THE TURRET

SPRING 2019

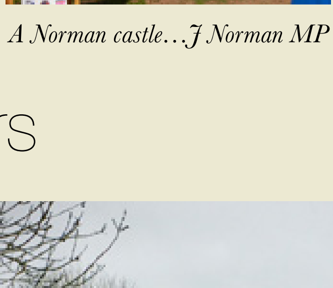
NEWSLETTER OF THE SNODHILL CASTLE PRESERVATION TRUST

Castle besieged

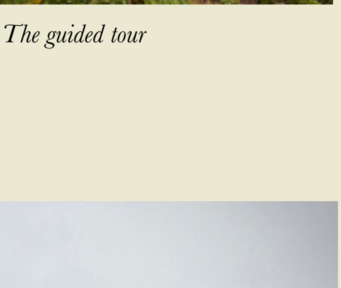
On May 5th 2018 we welcomed Friends and some 350 visitors to the public opening of the site. Guided tours were followed by Snodhill-made tea and cakes, and at 4pm the new oak gates were unveiled by Evelyn Bally, great-niece of the Rev George Prosser-Powell, last of the P-P Dorstone rectors. One of the first sunny days of that astonishing summer it was a propitious way to celebrate the completion of the HE contract, the fencing of the site and the ongoing restoration programme – now entirely in the hands of the Trust.

Time capsule in the restored ruins

The new oak gates



A Norman castle…J Norman MP



The guided tour

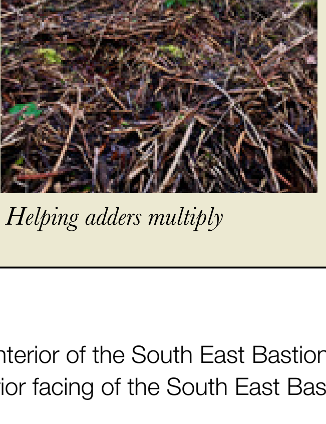
Trumpeting the Volunteers

The castle volunteers, led by Nick Longman, are responsible for perhaps the most visible changes to the site as its full topography rises up from the undergrowth. Every Thursday during the season (Oct – March) the team meet to methodically and sensitively clear under- and over-growth, creating vision splays and woodland access walks and maintaining our veteran and ancient trees. Firewood to take home (or wood to hand-turn), is a bonus. The work is done to ancient monuments specification: bonfires are mounted on platforms clear of the ground, and clearing is done by hand and barrow with ecological oversight (2018 was a good year for small copper butterflies, and somewhat less attractively, for giant hemlock).

This year we've created more habitat piles, hopefully redoubtable castles for creeping things, and later we hope to see the return of our family of redstarts to the orchard.

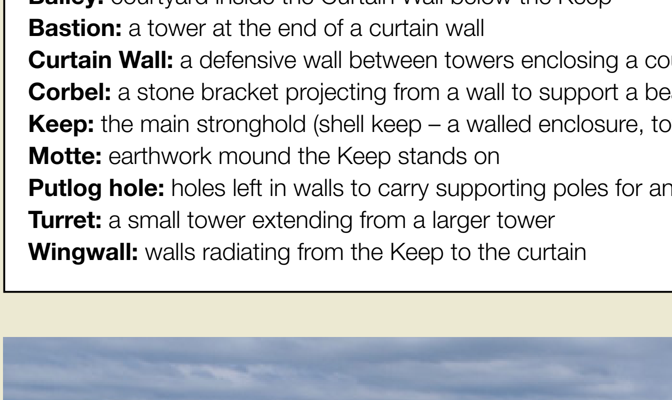
Everyone is welcome to join this select band
Contact Nick via info@snodhillcastle.org *for details.*

From this…



Resident slow worm

A small copper



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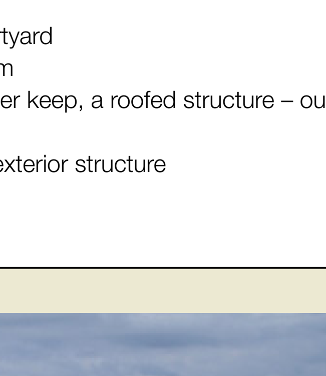
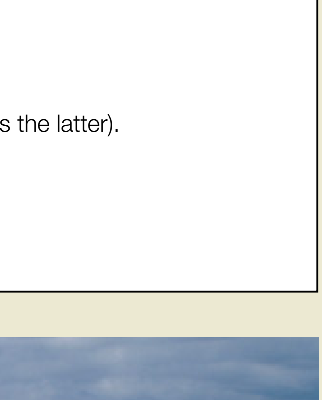


