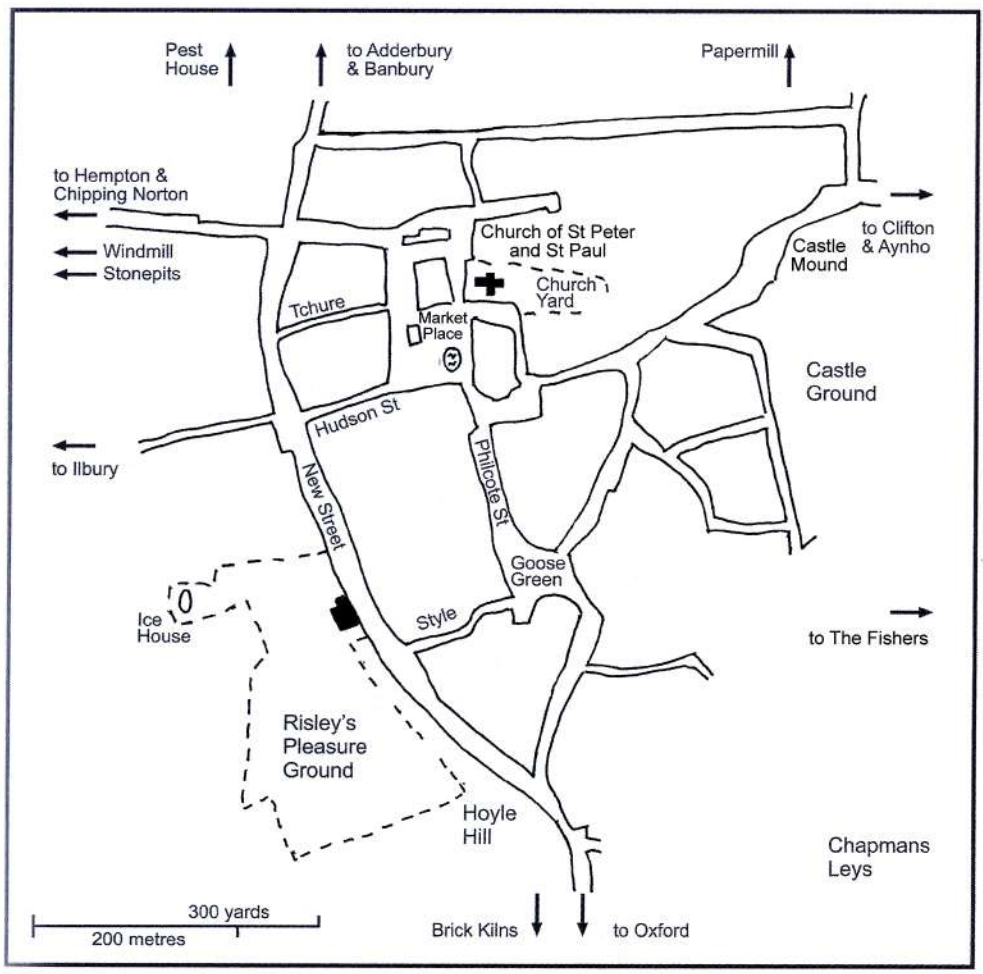
DEDDINGTON AND ITS CASTLE

Chris Day

Castles and castle sites have been the focus of attention for archaeologists, for military and architectural historians, and for those interested in the high politics of an age. It has to be admitted, the smaller the castle, the less intense the interest, but even a Deddington the sort of site that is most common in this region) merits the attention of scholars and it is interesting to try to find out about the role played by a small castle in the life of its local community across the whole of its existence.

