

Notes of Local Interest Group Meeting 25th August 2022

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Allan Lloyd, Wendy Ozols, Jenny Francis, Joan Lloyd, Elsa Harflett, Bronwen Jenkins, John & Margaret Price, John & Juliet Lewis, Rachel & Glyn Jones, Vanessa Hyde, Sheila Griffiths, Jacqui Mills, Geoff Steel, Marisa & John Olliver, Janet Russell, Jane Lloyd, Ros Tarrant, Dawn Richards, Gina Goodge, Susan Maiden, Jenny Ingram, Gaynor & David Price, Graham Croose, Joan Hughes, Celia Jones, Anne Goodwin, Cherry & Victor Williams, Grace Davies

Apologies: Dainis Ozols, Marilyn Price, Ann & Howard Dean, Allison Joyce, Lucy Trench, Robert Collingwood, Roy & Avryl Lloyd

ML welcomed everyone to Huntington Village and introduced Allan Lloyd, a local historian, who would be our lecturer and guide for the evening.

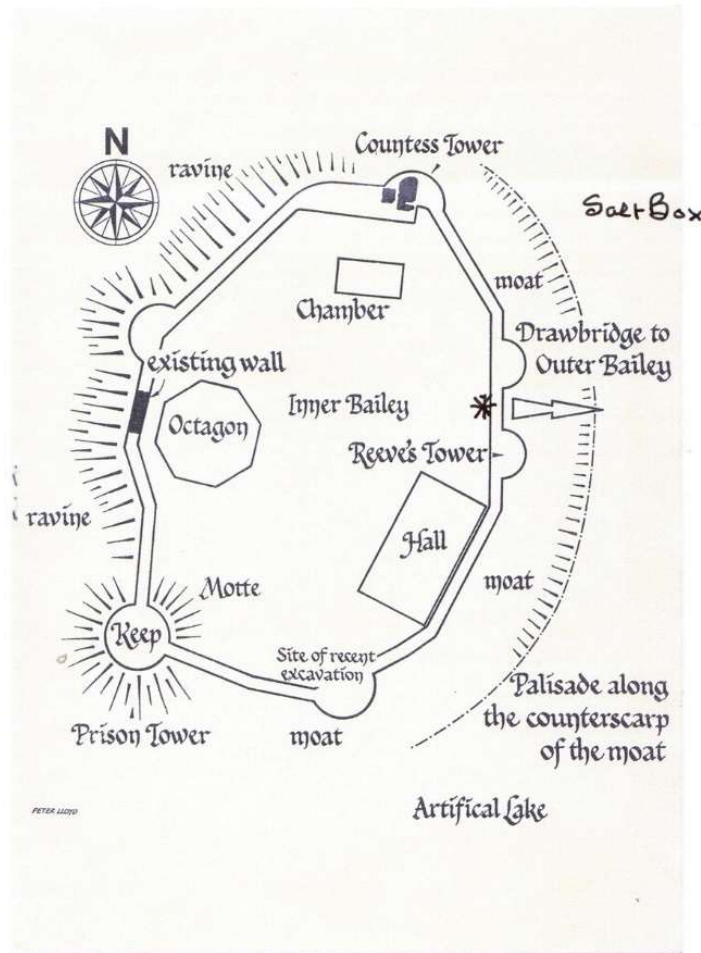
History of Huntington and Tour of the Village

Allan began by giving us some background information about himself. He was a teacher of History at Lady Hawkins School in Kington for rising 40 years and has been retired for a number of years. He now gives talks about the local area and leads visits. He makes no charge for his services, rather he invites people to make contributions to two charities which he supports, St Michael's Hospice and St Thomas à Becket Church.

