

The castle from the southwest with Hastings Tower on the right

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR GRANTED THE Manor of Ashby to one of his principal followers. Later it passed by marriage to the Zouch family.

The earliest remains of the castle appear to belong to the middle of the twelfth century. These buildings were rebuilt and added to during the following two centuries.

Edward IV granted Ashby to his Lord Chamberlain, Lord Hastings, who added the tower which bears his name.



ENGLISH HERITAGE

ASHBY DE LA ZOUCHE CASTLE



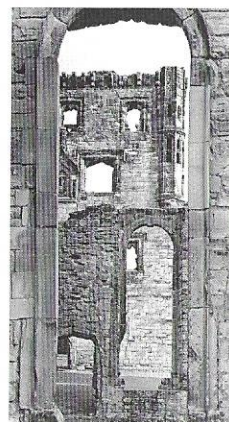
ENGLISH HERITAGE

THE CASTLE IS IN ASHBY DE LA ZOUCH, LEICESTERSHIRE, ON THE A50 TWELVE MILES south of Derby. Ordnance Survey Landranger map 128, reference SK363167.

Ashby de la Zouch Castle

LEICESTERSHIRE

T L JONES MA



The manor of Ashby was granted by William I to one of his principal followers, Hugh de Grentmeisnil, and subsequently passed by marriage to the Zouch family. The earliest remains of buildings are certain sections of the walls of the hall, buttery and pantry, which appear to belong to the middle of the twelfth century. In the course of the next two centuries these buildings were rebuilt and the kitchen and solar added to them.

After the Wars of the Roses, Edward IV granted Ashby to his Lord Chamberlain, William, Lord Hastings, who between the years 1474 and 1483 added the tower, which bears his name, and the chapel. These were the last additions of importance to the castle, which was 'slighted' after the Civil War.

This handbook takes you on a tour of the castle, describing it as it was built and lived in. There is also a history of the castle and those connected with it. This illustration above is looking south through the hall to Hastings Tower.

*The front cover illustration shows the north side of Hastings Tower seen from the solar
The illustration opposite is looking south through the hall to Hasting Tower*

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Tour and Description



The castle with the kitchen building on the left, the chapel near the centre and Hastings Tower on the right

The present entrance to the castle is from the west, across a rising grassy slope on the site of buildings which formed the west side of the south courtyard. The position of the original gateway is not known, but was probably approximately on the site of the old Grammar School (see page 13).

Kitchen building – exterior

From the ticket office the first building to be reached is the large and striking kitchen. Kitchen buildings of the style and scale at Ashby are not common in medieval architecture, although another good example is the abbot's kitchen at Glastonbury.

There is documentary evidence of a kitchen building here in 1347, but details

of the interior suggest that the present structure was erected between 1350 and 1400. All the windows were inserted about 100 years later; the stone used and the detail are similar to that of Hastings Tower.

On the external face of the south wall (1 on the plan on page 14) a small rectangular projecting turret contains the chimney of one of the great fireplaces and latrines on the first and second floors; remains of the latrine shafts can be seen in the southwest corner. Projecting about 20 feet (6.1m) southwards from this face are the remains of the buildings forming the western range of the south courtyard. The weather mould of the pitched roof can be seen on this wall. A staircase here led up to the first-floor apartments which lay over the buttery.

Kitchen – interior

down five steps to a small servery room with a hatch (in front of you) to the kitchen passage and a doorway to the courtyard. There are two other doorways which connect the kitchen with the kitchen passage.

The kitchen was an enormous room, over 30 feet (9.1m) high. It was roofed by a one-ribbed vault of three bays; on the west wall the semicircular columns supporting the intermediate bays of the vault can be seen rising from a horizontal projecting ledge about 11 feet (3.3m) above ground. The whole of the west wall and a portion of the north have been destroyed, almost certainly when the castle was slighted (intentionally partly destroyed to prevent it being used) after the Civil War.

Only the wall ribs of the vault remain, rising from plain moulded capitals (see the survey on page 25). The stone at the base of each arch has a carved grotesque head. Each bay of vaulting was slightly recessed.

Though partially destroyed, the kitchen has much of interest. There are two stone fireplaces; that in the south wall 4 is made up of separate flues running up in the wall on either side of the window. Between them is a circular recess for a cauldron, with a vent through the wall. To the right is an oven. To the left of the place a small door leads to a cellar and a brick barrel-vaulted underground passage to Hastings Tower (see page 11). In the east wall, to the right of the centre doorway, is a serving hatch 5 opening through to the kitchen passage. The remains of the stone table in the hatch can be seen as a ledge on the left. There is a small locker or cupboard between the hatch and the doorway through which you entered the kitchen.

The other fireplace 6 is smaller and of

less interest, the arch being a modern restoration. There is a cauldron recess to the right of this fireplace. To the left is a well. In the same wall a recess contains a small cupboard and a blocked window, which may have overlooked a postern (small gateway) in the boundary wall of the north courtyard. This wall has been rebuilt at some time and now overlaps the window reveal; the blocking may have taken place at the same time.

All the doorways in the kitchen building date from the fifteenth century, as do the serving hatch and locker, but it is impossible to say which are insertions and which are remodellings of similar original features. The windows are also fifteenth century, but they probably replace smaller windows in similar positions.

A spiral staircase, off the doorway 7 in the northeast corner, gave access to the upper floors of the kitchen building and the apartments over the kitchen passage and buttery. There were several rooms above the kitchen; six fifteenth-century windows survive and the corner of a fireplace can be seen in the north wall.

It is likely that originally the building reached only to its present height but old drawings suggest that later a third storey was added, or at least that the four corner turrets were carried up an extra storey.

Go through into the kitchen passage.

Kitchen passage

This connected the north and south courtyards, with a wide doorway to the former. For the greater part of its length this passage was covered with a flat timber roof; the holes for the supporting beams can still be seen in the west wall. Above both ends of the passage was a corridor or gallery at first-floor level connecting the kitchen with the rooms over the buttery.

At the north end the springing of the arch which carried the gallery can still be

seen in the outer wall of the kitchen stair turret and its north wall survives with two windows. Originally this arch formed the entrance to the passage from the north courtyard, but in the sixteenth century the present smaller doorway was inserted.

A broad opening 8 leads up two steps to the buttery and pantry.

Buttery and pantry

Only the foundations of the south and west walls remain. The surviving walls consist largely of twelfth-century masonry. This building appears to have been the solar of the twelfth-century manor house until the new solar was erected in the fourteenth century. It was of two storeys and was divided, on the upper floor at least, into three compartments. Traces of the two dividing walls can be seen on the east wall at first-floor level. The first floor was probably reached by external staircases on the site of the present north and south porches of the hall.

In the sixteenth century the buttery and pantry were converted into a large three-storeyed gabled building which is shown in pictures of the castle as late as 1800. Only the mullioned and transomed window in the north wall now remains.

Go through one of the doorways 9 in the east wall to the hall.

The hall

This was the communal eating and sleeping place of the household. It is the oldest building in the castle that is still standing and was probably completed before 1200, although it has undergone several drastic rebuildings since then. The original masonry is easily detectable, being of small squared rubble with thin bonding courses at irregular intervals. (The dating is shown on the plan on page 14.)

The earliest arrangement of the hall

cannot be determined with certainty, but it was probably of two storeys. The ground floor was a little more than 1 foot (30cm) below the present ground level. Two small round-headed arches in the west wall gave access to the original solar. Fragments of the heads of the arches can be seen beside the existing sixteenth-century doorways through which you entered.

The upper floor was probably reached by the same external stairs which led up to the upper floor of the old solar.

About 1350 the hall was redesigned as a single-storeyed building. The floor was raised to the present ground level and two stone arcades were built to support the roof; the octagonal bases of two of the columns can still be seen. At each end of the arcade the arches sprang from corbels in the wall. The corbels were richly carved but erosion has removed most of the detail.

The lord's table would have been on a dais at the east end of the hall 10. At the foot of the dais was an open fire on a brick hearth; the hearth that can still be seen may be a later replacement.

At this period the hall was lit by four large pointed windows, roughly in the position of the present windows. Access to the hall was by the screens passage; the passage being separated from the hall by wooden screens with doors. Above this passage was a gallery; the holes for the supporting joists can be seen in the west wall.

In the sixteenth century the porches were added at both ends of the screens passage. The south porch is the earlier and plainer of the two. The north porch, which is almost contemporary with the final reconstruction of the hall, has some elaborate strapwork ornament above the outside of the doorway 11. In the spandrels of the arch are much eroded remains of heraldic carvings. A picture of the castle in 1730 shows this porch with an elaborate gable with a sundial.

