

6 Deddington Castle Grounds

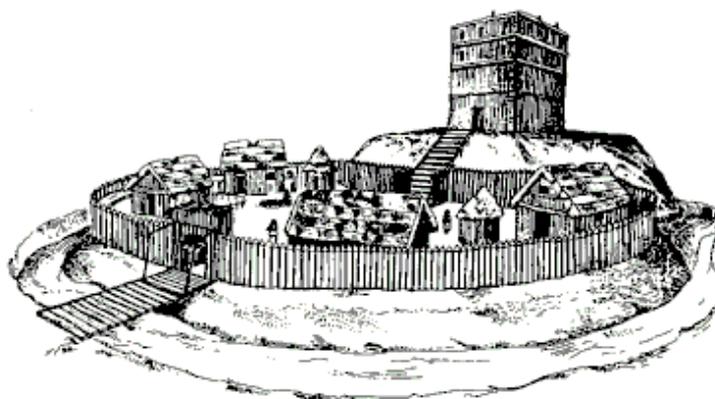
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Introduction

Entering the summery path shaded by the embankment wood, the only fragment of mature semi-wild wood open to the public in Deddington parish, there is an enshrouding quiet in the dimmed daylight. On the map prepared by Richard Davis of Lewknor (1797, lodged in the Bodleian Library, Oxford), the inner spaces of the Castle Grounds are shown as a single grassland with trees on all sides (see Ch. 2: 'Hedges and Hedgerows'). Today, the ring of trees, making a nearly continuous canopy on three sides, forms a moist wood favouring the growth of broad-leaved trees and a ground-storey of early spring flowers.

Immediately after the Norman Conquest, Bishop Odo of Bayeux was given Deddington as the headquarters for his extensive new estates in England. He constructed a castle on the site of a pre-existing fortified enclosure, probably of Iron Age date. On a low mound stood a wooden tower (Fig. 6.1); in the middle of the 12th century a stone tower replaced the wooden one, and a stone gatehouse was

Fig. 6.1: *Artist's reconstruction of a motte-and-bailey castle, built of earth and wood, surrounded by a moat. Such castles were common in late 11th-century England. Bishop Odo's castle in Deddington would have looked similar to this, but, being able to rely on the existing massive enclosures for defence, the mound of the Bishop's castle would not have been as high as those of other castles in the county.*



built by the de Chesney family. Within the castle bailey a hall and chapel were built, but by the 14th century the castle had fallen into disrepair and in 1377 'the canons of Bicester were buying dressed stonework from the castle walls'. [1] What we see today are an imposing embankment and a deep ditch on three sides, these two enclosing an area (the outer bailey) of some 3.4 ha (8.5 acres), and an inner bailey (0.40 ha, about 1 acre) with a remnant motte. As impressive as the ramparts are, what archaeologists find surprising, and possibly unique to this fort site, is the size of the outer bailey.

1. Tall Broad-Leaved Trees

In the 19th century, and on into the early decades of the 20th century, the Castle Grounds were host to the Gentlemen's Cricket Club and the village Archery Club. There was a 'remarkable structure called the Pavilion ... so large that it contained a spacious ballroom with musicians' gallery, cloakrooms and a refreshment room ... Dance music was provided by a band from Oxford, invariably including a harp'. [2]

The largest trees (Table 6.1) of the embankment are horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), both species introduced to Great Britain and found nowhere else in the parish of such size and number (Table 6.3). Smaller trees and shrubs of the subcanopy when dense in summer foliage – mainly elder (*Sambucus nigra*), elm (*Ulmus procera*), and juvenile sycamore – conceal the full form of the great trees from view. But winter disrobes the shrubbery, and reveals that the big trees of the eastern and southern sides of the Castle Grounds grow mainly on the outer slope, and below the summit, of the embankment; and that the great trees of the western side grow mainly on the summit, facing the setting sun.

The Castle Grounds, having been a 'pleasure ground' since the 19th century, and now a mini-arboretum, are rich with trees planted by eager arboriculturists: beech, birch, horse-chestnut, oak, osier, pear, pine, poplar, and rowan. Their diversity is a gift of man more than nature, and altogether there are 12 families, 19 genera, and 25 taxa of trees; and 8 families, 11 genera, and 11 taxa of shrubs (Table 6.2).