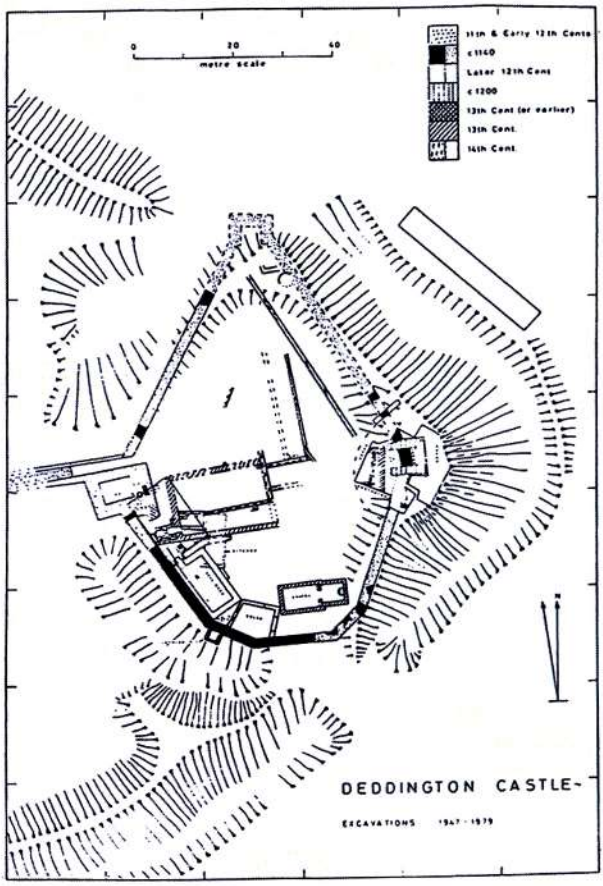
What follows covers something about those who built, fortified, and lived in Deddington castle and about those who profited from it when it had ceased to be inhabited. What was the site used for? Who had access to it? How did the castle and its owners influence Deddington's development, topographically and socially and finally, how did the castle shift from being a stronghold through private estate to public amenity? Much of the story, though peculiar to Deddington, has a much wider application.



Map of Deddington 1848 (BHS 29, 2007 endpapers

Deddington castle in the Middle Ages

There have been two archaeological excavations of the castle site, led by Professor EM Jope in 1947-51 and by RJ Ivens in 1977-9. The site lies at the eastern edge of the village and comprises an impressively ditched and embanked area of c.3.4ha, at the eastern end of which is an inner bailey of c.0.4ha. The outer bailey has never been excavated, although Late-Saxon pottery has been unearthed there. Within the inner bailey Late-Saxon artefacts and traces of a building confirm pre-Conquest occupation of the site, presumably by the Saxon thegn and his family.



Deddington Castle, Oxfordshire: A Summary of Excavations 1977-1979 'by RJ Ivens (Council for British Archaeology, Newsletter 13, 1983. Published by permission of the CBA)

After the Conquest Deddington was granted to the Conqueror's half-brother Odo of Bayeux, warrior bishop. It was the richest of 456 holdings granted to this most powerful of men and it formed the chief manor of his huge estates in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.[1] It is unlikely that Odo ever visited as he was deprived of his estates for rebellion in 1088. As Howard Colvin laconically observes in his *History of Deddington*, 'What reputation he left in Deddington can only be surmised, but if as the archaeological evidence suggests it was he who ordered the making of the castle, it is likely to have been that of an alien and absentee lord whose rights could be maintained if necessary by military force and whose hand lay heavily on the Oxfordshire landscape.[2]

It is assumed, though without evidence, that it was Odo who ordered the construction of a substantial earthwork motte, or mound, (its diminished shape visible today) which would have been surmounted by a timber keep. We do not know what happened to Deddington on Odo's fall: it was perhaps retained in the king's hands. The first substantial stone defences at the castle were most likely erected in the mid-12th century when Deddington was in the hands of William de Chesney, a member of what has been described as a 'minor knightly family' originally from a place called Quesnoy, near Caen. During the civil war of 1135-53 between King Stephen and the Empress Matilda, daughter of King Henry I and widow of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry V William was a strong supporter of Stephen, for whom he served as military governor of Oxford and its neighbourhood. Deddington castle was

1. RJ Ivens, 'Deddington Castle, Oxfordshire, and the English Honour of Odo of Bayeux' *Oxoniensia*, vol 49, 102-15; Victoria County History, Oxfordshire, vol 11, 91-6; HM Colvin, *A History of Deddington, Oxfordshire*, (1963), 17-53.
2. Colvin, *History*, 19.

strengthened by a curtain wall 2m. thick around the inner bailey and by the construction of a stone keep. The castle was presumably garrisoned and used as a supply base but military action, when it came, was not here but near Oxford where in 1153 William was defeated by Matilda's son Henry of Anjou, later King Henry II.