Allan gave us some background to the history of Huntington. It is located to the west of Offa's Dyke and therefore has had a great deal of Welsh influence. Its position in the medieval Welsh Marches means that it is in an area with the greatest density (per ha) of fortified sites in Wales. Huntington is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, where it is referred to as Hantinetune, "Homestead of the Huntsmen". Here it was described as mainly wasteland, a legacy of the hostile rampaging Welsh some 40 years earlier, as seen in the destruction of the pre-Norman, wooden Turret Castle in Hell Wood by Gruffydd ap Llewelyn. By 1092 a replacement motte and bailey castle was planned in the village and from 1170 the wooden palisade was being replaced by local limestone walls. As a result, because of the castle, Huntington grew in importance and became the administrative centre of the area in this medieval period. In 1256, Henry III gave the town a warrant for a weekly market (on a Friday) as well as a four-day horse fair in July. By 1270, the Welsh influence was still evident and two separate manors, under the jurisdiction of Huntington Castle, were created. The Welsh manor of Huntington included Brilley and Hengoed, and the English manor consisted of the rest of Huntington, including Kington. The Walrhey Gate separated the two; this was a toll gate.

In 1299, the Inquisition of Lands and Tenements of Huntington, witnessed by Richard de Baskerville and John de Huntington, listed 47 free tenants in the manor; this is a large number. At this time, Norman and Welsh tenants were living peacefully here together. In 1348, the Black Death resulted in just seven deaths. In 1372, it is recorded that the Lord's Manor Farm had three carthorses, 17 bullocks (for draught) and 324 sheep.

In a survey of 1521, Huntington was described as being mainly destroyed. A well-known local outlaw, Howell Uklegate, lived here at that time. From this time onwards, Kington took over as being the more important settlement as Huntington went into decline.