Table 6.1 Species and the Relative Positions of the Dominant Trees in the Deddington Castle Grounds

Diameter at Breast High (dbh) of the Dominant Trees (1999)

Map No.	Species	dbh (cm)	Map No.	Species	dbh (cm)
1	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	94	16	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	45
2	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	62	17	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	55
3	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	72	18	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	71
4	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	81	19	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	83
5	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	60	20	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	42
6	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	75	21	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	40
7	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	75	22	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	33
8	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	86	23	<i>Quercus robur</i>	60
9	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	107	24	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	96
10	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	54	25	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	62
11	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	105	26	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	119
12	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	55	27	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	133
13	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	70	28	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	77
14	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	90	29	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	93
15	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	55			

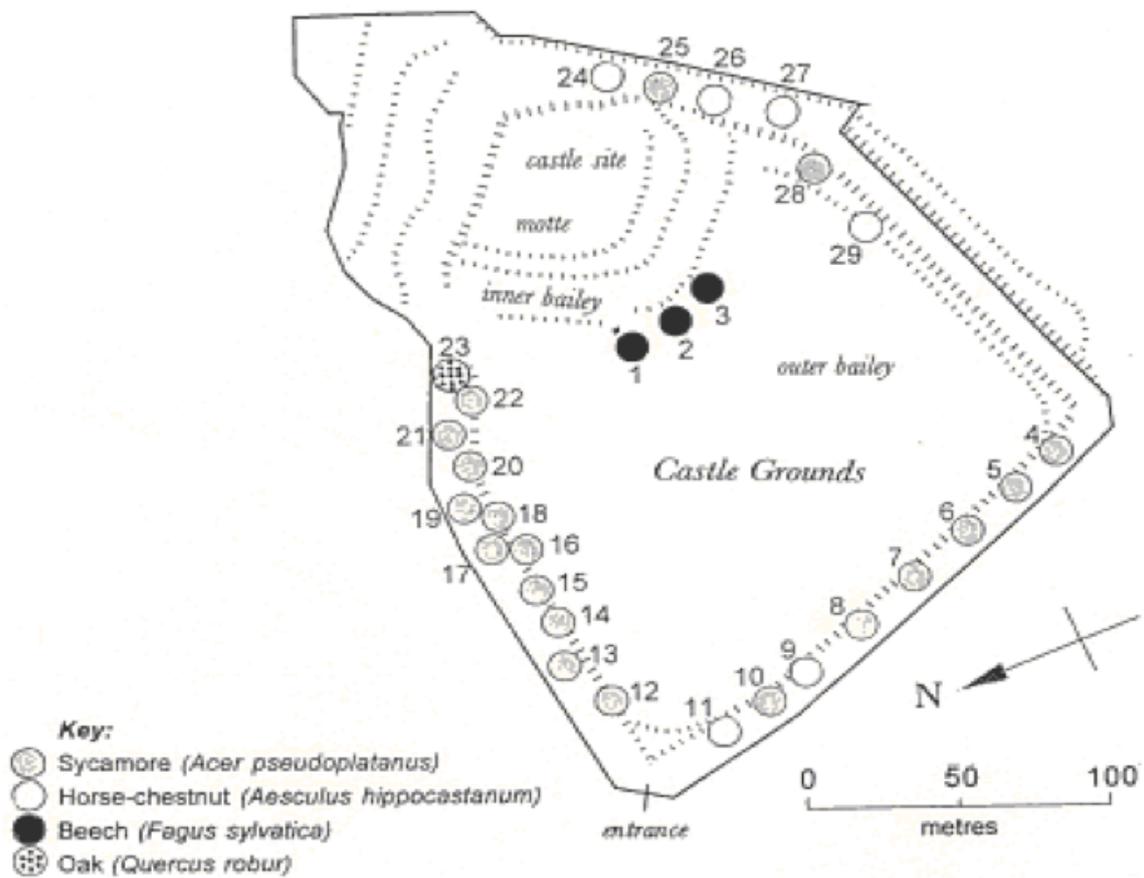


Table 6.2 Woody Plant Totals for the Castle Grounds

<i>Families</i>	<i>Genera</i>	<i>Taxa</i>
20	30	36

The diameter at breast high (dbh) was measured of 29 large trees (Table 6.1). Sycamores compose two-thirds (66%) and horse-chestnuts one-fifth (21%) of the sample. The latter are greater in girth. While both trees were introduced to the British Isles, they have long been satisfied with their home here. The largest sycamore has a dbh of 90 cm; all the horse-chestnuts have a dbh greater than the largest sycamore, ranging from 93–133 cm.

