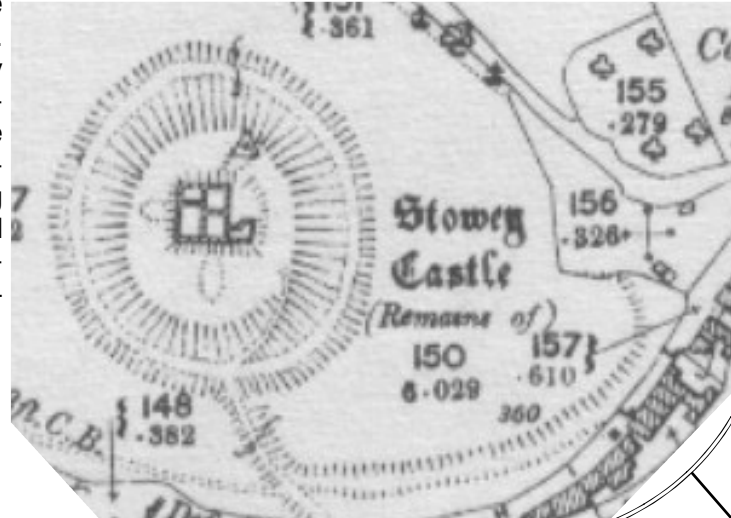


**Welcome to Nether Stowey Castle!**

Hold this sheet with the top towards Steptom (the big island in the middle of the channel) and the margin will indicate the direction of various landmarks and localities - distances are in miles.

The drawing above shows how the castle might have looked in its heyday, about 900 years ago, and the plan below is taken from the first Ordnance Survey map, of 1888.

The castle consisted of a square keep, (which may have been stone, or a wooden superstructure on stone foundations) and its defences, and an outer and an inner bailey. It contained all the necessary buildings for the lord of the manor to administer his estates. He required prestigious accommodation at his castle, so the keep would have contained apartments for the family, including a hall and kitchen, (which may have been located in a separate building to the east) and a chapel (perhaps incorporated in the keep, or separate, in the upper bailey). The lower bailey would have contained more functional buildings, including another hall and kitchen, a brew-house and stables.



**W**

**E**

**S**

# A Possible History of Nether Stowey Castle

## The Coming of the Invaders

The Victoria County History recounts that, in 1066, the estate called Stowey was shared by Earl Harold [*killed at Hastings*], Alwi Banneson [*hence Banneson Road in N S*] and two thegns, Oswerd and Ailward. Then the Normans came, and by 1086 the first Norman Lord of the Manor, Alfred d'Espaignes [*Espaignes is a place in Normandy, and nothing to do with Spain*] held the whole estate, with Oswerd and Ailward as under-tenants.

There is evidence that he may have started his "occupation" with a temporary fortified HQ at Castle Field, Over Stowey. A survey of the surviving earthworks there identified two smoothed mounds, the purpose of which was not clear. A geophysical survey did indicate that the mound in Castle Field was partially surrounded by a wide ditch, and that the area had been deliberately built up with soil or other material. The combination of documentary, earthwork and geophysical evidence suggests that an early defended site was located there.

## A Permanent Base

The latest survey and associated research suggests that a stone castle was built at Nether Stowey in the late 11th or early 12th century, during the civil war between Stephen and Matilda, when Isabel, daughter of Alfred d'Espaignes and wife of Robert de Chandos, held the Stowey estates.

Robert and Isabel's granddaughter Maud married one Philip de Columbers, and was returned in 1212 as holding Stowey of the King in chief as the head of an honor [*a grouping of several manors under the administration of a lord and court*] of 10 'knight's fees' [*land or property which could be inherited*]. Philip de Columbers lived at the castle and laid out a deer park and warren to the south and west.

The manor of Nether Stowey passed through the de Columbers family until the 14th century, when it came into the possession of the Audley family by marriage. They lost the manor in 1497 for leading a Cornish insurrection, but it was restored to them in 1512.

## "Decline and Fall"

The recording of Willelmo atte Castel as a burgher of Nether Stowey in 1327 suggests that the castle was still in some form of residency at that time. However, at least part of the castle seems to have been abandoned by the end of the 15th century, as

a late 15th-century document records that the site was let for pasture. The remains of the castle were recycled as building stone for Stowey Court, which became the principal residence of the lord of the manor, and other building in the village. The site was known as "Castle Hill or Old Castle" in 1620 when it was sold to Charles Steynings of Holnicote in Selworthy.

Between 1538 and 1553 the manor was held by the Seymours, Dukes of Somerset, but reverted again to the Audleys, who sold it in 1627. It passed through various hands until 1838, when the lordship and some land was sold to Sir Peregrine Acland and the remaining land to Henry Labouchere [*Lord Taunton, of Quantock Lodge, Over Stowey*]. Sir Peregrine undertook some excavation of the castle ruins, but unfortunately his findings were not recorded.

## St Michael's Church

There is some dispute about where this was located, but the 1888 Ordnance Survey map placed it firmly in Smith's Close, a small triangle of land at the junction of Castle Hill and Butchers Lane [*see over*]. This piece of land is still in the ownership of the Acland-Hood family. Fragments of worked stone, said to have come from St Michael's, have been recorded.

## Geology

The Castle is sited on a small isolated knoll of Leighland Slates of the Devonian series, about 120m [*390 ft*] high, an outlier of the spur which forms the northern edge of a steep-sided valley called Bin Combe, which is an access route up into the heart of the Quantock Hills. The castle occupies a striking position, dominating Bin Combe and the settlement of Nether Stowey, and affording views across the Parrett estuary and Bridgwater Bay to the north and east, and across the eastern foothills of the Quantocks to the south and west.

The stream which flows down from Bin Combe and around the base of Castle Hill on the west side is known locally as Stowey Brook. Stowey Mill, which was still working in 1888, stood on the stream, where Butcher's Lane and Mill Lane meet. A fragment of wall, the sluices, and the site of the millpond survive.

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*[Adapted from the English Heritage Survey Report Series AI/16/2004, which may be seen in Nether Stowey Library, and other sources]*