Helping adders multiply



… and beetles burgeon

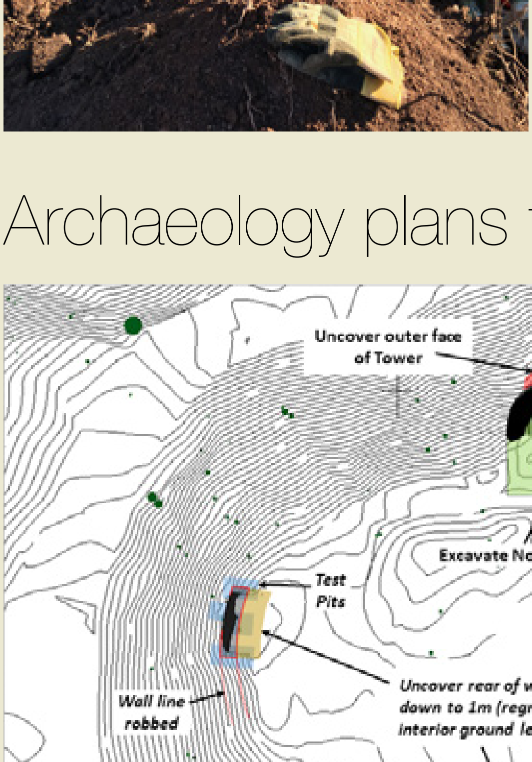
A CASTLE GLOSSARY FOR SNODHILL:

Apse: curved or polygonal end of a tower, chapel etc (as in the interior of the South East Bastion)
Ashlar: stone finely cut into blocks of regular size (as in the exterior facing of the South East Bastion and the North Tower)
Bailey: courtyard inside the Curtain Wall below the Keep
Bastion: a tower at the end of a curtain wall
Curtain Wall: a defensive wall between towers enclosing a courtyard
Corbel: a stone bracket projecting from a wall to support a beam
Keep: the main stronghold (shell keep – a walled enclosure, tower keep, a roofed structure – ours is the latter).
Motte: earthwork mound the Keep stands on
Putlog hole: holes left in walls to carry supporting poles for an exterior structure
Turret: a small tower extending from a larger tower
Wingwall: walls radiating from the Keep to the curtain

Keep from the south

Adam Stanford and squadron

View from the SE Bastion



Archaeology review

Trowels were put away during 2018 while we reviewed and prioritised our next investigations, although Adam Stanford of Aerial-Cam surveyed the site for Historic England and kindly flew one of his squadron of drones over in late July scouting for parchmarks (none were conclusively identified, but we got some great footage nevertheless!). We have a substantial programme for 2019 (see map below) which will aim to further explore the findings of 2016-7, which Garry Crook summarises here:

North Tower
The North Tower is that huge curved fragment on the north slope (ie. left hand side) of the Bailey. Of soft red sandstone, it was clearly massive but the surviving ruin, its interior face now impressively rough-racked and soft-capped, intrigues as to its purpose. The 2017 excavation found it to be between 10 - 12m in diameter, with walls 3m thick. Such a large, apparently independently defensible tower in the bailey of a castle which already had an existing (and apparently serviceable) keep is unknown elsewhere; and in 2019 we plan to dig further to confirm its full size and function.

South East Bastion
This is the low parapeted wall structure down to the right of the Keep from the Bailey. Digs ascertained it was a complex, irregular multi-angular tower. Its shape, orientation, the evidence of interior decoration, and the existence of two 'cupboards' suggest it could have been a private chapel but more excavations are needed to finalise its form and function. Meanwhile it has given us a fine 'belvedere' over the valley towards Peterchurch.