To complete the story of the castle's buildings as revealed by archaeology, a gatehouse and wall tower were added c.1200. At its greatest state of development in the 13th century the castle included a chapel, a hall, a solar (living room above the hall and several outbuildings. None of this is apparent today.[3]

Earthwork motte or mound (Chris Day

In the post-war settlement, the Chesneys were allowed to retain some of their lands, including Deddington. The family must have been helped by the meteoric rise of William's brother Robert d.1166 who was made Bishop of Lincoln and thereby, incidentally, overlord of Banbury, which belonged to the bishops of Lincoln) the day after his ordination as a priest in December 1148.[4] Inheritance to the estates was later disputed, with the result that in 1190 Deddington was divided into three manors, a division that more or less persisted thereafter and had long-lasting implications for the place. That is not to say that ownership of the three manors was without dispute. This was an age of great political uncertainty and of shifting allegiances in which, as has been observed, 'the courtier of one reign might become the outlaw of the next' [5] Thus, the Castle manor had passed into the hands of the de Dive family,[6] related to the Chesneys by marriage and, like them, originally from near Caen (Dives-sur-Mer The Dives were strong supporters of Richard the Lionheart against his troublesome brother Prince John. Their right of ownership was disputed by the Murdac family, which had enjoyed the favour of Henry II but not that of Richard – a good example of the shifting fortunes referred to above. In an attempt to restore their fortunes Ralph Murdac supported Prince John when he rebelled against his brother the king in 1194. Had John's rebellion succeeded the Murdacs would have ousted the Dives. As it was, Ralph forfeited his estates. He compounded his error of political judgement by dying in 1198, before his patron John came to the throne. When, therefore, Guy de Dive fell from favour on John's accession in 1199, Ralph was revolving frustratedly in his grave. Guy's lands were returned to him in 1204, except, that is, for Deddington castle, which, in the words of the royal grant, 'we wish to keep in our own hands' In other words, the castle's custody was a matter of royal concern. Not surprisingly, the king was reluctant to relinquish the castle until he could

3. EM Jope, 'Excavations at Deddington Castle, 1947' *Oxoniensia*, vols 11-12 (1946-7), 167-8; RJ Ivens, 'Deddington Castle: Summary of Excavations 1977-9' Council for British Archaeology *Newsletter*, No. 13 (1983), 34-41.
4. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, under the name Robert de Chesney; Colvin, *History*, 19.
5. Colvin, *History*, p 22.
6. *ODNB*, de Dives family.

be sure of Dive's loyalty. That took another year and, no doubt, a substantial sweetener to the ever-needful royal treasury. Guy died in 1214, leaving behind an under-age heir another financial opportunity for the Crown. King John exercised his feudal prerogative by marrying Guy's widow to Robert de Harcourt of Stanton Harcourt and by taking the castle back into his own hands, entrusting it to his old supporters and rivals of the Dives, the Murdac family.

