and ponds that were probably intended to be viewed from the south tower . The parish church of St John the Baptist , of Noman origins but largely rebuilt in the middle of the 17th century , lies just alongside the castle .

Stokesay Castle forms what archaeologist Gill Chitty describes as " a comparatively complete ensemble " of medieval buildings , and their survival , almost unchanged , is extremely unusual . Historian Henry Summerson considers it " one of the best @- @ preserved medieval fortified manor houses in England " .

= = = Buildings = = =

The gatehouse is a two @- @ storied , 17th century building with exposed timber and plasterwork , constructed in a distinctively local Shropshire style . It features elaborate wooden carvings on the exterior and interior doorways , including angels , the biblical characters of Adam , Eve and the serpent from the Garden of Eden , as well as dragons and other nude figures . It was designed as essentially an ornamental building , with little defensive value .

The south tower forms an unequal pentagon in shape , and has three storeys with thick walls . The walls were built to contain the stairs and garderobes , the unevenly positioned empty spaces

weakening the structure , and this meant that two large buttresses had to be added to the tower during its construction to support the walls . The current floors are Victorian in origin , having been built after the fire of 1830 , but the tower remains unglazed , as in the 13th century , with shutters at the windows providing protection in winter . The basement was originally only accessible from the first floor , and would have provided a secure area for storage , in addition to also containing a well . The first floor , which formed the original entrance to the tower , contains a 17th @-@ century fireplace , reusing the original 13th @-@ century chimney . The second floor has been subdivided in the past , but has been restored to form a single chamber , as it would have been when first built .

The roof of the south tower provides views of the surrounding landscape ; in the 13th @-@ century protective wooden mantlets would have been fitted into the gaps of the merlons along the battlements , and during the English Civil War it was equipped with additional wooden defences to protect the garrison .

The hall and solar block are adjacent to the south tower , and were designed to be symmetrical when seen from the courtyard , although the addition of the additional stone buttresses in the 19th century has altered this appearance . The hall is 54 @.@ 5 feet (16 @.@ 6 m) long and 31 feet (9 @.@ 4 m) wide , with has three large , wooden 13th @-@ century arches supporting the roof , unusually , given its size , using lateral wooden collars , but no vertical king @-@ posts . The roof 's cruck joists now rest on 19th @-@ century stone supports , but would have originally reached down to the ground . The roof is considered by the historian Henry Summerson to be a " rare survival for the period " . In the medieval period a wooden screen would have cut off the north end , providing a more secluded dining area .

The solar block has two storeys and a cellar , and would have probably acted as the living space for Laurence of Ludlow when he first moved into the castle . The solar room itself is on the first floor , and is reached by external steps . The wood panelling and carved wooden fireplace are of 17th @-@ century origin , probably from around 1640 . This woodwork would have originally been brightly painted , and included spy @-@ holes so that the hall could be observed from the solar .

The three @-@ storey north tower is reached by a 13th @-@ century staircase in the hall , which leads onto the first floor . The first floor was divided into two separate rooms shortly after the construction of the tower , and contain various decorative tiles , probably from Laurence 's house in Ludlow . The walls of the second floor are mostly half @-@ timbered , jettying out above the stone walls beneath them ; the tower has its original 13th @-@ century fireplace , although the wooden roof is 19th @-@ century , modeled on the 13th @-@ century original , and the windows are 17th @-@ century insertions . The details and the carpenters ' personal marks on the woodwork show that the hall , solar and north tower were all constructed under the direction of the same carpenter in the late 1280s and early 1290s .

= = = Interpretation = = =

Stokesay Castle was never intended to be a serious military fortification . As long ago as 1787 , the antiquarian Francis Grose observed that it was " a castellated mansion rather than a castle of strength " , and more recently the historian Nigel Pounds has described the castle as forming " a lightly fortified home " , providing security but not intended to resist a military attack . The historian Henry Summerson describes its military features as " superficial " , and Oliver Creighton characterises Stokesay as being more of a " picturesque residence " than a fortification .

Among its weaknesses were the positioning of its gatehouse , on the wrong side of the castle , facing away from the road , and the huge windows in the hall , reaching down to the ground and making access relatively easy to any intruder . Indeed , this vulnerability may have been intentional - its builder Laurence was a newly moneyed member of the upper class , and he may not have wanted to erect a fortification that would have threatened the established Marcher Lords in the region .

Nonetheless , Stokesay Castle was intended to have a dramatic , military appearance , echoing the castles then being built by Edward I in North Wales . Visitors would have approached the castle across a causeway , with an excellent view of the south tower , potentially framed by and reflected in

the water @-@ filled moat . The south tower was probably intended to resemble the gatehouses of contemporary castles such as Caernarfon and Denbigh , and would probably have originally shared the former 's " banded " stonework . Cordingley describes the south tower as " adding prestige rather than security " . Visitors would then have passed by the impressive outside of the main hall block , before entering the castle itself , which Robert Liddiard notes might have been an " anticlimax from the point of view of the medieval visitor " .

= = = Carved 17th @-@ century woodwork = = =