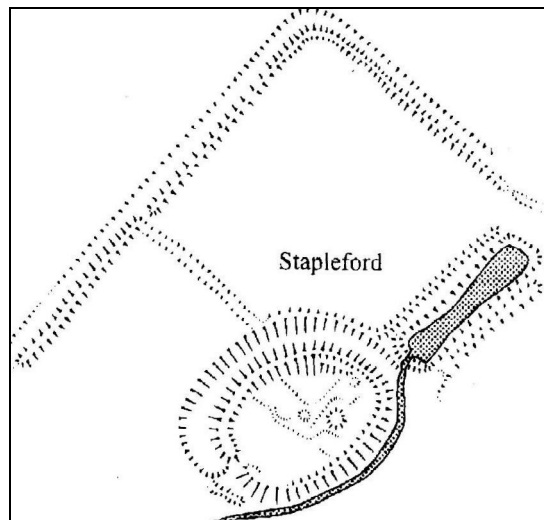


STAPLEFORD

Ringworks Grid Ref: SU069379

Description and plan

This is a strong ringwork and bailey castle site, situated on the third river terrace in the valley of the Till and above the River Wylve at about 68.58m OD. A branch of the River Till has been diverted further upstream and forms its eastern boundary. Before this, its course has been excavated to form a deep moat, or possibly a fishpond, but has been dredged in recent years (NMR). The site is a Scheduled Monument (AM141) with SMR number SU03NE452.



*Plan of Stapleford ringwork and bailey
(© Prof.Oliver Creighton, University of Exeter)*

The site survives as prominent earthworks, which lie on gently sloping ground at the edge of the river flood plain. The bank of the ringwork is 3.6m high and rises 6m above the base of the ditch. The bank to the SE on the lower lying ground is slighter. The ditch has an average depth of 3.5m for much of its length and on the SW is breached by the causeway of the original entrance. (NMR). The entrance itself was known as Slay Gate, a name later applied to the adjoining pair of cottages; these are now called Castle Cottages.

The motte itself is completely enveloped in trees and the whole site is on private land. But it has been surveyed in the past, and internally building platforms were visible, though the area has been much disturbed. The internal measurements of the ringwork are approximately 70m by 50m. (*ibid.*).



Stapleford Castle, seen from the south, the area of the main entrance

There is a banked enclosure to the north and west of the ringwork, which may have been part of the bailey or the manorial complex (*ibid.*). The ditches and banks of this enclosure are well-maintained and very obvious. The two sides measure 160m and 260m, the bank being as much as 2m high in places, with an outer ditch of approximately 1.7m deep (*ibid.*). The south west corner is occupied by a number of large farm buildings.



Ditch on south west side of bailey



Bank above ditch on NE side of bailey

The embanked pond is probably about 90m long, but having been recently dredged, it is not possible to state with certainty its original dimensions. The water is not stagnant, as the River Till feeds it at some point, possibly underground.



The probable fishpond at Stapleford Castle

Tenorial history

Stapleford parish consists of four small settlements, divided by the north-south River Till. Church Street and Uppington (originally Uppingham) make up what is now the main part of Stapleford, on the east bank of the river, with the church at its centre. Over Street and Serrington are on the west bank. Stapleford Castle stands at the north end of Over Street and perhaps this was the original focus of the village, before the church was built in the 12th century on the east bank (Freeman, 1995: 253-5).

In 1086, Swein, one of the few thegns remaining in power in England, held 10½ hides of land in Stapleford, on which he paid tax. This holding he had inherited from his

father, also Swein, who had held it at the time of the Conquest. There was land for ten ploughs, two of which were in lordship, with one slave. (Thorn & Thorn, 1979: 67.94). The Geld Rolls tell us that Swein had 2½ acres in demesne, (Darlington, 1955: 209), which could well be accounted for by the embanked bailey to the north and west of the castle.

Stapleford seems to have been a sizeable place at the time of the Survey. There were seventeen villagers and ten smallholders, with the other eight plough teams between them. The manor also boasted two mills, paying 30s and there were forty acres of meadow a square half-league of pasture and woodland one league long by half a league wide. The value at the time stood at £12, (Thorn & Thorn, 1979: 67.94).

By 1166, the manor was in the hands of Geoffrey Hose (later Hussey) and descended through this family, whose heirs all seem to have been named either Geoffrey or Henry (Freeman, 1995: 256). A charter of 1198, issued by Richard I, confirmed all the holdings of the Cistercian Abbey of Stanley, and all its gifts and sales. Henry Hussey, the lord at the time, and his son, Geoffrey, must have made such a gift to the Abbey, since they are named as 'of Stapleford', while Henry's brother, Hugh, made a like gift from his lands in Blagdon, Somerset.(Chettle & Kirby, 1956: 269).

In 1227, there was a petition made at Wilton, by Geoffrey Sauvage and Mabel his wife. She had been the widow of Geoffrey Hussey and the dispute was between Mabel's son, Henry Hussey, and Mabel and her new husband, concerning Mabel's dower lands in Corsley, Kincheston, Sexhamcote, Stapleford, Harnham and Figheldean Berleigh. (Fry, 1930: Figheldean was often coupled with Stapleford.

The manor continued in the Hussey family, descending in moieties from about 1285, and eventually passed into the hands of the Esturmeys and subsequently the Giffards, when it descended together with Sherrington manor (Freeman, 1995: 256-7).

Sally Thomson, 2013

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