Despite prolonged litigation after King John's death in 1216 none of the feuding families succeeded in making good its claim to another's estates, and the three manors descended separately. The manor of the Dive family, was known, unsurprisingly, as the Castle manor and the castle was still significant enough, in status if not in military substance, for successive lords of the manor to describe themselves as 'lord of Deddington castle'

There seems to have been something about the lordship of Deddington castle that clouded political judgement. William de Breauté, who had possession during a minority in the Dive family in the early 13th century, died in rebellion against the Crown. John de Dive took up arms in support of Simon de Montfort against Henry III and was killed at the battle of Evesham in 1265. The Dives forfeited their lands but were allowed to recover them on payment of a substantial fine. Thereafter, the family seems to have kept its collective head down, but on its shoulders at least. They left the exciting life to the lords of the other Deddington manors such as Osbert Giffard, who in 1284 abducted a possibly not unwilling nun of Wilton and took her overseas, 'to the peril of her soul and the scandal of many' [7]

There must have been considerable excitement in Deddington in June 1312 when Piers Gaveston, one of the most powerful men in the kingdom, was brought there as a prisoner. He was the son of a professional soldier from Gascony who had risen high in the favour of King Edward I. Brought up in the royal household, Piers Gaveston formed a deep and lifelong friendship with the young Prince of Wales, later King Edward II. Gaveston's rise to eminence owed much to the favour of his royal companion, though he was a man of great natural gifts. Singularly missing from those gifts were sensitivity and tact. He alienated the greatest barons in the land by his arrogance and tactlessness, to the point where they took up arms against him and the king. His end came when he was forced to surrender himself to the earls of Pembroke and Warwick in Yorkshire. He was escorted by Pembroke to London on the promise of a safe conduct. On 9 June they reached Deddington, where Gaveston was lodged under guard while Pembroke rode over to inspect his manor of Bampton, near Witney. Before dawn the next day the earl of Warwick appeared, seized Gaveston and took him back to his castle at Warwick. A hastily convened trial of sorts condemned Gaveston to death and he was beheaded on 19 June at Blacklow Hill, between Warwick and Leamington.[8] It is usually assumed that Gaveston was lodged at Deddington castle, but its state of disrepair at that time made it unsuitable and he was, in fact, lodged at Castle House, which stands immediately north of the church. Castle House is the rectory, and it is so named because it was usually leased with the Castle estate. Sadly, therefore, the event most closely associated in people's minds with the castle did not take place there at all.

Castle House (Charles Latham

7. Colvin, *History*, 31-2.
8. *ODNB*, Piers Gaveston.

The castle was, as noted above, in a state of decay. Although described in 1277 as 'an old demolished castle' enough remained to be the focus of the only recorded warlike incident in its history when in 1281 Robert of Aston and his associates broke down the gates and doors.[9] It is impossible to be certain, but the Aston in question here is likely to be North Aston. Significantly, an earlier Robert of Aston, mentioned in the early to mid-13th century, was the husband of an Alice Chesney. The attack may have been yet another episode in the family dispute over the lordship of Deddington. Henry de Dive was recorded at his death in 1277 as holding of the king an 'old demolished castle'

In 1310 the castle was described as 'debile' meaning weak, diminished, or worn out. It nevertheless retained a chamber and a dovecot, the chamber perhaps lodged in by a keeper.[10]

In 1377 the canons of Bicester Priory were given permission (for a price: 5 marks to enter the castle and cart away *omnes lapidos vocatos hewedstones murorum*' i.e. the dressed stone from the walls.[11] After which the rubble infill would soon disappear It is tempting to assume that the stones are still to be found in Deddington village houses but dressed stone, timber and roofing materials were valuable commodities. The castle's owners would have taken good care to protect their investment.

The archives of St George's Chapel, Windsor contain many references in the 15th and 16th centuries to repairs at Castle House the rectory) but, significantly, none to buildings at the castle.[12] When the antiquarian John Leland visited Deddington in the early 16th century, he noted merely that 'there hath been a castle at Deddington [13] Leland was travelling the country collecting towards what would have been, had he completed it, a mammoth history and gazetteer

There may have been nothing above ground worthy of Leland's notice, but plenty remained below. It was noted in 1819 that people were digging for building materials at the east end of the site.[14] *Gardner's Oxfordshire Directory* of 1852 recorded that about ten years previously the keep had been excavated for materials. Even despite those, and possibly other, depredations, there remained stonework for 20th-century archaeologists to uncover

The castle and urban development

Deddington was one of many new towns established in England and Wales in the late 12th and 13th centuries. No documentary evidence survives, such as a charter that relates specifically to the setting up of the borough, with a nice convenient date. Instead, other documents offer clues. If only one of the three manors in Deddington possessed burgage plots the basic tenements in a town), it could be assumed that they were established after 1190, when the manor was divided into three. The fact that burgages are to be found on all three manors therefore argues that they were created before 1190. It is probably safe to place the borough's creation in the late 12th century.

