

# Review Article:

## Goodall, John, *The English Castle*

by

RICHARD K. MORRIS

Goodall, John, *The English Castle 1066-1650*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art (2011), xix + 548pp., 362 ills, £45. ISBN 978-0-300-11058-6.

'As the darkness grew on the evening of 25 January 1377, a party of more than a hundred mummers passed through the streets of London...'. Dramatic historical openings to chapters are just one of the ways in which John Goodall woos the general reader in this long awaited blockbuster of a book on English castles. Another delight is the outstanding array of photographs. But this is no coffee table glossy, but a book with some serious themes about English medieval architecture. Goodall is concerned about the misrepresentation of the image of the castle in films, television and by the heritage industry – his recent debates about the National Trust's presentation of buildings are relevant here – so 'the principal object' of the book is 'to offer an accessible, updated overview of the castle in the light of recent research'.

Goodall's mission is to reclaim castles from archaeological and antiquarian studies and to integrate castle architecture into the mainstream of medieval architectural history, which traditionally has focused primarily on ecclesiastical architecture. In doing so, he is in effect writing his account of English architecture 1066-1650, seen primarily from the perspective of castles. An important feature of his history is to prioritise the study of physical remains and to draw attention to the significant evidence to be derived from technical details – music to this reviewer's ears. Obviously demonstrating architectural relationships of detail between church and castle is harder in the early part of his study, except in fortuitous cases like the geographically close works at Canterbury Cathedral (Trinity Chapel) and Dover Castle (great tower chapels) in the 1180s. Rather, Goodall has to turn to patronage and more general concepts, so that at the start of the 13th century he introduces a new category – 'the Gothic castle'. He proposes that the fundamental change in English castle design in King John's reign reflects an admiration for 'High Gothic' and French culture. Thus the round tower and the semi-circular wall-tower in military architecture are no less characteristic of English Gothic than the familiar pointed arch. The inference is that castles, for all their rugged fortified image in the popular imagination, are as susceptible to contemporary fashion as churches, an argument which is demonstrated more easily in the better documented later medieval period, which is the heartland of the book. From the 14th century on, the same 'creative dynamics' between the secular and ecclesiastical spheres of architecture becomes a familiar theme. A case in point is the significance of the works at Windsor Castle, under both Edward III and Edward IV, for various phases of Perpendicular architecture, or the remarkable use of a bay window design from secular architecture in Henry VII's Chapel, Westminster Abbey.

The later medieval period also provides the best evidence for one of the underlying themes of the book – the dominant role of the royal works department and London-based masons in the design of English medieval architecture. In effect, though not so termed, we are talking ‘court style’. We are most familiar with this argument in the reign of Richard II, when Goodall notes the creation of what was in effect a single office of the king’s works and its role in establishing the Perpendicular style across the kingdom: a style with characteristics – ‘architectural logic’, ‘box-like volumes’ and ‘rich detailing’ – which are as relevant to castles as to churches and other building types. The first king’s mason was Master Henry Yevele (Goodall does not adopt John Harvey’s preferred spelling of ‘Yeveley’),<sup>1</sup> who is seen as having a ‘centralising influence on architectural practice across the country’, acting as a consultant and providing designs for local masons. This is relatively familiar ground to readers of John Harvey,<sup>2</sup> but what is new here is the evidence Goodall gleans from the design and detail of castles to demonstrate this ‘centralising’ hypothesis in other periods. For instance, he convincingly shows that twin ‘ear turrets’ (one of a number of new terms in the book, see Plate 132) and other features of the De Clare gatehouse of *c.* 1250 at Tonbridge Castle are derived from Henry III’s aborted works at the Tower of London in the 1240s, and that the ‘Tonbridge-style’ gatehouse was copied at Caerphilly (*c.* 1270) and widely imitated elsewhere well into the 14th century. Distribution patterns of this kind are most obviously explained, argues Goodall, by buildings ‘designed by masons with a common training and access to an archive of architectural drawings’, namely in the king’s works. Related to this is his novel suggestion that the evidence from their castles indicates that the dukes of Lancaster also maintained a works department ‘with a corporate architectural memory informed by a collection of architectural drawings’. He argues that the forms of earlier buildings are referenced, even copied, in later works. For instance, the great gatehouse of Lancaster Castle (1402) bears comparison with that of 1313 at the Lancastrian castle of Dunstanburgh, or, in the context of the royal works, the façade and plan of Hengrave Hall (1520s, by an unknown mason ‘based in London’) show knowledge of works of the 1440s at Herstmonceux Castle and Henry VI’s Eton College. For Goodall such connections present ‘clear evidence’ of masons ‘leafing through’ collections of drawings and ‘cherry-picking ideas from old designs’. Though it would be foolish to deny some use of architectural drawings in the later Middle Ages in England, despite the dearth of surviving examples before the 16th century, his argument appears to undervalue the visual awareness and memory of the master masons, their tactile skills honed on cutting stone and their knowledge of other buildings through extensive travel. Many of the ‘very distinctive details’ listed by Goodall – such as spur bases and clasped turrets – could be easily memorized by a professional eye and reproduced elsewhere.