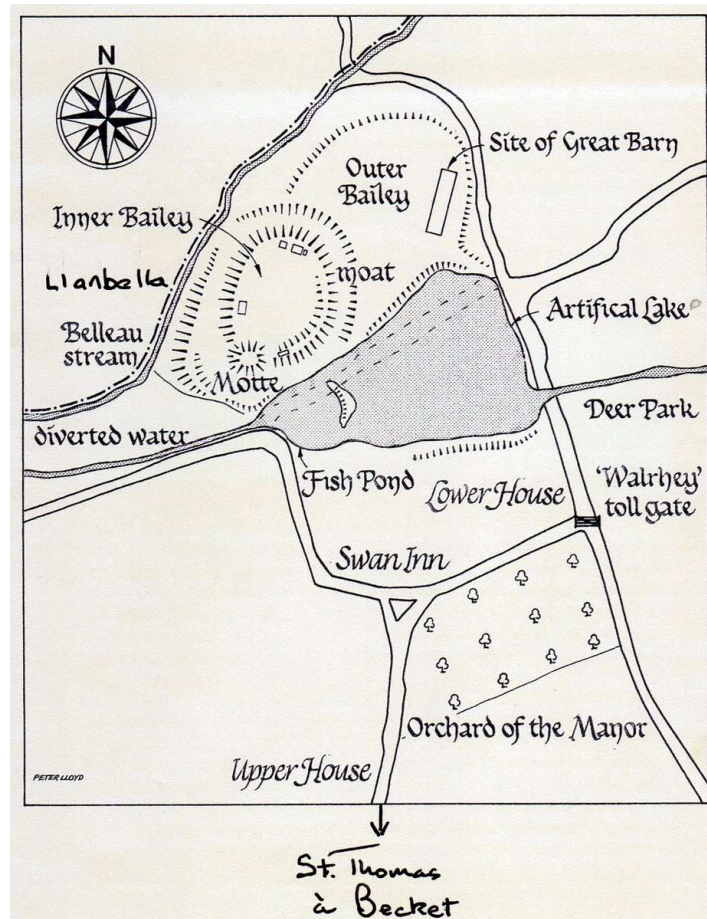


Huntington Castle – plan courtesy of Allan Lloyd

Tour of the Village

- 1. The Castle** Allan thanked Rachel and Glyn Jones for allowing us access to the castle, which dates from the 11th century. We approached the site via what would have been the main entrance to the castle when it was occupied (see * on map above). On the east and north east sides of the motte and inner bailey there is a deep, steep-sided ravine cut by the Belleau stream and this provides excellent protection and a natural defence. This is a typical motte and bailey castle. To the south of the site, there was an artificial lake/fish pond (more about this later). Two bits of the original stone structure remain and are clearly visible. In front of one of these, there was a feature known as the Octagon. This structure had an undercroft, but no-one is sure about what exactly it was used for. To the north of the inner bailey was the Chamber and this is where the custodian lived. The main building in the castle was the Great Hall to the south east of the inner bailey. It is recorded that in 1372 this building had its roof retiled and this involved work for a tiler and his mate for three weeks, so it must have been a substantial building. The custodian of the castle exercised both civil and criminal jurisdiction and held court here three times a year. Another structure in the site was the Countess Tower, bits of which still remain, including part of a staircase. In the 1400s, the custodian of the castle was Edmund, Earl of Stafford. On his death at the Battle of Shrewsbury (1403), his wife took over from him. The Countess Tower is named after her. Under her custodianship, the gateway and doors were strengthened and it is

thought that she may have diverted the stream to create the lake. She also developed the outer bailey to the north east. At this time, Huntington Castle was at its strongest and Owain Glyndwr did not touch it. The keep was the last part of the castle to be occupied; there was a prison tower at the top. In 1460, the castle was described as beyond repair and by 1521 it and the land had reverted to the Crown; it was sold in 1564 for a large sum of money, which is strange given that it had been described as “useless”. The site is surrounded by what is thought to have been a moat, but this is not necessarily the case as part of the “ditch” is higher than the roadway and so the water would have had to flow uphill. The ditch is also V-shaped and very deep and so it could possibly have been a fosse (dry ditch). There was a Reeve’s Tower on the east by the “fosse”; the reeve was always local and sometimes Welsh. The outer bailey beyond the fosse was shield-shaped; this area had been planned and developed by the Countess in 1403. It also had a ditch and a hawthorn palisade. The Great Barn, used to store rye and oats, was situated in this area. Further away still, and also on the east side, was the Salt Box, a very important building at a time when salt was absolutely essential for the preservation of meat.



Huntington village (part) – plan courtesy of Allan Lloyd

2. **Artificial Lake/Fishpond** Our next stop was in the garden of the 1756 toll gate cottage (many thanks to Dorothy Jones for this) where we had a good view over the location of the lake. The ridge at the edge of the lake is still quite obvious. The fishpond was at the top end of the lake, on the west side. On the raised ground beside the lake site there are hidden house platforms. This was the closest that people could live to the castle (for refuge)

because of the position of the lake. To the east of the lake was the deer park for the Manor House; it was a considerable size, having a circumference of about two miles. In 1503, Thomas Shirley was appointed park keeper at 2d per day and in 1506 William Uvedale became gamekeeper. In 1521 it is recorded that there were one hundred deer in the park and by 1529 cattle had also been introduced. At the southern end of the park there was probably a hunting lodge on the banks of the River Arrow. In the 1870s, the Romilly family were living in Huntington Park, the country house built on the site of the hunting lodge and Sir Samuel Henry Romilly married Arabella Charlotte in 1878. Their eldest son, Bertram, married Nellie, the sister of Clementine Ogilvy Spencer Churchill, and so Huntington has a link to Sir Winston Churchill, who, with his wife, regularly came to stay with the family.