What role might the castle, or rather its owners the Chesneys, have played? It was fairly common in the Anglo-Norman period for the creation of boroughs to be associated with castles, or with abbeys, and since Deddington had a castle it might seem at first sight to be such a case. But the close association of borough foundations with castles was less common in southern England than elsewhere – notably, of course, in Wales. Moreover, a glance at

9. *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, vol 1, 367.
10. *ODNB*, de Dive Family; *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, vol 5,145; VCH Oxfordshire, vol 11, 90; Colvin, *History*, 14.
11. Colvin, *History*, p 14.
12. Deddington material can be found in St George's Chapel Archives, notably SGC IX, XIII, XV, XVI, XVII and XXXV.
13. Leland, *Itinerary*, ed. L Toulmin Smith, vol 2, 38.
14. JN Brewer, *Topographical and Historical Description of Oxfordshire*, p 465.

the map shows that Deddington castle and the marketplace have no apparent relationship – topographically, at least (see above).

Despite political instability in the late 12th century, the borough of Deddington was not planned with defence in mind. A new town did not need to be placed in the defensive lee of a castle. Deddington was a commercial development, taking advantage of its position at the junction of important through routes. The marketplace and burgage plots were laid out in relation to those routes rather than to the castle, which was less convenient for such a purpose. In effect, the marketplace replaced the castle gate as the focus of the community. In other towns (for example Windsor) the castle dominated the town. Not here. The unobservant traveller in the marketplace might not know that there was a castle here at all.

It might be supposed that, nevertheless, the town was set up to supply the needs of the great family and its retainers living at the castle. That is unlikely. Such households tended to get their supplies from their own estates, while luxury goods would be imported directly or bought at major regional markets like Oxford. There would undoubtedly be a demand for goods and services that would provide some stimulus. Deddington, however, fits better into that category of small boroughs which made a living providing goods and services not to a great household but to a rapidly expanding rural economy, supplying woollen and linen cloth, leather goods, iron goods, fish, salt, and tar. Only the annual fairs would attract more specialised traders travelling long distances. Deddington in the late 12th century was a composite place, combining rural and urban functions. When one of the Chesney family, presumably, laid out the marketplace and burgage plots he was taking advantage of, rather than creating trade.

What was in it for the lord? A new town was a speculation, and if it was successful it could be highly profitable to its owner. He got rents from burgage plots and market stalls, and he received tolls from traders coming in from outside. He also profited from control of weights and measures, and he received the fines imposed on offenders. Later on, he got additional fines and rents by allowing building encroachment in the marketplace. Such encroachments are seen in most market towns, and there are good examples in Deddington, notably the block presently occupied by shops and a restaurant, and Wychway House. They are usually regarded as originating in temporary market stalls that later became illegally permanent. It seems, though, that market owners often encouraged such buildings albeit to the dismay of townspeople who would be inconvenienced by them) in return for additional rents.

What about the townspeople? They were in a privileged position. They got a tenement for a straight money rent, free of the burdensome and sometimes humiliating services owed by tenants of agricultural holdings. What is more, town tenements were freely transferable, offering a possible source of profit or of making provision for one's children. The initial tenant of a burgage plot always had the opportunity, if the town was successful, of subdividing his plot, perhaps covering his entire rent from what he charged his own sub-tenant. Many medieval burgesses, especially in a small place like Deddington, were also farmers. They therefore had good opportunities to make a profitable living, and they had a hedge against bad times. It is a false dichotomy to see a place as either rural or urban. It could be, as Deddington was, both.