In the final reconstruction of the hall the present round-headed windows with keystones replaced the pointed lights and the open hearth was replaced by the fireplace with an external chimney in the north wall. In its final form the building appeared with a steep pitched roof and circular windows in the gable ends. The house survived until after 1730, the gables were rebuilt after 1770.

Leave the hall by the southeast door and turn left into the solar.

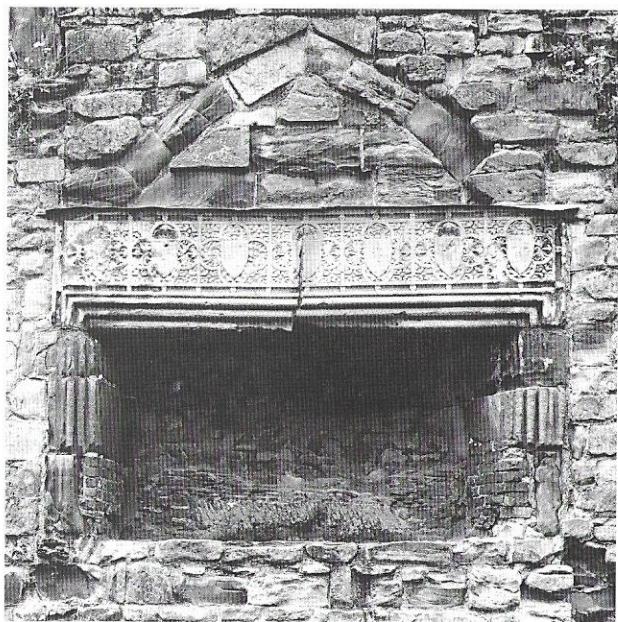
The solar

The solar block contained the private apartments of the lord and his family. It had two floors and the ground floor was divided into two rooms by a central wall. At first its length (north to south) was the same as the width of the hall, but later it was extended at both ends. These

extensions contained doorways, now blocked, which appear to belong to the early fifteenth century, suggesting that enlargement took place then. A similar doorway, also blocked, led into the southeast corner of the hall. This may have been replaced by the existing sixteenth-century doorway in the southwest corner of the solar **12**.

A doorway in the northeast side of the solar led to a small set of rooms **13**. Only a portion of the wall with a fireplace remains; this has been very much rebuilt so it is impossible to say when it was constructed. Joist holes for its upper floor can be seen in the solar wall.

As shown in old prints, the solar roof was a steeply pitched gable-ended structure; it was not marked by the weather moulding still visible in the outside of the north wall above the window. This formed a decorative pediment; the true pitch of



Fifteenth-century fireplace in the solar

the roof is indicated by the weather moulding on each side of the window.

A set of rooms northeast of the solar is shown on old drawings and plans, and it is said to have been built to provide extra accommodation for the visit of James I and his suite. It was pulled down in 1830 when the present manor house was built, and no trace of it remains.

Next visit the chapel.

Chapel

The unusually large and fine chapel is the last of the range of buildings that begins with the kitchen. This was apparently the earliest of the extensive additions made by the first Lord Hastings between 1464 and 1483.

The richly moulded entrance in the west wall **14** is of a workmanship very like that of Hastings Tower, and there is a close resemblance between the masonry of the two buildings. The tracery of the fine perpendicular windows has now almost completely disappeared, but the Bucks' engraving of 1730 (see page 23) shows it intact.

Below the east window is a blocked doorway **15** which appears to have been a very late insertion. In the southeastern corner **16** is an original ogee-headed piscina. The engraving of 1730 shows that the chapel had a low-pitched roof with large battlements; the outline of the gable end can still just be discerned in the east wall.

Various holes in the internal walls suggest that there were once wooden panelling and seating. Some linen-fold panelling in Smisby Church, a mile and a half away, is said to have been taken from Ashby.

The western end of the chapel was a low vestibule. The spiral staircase **17**, in the turret which projects from the south wall, led to two floors of domestic apartments above the vestibule. The joist

holes for the first floor can be seen in the west wall of the chapel; from this floor doorways led into the upper floor of the solar block.

A raking groove in the outer wall of the stair turret and the adjacent chapel wall shows that a range of two-storeyed buildings once projected southwards towards Hastings Tower, forming the western enclosure of a small courtyard **18** that was bounded on the north by the chapel. Doorways from the stair turret led to the first floor and the roof of this range.

In recent years the chapel has been used as a mausoleum for members of the Hastings family.

Priest's Rooms

Forming the east side of the small courtyard **18** are the remains of a range of two-storeyed buildings traditionally called the Priest's Rooms, although there is no evidence that they served that purpose.

A staircase in the thickness of the north wall **19** led to the upper floor; a doorway **20** leads to a latrine within the same wall. In the east wall are four late fifteenth-century fireplaces, one with carved spandrels. Also in this wall a doorway **21** leads to another latrine, below which is a cesspit reached by a sloping ramp from the courtyard. It is interesting to compare these latrines with the earlier ones in the kitchen building.

This range also belongs to the additions made between 1464 and 1483. That it is later than the chapel is proved by its junction with the east wall and southeast angle buttress of the chapel, but it probably preceded the erection of Hastings Tower by several years.

There are indications of buildings along the south side of this courtyard **22**, including the remains of a fireplace. The date and purpose of the buildings are

certain, but they were demolished by stings, no doubt when the wall behind m was built. This wall is contemporary h Hastings Tower, which it adjoins. st holes and corbels for roof timbers w that it formed the outside wall of a -storeyed range, but no foundations can seen. Possibly the range consisted of 1-to timber outbuildings.

In the centre of the wall is a recess with cross-shaped loophole for bowmen. To right is a low arch above a drain through wall, which is connected with the cistern cesspit of Hastings Tower. On the outside of this wall, at the theast corner **23**, the remains of an angle ret can be seen, corbelled out from the l on a fine moulded base. This closely embles the work in Hastings Tower.

Hastings Tower

nding somewhat aloof from the dings previously described, Hastings ver was the last major addition to the le and, although ruined, it still forms most striking feature.

The first Lord Hastings obtained licence renellate (fortify) in April 1474, and uniformity of design, with certain lence of hasty planning, suggests that it completed in a very short time after : date. The tower originally rose almost eet (27.4m) but it has lost the upper 10 (3m) or so which formed its parapet, lements and angle turrets.

n plan the tower was almost square a smaller rectangle attached to the side. The main part of the tower had : storeys but the smaller part had seven in the same height.

The southern portion of the tower, uding the entire south wall, was royed when the castle was attacked in 3, thus the appearance of this portion certain. The south wall may have ained a postern door and windows

arranged like those in the north wall.

The entire tower was crowned by a parapet with machicolation which still remains in parts, consisting of corbels on which the parapet was supported on arches. These can still be seen at the top of the exterior of the tower (see page 9).