There is a wide gap along the embankment between the trees numbered 4 and 29 in the table. The 19 sycamores are growing on the inner slope; more than half are growing from old crowns with multiple trunks. In the wide gap between 4 and 29 are common hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) trees, the dbh of their single and multiple trunks ranging from 10–35 cm dbh; most are about 24 cm dbh. The two largest horse-chestnut trees (26 and 27) are perched on a second dyke, lower than the embankment, and face the cultivated fields leading to the River Cherwell. The westernmost has a dbh of 133 cm; the easternmost, which is taller, has a dbh of 119 cm.

Horse-chestnuts attain a great girth much faster than oak (*Quercus robur*), have a wide full form, and a showy flower, making them desirable ornamental trees in public spaces: see horse-chestnut trees in the centre of Deddington village green, on the islet of protected ground between Castle Street and Hopcraft Lane, abundantly

along the Chipping Norton Road from Hempton to Deddington, and along the A4260 between Oxford and Banbury. In semi-wild sites they are less common; in patches of woodland, and along parish rivers and streams, they are less common than sycamore. There are horse-chestnut trees along a stream on College Farm land, and overlooking the River Cherwell on Boulderdyke Farm. In contrast, sycamore grows commonly in overgrown hedges and mesic woodland despite suffering a measure of public disdain.

Of the three tall native trees in the Castle Grounds, only ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) is self-seeded. Where once armed guards walked a parapet, a great ash tree stands vigil, north of the castle mound; another is on the edge of the western side. Otherwise ash occurs with greater frequency in the hedgerows where solitary trees may attain great height, and in a few woodland sites, especially Ilbury Wood. Once, the land beyond the wire fence, forming an eastern boundary of the Castle Grounds, was part of the medieval castle; so was the shallow land, now the site of the Old Spinney, shown as the wood at the upper edge of the aerial photo of the Castle Grounds. Occasionally there is a surplus of ground water in the wide ditch of the eastern boundary, ideal for the osiers (*Salix viminalis*) that have been planted and are prospering there.

A solitary large oak tree grows among the sycamores on the western side of the outer bailey; there are also three sites of plantings, some now more than juvenile and having it within their destiny to change the look of the Castle Grounds, on the western side. But oaks are not plentiful in the Castle Grounds. Laboratory analysis of sample material from a big stump on the southern side of the outer bailey, has led to the conclusion that the stump is of oak.[3] According to John Scott, formerly of Deddington, there were once more oak trees. He writes: '... formerly there were many oaks in the Castle Grounds but the war saw the remaining ones felled'.[4] Evidence for his view is provided by a notebook Chris Day, of Deddington, examined in the archive of St George's Chapel, Windsor. Timber growing in the castle-yard is noted in the following manner: 103 oaks, all maidens, some very small, a lot above 10', several 20' and above, tallest 45'.[5] Early 19th century is the likely date of the notebook. From the number of trees (103 oaks!) – and there were as well 231 ash, 156 elms, 66 sycamores, 55 poplars – it seems as if the Castle Grounds were a forestry nursery (Fig. 6.2).

The principal ornamental trees of the Castle Grounds are the three well-grown beech trees. They separate the mown from the unmown grassy sward of the outer bailey, and give to the open space the aura of a manorial parkland. The two outer trees are native beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), which form 'nearly pure stands in the Chilterns and elsewhere', but seldom occur in wild places in Deddington parish. A copper beech (*Fagus sylvatica* var. *atropunicea*) stands between them, and is a variety known since 1680. Two sapling beech have been planted in a line with these older trees in 2000. Recently a new planting of beech was made by Mr Scott in the corner of the junction of the northern and eastern edges of the Grounds. The young trees are shaded by a semi-circle of eight Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) a species