St George's Chapel, Windsor

The Dive family's long association with Deddington came to an end in 1364 when they sold their estate to the Warden and Canons of St George's Chapel, newly founded by Edward III in Windsor Castle. The canons held it for 500 years until in 1866 the title passed to

the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners sold the site to Deddington parish council in 1945.[15]

Leadenporch House (Helen Forde

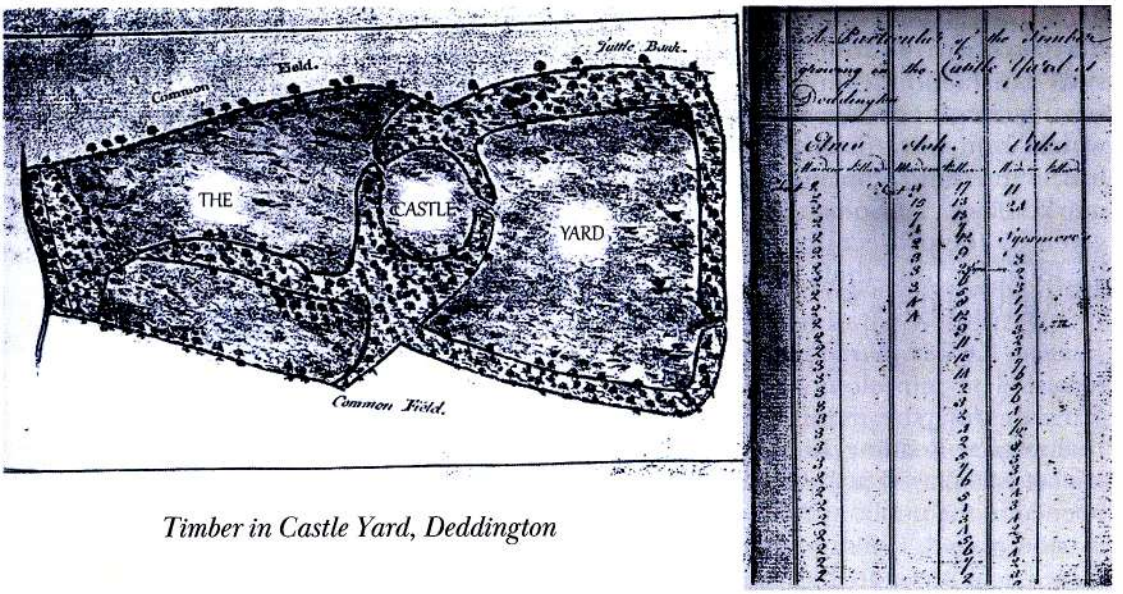
Under the canons' ownership, the castle site embarked on a new chapter· instead of being the decaying stronghold of a declining knightly family, intermittently involved with national politics and warfare, it became part of what in modern parlance might be called the property portfolio of a leading institutional body. The canons already owned the rectory estate at Deddington, and the castle with its associated land and houses was a logical purchase. In the 1460s or 1470s the canons added to their portfolio an ancient freehold estate of 80-100 acres called the Leadenporch, whose name derives from the house of that name still standing in New Street. The estate directly associated with the castle is described in a rental of 1557 It divided the estate in two. One, described as 'the castle and park' was an enclosed area comprising the castle and grounds, and including a pond, a fishery and a warren; the other part comprised 12 acres of pasture and 30 acres of meadow that contained a *gurgite*' meaning a weir That fish weir, as it is elsewhere called, lay in the area still known as The Fishers. The canons' insistence that their tenants regularly scour the ditches is one reason why they remain so impressive today.

To the canons of St George's, all these things were an investment that was expected to show a return. In 1393 Richard II granted the canons the right to hold two annual fairs, each of three days' duration, starting on 15 July and 11 November Intriguingly, the grant refers to the fairs as being held at the castle. If so, that would be an early, and possibly short-lived opening up of the grounds to the public. Later fairs were held in the marketplace.