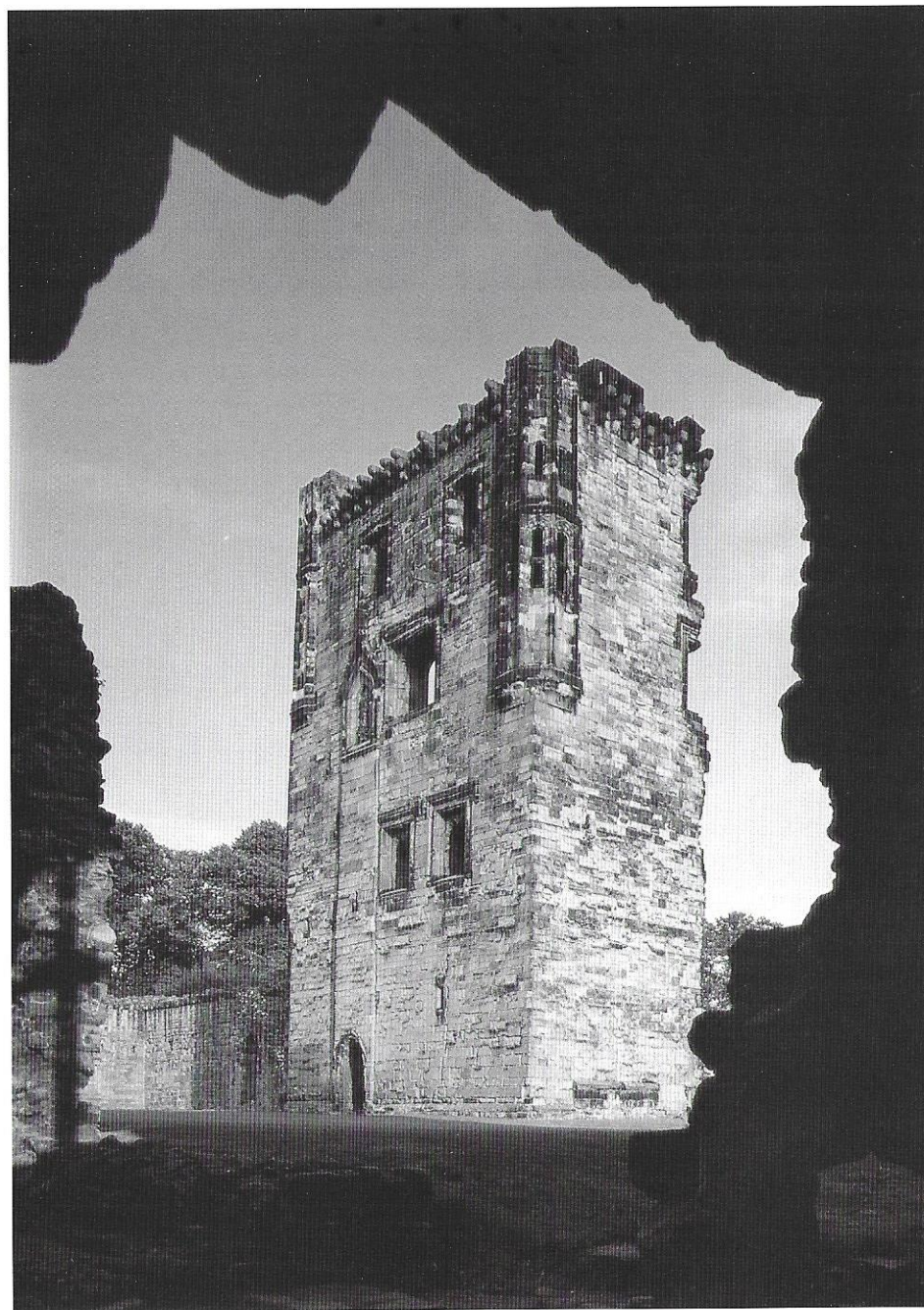
On the north side the three angle turrets originally rose above parapet level, and no doubt there were similar turrets at the southwest and southeast angles. The turrets were semiocagonal in plan and decorated with the panelled tracery, common in fifteenth-century work; their bases had carved shields.

The northeast angle of the tower **24** is chamfered off for its lowest 30 feet (9.1m).

The only remaining entrance is in the north wall near two wells. The narrow doorway has a pointed arch and portcullis grooves. The jambs and arch have one continuous rich moulding, in two orders—the outer carved with foliage and fleur-de-lis, the inner with heraldic lions. The doorway is set in the centre of a narrow flat pilaster, purely decorative, which rises to the sill level of the top storey of the tower, and terminates in a richly moulded niche, surmounted by a crocket ogee finial (ornament). In the niche are the Hastings arms and crest, supported by kneeling figures.

On your left when entering is a spiral staircase **25** which led to all floors of both sections of the tower and to the roof. It still leads to the top and if you have the energy for the long climb you will be rewarded with a fine view.

Under this staircase is a small square room with an arched roof and a seat or shelf. This has been described as a prison but it was probably a porter's room. Outside the door is a pit which contained the stairs to the room. Beyond this is a store room **26** with two ventilation shafts, one in the east wall and one in the north. The ceiling was a plain barrel vault.



Hastings Tower from the northwest

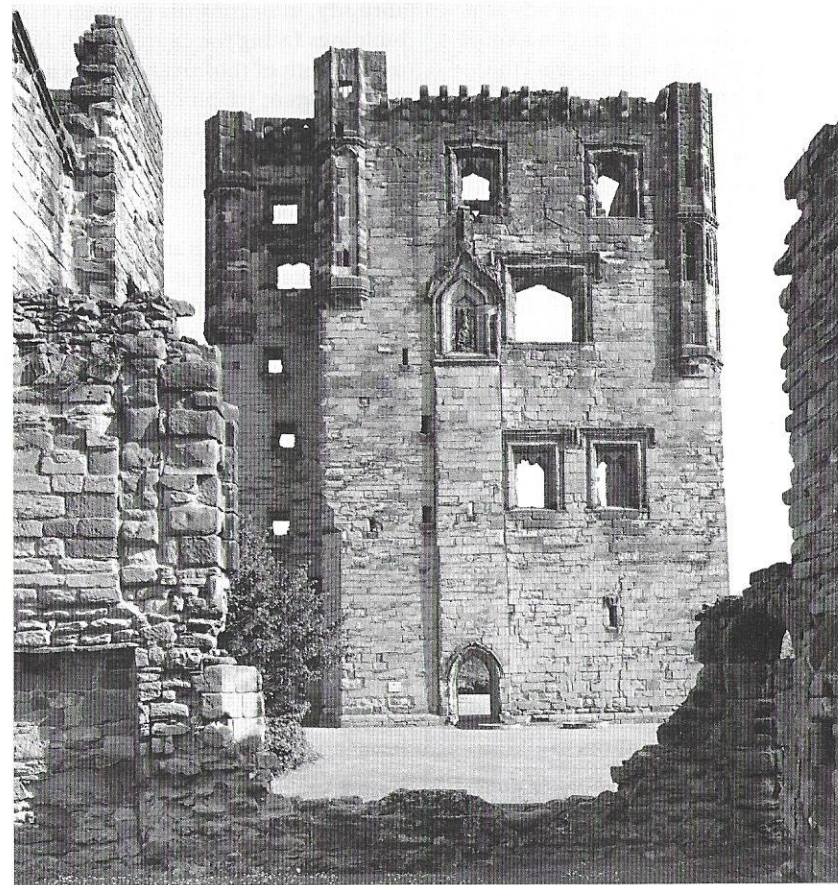


Hastings Tower from the southeast

in the southeast corner is a cesspit and
 ain **27**, which suggests that the rooms
 is section of the tower contained
 nes within the south wall, similar to
 e in the Priest's Rooms.
 he first-floor room was probably also
 re. It had no door to the staircase but
 reached through a trapdoor in the
 den floor of the room above. The upper
 ns were probably bedrooms. The
 nd-floor room was vaulted and has
 ire-headed windows and several
 oards recessed in the wall. The third-
 fourth- floor rooms have similar

windows, and the latter a small fireplace in
 the east wall. The two top (fifth and sixth)
 floors have large ornamented windows
 which have four-centred arched heads.

The ceiling of the ground floor of the
 main part of the tower was a plain pointed
 vault, the springing of which remains on
 the surviving walls. As this room was used
 for storage, and for security purposes,
 daylight and ventilation were limited. A
 narrow loop with deeply splayed sill
 remains in the north wall **28** (see the
 illustration above). The outside of this loop
 is surmounted by the Hastings shield.



The north side of Hastings Tower seen from the solar

A flight of steps **29** leads down to the
 brick barrel-vaulted underground passage
 to the old kitchen in the north range.

The first floor of the main part of the
 tower was the kitchen. This had a more
 elaborate ribbed vault in three bays. Red
 and grey sandstone are used indiscrimi-
 nately in the piers of this vault. In the
 north wall two bays of the vault contain
 two-light square-headed windows, the
 third a slit.

Below the centre window is a sink and
 below that a well in the thickness of the

wall, giving the tower an independent water
 supply. The portcullis of the entrance
 gateway was worked from the recess
 containing the slit. In the west wall is the
 large kitchen fireplace, with a recess,
 apparently an oven, on the right, ventilated
 by an outlet high up in the west wall.

The floor above the kitchen was the
 hall. This had a wooden ceiling and a large
 square-headed window in the north wall
 (shown on page 10 and above) with a four-
 centred rear arch. Only one jamb of a
 similar window remains in the west wall.

TOUR AND DESCRIPTION: Wilderness

the northwest corner is a doorway to a passage within the wall, leading to a small room in the northwest angle turret (the windows of this are shown in the cover plan). This room, which is now inaccessible, was probably a small chapel. The top floor of the tower contained a solar or withdrawing room. It was reached from the staircase through a short passage within the north wall. On the wall of the passage are three shields of the Hastings and Beauchamp families. In the centre of the north wall is a flat-headed window carved with various Hastings devices. On either side is a small two-light square-headed window. A wall passage leads from the window recess on the left to a small room above the chapel. In the west wall are remains of a larger window.