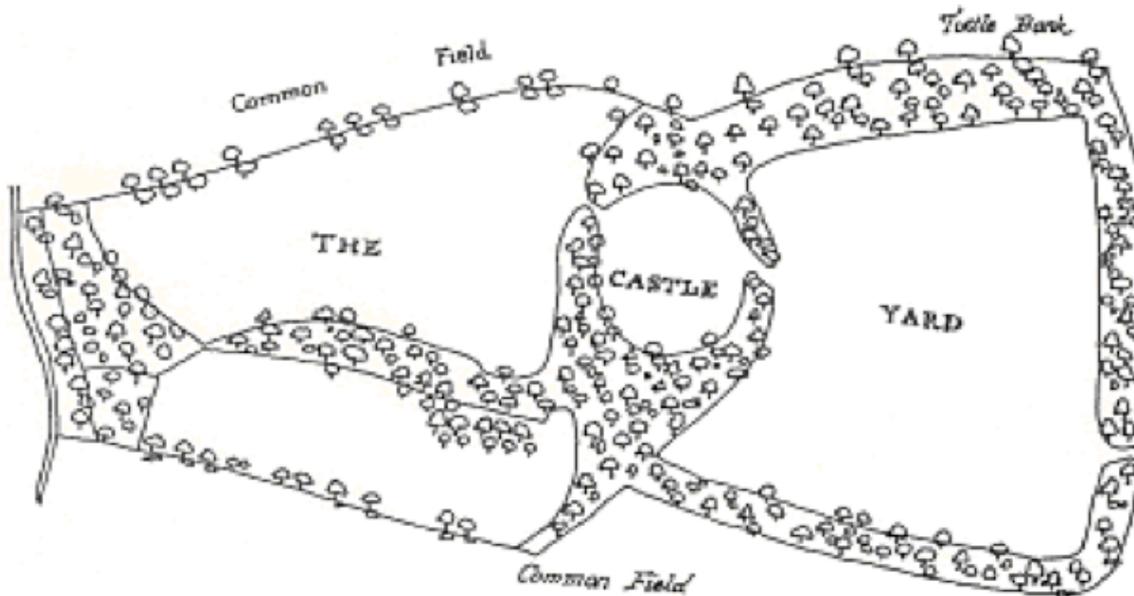


Fig. 6.2: The afforestation of the Castle Grounds, redrawn from an undated notebook in the archive of St George's Chapel, Windsor. The number and location of the trees in the figure are an exact copy of the original, as is the typography.

which, while long native to the British Isles, disappeared from the south of England 200 years ago. In this same site there are three young alders (*Alnus glutinosa*), a tree which grows abundantly in the wild in the parish, along South Brook, and only rarely anywhere as an ornamental.

Crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*) is naturally ornamental, and has been planted to good advantage in several places on the edge of the wood, facing the green sward of the outer bailey. The largest apple tree is on the western side, near the old plank bench. There are 11 young apple trees on the north side. They too are an ornament to the wooded edge, contributing to the bounty of spring their pale pink flowers, and to the understorey the vitality of their weaving limbs. English elms, which seldom are happy anywhere in the parish, are tall and healthy in several places in the Grounds. Referring to Table 6.1, there are three English elms between the sycamores numbered 7 and 8 which have nearly reached the limit of their growth potential, to about 30 m. In the northeast corner of the inner side of the outer bailey there are young trees, dead and dying. Even so, English elm, with persistent optimism, has in many places – both in the understorey and on the edges of the wood – regenerated from suckers of old elms attacked by Dutch elm disease (the fungus *Ceratocystis ulmi*). English elm and sycamore together are the principal woody plants of the hedgerow, forming the outer western boundary of the Castle Grounds.

Wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*) is, like the good prince, tall and handsome; although it is naturally less common than English elm, Wych elm seems immune to *Ceratocystis ulmi*. The two tallest Wych elms are on the western side. In Table 6.1, these trees are between 7 and 6 and between 6 and 5. In addition, there is an *Ulmus glabra* on the north side.

Non-native trees – horse-chestnut, Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), and sycamore – comprise 36% of the sample (Table 6.3). Norway maple is more common in the Castle Grounds than in any other place in the parish, occurring on both sides

of the outer bailey. Although not tall, rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) – four trees in the northwest corner – is mentioned here because it is abundant in this part of the Castle Grounds.

Table 6.3 Tall Trees of the Deddington Castle Grounds

<i>Family/Genus Species</i>	<i>Common Name</i>	<i>n/i</i>	<i>freq</i>	<i>hp/m</i>
Aceraceae				
<i>Acer platanoides</i>	Norway Maple	int	some	30
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	int	abn	35
Betulaceae				
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Alder	nat	two	29
<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver Birch	nat	some	30
Fagaceae				
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	European Beech	nat	two	30
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Copper Beech			
<i>Quercus robur</i>	English Oak	nat	few	25
Hippocastanaceae				
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	Horse-chestnut	int	abn	39
Oleaceae				
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	nat	com	37
Pinaceae				
<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	Scots Pine	nat	ten	36
Salicaceae				
<i>Populus x</i>	Poplar	nat	one	30
<i>Populus canescens</i>	Grey Poplar	int	few	37
<i>Salix fragilis</i>	Crack-willow	nat	one	25
Ulmaceae				
<i>Ulmus glabra</i>	Wych Elm	nat	few	37