Given the emphasis of the book on art history, it will come as no surprise that there is very little coverage of fortifications. A good but brief summary of the types of weapons developed in the period (‘the trappings of fortification’) is given in Chapter 1, though significant features of castle defence (and pretence) like the drawbridge and portcullis hardly get a mention in the book. We are rightly cautioned that set-piece sieges were very unusual in English history, and thus we should not expect all English castles to have ‘real fortifications’ – the ‘real castle’ for military historians. The absence of convincing

fortifications saw the appearance in the 14th century of what have been previously termed castles of display or of chivalry – ‘the *castrati* of castle studies’, as Goodall delightfully terms them – and the continuum of the story of castles through to the 17th century was broken. Goodall’s book sets out to rectify this situation: his working definition of a castle is ‘the residence of a lord made imposing through the architectural trappings of fortification’ (p.6). In the chapter on the Gothic castle, he explains the duality of these trappings, influenced by the development of chivalry and heraldry in the 12th century. Just as warfare was distinguished from tournaments, so features of functional fortification like temporary *hourdes* are to be distinguished from permanent features of potential display like crenellations. The latter led to a ‘revolution’ of ‘fantastical decoration’ and ‘theatrical effects’ in the castles of the reigns of Edward I and Edward II, exemplified by battlements with carved stone figures (‘inhabited battlements’) but also by a general superfluity of military details. This became the architectural vocabulary for castles right through to the 17th century and beyond, and it is crucial for Goodall’s argument that these are regarded as credible status symbols of the political elite, not ‘mock’ castles. This may be the reason why he avoids the more speculative interpretations of the influence of Arthurian romance on castle architecture,<sup>3</sup> limiting himself to documented examples of Arthurian activity like Edward III’s Round Table at Windsor (1344) and Queen Elizabeth I’s entertainment at Kenilworth (1575). At Edward I’s Caernarfon Castle, for example, which arguably celebrates in its architecture an association with the walls of Constantinople and thus with the Emperor Constantine, grandfather of King Arthur in legend, it suits Goodall’s purpose rather to focus on architectural sources in Roman Britain and in royal works in south-east England. However, what he does add as background to understanding the ‘trappings of fortification’ in general are interesting sections on ‘Ancestry and Literary Romance in Castle Architecture’ (Chapter 10) and ‘Heraldry, Ancestry and the Castle’ (Chapter 15). The latter includes reference to the extensive display of family lineage at Lumley Castle, to which King James I responded after a tedious visit in 1603, ‘I didna’ ken Adam’s ither nam was Lumley’.

One word in the title which will not have escaped readers’ notice is ‘English’: this is not a book about British castles. Scotland (with the exception of a brief excursus to Bothwell) finds no coverage, as Goodall acknowledges, and the inclusion of certain castles in Wales and Ireland is explained as part of an English colonisation process, and as reflecting (and sometimes illuminating) English architectural developments. For another of Goodall’s purposes is to extol the vigour and invention of English medieval architecture, and to counter the tendency to explain the development of English castle design primarily in terms of foreign models. This is to reclaim castles from the world of military function and repatriate them as aesthetic objects. Whilst recognizing the importance of the continent for the genesis of the great tower in the 11th century and the detailing of brickwork in the 15th, he rightly rejects French sources for features like machicolated parapets (first seen at Conwy Castle) and for buildings like the highly sophisticated great tower at Wardour Castle (1393). His case is generally well made, but how comfortably it sits with the thesis of ‘the Gothic castle’ (see above) is less clear.