Extending westwards from Hastings Tower is a grassy bank which marks the site of a wall or buildings which once joined to the kitchen building, thus completing the south and west sides of the south courtyard. These remains are fragmentary but it is unlikely that the buildings were of great size or importance. On the west side of Hastings Tower the ground-floor string course breaks off

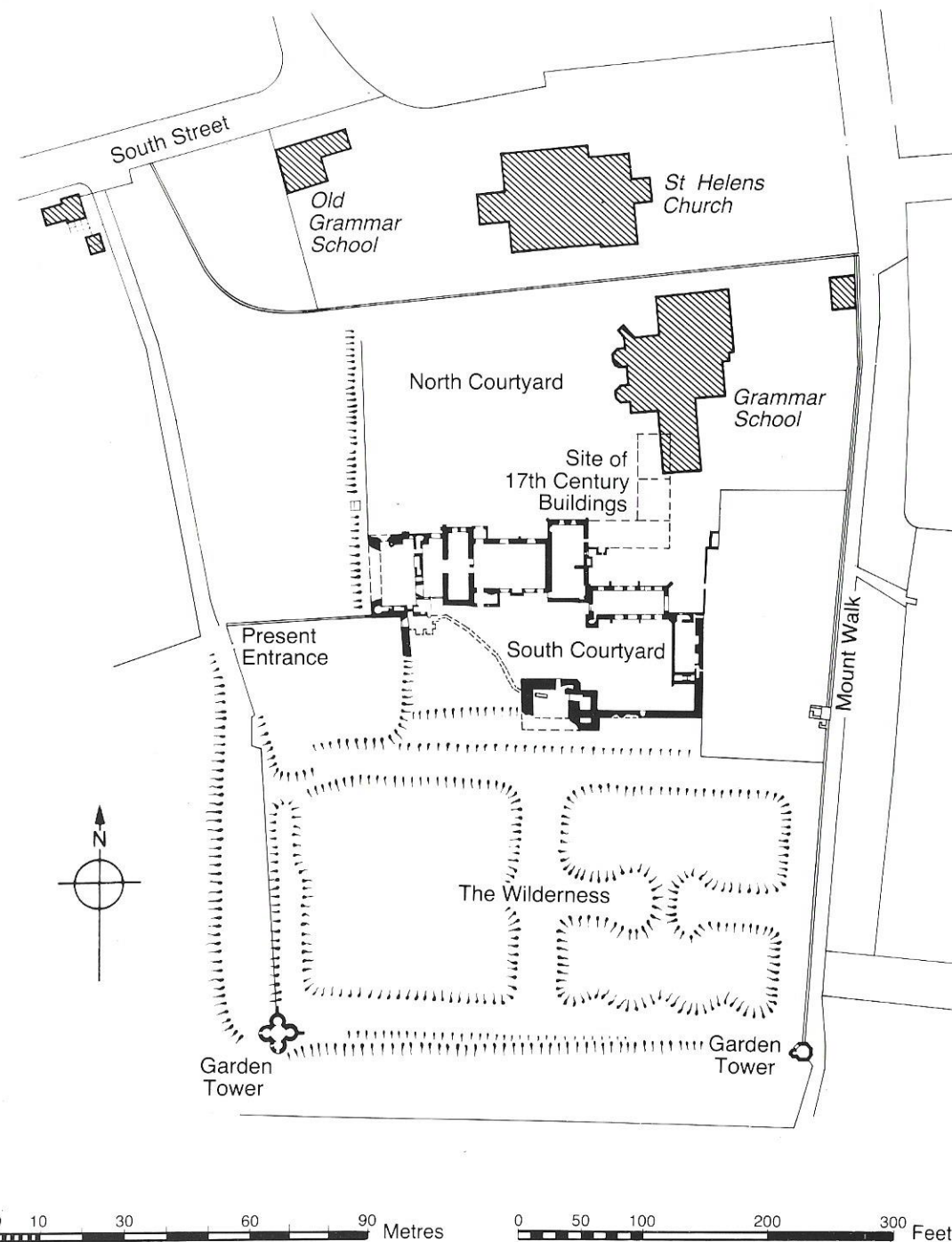
abruptly, indicating the position of these buildings facing the courtyard. A few feet to the south of this break there is a rebate of the postern which is shown in one eighteenth-century engraving of the castle.

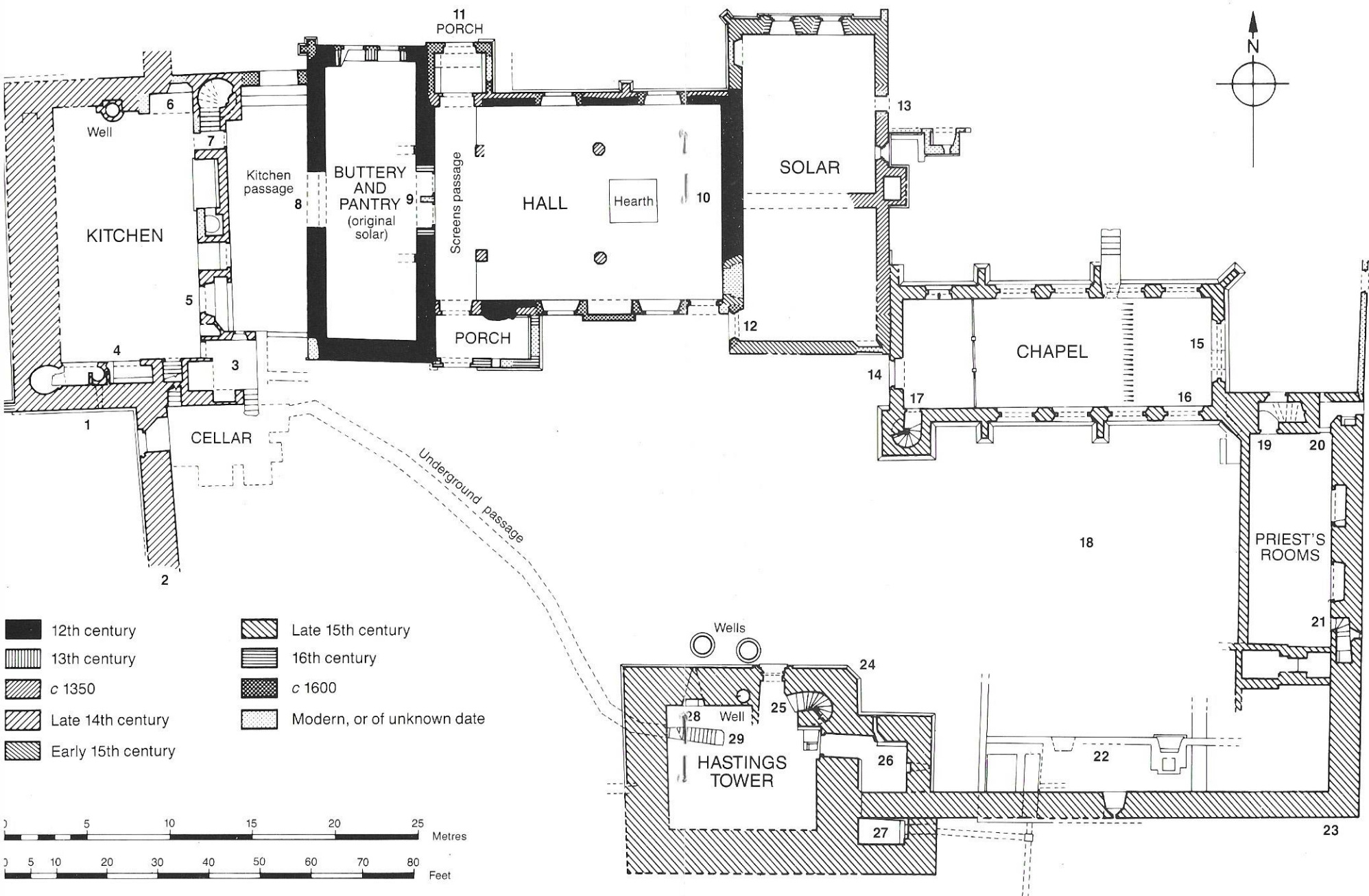
Wilderness

South of the castle is an area of about 2 acres (0.8ha) known as the Wilderness. This was enclosed in the sixteenth century to form the castle garden. Fragments of the brick wall and contemporary angle towers or garden houses at the southwest and southeast corners still remain.