Key: n/i = native/introduced, freq = frequency, hp/m = height potential in metres; int = introduced, nat = native; abn = abundant, com = common, few = not many

References

- [1] Crossley, Alan (ed.) (1983). *A History of the County of Oxford*, Vol. XI: Wootton Hundred (Northern Part), p. 90. *The Victoria History of the Counties of England*, Elrington, C.R. (ed.). The University of London Institute of Historical Research, Oxford University Press.
- [2] Turner, Mary Vane (1933). *The Story of Deddington*. J. Smart & Co., Brackley, Northants., p. 73.
- [3] Samples were taken of the putative oak stump and examined by Dr Jason Kilgore in the wood laboratory of Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA: 'Earlywood vessels are significantly larger than latewood vessels in transverse view; the wood is ring-porous. Transition from earlywood to latewood is abrupt, and latewood vessels are distributed somewhat evenly through the latewood. In addition, the latewood vessels are not distributed in wave-like tangential bands, ruling out *Ulmus* spp. Tyloses are abundant in the earlywood vessels. No other species but oak exhibits these features.'
- [4] Scott, John. Letter to the author dated October 1999.
- [5] Windsor Muniments, VI, 3.5.

2. Shrubs and Small Trees

The understorey of the ramparts is dominated by hawthorn, densest on the outermost bank of the south-facing side of the outer bailey, and crowded among sycamore saplings. Conspicuously under-represented is blackthorn. Elder is plentiful in the understorey of the western side.

Rarities (plants of which there is only one specimen in the Castle Grounds) include buckthorn and two species found only in the Grounds: butcher's broom and a horticultural variety of cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster sp.*) (Table 6.4). Holly occurs

Table 6.4: Shrubs and Small Trees of the Deddington Castle Grounds

<i>Family/Genus Species</i>	<i>Common Name</i>	<i>n/i</i>	<i>freq</i>	<i>hp/m</i>
Aquifoliaceae				
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly	nat	few	23
Berberidaceae				
<i>Berberis vulgaris</i>	Barberry	nat	one	3
Caprifoliaceae				
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder	nat	abn	10
<i>Viburnum x pragesi</i>	Viburnum	int	one	10
Celastraceae				
<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	Spindle	nat	one	8
Liliaceae				
<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i>	Butcher's Broom	nat	one	100 cm
Oleaceae				
<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>	Wild Privet	nat	few	5
Rhamnaceae				
<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i>	Buckthorn	nat	one	8
Rosaceae				
<i>Cotoneaster sp.</i>	Cotoneaster	int	few	–
<i>Crataegus laevigata</i>	Midland Hawthorn	nat	some	12
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	nat	few	15
<i>Malus sylvestris</i>	Crab Apple	nat	few	12
<i>Prunus avium</i>	Wild Cherry	nat	one	31
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn	nat	some	4
<i>Pyrus pyraster</i>	Wild Pear	int	five	15
<i>Rubus sp.</i>	Blackberry	nat	abn	–
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Rowan	nat	four	18
Salicaceae				
<i>Salix viminalis</i>	Common Osier	nat	five	10
Taxaceae				
<i>Taxus baccata</i>	Yew	nat	one	10
<i>Ulmus procera</i>	Elm	nat	com	33

Key: n/i = native/introduced, freq = frequency, hp/m = height potential in metres; int = introduced, nat = native; abn = abundant, com = common, few = not many

occasionally throughout the understorey, rarely as a well-grown tree, except by the entrance to the circumferential pathway on the north side.

3. Herbaceous Flora

No other site in the parish with public access has such a full display of spring flowers, abundant under tall trees of the high ramparts (Table 6.5) before broad leaves reduce sunlight reaching the forest floor. Small stands of sweet violet in three colour forms – light and dark violet, and white – flower in early March; in the same season, lesser celandine grows abundantly on the lower slope of the southern embankment. Cow parsley, with its tiara of white umbels borne lightly on tall (to 1.5m high) slim stalks, crowns both sides of the circumferential pathway. This vigorous plant, even more abundant on roadside verges, reminds us that the ground-storey flora in Castle Grounds, as indeed in shady woodlands generally, is a brief showy display of only a few species, colour and abundance more than diversity.

