

The Origins and Early History of Maxstoke Castle.

William de Clinton, who inherited certain temporary rights in Maxstoke from his mother Ida de Oddingsales, built this fine example of a mid C14th fortified house for his nephew and heir John son of William's his elder brother another John. William rose to favour at the start of the young king Edward 3rd's reign (1327-77) helping to arrest Roger Mortimer Queen Isabella's lover and ruler in Edward's name at Nottingham Castle in 1330. In the same year he was appointed Justice of Chester, Constable of Dover and Warden of the Cinque Ports on the south coast. Then in 1337 the king made him Earl of Huntingdon. In the opening stages of the 100 year's War he took part in the battle of Sluys 1340 and Crecy campaign of 1346. About this time he built Maxstoke Castle, applying for a royal licence to crenelate his 'dwelling place' (1345). You were not allowed to fortify a building without such a licence that brought in money for the Crown too. Bear in mind that there had been civil strife even under Edward 2nd in 1320s as well as full blown civil wars in 1260s so it was not so strange to see a king suspicious of high-powered subjects who wished to fortify their properties.

The basic design of Maxstoke harked back to the previous century with its impressive gate house and murder holes yet it also embodied newer concepts relevant to a more peaceful era. Dugdale described it as a 'fair and strong castle'. It was not capable of withstanding a serious siege but was moated and surrounded by a hunting park with 100 acres of meadow and 200 acres of pasture stretching into Shustoke and Coleshill parishes. The designer envisaged nothing more than a possible attack by thieves or brigands. The building, made of local red sandstone as the priory was probably from local quarries. There was a surrounding curtain wall now demolished and a gatehouse on the eastern side. A walkway ran at first floor level. On the west side was a range of domestic buildings with service rooms to the south, a Great Hall and an adjacent comfortable, private suite to the north including a chapel, similar in layout to Kenilworth or Warwick castles. There was excellent stabling too. See VCH 4 Warwickshire pp133-6 for plan and notes. Towards the end of his life, (he died in 1354) Clinton became Admiral of the Western coast and Forester south of the Trent. He was buried in Maxstoke church. He had married a widow, Juliana Leyburn, previously wife of John de Hastings of Bergavenny but they had no children.

His nephew John also a professional soldier inherited it aged 28 dying in 1398. He married twice. Firstly Idonea sister of Lord Say so that their heir inherited this title from his maternal uncle and then Elizabeth de la Plaunch, a widow who outlived him by many years dying in 1423 aged over 80. She was a founder of the Collegiate church at Knowle. The castle remained in this family to 1438 when a great grandson of John de Clinton, also John exchanged it for property at Whiston and Woodford in Northamptonshire belonging to Humphrey 6th Earl of Stafford.

Humphrey Stafford was one of the greatest landowners in the land. His mother Ann a member of the royal family a grand-daughter of Edward III was also co-heiress of Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester; his wife Anne Neville a daughter of the Ralph Earl of Westmoreland and Joan only daughter of Katherine Roet/Swynford and John of Gaunt. They made Maxstoke one of their main Midland residences so playing a significant role in Warwickshire politics. Its strategic geographical position was important being near a north-south; east-west crossroads in Coleshill. That still remains the case with M6 and M42 links. They stayed here when the royal court was in Coventry especially during Henry VI's reign, leaving a permanent retinue of administrative officers there. After

a distinguished military and administrative career in France he inherited the title Duke of Buckingham in 1444 through his mother.

The Wars of the Roses caused the family much grief when his heir Humphrey died after the first battle of St Albans in 1455. The first duke was also killed at the battle of Northampton in 1471. His IPM (Inquisition Post Mortem) was held at Meriden on 20 October 1471. The second Duke his grandson Henry married against his wishes to Katherine Wydville sister of Edward IV's Queen Elizabeth rebelled against Richard 3rd in September 1483. He was executed and his lands confiscated. Maxstoke as a small fortification was partly dismantled by King Richard.

After Bosworth Henry VII's mother Margaret Beaufort, formerly the daughter in law of Duke Humphrey became guardian to the young, under age 3rd duke, Edward until 1499. She used Maxstoke as one of her Midland residences demolishing buildings to the north of the courtyard and rebuilding others similar in style to the colleges at Cambridge she endowed. Some work remained unfinished in 1521 when a survey of the castle was made on the execution of the 3rd Duke by Henry VIII.

As well as Margaret Beaufort, several high-born ladies had made a home here: Juliana de Clinton to 1368, Elizabeth de Clinton who died 1423 and Anne, Duchess of Buckingham the first duke's widow to 1472. Nicholas Cowley the steward for Duchess Anne was a family friend of my ancestors the Marvyns, John and Hugh, father and son, deputy stewards (there was no steward). Hugh was paid 2d a day as bailiff and a further 2d a day as keeper of the park. The Marvyns lived at Church Lawford manor house on an estate also belonging to the Buckingham family.