The southwestern tower is larger and rises to three storeys. It is quatrefoil in plan, the northern lobe containing a spiral staircase. The southeastern tower has only two storeys and is octagonal in plan with a staircase contained in a smaller semi-octagon projecting from the southwest side. In the south face there formerly existed a corbelled-out chimneystack from a fireplace on the first floor. Both towers have large square-headed stone windows.

Eighteenth-century illustrations show that the western half of the garden contained a bowling green. The earthworks in the eastern half are the remains of ornamental ponds.







The castle in 1830 from a painting by J M W Turner

Norman manor house

The Domesday survey of Leicestershire, completed in 1086, it is recorded that Hugh de Grentmeisnil held the manor of Ashby, with one Ivo, who held one or two other manors in the vicinity as his tenant. At that date there were living on the manor a priest and twenty socmen, villeins and villeins. [See the Glossary for the definition of socmen, etc.] This entry is the first indication of the existence of a settlement at Ashby—unless the termination ‘-by’ in the name is held to be sufficient evidence of Danish occupation. Grentmeisnil, who had accompanied William the Conqueror to

England in 1066, had received at the subsequent distribution of confiscated Saxon lands over seventy manors, by far the largest single holding in the country.

Ivo was a relatively minor figure, holding an unimportant fragment of a large estate, and in early medieval times Ashby seems to have had no defensive structure at all. There was no doubt a simple manor house somewhere near the castle site, surrounded by a fence. The site had little strategic value, and although possessing no natural defences, it does not appear ever to have been surrounded by a moat.

In or about 1100, Robert de Beaumont, Count de Meulan, acquired the whole vast estate of Hugh de Grentmeisnil, becoming

thereby the most powerful magnate in the country, and, being already a count, was shortly afterwards styled Earl of Leicester (earldoms with English titles were then very few). About the same time Ivo's subtenancy passed to one Robert Belmeis who may have been his blood-heir, or may have benefited from the redistribution. This family flourished under the patronage of the Montgomerys in Shropshire and produced two Bishops of London, uncle and nephew, called Richard Belmeis. Richard and another nephew, Philip, founded the Arrouasian Abbey of Lilleshall in Shropshire, in the 1140s, and Philip Belmeis, who inherited the whole of Ashby, gave the church to the abbey.

The Belmeis evidently held Ashby in chief (directly of the Crown); their status was by then much higher than Ivo's and their interests much wider. For the centre of a lordship of this increased importance it was apparently felt that a larger and more substantial house was required. Certainly the ‘broad and narrow’ masonry of squared rubble with wide joints, visible in the walls of hall and buttery, suggests that soon after 1150 stone buildings began to replace the timber structures of the early Norman manor house.

After the death of Philip Belmeis in about 1160, without male heirs, the manor passed with his daughter's hand to Alan la Zouch, a Breton nobleman, descended from the Earls of Brittany and Rohan. Alan was a considerable landowner in Brittany, in addition to his holdings in this country. During the next two generations, the family acquired, in exchange for their Breton estates, lands in four other counties, principally in Cambridgeshire.

Their title to these lands is confirmed in Patent Roll entries for 4 March, 24 May and 15 August 1217. By the end of the twelfth century the Zouches had completed a hall and solar of stone on the site of the present hall and buttery. These were both

two-storeyed buildings, of which the first floor was reached by means of external staircases, probably on the site of the porches to the present hall. The kitchen may then have been on the ground floor of the solar block or in a detached wooden building.

Thirteenth and fourteenth centuries

For a century or more after this there is little evidence of building, although the family continued to increase in importance. Entries in the Close Rolls for this period show that Roger la Zouch (1199–1238) spent much of his time abroad in the King's service. Alan, who succeeded him, added to the family lands some estates in Shropshire and Devon, and successively held a number of important posts—Justice of Chester and of the Four Cantreds, Justice of Ireland, and Constable of the Tower of London. There is also evidence of the growth of the town at this period, for in 1230 another entry in the Close Rolls shows that a market was held there. It is of course from its connection with this family that Ashby acquired the suffix ‘de la Zouch,’ which is absent from the earliest references to the place.

In 1314 the elder branch of the family died out, and the manor passed to Sir William Mortimer, of Richard's Castle in Shropshire, who assumed the name la Zouch and was created Baron Zouch of Ashby in 1323. Soon after this change of ownership it was evidently felt that the existing buildings were inadequate, for it is apparent that considerable alterations took place at this period. An entry in the *Inquisitiones post Mortem*, on the death of William's son, Alan la Zouch, in 1347 throws some light on the condition of the castle at that time.

‘Within the dwelling-house (*mansum*) of the manor a ruinous old hall, a new chamber not yet roofed, to be removed so that the

there may remain in the possession of lord, and the said chamber to be rebuilt where on the soil of the said Eleanor, a house called "the bakery," "brewhouse kitchen" with an oast house in the same, a well near the said house. . . .'

The meaning of this entry is somewhat obscure, but it is clear that not only had the house become inadequate for its purpose, but also that it had been allowed to fall into disrepair. In the next few years it was completely rebuilt, only the outer walls of the old structure being retained. The scale of the building was made more impressive by redesigning it as a single-storeyed hall, with its floor at the present ground level; entrance was by means of the existing screen passage at the west end of the hall. At the same time the arrangement of hall and solar was reversed: a new solar was created at the east end of the hall, and the existing solar at the west end was adapted to serve as buttery and pantry. The fine screen building was added in the latter years of the fourteenth century.

Fifteenth century: Lord Hastings

During the second half of the fourteenth century little is known of the lords of the manor. This is surprising, because the two families whose lives covered this period must have been men of substance and some importance, otherwise they could not have undertaken the extensive building programme just described. With the death without male heirs of Hugh la Zouch in 1399 this branch of the family became extinct, and during the next sixty years Ashby changed hands several times, eventually coming into the possession of the 1st Earl of Ormonde. Butler supported the Lancastrian cause in the Wars of the Roses and was beheaded after capture at the battle of Towton in 1461; a traitor, his estates, including Ashby,

reverted to the Crown. During this unsettled period no great building activity was to be expected, and apparently the only new work was an extension of the solar, which brought it to its present size. In October 1464, however, Edward IV granted the manor to his Lord Chamberlain, William, Lord Hastings, and a new chapter in the history of Ashby opens.

The career of Lord Hastings provides a good illustration of the rapid changes in fortune which were a feature of political life in fifteenth-century England. Although descended from one of William the Conqueror's followers, his family had not risen above an insignificant place among the Leicestershire gentry. Hastings himself, however, had the shrewdness or luck to throw in his fortunes with the winning side in the Wars of the Roses, and soon became a favourite companion of the Yorkist claimant to the throne, the future Edward IV. His reward came after the defeat of the Lancastrians at Towton; he was given lands, such as Ashby, and offices, such as that of Lord Chamberlain, but it was above all his value as a diplomat that raised him to such eminence at the Yorkist court. His ambitions evidently included a desire to build on a scale worthy of his position; for in 1474 he obtained licences to erect fortified houses on his possessions at Ashby, Kirby Muxloe, and Bagworth. At Kirby Muxloe, the seat of the Hastings family since the Norman settlement, he began to build a completely new structure, the symmetrically planned moated brick fortress, which can be seen there today. At Ashby, he added several new buildings to the existing manor house, of which the most important was the Hastings Tower.

Hastings Tower and its significance

Although little more than half of the tower is still standing, it is by far the most

impressive of the remains of the castle. It was built on a scale and with an elaboration of decoration previously unknown at Ashby. Also it illustrates the trend in the development of military architecture in the fifteenth century.

During the previous 250 years the Norman idea of a strong keep, suited only to passive defence, had gradually given way to a system in which the principal line of defence was the curtain wall of the castle; this was strongly fortified with projecting towers at intervals. Ultimately these towers became self-contained defensive units, while the weakest point in the curtain wall, the entrance, was provided with a gatehouse of exceptional strength.

The most elaborate development of this system of defence was reached with the series of castles built by Edward I in the course of his conquest of North Wales: in some of these castles, notably at Beaumaris, in Anglesey, the configuration of the ground allowed that the fortifications should take the form of two concentric wards, each with two gatehouses, and arranged so that the outer ward walls were commanded from the battlements of the higher inner ward walls.

After 1350 developments in warfare soon made the Edwardian castle obsolete. Although it was many years before the new invention of artillery became effective enough to menace the security of stone walls, changes in military organisation presented a more serious threat. Strongholds, which could survive sieges by the feudal levies (enrolled men) and short-term paid armies of Edward I's period, would inevitably be starved into surrender by the professional armies and the onslaught of the new artillery which were characteristic of fifteenth-century warfare.

