

## NOTES

### CROFT CASTLE

According to a medieval history of Ford Abbey, William de Rieviers or Redvers, earl of Devon and lord of the Isle of Wight (died 1217), divided his estate in Crewkerne between his two daughters. Joan, wife of William de Briwere, received fifty librates of land at 'Cruft' in the manor of Crewkerne, with the advowson of the churches, and Mary, wife of Robert de Courtenay, had the remainder of the manor with the foreign hundred and the chace (*chacia*) of Crewkerne. Joan's share was described elsewhere in the same history as the patronage of the churches and fifty librates of land *de castris*.<sup>1</sup>

William de Briwere died in 1232-3,<sup>2</sup> but his widow survived, and in 1256 gave two virgates of land which had formed part of her marriage portion, lying in the vill of Hewish 'in her manor of Crewkerne', to the priory of Christchurch (Hants). Her charter was dated at Craft on the morrow of the feast of the translation of the Holy Cross.<sup>3</sup> Craft was evidently Joan Briwere's place of residence in Crewkerne.

By 1267 an estate called Craft and Cruk' was in the hands of Isabel de Fortibus, countess of Devon and Aumale,<sup>4</sup> and her ownership gave the name Craft Comitisse to part of the property.<sup>5</sup> An account of the manor for 1267-8 shows clearly that Craft was still the site of a residence, for payments are recorded for mending two cisterns 'against the coming of the countess' and for collecting brushwood 'to brew and bake in preparation for the same coming'. A further extraordinary payment was made for the carriage of four wine casks to Craft, with 39 gallons of wine to put in them; and among the items of income was cash for the sale of a small cask and 100 gallons of ale left over after her departure.<sup>6</sup>

Thereafter no further references to Craft as a residence have been found, though the name continued. By 1315 there were two hamlets called Craft St. Reigne and Craft Comitisse,<sup>7</sup> whose fields were a single unit, the home farm comprising nearly 220 acres of arable, 15 acres of meadow and 50 acres of pasture.<sup>8</sup> By the middle of the 14th century the property seems to have been absorbed into the manor of Crewkerne,<sup>9</sup> the name Craft surviving as Croft in field-names and farm-names until the present day.

The centre of this estate, the residence of Joan Briwere and Countess Isabel, has proved more difficult to locate, but persistent tradition, well documented from the 17th century onwards, refers to a large close of pasture called 'Castell' or 'the castles';<sup>10</sup> and Thomas Gerard, writing in 1633, refers to the 'traditions . . . of a castle . . . called Croft Castle, which being banished there rose up in the roome a mansion house for the lords of it which also hath given place unto time'.<sup>11</sup>

Castle Hill, an isolated outcrop which rises to over 450 ft north of the Wind-whistle ridge in the north-west corner of Crewkerne parish overlooking the parishes of Hinton and Merriott (ST 420108), forms part of an irregular enclosure called Castles.<sup>12</sup> It lies within an area of demesne land which was divided into tenths by the end of the 16th century, but was then still known as 'Countes Croft', the 13th-century 'Craft Comitisse'.<sup>13</sup> The hill itself was planted with trees by Earl Poulett in the late 18th century,<sup>14</sup> but was subsequently returned to scrub and grass. No earthworks are visible, but its top is roughly level, sloping slightly to the south-west.

On the strength of the discovery of two fragments of 12th-century pottery, together (presumably) with the name Castle Hill, the site has been tentatively recognised as that of a Norman castle.<sup>15</sup> Ploughing in 1976 revealed eight more sherds of similar pottery, two pieces of iron, probably nails, and a slab of dressed Ham stone, the pottery and iron located on the lower side of the hill top, the Ham stone near the highest point, where stinging-nettles were clearly well established.<sup>16</sup>

So the evidence for a castle on the hill is still not strong, but it is clear that a substantial residence connected with the manor of Craft was in existence in the 13th century. But the manor lands were extensive, stretching further west along the north side of the Windwhistle ridge to an area called Upcroft and Hentonescraft. The latter

was a medieval village which subsequently shrank and was finally taken over by extensions to Hinton Park in the 18th century.<sup>17</sup> Upcroft, possibly the former estate of Craft St. Reigne, for it lies just below the site of St. Reigne's chapel, was bought by Sir Hugh Poulett out of the manor of Crewkerne in 1541 and was converted by him into a deer park.<sup>18</sup> Aerial photographs reveal the village street of Hentonescraft on the lower ground in the valley, and there are less easily interpreted earthworks on the hillside within the old park. The 'mansion' which Gerard supposed succeeded the 'castle' was almost certainly a rationalisation to explain a manor-house in the centre of Crewkerne; but might not the earthworks at Upcroft prove a better site for a 13th-century landowner's house than an exposed hill top? And might not that hill, albeit occupied in some way in the early Middle Ages, be a 'castle' of an earlier period?