3. **Manor House** The next stop was outside what is known as the Manor House. The oldest part of this house, the west end, dates from the 16th century. Originally, it was a single storeyed building; the upper storey was added in the 18th century. The beam in the oldest end has been truncated and the original house extended out into what is now the road by some distance. The wood in the beams in the oldest end is around 1000 years old. The current owners, John and Sandra Jones, invited us into the sitting room in this part of the house to see the old beams – many thanks to them for allowing us this privilege. On the newer section, there were servants quarters on the higher level and possible a byre beneath. Outside, there is a traditional open shed with a very old wagon, dated 1886. Just beyond the Manor House, we stopped at the point where the Walrhey Gate (a toll gate) was located. This was destroyed by Owain Glyndwr in the 15th century.
4. **Huntington Court** Fiona Shone, the current owner, told us a bit about the house. Fiona is a church warden and it is tradition for owners of this house to be connected with the church in some way. A Colonel Crosby of Durban (South Africa) modernised the house in 1840 and doubled its size. In 1922, the house was sold and all of its contents auctioned off. A Dr Edwards bought it and lived there until 1954 when he gave it to Dr Jack. The Jack family was here until 2011 when Fiona bought it. Huntington has no vicarage and this is the nearest house to the church, and probably why its owners have all had an association with the church.
5. **The Church of St Thomas à Becket** The church originally dates from the early 13th century and is constructed of local limestone and rubble. The bell turret dates from the 17th century; the bells are from 1671 and 1703. The porch is more modern. The sundial on the top of one of the walls is inscribed “IP 1629”. The churchyard is more or less circular indicating that it could be a Celtic site. In the churchyard are the graves of seven members of the Romilly family, including Bertram, who fought in the Boer War, commanded the Camel Corps in The Sudan and was a Colonel in the Scots Guards in WW1, when he was seriously wounded and awarded the DSO. The walls of the church have been heightened, probably in 1629 when the sundial was added. The church has strong links with the Romilly family and Arabella Charlotte Romilly (d1907) was responsible for restoring it in 1892. The stained glass in the windows, the work of Henry and Edward Payne, is particularly important and depicts both St Thomas à Becket and St Francis of Assisi. The font is from the 14th century (on a later base) and has an octagonal bowl. Local tradition states that the church was built as an act of penance by Richard le Breton, one of the knights who murdered Thomas à Becket in Canterbury Cathedral on 29th December 1170. However, this is very unlikely because he fled to Yorkshire after the murder and was excommunicated in early 1171, being exiled for 14 years to the Holy Land, where he died along with the other three murderers. Being in such a rural and remote location, the church escaped the notice of the Royal Commissioners after the Reformation when Becket was no longer regarded as a saint and all of the churches

dedicated to him were rededicated. As a result, it is one of only a relatively small number of English churches that still claim him as sole patron. The pews on one side date from the 16th century and are very uncomfortable! On the north wall is a memorial to the Watkins family. There is also a pewter replica of a token received by pilgrims on arrival at the tomb of St Thomas à Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. Thomas was canonised in February 1173 by Pope Alexander III. His body was reinterred to the present shrine on July 18th 1220. Sir Winston Churchill and his family attended the church when they stayed with their relatives (the Romillys) and Allan showed us which pew he would have sat in.

6. **Walk back to the Village Hall** We walked back along the lane, passing through the farmyard belonging to Upper House; this was the site of the Manor Farm and was the centre of medieval Huntington. We stopped outside the Old Post Office. Originally, this was a pub called The Wych after an ancient wych elm at the site. It later became the post office with a shop attached. Mrs Cowdell was the last post mistress. We also passed the Swan Inn, which is shown as the blacksmiths shop on the 1844 tithe map. Behind the pub are more house platforms, like the ones we saw near the former lake.

The evening finished back at the village hall where refreshments were enjoyed by us all, having been kindly provided by Vanessa Hyde, Sheila Griffiths and Rachel Jones. We are so grateful to them for their generous hospitality.

Allan showed us his book, "Standing on Aberyscir Hill", and said that he brought copies for us to take away. The book was his gift to us, but if we wanted to donate then the proceeds are going to St Michael's Hospice. He has already raised over £4000 for this very worthy cause and his target is £5000.

ML thanked Allan on behalf of all of us for a most enjoyable and informative evening. We have rarely had such a brilliant guide for one of our field outings and we are extremely grateful to him for giving so generously of his time to lead us on such an educational tour of Huntington. His knowledge of the history of the place is certainly encyclopaedic and his delivery most commanding. Many thanks to Allan for rounding off our field visits for this year so brilliantly.