The canons preferred to lease the estate rather than run it themselves. Documents relating to such an arrangement can be frustrating as little record is left of what a tenant was actually doing. There is enough evidence, however, to make clear the importance of the grounds for pasture and for timber. Fortunately, the canons took a particularly keen interest in their timber a slow-growing crop that a careless or greedy tenant could easily ruin. Tenants were occasionally visited and required to account for missing trees, as when in the reign of Henry VIII, John Rogers was grilled about nine trees, 'the best in the lordship' worth 53s. 4d.

The importance of the timber is demonstrated in a small notebook of the late 18th century recording the number and height of each species growing in the 'castle yard' Ash trees (231) were the most numerous, followed by elms (156), oaks (103) sycamores 66), and poplars (55). That is a startling number, and many more than there are now. There are no English elms, and no poplars; the stump of a single oak remains. There are plenty of ash, and horse chestnuts that were planted in the 19th century. Many of the trees recorded in the notebook were less than 3 feet high, suggesting that saplings were being planted densely and subsequently thinned out. It also suggests careful management rather than a site abandoned and left to grow over.

15. Colvin, *History*, 27; Deddington PC records, mss re purchase of castle grounds, 1945; letter to the author from the clerk of Deddington Parish Council, 25 April 2001.



Timber in Castle Yard, Deddington

The modern history of the castle site

In the early 19th century the castle grounds could be visited, though it was not permanently available for public recreation. In 1836 the vicar recorded in his diary that 'I went into the castle grounds to see their cold bath' One would dearly like to know what and where that cold bath was. For events, special permission was needed. It was usually granted, if the cause was deemed worthy.

The gradual opening up of the grounds to the public illuminates aspects of changing patterns of social, especially sporting, life so characteristic of the period. Trade directories, newspapers and diaries reveal a growing range of activities being accommodated at the castle grounds in the 19th century. A horticultural society was established in 1838, its annual show occasionally housed in a marquee at the grounds where the gentry awarded prizes to cottagers. Cricket was being played there by 1838.[16] The Deddington Rifle Corps, formed in 1860, carried out perhaps the first military parades at the castle for 700 years.[17]

However the activities hosted at the castle grounds were primarily for the better off. The cricket club, later expanded to include archery, was hardly inclusive, as its title of Gentlemen's Cricket Club made clear Indeed, the club and the archery club employed a professional cricketer and groundsman who lived at the castle grounds lodge. The point was reinforced by the first building of any size to be erected there since the Middle Ages. In 1860 a large pavilion for the archery and cricket clubs was built in the south-west corner of what had been the outer bailey. A ball held there in August of that year was attended by 114 people.[18] According to one account, it was 'so large that it contained a spacious ballroom with musicians' gallery, cloakrooms and a refreshment room. The whole was covered with an immense roof of thatch. Inside the ballroom walls were hung with glistening chintz in a floral design and at intervals gas jets were arranged around in star-like clusters. Dance music was provided by a band from Oxford, invariably including a harp. The society gatherings there were brilliant and

16. G Smedley-Stevenson, ed, *Early Victorian Squarson: the Diaries of William Cotton Risley 1835-48*, (BHS 29) 2007, 37-8, and *passim, ibid.*1849-69, (BHS 32), 2012, 482; *JOJ*, 29 August 1863.
17. *North Oxon Monthly Times*, 5 Jan 1860.
18. Smedley-Stevenson, *Early Victorian Squarson* (BHS 32), 2012, 444-5, 451, 453.

exclusively 'County' Deddington could have no share in those functions except such satisfaction as might be obtained from gazing upon the smart equipages which went towards the entrance gate full, returning empty to park in the marketplace' [19] Some indication is given by the prosecution of a labourer in 1865 for the theft of champagne from a party there.[20]

Thatched Pavilion (photographer unknown)

Jackson's Oxford Journal in August 1863 recorded celebrations at the castle grounds for the anniversary of the Deddington Reading Room. A game of cricket was played at 11.00am – apparently behind closed gates. The grounds were only opened to the public at 2.00pm. Tea and cake were served to c.400 people in the marquee. A band played. Children enjoyed games. The Journal correspondent recorded who was there: 'we noticed on the ground and at the tea tables the Revd WC Risley and Mrs Risley... and there follows a list of the great and the good of the neighbourhood.[21] Either no-one else was there or, more likely, they were not considered worthy of record. In much of this the goings-on at the castle grounds were, of course, the world writ small.