1. B. L. Cott, Jul. B. x, printed in G. Oliver, *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*, 343-5.
2. *Close R.* 1231-4, 198.
3. B. L. Cott, Tib. D. vi, fos. 178-178v. With more land also at Hewish granted a little later (the charter is undated) she established a chantry at Christchurch.
4. Bodleian Libr. MS Top. Gen. d 20.
5. S.R.O., D/D/B reg 1 (Register of Bishop Droxford).
6. Bodleian Libr. MS Top. Gen. d 20.
7. S.R.O., D/D/B reg 1.
8. B. L. Add. MS 49359, fo. 74.
9. *Feud. Aids*, iv, 316-17, 339.
10. S.R.O., DD/SS 54 (1633), DD/PT 23 (1663), 40 (1652).
11. *Som. Rec. Soc.*, xv, 66.
12. S.R.O., tithe map.
13. S.R.O., T/PH/hsy (photocopy of manor survey 1599).
14. S.R.O., DD/SB, map of Crewkerne c. 1772 (copy of 1835).
15. D. F. Renn, *Norman Castles*, 160; *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, 98, 9.
16. Pottery found by the author, deposited in County Museum, Taunton.
17. S.R.O., DD/PT, 17, 44; DD/SS 24; DD/SAS (C/212), map of Hinton park.
18. *L. & P. Hen. VIII*, xvi, p. 420; S.C. 6/Hen. VIII/6179.

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## A SOMERSET LINK WITH THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Most lovers of Exmoor will be familiar with Lady Harriet Acland's Drive, which follows the course of the river Haddeo from Upton, through Hartford and Bury, to a gate on the Tiverton-Minehead road (A 396), opposite to a drive leading to Weir House in Pixton Park. Not everyone, however, who sees 'Lady Harriet Acland's Drive' in print on the six-inch Ordnance Survey map will know about the life of this remarkable lady, whose name is still recorded in the cartography of Exmoor two hundred years after the battle of Saratoga in which she played such a memorable part.

Lady Christian Harriet Caroline Fox-Strangways was a daughter of Stephen, 1st Earl of Ilchester, and in 1770 she became the wife of Major John Dyke Acland of Pixton, the son and heir of Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, the 7th Baronet. In the American War of Independence Major Acland commanded a brigade of Grenadiers, and Lady Harriet accompanied her husband on his campaigns. In the disastrous defeat of the British Army at Saratoga, in October 1777, Major Acland was severely wounded and taken prisoner. With the permission of General Burgoyne, the British Commander, Lady Harriet crossed over the river Hudson to the enemy's lines for the purpose of nursing her wounded husband. An oil painting of Lady Harriet in an open boat by Robert Pollard, entitled 'Lady Harriet Acland travelling up the Hudson' commemorated the event, and it was subsequently engraved by the artist and published in 1784. The oil painting, in the possession of the executors of the late Mr. Aubrey Herbert, was shown in the 1776 Exhibition at Greenwich.<sup>1</sup>

After Major Acland had recovered from his wounds, he and Lady Harriet returned to England to live at Pixton, and there in November 1778 he died. There was one son of the marriage, John Dyke Acland, who succeeded to the Baronetcy on the death of his grandfather, Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, on February 24th 1785. The child only lived for a few weeks after this, however, and in the Dyke-Acland Pedigree given in Chadwyck Healey's *The History of Part of West Somerset* is recorded:

Sir John Dyke Acland, 8th Baronet. Named in his grandfather's will as 'the only son of my late dear son, John Dyke Acland'. Buried at Broadclyst 23rd April 1785, 'aged about 7 years'.