Because the Castle Grounds were a site of use to man as early as the Iron Age, one could hope herbaceous species ('herbaceous' means plants that flower, set seed, do not have woody stems and die back in winter) associated with ancient woodland persist in the shade of the horse-chestnut trees. Dog's mercury is one such species, a recognised indicator of ancient woodland; it is not common in the Castle Grounds, nor is there any evidence of an ancient woodland; trees were cleared long ago to build army barracks and feed kitchen fires. Its use as a site in the Iron Age is highly speculative.

Lords-and-Ladies, common, even abundant, in some hedgerows, and bluebells, present in only one other woodland (the Old Spinney at Leadenporch Farm) are less common here than one would expect or wish. The most successful plant on the steep embankment slopes is ivy, holding the soil against erosion like no other plant might do; even so, tracks have been worn through the ivy, by dogs and people. Where the earth is laid bare, we should expect rainfall to cut gullies, altering the continuous and compact form of the ancient embankment.

Concluding Story

Every plant has a story, a tale of origin in paleontological time, of distribution round the world, of habitat preference, and pleasure given to man; but I shall keep this brief. Rustyback fern grows on the old decayed wall, moss covered on top, on the western side of the Castle Grounds. The wall is the habitat. Fern and stones are not accidentally associated. Unlike lichen, the fern takes no nutrition from stone; but it roots in cavities, openings, decayed and collapsed segments of a wall. The very features that distress the man responsible for upkeep attract the fern. For where there are cavities there is soil. Not a lot but enough. August is a good month for seeing these ferns. They are seldom so bright and glistening.

The dark wood contrasts vividly with the open space and sunlight of the grassy swards. Of the two baileys, the outer is larger, the grass is cut like a lawn. The inner bailey is formed of small knolls and tiny vales; tall grasses and hogweed are dominant.

Table 6.5: Herbaceous Flora of the Deddington Castle Grounds: Plants of the Shady Wood

<i>Family/Genus Species</i>	<i>Common Name</i>	<i>n/i</i>	<i>freq</i>
Aspleniaceae			
<i>Ceterach officinarum</i>	Rustyback Fern	nat	occ
Apiaceae			
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow Parsley	nat	abn
Araceae			
<i>Arum italicum</i>	Lords-and-Ladies	int	occ
<i>Arum maculatum</i>	Lords-and-Ladies	nat	abn
Araliaceae			
<i>Hedera helix*</i>	Ivy	nat	abn
Brassicaceae			
<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>	Garlic Mustard	nat	abn
Euphorbiaceae			
<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>	Dog's Mercury	nat	abn
Geraniaceae			
<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	Herb-Robert	nat	occ
Lamiaceae			
<i>Lamium album</i>	White Dead-nettle	nat	abn
<i>Stachys sylvatica</i>	Hedge Woundwort	nat	few
Liliaceae			
<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	Bluebell	nat	occ
Onagraceae			
<i>Circaea lutetiana</i>	Enchanter's Nightshade	nat	occ
Poaceae			
<i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>	False Brome	nat	rare
Polygonaceae			
<i>Rumex sanguineus</i>	Wood Dock	nat	com
Ranunculaceae			
<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>	Lesser Celandine	nat	abn
Rosaceae			
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood Avens	nat	occ
Rubiaceae			
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Cleavers	nat	abn
Urticaceae			
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Stinging Nettle	nat	abn
Violaceae			
<i>Viola odorata</i>	Sweet Violet	nat	occ

*Ivy is a woody climber and so is not strictly speaking herbaceous, but its dominance in the herb-storey merits inclusion with herbaceous plants of the shady wood.

Key: n/i = native/introduced, freq = frequency; int = introduced, nat = native; abn = abundant, com = common, occ = occasional

Management of the inner bailey is an experiment in allowing grassland to develop without inputs of nitrogen, phosphorus or potassium. In the outer bailey, where the grass is regularly cut, daisy and dandelion flower again and again, undaunted by the mower; the grasses and herbs of the inner bailey are left to complete their life cycles. A pretty flower, common toadflax, blooms amidst tall grass in the inner bailey, but it hasn't a chance to thrive long, the grass being dominant. This is an interesting example of misguided restoration ecology: the inner bailey has been left unmown to favour native plants, but those that are thriving are not those that are wanted.