After an Introduction and Chapter 1 dealing with generalities and noting that four castles feature regularly throughout the narrative (Fig. 1), the book is divided into



Fig. 1

Kenilworth Castle, seen from the south with the site of the great mere flooded. Kenilworth is one of four castles featured regularly in the book – Dover, Windsor, Durham and Kenilworth – representing respectively the great fortress, the royal palace, the prelate's castle and the magnate's castle. Three of the four survived the 17th-century Civil War and are still in use: only Kenilworth was abandoned, 'a ruin of breathtaking splendour to the present day'.

*Photograph, R. K. Morris 2007*

fifteen chronological chapters based on the reigns of monarchs or groups of monarchs. It commences with William I (Chapter 2, *The Castles of the Conquest*) and finishes with James VI and Charles I (Chapter 16, *The Stuart Castle*). Some monarchs like Edward III receive more than one chapter (*The Lion of England* and *The Genesis of the Perpendicular Style*), others are grouped together in a single chapter, for example Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII (*The Yorkist and Early Tudor Settlement*). This narrative structure works pretty well as a framework on which to assemble such a potentially unwieldy mass of material. As Goodall explains, the advantages of doing so are that buildings appear in their historical context, that they are easier to match with the fundamental evidence from royal records, and that monarchs' names provide 'a comforting element of familiarity' for the general reader. Inevitably there are a few orphans. The feature on Conisbrough Castle, placed in Richard I's reign, appears odd separated from the discussion of Orford and polygonal great towers in Henry II's reign twenty pages earlier; and the section on 'The Midlands and South Wales' in Chapter 11 (Richard II's reign) is almost devoid of midlands' content because the most relevant buildings at Warwick and Kenilworth were discussed in the previous chapter.

It is impossible here to give even a brief résumé of the chapters, so a few extracts must suffice to give a flavour of the rich and varied contents. In Chapter 3, *The Castles of the Conquest*, the author manages to indulge himself in what one suspects is one of his

favourite castles, Richmond in Yorkshire, giving this rather forgotten site – ‘perhaps the best preserved 11th-century castle in England’ – justifiable coverage alongside the much better known Tower of London and Colchester. Chapter 4, *The Age of Magnificence* (William Rufus, Henry I and Stephen) includes re-assessment of the ‘great tower’ (aka ‘keep’ to traditionalists), leading off with two outstanding royal examples at Norwich and Corfe castles, and explaining that their appeal was more complex than just a stronghold in times of unrest. The great tower was the visual focus of a castle, the ultimate symbol of lordly power and living on a grand scale: the most sophisticated examples were ‘prodigy buildings’, every bit as complicated architecturally as contemporary great churches. The continuous attraction of living in a great tower, and its architectural descent from 12th century models, is a significant sub-plot of the book; whether new-built as at Caernarfon (the Eagle Tower), Knaresborough and Warkworth, or an older tower updated, as at Chepstow (modernised in the 1230s), Pontefract (in the 1370s) and Appleby (in the 1650s).

Chapter 7, *The King’s Works and Wales*, is enlivened by coverage given to castles outside Edward I’s well-known big six in north Wales: less familiar castle works of the same period, such as the gatehouses at Leybourne (Kent), Barnwell (Northants.) and Bungay (Suffolk). All of these, Goodall argues, are indebted in their architectural details to previous royal works. The appearance of brick as a fashionable building material is the outstanding feature of Chapter 12, *The Lancastrian Age*, transforming secular architecture in the first half of the 15th century. Here Goodall acknowledges especially the work of the late Nicholas Moore, whose early death extinguished his own plan for a monograph on English medieval brickwork and who bequeathed his research archive to the author. A particular focus of the chapter is on the influence of Henry VI’s Eton College (founded 1440), where brick walls decorated with displays of diaper patterns, continental in inspiration, were used in buildings designed and detailed in stone, in the English idiom: a combination which became the fashionable style for castles and palaces in the south and east of England into the Tudor period. Amongst the progeny of Eton is Herstmonceux Castle, which is given its own section at the end of the chapter to illustrate ‘the vigour and invention of castle building at this time’, and the specific significance of its façade design (‘the Herstmonceux-type façade’). Yet surprisingly there is no discussion or proper illustration of the façade’s great gatehouse, surely one of the outstanding works of medieval castle architecture, with its theatrical play of shapes and texture and the many ‘trappings of fortification’ (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup>