Lady Harriet survived the death of her husband and son for many years and died at Tetton House, Somerset, in 1815. She was buried at Broadclyst on July 20th. Her obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (Volume 85, Part II, pp. 186-7) recalls her exploit in the dramatic detail so clearly evident in Robert Pollard's painting:

'At Tetton-House, co. Somerset, Rt. Hon. Lady Harriet Acland, sister of the late Earl of Ilchester, mother of the late Countess of Cardigan, and widow of the late gallant Col. Acland, who was actively employed during a considerable part of the American war. While conjugal affection is esteemed a virtue, and sincere attachment deemed amiable in the female character, the conduct of this lady must call forth the admiration of mankind. In the year 1767 (*sic*),<sup>2</sup> Lady Harriet accompanied her husband, then Major Acland, to North America, and underwent a variety of hardships, both from cold and fatigue. In the midst of all these difficulties and dangers, the Major was taken dangerously ill. The anxiety she experienced on this trying occasion, rendered her own health extremely precarious; yet in the rigid climate of Canada, and destitute of every common comfort, this amiable woman was his only nurse. When scarcely recovered, the troops under the command of the Major were ordered to the attack of Ticonderago (*sic*); and Lady Harriet, at the ardent request of her beloved husband, was induced to remain behind; but the idea of not accompanying him to the post of danger, was more distressing to her than all the difficulties she had encountered with him. By the gallant exertions of the troops, Ticonderago was taken, but the Major received a dangerous wound. The moment this misfortune reached the ears of his disconsolate wife, she resolved to fly to his assistance, and had the happiness of saving his life by her unremitting care and attention; after which she declared that no earthly power should ever again induce her to quit him. The brigade of grenadiers, which Major Acland commanded, was exposed to uncommon hardships, being continually employed in harassing the Enemy. The duty, indeed, was so severe that the officers were seldom able to take off their clothes. At this period the tent in which Lady Harriet slept took fire, and it was with great difficulty her valuable life was preserved; yet her undaunted mind never for an instant forsook her. Immediately after this accident, the Major was ordered to march and give battle to the Enemy, and Lady Harriet was confided to the care of the baggage guard. A dreadful fire of musquetry soon announced that the action had commenced; she remained for several days in the most anxious state of suspense, with her companions in affliction, the wives of Major Hornage and Lieut. Beynett. Major Hornage was soon after brought in mortally wounded, and to this soon succeeded the intelligence that Lieut. Beynett was no more. Lady Harriet now dreaded to inquire, whether she bore the melancholy title of widow, or had still the happiness to be a wife. At length she was overwhelmed with affliction, on being informed that the British troops had been defeated, and that her husband, covered with wounds, had been made a prisoner. In a few hours she recovered her fortitude, and addressed a letter to the English Gen. Burgoyne, imporing his permission to pass over to the Enemy's camp. With this request the General complied, and he wrote a few lines to the American Gen. Gates to permit her to attend the object of her care. She immediately went on board an open boat, without any covering to protect her from the dews of the night, and proceeded up the river to the Enemy's camp. For eight hours she was obliged to remain in this situation. At daylight the centinels (*sic*) were induced to deliver the letter to Gen. Gates, who once

more restored her to her gallant husband. On their return to England, a portrait of her Ladyship standing in the boat, with a white handkerchief in her hand, as a flag of truce, was exhibited at the Royal Academy, from which a plate was afterwards engraved. The person of her Ladyship was highly graceful and delicate, and her manners elegantly feminine.'

1. *The Times*, 14 April 1976. A photograph of the engraving has been added to the Somerset Archaeological Society's collection.
2. The date should be 1977.

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#### A BRONZE PALSTAVE FROM RADSTOCK, SOMERSET: ADDENDUM

Since the publication in 1975<sup>1</sup> of the Middle Bronze Age palstave from Radstock, further information has come to light. This demonstrates that the palstave from Radstock recorded as being in the Weston-super-Mare Museum is, in fact, the same implement as the published one now in the County Museum, Taunton.

In 1968 the staff at Weston-super-Mare were anxious to acquire a bronze flat axe from Uphill, which had recently been sold in a London auction sale.<sup>2</sup> The axe had been bought by a dealer and sold to a private collector when the museum staff attempted to start negotiations. To recover the implement, an exchange was arranged from the museum collection comprising two stone axes, a group of flint arrowheads and the palstave. Only the palstave was of local provenance.

To complete the provenance of the implement, the museum accession register records that it was 'excavated' in Radstock and presented to the museum in September 1902 by Mr. S. Lloyd-Harvey of Foxhills, Radstock. The precise findspot is not recorded. The original correspondence concerning this transaction has been deposited in the County Museum.<sup>3</sup>

1. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, 119 (1975), 67.
2. Knight, Frank and Rutley, 28th May, 1968, Lot 71.
3. I am grateful to Dr. J. Close-Brooks, of the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, Mr. R. S. Murray of Blackburn, and Miss K. J. Evans of the Woodspring Museum, Weston-super-Mare, for the information on which this note is based.

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