Organised sport in this period had, under the influence of the public schools, been taken up with enthusiasm by the middle classes. Rural labourers might be admitted and even encouraged to join in, once the middle classes realised that sport could be equated with virtue and leisure activities with improvement. In Deddington, as elsewhere, one can observe this evangelical and teetotal ethos in a plethora of voluntary associations: the Reading Room and Lending Library in 1858, a Penny Bank in 1859, a Sunday School Shoe Club in 1861, a Choral Society in 1862, a short-lived coffee tavern in 1881, and so on.[22] As Howard Colvin has noted, Deddington in the reign of Victoria was transformed 'from the town where the people proverbially 'sold the bells to buy gin into as sober and self-respecting a community as any in Oxfordshire' [23]

Many Deddingtonians, however lacked the time for leisure activities or the money to pay for them. In sport, specifically, the formation of a football club in 1886 may be seen as heralding a change.[24] The club played its matches at the castle grounds, and it is perhaps not too fanciful to see this as the start of opening up the site to the whole parish. In 1911 the *Post Office Directory* announced that the castle grounds are 'used as a parochial recreation ground, managed by a syndicate. In 1912 a rifle club was set up, using the outer bailey for a firing range, firing into the embankment. The club was disbanded in 1914.

Mrs Mary Vane Turner lamented in 1933 that the only uses to which the grounds were put were a faltering flower show, a bowling green, and football. Cricket had moved elsewhere. The great pavilion had been demolished not long before on account of the cost of repairing its thatch. She was especially concerned at the lack of provision for children's

19. M Vane Turner, *The Story of Deddington* (Deddington W.I. 1933, reprint Deddington & District Hist. Soc. 2008), 73.
20. Smedley-Stevenson, *Early Victorian Squarson*, (BHS 32), 423 n 8.
21. *JOJ*, 1 August 1863.
22. *VCH Oxfordshire* vol 11, 90.
23. Colvin, *History*, 79.
24. Bodleian Library G.A. Oxon. 4o 78, 237.

games.[25] The purchase of the castle grounds by the parish council in 1945 led eventually to the provision of the facilities that Mrs Vane Turner had demanded. A playground was laid out, and changing rooms were built for the footballers. The Rifle Club was reborn in 1945, formed from the disbanded Home Guard. Happily, they replaced the practice of firing across the range with a purpose-built range comprising three Nissen huts bought from Enstone aerodrome. The site was levelled using a bulldozer. It is unlikely that any archaeologist was invited to keep a watching brief. The Deddington Scout Troop took over the building in 1980, and it was demolished in 1982.

The opening of the Windmill Centre off the Hempton road in 1987 with its playing fields and facilities, transferred organised recreation from the eastern to the western edge of the village. The castle grounds remain open to all and are a highly valued local amenity. The issues that arouse strongest feelings now are probably those relating to planning and the likely impact of housing development and the motor car those quintessentially modern concerns. But that is as it should be; the castle has always reflected aspects of national as well as local life. Any rounded picture of English history must take account of the Deddington castles as well as the Windsors.

Castle Site in the Snow (Chris Day

This article is based on original research by Chris Day. It has been impossible to track down some of the original illustrations or references to published sources as he did not record them in his notes. Banbury Historical Society is grateful to Alison Day for permission to print both this article and that on Thomas Walker in his memory, together with some of his photographs.

25. Vane Turner, *The Story of Deddington*, 74.