These new developments brought their own problems. The limited accommodation of the earlier castles, which

was adequate when the peacetime occupants were the lord, his family and household, could not take in addition the permanent band of soldiers; nor was the lord prepared to live, with these hirelings, the communal life of the old feudal household. In many cases the problem was solved by providing accommodation for himself and his family in the upper storeys of the strongly fortified gatehouse; the gatehouse of Tonbridge Castle, erected about 1300, is an early example of this combination of living quarters with one of the principal defensive features of the castle.

This gatehouse accommodation, however, lacked in comfort what it had gained in privacy and security, and was superseded by the imposing tower houses which are a feature of many English castles, that at Tattershall being perhaps the best known. Experience of the habits of the mercenaries also showed that separate accommodation was necessary for safety as well as privacy, and these towers were built of sufficient strength to resist attacks from disaffected elements in the garrison. In addition to these utilitarian considerations they reflect, both in their size and in their elaborate internal decoration, the ostentatious pride of the 'overmighty subject' who was the scourge of England during the Wars of the Roses.

Hastings Tower illustrates admirably all these features which made the tower house fashionable in the fifteenth century. It was evidently intended to make a considerable addition to the total accommodation of the castle; for it was so planned as to avoid the necessity for pulling down existing buildings during its construction. Finally, a number of points show the importance attached to considerations of security. The tower has unusually thick walls (8ft 7in [2.6m] on the ground floor), an absence of windows on the ground floor, and is entered from the south courtyard by a single small

urway, protected by a portcullis. Furthermore, despite the existence of two wells in the courtyard immediately adjacent to the tower, it was thought necessary to dig a well in the north wall, thus providing occupants with an independent water supply.

Other additions made by Lord Hastings

Although the tower was his principal addition to the castle, Hastings was also responsible for the erection of the present chapel, with a small courtyard of domestic buildings which stood to the south of it. The layout of these buildings indicates that they were constructed a few years earlier than the tower, although the masonry and detail of the mouldings are similar. The splendour of the chapel is significant, for while large detached chapels were not uncommon in medieval English castles they almost always serve a collegiate function, or as parish churches, in addition to their function as the private chapel of the castle. At Ashby there is no record of a collegiate establishment, while the present parish church of St Helen is contemporary with the chapel; the only possible motive for some of that desire for the showy and grandiose which played a part in the construction of the tower.

Of the courtyard south of the chapel there remains only the much ruined range of buildings, sometimes known as the east's Rooms, which formed its east side. The range forming the west side has disappeared, but its former existence is indicated by foundations and by the groove in the wall of the staircase turret at the northwest corner of the chapel. The south porch, which probably consisted of wooden superstructure, has also disappeared; this range stood on the site of some earlier buildings of unknown date or

purpose. After the construction of Hastings Tower this courtyard was enlarged by the completion of a range of buildings joining the tower to the kitchen.

The formation of this court, dictated no doubt by the pressing need for more accommodation, marks a new development in the plan of the castle. Hitherto new building had been confined roughly to the line of the south side of the original court of the manor house. The exact limits of this court are a matter for conjecture, but its north wall was probably on the line of the modern north wall of the manor house grounds, in which can be seen a fragment of masonry, with a plinth, and the line of the west wall is shown where it is bonded into the north wall of the kitchen building.

The main entrance must have been in the north wall, probably opposite the end of South Street, and the principal buildings lay along the south side. Now, however, with the formation of this new court and the construction of Hastings Tower, the emphasis was switched to the other side of these principal buildings. Thus Ashby became a two-court manor house, the original courtyard forming a forecourt; the new main court lay to the south and was reached by the screens passage at the west end of the hall or by the passage between the kitchen and the buttery. This arrangement of inner and outer courts is a common one in the fortified dwelling house of the later Middle Ages; the Derbyshire houses of Haddon and Wingfield are other examples.

Sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries

Hastings did not live to enjoy the fruits of this activity for long—in June 1483 he was beheaded by Richard III. The lands and title, however, remained with the family and his son consolidated his position by supporting the winning cause two years

later at the battle of Bosworth Field.

During the next century and a half the Hastings family prospered. In 1529 the grandson of the first baron was created Earl of Huntingdon, while the third earl was Lord President of the Council of the North under Elizabeth I. During this period, for the first time, the history of Ashby becomes reasonably well recorded, revealing a number of events of more than local interest. Its royal visitors included Henry VII in 1503, Anne of Denmark and Prince Henry in 1603, James I in 1614 and 1617, and Charles I and his queen in 1634. A less willing royal visitor was Mary Queen of Scots, who on two occasions passed a night there, in 1569 and 1586.

For the first time also it becomes possible to form an idea of the pattern of life in the castle. This was evidently luxurious; for in 1609 it is recorded that the household numbered no fewer than sixty-eight persons, and the cost of running the establishment for the year came to the sum, enormous for that time, of £2855-13s-4d. Entertainment was on a lavish scale. In 1606, for example, on the occasion of the visit of the Countess of Huntingdon's mother, a masque, specially written, was performed in the Great Chamber (the hall), recalling the better-known performance of Milton's *Comus* at Ludlow Castle. But all previous occasions were surpassed by the visit of James I and his Court in 1617. The length of his stay is variously reported to have been from three weeks to two months, during which time the nobility of the district were invited to Ashby to pay their homage. The expense of entertaining this gathering was a strain even for the vast resources of the Earl of Huntingdon.

From time to time small additions and modernisations were made to the fabric: the north and south porches of the hall belong to the early years of the sixteenth century; the existing large windows were inserted in the following century. Also of

this period was a set of rooms east of the solar, now demolished but shown in eighteenth-century prints of the castle; it is traditionally supposed to have been erected hastily for the visits of James I.

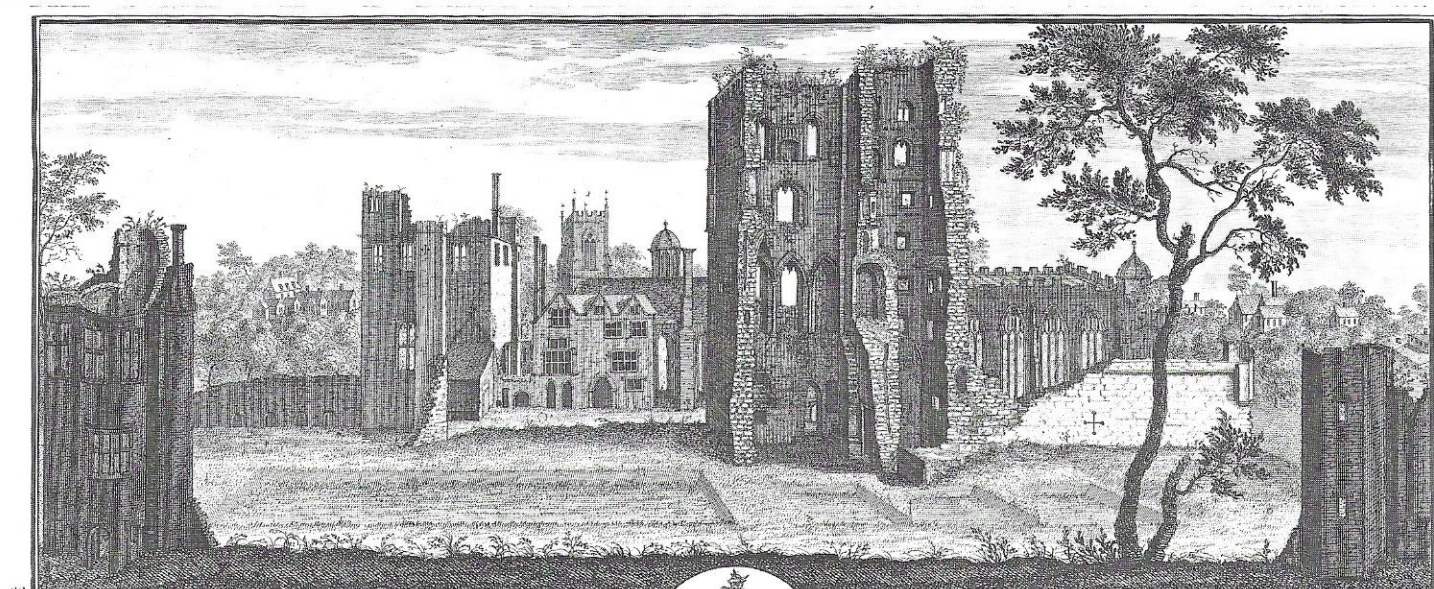
The Wilderness or wild garden south of the castle was probably laid out during this period; the two corner turrets and remains of the garden wall suggest a date in the middle of the sixteenth century. Originally it had a bowling green, which enjoyed a more than local reputation as late as 1720. The earthworks in the eastern half are the remains of ornamental ponds.