The closing chapters 14 to 16, covering the years 1509-1650, are especially concerned to counter the popular perception of ‘the decline of the castle’ as expounded, for example, in Michael Thompson’s book of that name, which defined a castle as a fortified residence in which the fortifications predominate.<sup>5</sup> These chapters are the least coherent of the book because Goodall’s main argument for the continued prominence of the castle is harder to illustrate, and the many sub-sections impede the flow of the main arguments. New-built castles and major remodellings of existing castles are relatively rare in these years and the names of the best-known are all too familiar from the writings of Mark Girouard<sup>6</sup> – Longford, Kenilworth, Lulworth, Ruperra and Bolsover. The fact that most privately owned castles were still lived in, maintained and improved, because they continued to represent the most appropriate symbol of military prowess and social status for the ruling



Fig. 2

Herstmonceux Castle, the great gatehouse (1440s), with echoes of the Eagle Tower at Caernarfon and Caesar's Tower at Warwick, in the playful changing shapes of the towers, and the turrets set back behind a boldly machicolated fighting deck. The use of bright red brick adds a texture and colour in dramatic contrast to earlier castles. Add to this an exuberant array of 'the trappings of fortification' – arrow loops, gunloops, drawbridge beam-slots and the menacing super-arch implying the presence of murder-holes – and this is one of the outstanding achievements of English castle design; but it is not featured in the book.

© History of Art Department, University of Warwick; photograph, Alan Watson

class, makes for unspectacular argument in the context of new buildings, particularly country houses. So resort is made to other, less familiar forms of evidence, such as the report of the 1617 visit of James I and leading courtiers to Warkworth Castle, where 'the lords were much moved to se it soe spoyled and soe badly kept'. For Goodall, these words, set against the exceptionally unfortunate circumstances of the Percy family, show 'just how admired castles remained' and 'how central they were to noble identity', rather than adding weight to the conventional view of castles being abandoned and falling into ruin. He also rightly brings into play the continued significance of the Perpendicular tradition in reinvigorating Elizabethan architecture, and forming arguably the main constituent of High Elizabethan style (though he does not use the term). Too much attention has been paid to the new Renaissance style, which tended to develop away from castles in town-houses and at former monastic sites, and which he dismisses as no more than cosmetic in the 16th century. However, considering that Kenilworth Castle is one of the four featured castles of the book, he misses the opportunity (pp.441-3) to point out that the Leicester Building there is surely the first influential exposition of High Elizabethan – a great tower of compact plan with huge windows, eschewing externally all traces of classical detail; and, to prove Goodall's point, it is built in the context of a castle.<sup>7</sup> Rather, he refers to Kenilworth after Leicester's works as an 'architectural hotchpotch'.

Turning to the format of the book, the visual apparatus is stupendous. Goodall draws on all his experience with English Heritage guidebooks and as the architectural editor of *Country Life* (rather like the lavishly illustrated publications of his distant predecessor, H. Avray Tipping). Apart from the superb modern colour photographs, many of them full-page, quite a few of the later buildings are illustrated by classic plate photographs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries from the *Country Life* archive. Moreover, he has assembled what must be the largest collection of recent English Heritage and Cadw reconstruction drawings published in one place. There are many coloured plans as well, some drawn specially but many others borrowed from English Heritage and Cadw guidebooks: Goodall notes that the intention had been to publish them all at a uniform scale, but that this proved to be impracticable within the confines of the book.