From the Civil War to the twentieth century

Without doubt the most stirring chapter in the history of Ashby is that which deals with its part in the Civil War. Neither the aged fifth Earl of Huntingdon nor his eldest son, who succeeded to the title in 1643, played an part in the struggle, but his second son, Henry Hastings, became the main champion of the Royalist cause in Leicestershire.

Shortly after the battle of Edgehill, Hastings occupied the castle and placed the garrison on a war footing. For more than three years it was to be the centre of operations that covered most of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Staffordshire, and this earned for Hastings the nickname of Rob Carrier among the Parliamentarians.

Several improvements were made in the defences, notably the building of the Mount House which stands to the east of the castle on the Leicester road, and some underground passages. According to a contemporary diary the former was erected in 1644, not only as a fortified outpost, but also as accommodation for reinforcement of Irish troops, to avoid racial and religious disputes between them and the English members of the garrison. The same source



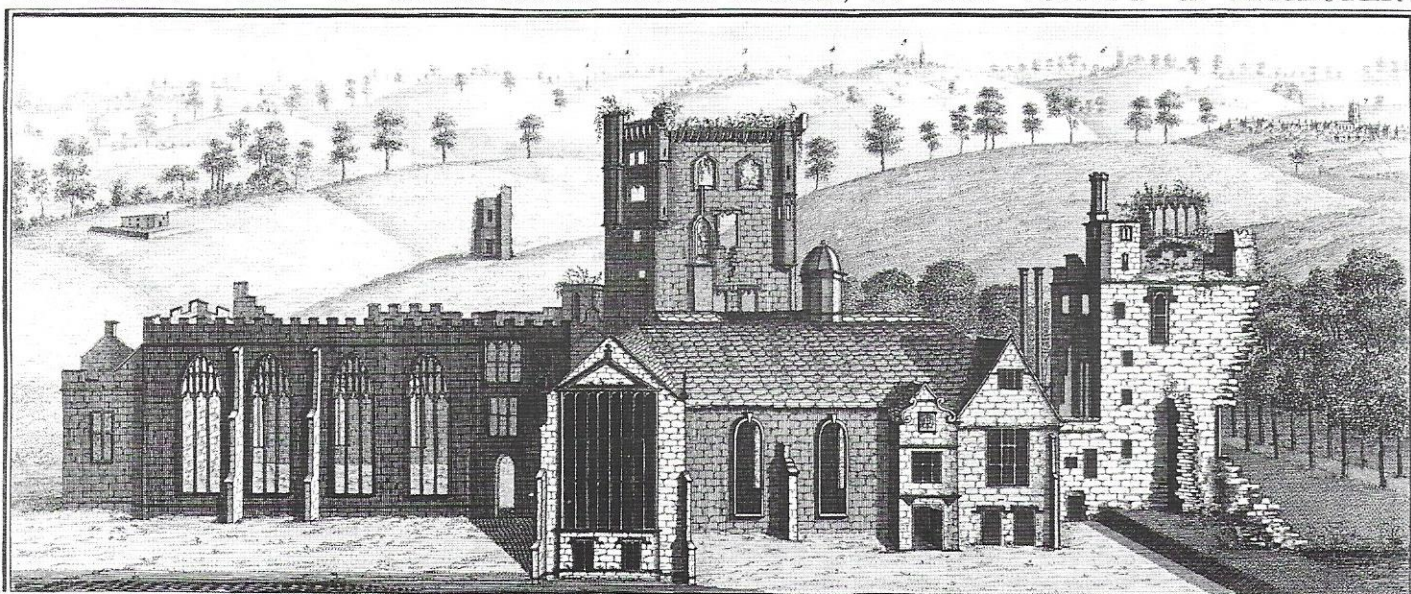
To the Rt. Hon.^{ble} THEOPHILUS Earl of Huntingdon.
Baron Hastings, Hungerford, Botreaux, Melins, & Mordaunt.
Owner of this Castle.
This Prospect is humbly Inscribed by
Your Lord's most Obedt^l & Obedt^d Serv^{ts}.
Sam^l & Nath^l Buck.



THIS Castle and Manor thereto belonging were formerly the Possession of Alan de la Zouch whose Name it still retains. He descended from Alan Count of Britannie and Constantine his Wife, Daughter of Conan King of Britannie, and Maud his Wife daughter of Hugh King of France. Alan de la Zouch having nothing granted him but the Manor of Ashby de la Zouch, and the Manor of Melins, he was obliged to convey certain Towns to be examined by a Title they held their lands. Alan de la Zouch was summoned a manor of Ashby, who being demanded by the King's officers, he held certain lands then in his possession, and he immediately drew his sword, saying, "But this my grandfather held his lands, and by his sword keep them, and being repulsed by the King's officers, he was slain. Alan de la Zouch put a great stone upon the entrance of the manor, he made an altar upon it, and he was buried there. He was slain in the year 1170. He was slain by the King's officers, who were for many descents Barons of this Realm. — Continued in Plate IV. 23.

Two views of the castle from engravings by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck

THE NORTH VIEW OF ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH CASTLE, IN THE COUNTY OF LEICESTER.



After the decease of Alan de la Zouch aforementioned, this Castle and Manor devolved to Alan de la Zouch his Grandson, who was summoned by writ to Parliament among Barons, and he having no issue, gave this his Possession to Rich^d. Mortimer of Richards Castle, who called himself Zouch's Mother being Daughter & Heir of Alan de la Zouch. Great Uncle to this Alan. It came afterwards by Marriage into the Families of the Countess of Hereford and Holland's (and in 1361 to Hugh Burnell K^t of Shropshire in right of Joyce his Wife from him to Sam^l Butler E^{cl} of Ulster & Melshire, who being attainted 1534, the said E^{cl} granted it to W^m. Hastings K^t. and Heir to it. Leonard Hastings K^t. he having signified himself up to King Henry 8th also made him a Baron, Chamberlain of the Household, Capt^l of Calais &c. of whose Nob^l Order of the Garter in 1547, of whose Reign he had Licence to make a Castle of this his Manor. He was slain in the year 1547, and his son, who was made a Baron, son of the said E^{cl} by the Lord Zouch's daughter, was slain in the year 1547. This Castle hath since descended from the Hastings aforementioned to the E^{cl} of Huntingdon in 1711. The family it now remains.

ntions the underground passages, ended to improve communications in the nt of a siege; one apparently ran from : kitchen to the Mount House and other, now restored, joins the kitchen with stings Tower. The latter, however, may e been in existence before the Civil War. By the end of 1644 the Parliamentary ces were gaining the upper hand in the ntly, and the castle was closely besieged, : town having been occupied by :liament. For a year the fortunes of the posing forces fluctuated, but after the tle of Naseby the situation became perate for the Royalists. Although the tle proved too strong to be taken by rm, an outbreak of plague and dwindling d supplies took their toll of the garrison, ich was finally compelled to surrender 28 February 1646.

The terms of surrender were remarkably erous, suggesting that the :liamentarians were relieved at the noval of so great a thorn in their side. As s usually the case, these terms included vasion for the 'slighting' of the castle, t apparently none of the principal ildings was damaged at this stage. In vember 1648 a Committee of the House Commons, sitting at Leicester, recorded t Hastings Tower was still habitable and ensible, and resolved that 'the Garrison Ashby de la Zouch be forthwith slighted l made untenable.' The slighting of the ver and the kitchen building was carried : in the following year on the usual lines, e complete wall of each building being :troyed by undermining and gunpowder. s this and not age that accounts for the nous state of these buildings.

After this the Hastings family abandoned aby as a residence in favour of their other t at Donington Park. Certain portions of castle seem, however to have remained itable throughout the eighteenth tury. The Bucks' views of 1730 show

hall, solar and chapel still roofed, and a three-storeyed building on the site of the butteries; views of 1759 show another building east of the solar. During the course of the century these apartments were probably superseded by Ashby Place, a large house that was built on the site of the present manor house, possibly in 1724; in that year a document mentions that great improvements were being made at Ashby. For many years this was the home of Selina, countess of Huntingdon, who was a prominent figure in the Evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. It disappeared in 1830 to make room for the present manor house, now part of the grammar school.

The coming of the nineteenth century brought with it promise of better treatment than the castle had received in the previous century. The turning point was the publication of *Ivanhoe* in 1819; Scott was well acquainted with Ashby, and his choice of the town as the site of the famous tournament aroused public interest in the long-neglected castle. The town evidently benefited indirectly from the success of the novel, and it enjoyed sufficient vogue as a spa during the early years of the century to justify the erection of the pretentious terraces of houses still standing in South Street and Station Road.

Under the first Marquess of Hastings (1754–1826) work on the preservation of the castle ruins was begun, and it continued sporadically during the rest of the nineteenth century. In 1907 the east part of the chapel was screened off as a mausoleum for members of the Hastings family, then in 1924 some stained glass, formerly in the chapel windows which retained their glass until late in the eighteenth century, was placed in four windows of the parish church. In 1932 the castle ruins and the Wilderness were placed in the guardianship of the Commissioners of HM Works. Since 1984 the castle has been in the care of English Heritage.

Glossary

Arcade Passage arched over; range of arches supported on columns or piers

Bastion Projection from outer wall of a castle or fortification, enabling defenders to use flanking fire

Battlements Indented parapet covering troops from enemy observation and fire; crenellation; embrasure

Bordar Villein of the lowest rank who rendered menial service in return for a cottage held at the will of his lord

Buttery Storeroom where liquor (especially ale), butter, cheese, bread and other provisions were kept and issued

Buttress Masonry built against a wall to give additional strength

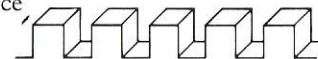
Capital Uppermost part of a column or shaft, often decorated

Chamfer Bevelled or mitred angle without moulding; plane produced by bevelling off a square edge

Charge In heraldry, a device borne on a shield

Corbel Stone or wood projecting from a wall to support a beam or other weight

Crenellation Battlements or indented parapet consisting of alternating merlons (raised parts) and embrasures (indentations). A licence to crenellate was the equivalent of a permit to fortify a residence



Crenellation (battlements)

Crocket Small carved decorative projection

Curtain (wall) Perimeter wall of a fortified place, connecting two towers, etc, and not normally supporting a roof; wall enclosing a castle or one of its parts; portion of a rampart which connects two adjacent bastions

Embrasure Splayed opening in a wall for admitting light or shooting through; also used as the equivalent of crenellation

Finial Ornament at the top of a spire, gable, arch, etc

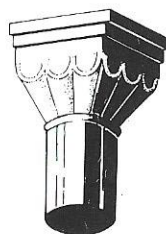
Garderobe Latrine, normally discharging into a cesspit or through an outer wall into a moat or on to the ground

Hall Great hall; principal room in a medieval house or castle; large room for public business, also used for dining and sleeping

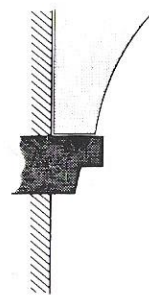
Jamb Side post of a window, doorway or fireplace

Keep Fortified tower; principal stronghold of a castle and the place of last resort in time of siege; normally used of eleventh and twelfth-century towers but sometimes applied to those of later date; donjon; *shell keep*, a buttressed stone tower at the top of a motte (mound)

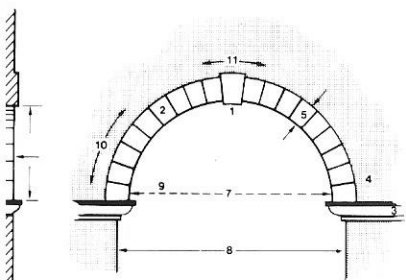
Keystone Central stone of an arch, sometimes carved



Scalloped capital



Corbel



1 Centre
2 Span
3 Springing line
4 Haunch
5 Crown
6 Keystone
7 Voussoirs
8 Impost
9 Abutment
10 Extrados
11 Intrados or soffit

lights Parts of a glazed window or opening for light

lintel Stone or wooden headpiece of a doorway or window opening

lozenge Narrow vertical slit, deeply bevelled to increase angle of vision, through which defenders shot with bows or guns (see arrow loop, gun loop); *cross loop*, lozenge in the form of a cross

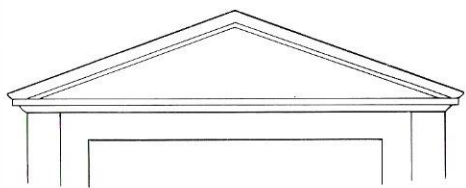
loopholes Openings between battlements of a parapet or in a floor such as vault of a gateway, for directing missiles to attackers below

lunette Upright dividing a window or doorway opening into two or more lights; *transom* is the horizontal member

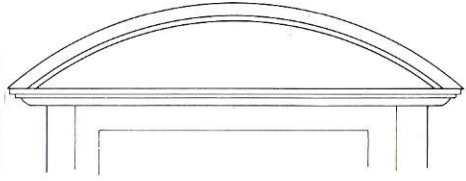
ogee Arch of continuous double curve, convex and pointed above and concave and convex below

parapet Protective wall at the edge of a roof, covering troops and guns from enemy observations and fire

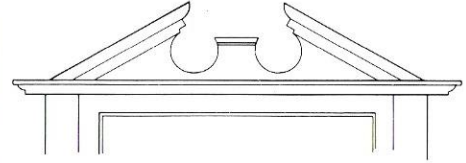
pediment Low-pitched gable-end form used decoratively rather than functionally in classical and Renaissance architecture over a portico, door, window, niche, etc



Triangular pediment



Segmental pediment



Open segmental pediment

Pier Solid masonry support or pillar; main pillar

Pilaster Square column engaged in a wall and projecting slightly from it

Piscina Carved shallow basin with a drain in a wall niche near the altar, for washing sacred vessels

Plinth Projecting base of a wall or column, often chamfered (qv) or with decorative mouldings; *dressed plinth*, stone of plinth with prepared shape and surface

Portcullis Iron-shod wooden grill suspended by chains in grooves in front of a gate or door and let down to ground level for additional security when necessary

Postern Secondary entrance, or gateway in a wall, often concealed and normally at the rear of a building

Quatrefoil Four-lobed tracery

Reveal Vertical sides of an aperture

Rib Projecting band of stone structurally supporting a vault or an arch

Screens Wooden partitions at the lower or kitchen end of a hall; *screens passage*, passage separating the great hall from the kitchen

Slight Raze or level to the ground

Socman One who holds lands in socage, i.e. in return for specific services

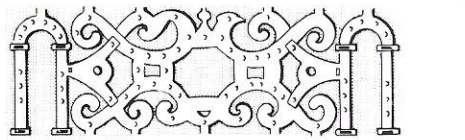
Solar Private chamber, often bed-sitting room, at the upper end of the great hall and at a higher level than the hall floor; great chamber

Spandrel Triangular area above the haunch of an arch; space between the shoulder of an arch and the surrounding mouldings

Splay Diagonally cut-away surround of a window or doorway in which the opening widens towards the face of the wall, thereby admitting more light and increasing the angle of view for observation or shooting through

Springing Intersection at each side of an arch between its lower surface and the faces of the walls or piers carrying it

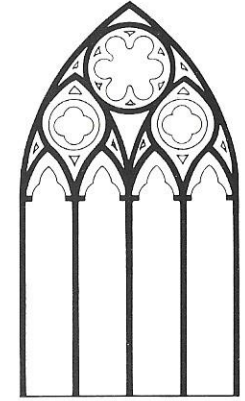
Strapwork Decoration consisting of interlaced bands



Strapwork

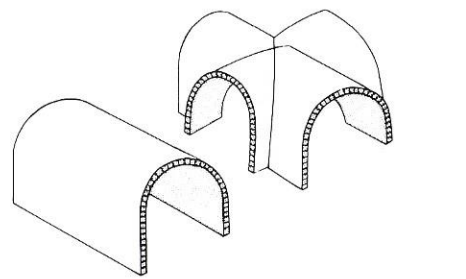
String course Moulding or projecting band running across the façade of a building or around its walls

Tracery Decorative work formed by the branching of verticals (mullions) in the upper part of a window



Geometrical (bar) tracery

Transom Horizontal bar of wood or stone across a window or the top of a doorway



Tunnel vault and groined vault

Vault Arched roof or ceiling, often supported by stone ribs; *barrel vault*, continuous arched semicylindrical vault; *tunnel vault*, as barrel vault or sometimes pointed rather than semicylindrical in section

Villein Feudal serf

Ward Courtyard of a castle; bailey