A distinctive feature of the book's design is the emphasis placed on interpreting the 362 plates by descriptive and analytical captions, sometimes in tandem with reference numbers superimposed on the images. The latter is a device associated with guidebooks, first used, I believe, by Cadw in the 1980s and brought to English Heritage by Dr David Robinson, where it is extensively employed in the new Red Guidebook series. Goodall is 'evangelical' about urging the study of physical remains, so that anyone with a careful eye and a modicum of knowledge can analyse the buildings for themselves, and this device is ideally suited to his purpose. It means that in one sense the book is like a giant guidebook. A reader may look through the plates, absorbing the captions, or read the main text as a narrative. To try to do both simultaneously is hard work, as this reviewer discovered, for each caption is 100-150 words long. In this arrangement lurks the danger that the contents of the captions may contradict the main text, but I found hardly any instances of this – a tribute to the high standard of proof-reading in the volume and the fact that the author wrote all the captions (an unusual circumstance).

However, though this is a stimulating book, it is also a physically challenging one. Yale need to think if there is a future for such large heavy tomes as *The English Castle* (3.2 kilos, measuring 290x250mm) and Girouard's *Elizabethan Architecture* (3.4 kilos). The sheer difficulty of sitting down and reading the former for any length of time potentially inhibits the full appreciation of Goodall's excellent narrative. In such circumstances, one must question a book design in which the full-page photograph which introduces each chapter is simply embellishment, not given a plate number and therefore not referred to in the text. Thus, in Chapter 15, the photograph of Longford Castle (p.430) – one of the fine photos from the *Country Life* archive – is a much more appropriate illustration to judge his point about the 'solidity' (or otherwise) of the castle than the distant view of 1680 (pl.348).

The book is very much John Goodall's personal account of English medieval architectural history and the story of the castle. His interpretation of buildings and their dating is not always incontrovertible, sometimes selective to suit his arguments. For example, this reviewer still disagrees about the date of the 14th-century gatehouse at Caldicot Castle (Monm., p.334), but that is beside the point; alternative viewpoints are usually referenced in the notes. The book is full of unusual insights and observations, like the convincing attribution of the problematical Spy Tower at Warwick Castle to the tenure of George, duke of Clarence (1471-83). No review can do justice to all of these, except to guarantee that all castle-buffs will be similarly rewarded in their reading.

In 1979, I introduced a course entitled 'The Englishman's Home [is his castle]' in the History of Art degree at the University of Warwick; as a matter of fact John Goodall taught for a term on it in the 1990s. It covered very much the same material and time-span as the book under review, and in its time it was a pioneer course for an art history department. Had I written a course-book, this would have been the book. So I am delighted to welcome it after all these years: indeed envious that I did not write it. John Goodall is the finest scholar of English medieval architecture of his generation, and *The English Castle* is an exceptional achievement.

## NOTES

- 1 J. H. Harvey, *English Mediaeval Architects: a Biographical Dictionary down to 1550* (rev. edn, Gloucester 1984), 358. John Harvey adopted the extra 'y' in his later writings to stress that Yeveley hailed from Yeaveley (Derbys).
- 2 J. H. Harvey, *Henry Yevele c. 1320-1400: the Life of an English Architect* (London 1944).
- 3 For example, R. K. Morris, 'The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm', in M. Strickland (ed.), *Armies, Chivalry and Warfare in Medieval Britain and France*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies VII (Stamford 1998), 63-81; for Caernarfon, see 71-2.
- 4 Goodall references his article, 'A Medieval Masterpiece: Herstmonceux Castle, Sussex', *Burlington Magazine*, 146, no. 1217 (August 2004), 516-25, where the gatehouse is illustrated in Figs 3-4 and described as 'this magnificent structure'; but its omission from the book is unfortunate.
- 5 M. W. Thompson, *The Decline of the Castle* (Cambridge 1987), 1.
- 6 Most recently, M. Girouard, *Elizabethan Architecture* (New Haven and London, 2009), ch.8; reviewed in *TAMS*, 55 (2011).
- 7 R. K. Morris, "'I was never more in love with an olde howse nor never newe worke coulede be better bestowed": the Earl of Leicester's remodelling of Kenilworth Castle for Queen Elizabeth I', *Antiquaries Journal*, 89 (2009), 299-301. Goodall includes reference to this article in his bibliography.