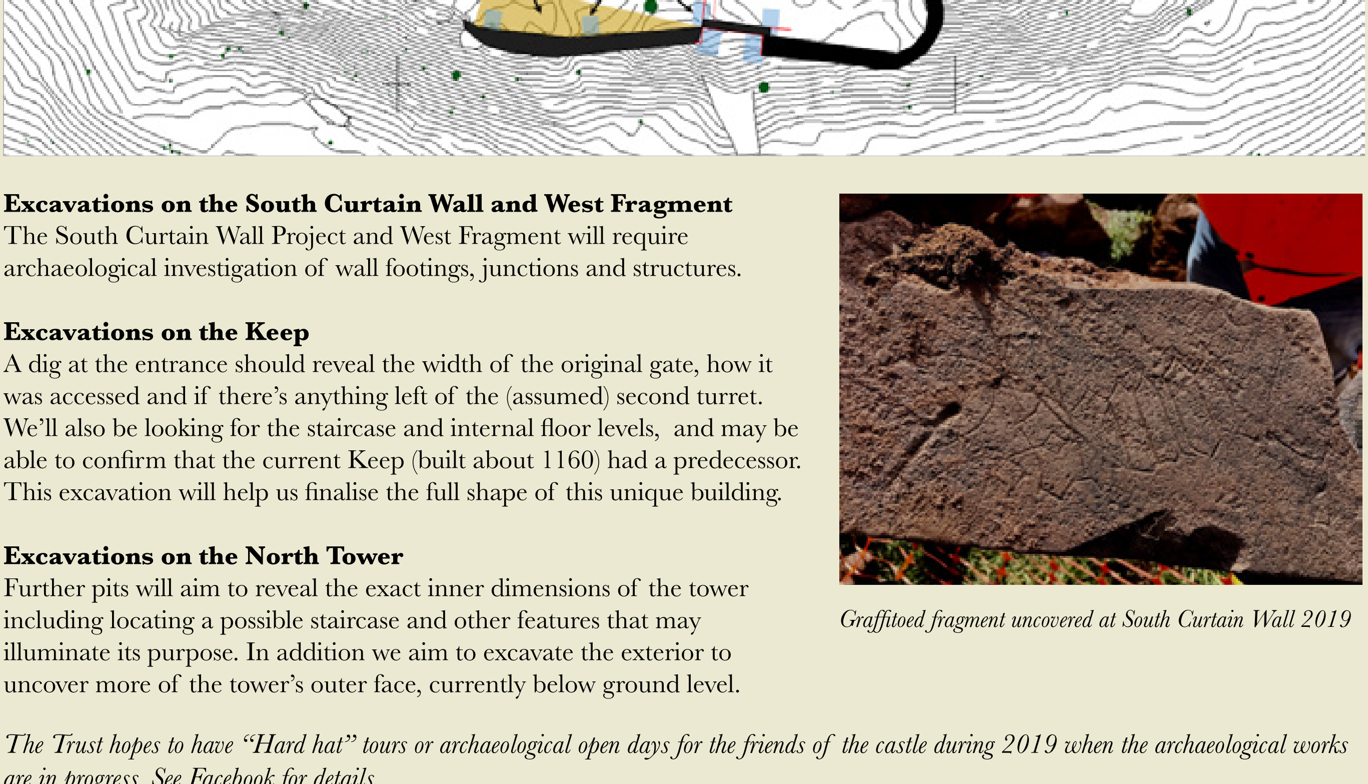
Keep
The structure is confirmed as a 12-sided tower keep, a unique and complex form with multiple build phases, repairs, rebuilds and modifications possibly continuing up to the 17th Century. Roof tiles, window fragments and an intact and sooty fireplace have been uncovered, and tantalising evidence indicating it could have had a basement, and that the current 1.8m thick structure (of around 1160) appears to have had a much stronger 3m thick walled predecessor of an earlier date. This discovery needs further investigation but Snodhill Castle certainly looks to have had one of the earliest multi-angular keeps in the country.

The archaeological work undertaken during 2017 confirmed what had long been suspected; that most of the castle's remains are buried in demolition rubble to a great depth. Excavations in several places were over 1m deep but never reached the medieval floor or ground levels, suggesting that defensive walls, towers and internal buildings several metres high may well be surviving in the rubble.

Archaeological reports are available here:-
https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/issue.xhtml?recordId=1161787&recordType=GreyLitSeries

https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/issue.xhtml?recordId=1161791&recordType=GreyLitSeries

Archaeology plans for 2019



Excavations on the South Curtain Wall and West Fragment
The South Curtain Wall Project and West Fragment will require archaeological investigation of wall footings, junctions and structures.

Excavations on the Keep
A dig at the entrance should reveal the width of the original gate, how it was accessed and if there's anything left of the (assumed) second turret. We'll also be looking for the staircase and internal floor levels, and may be able to confirm that the current Keep (built about 1160) had a predecessor. This excavation will help us finalise the full shape of this unique building.

Excavations on the North Tower
Further pits will aim to reveal the exact inner dimensions of the tower including locating a possible staircase and other features that may illuminate its purpose. In addition we aim to excavate the exterior to uncover more of the tower's outer face, currently below ground level.

Graffitoed fragment uncovered at South Curtain Wall 2019

The Trust hopes to have "Hard hat" tours or archaeological open days for the friends of the castle during 2019 when the archaeological works are in progress. See Facebook for details.

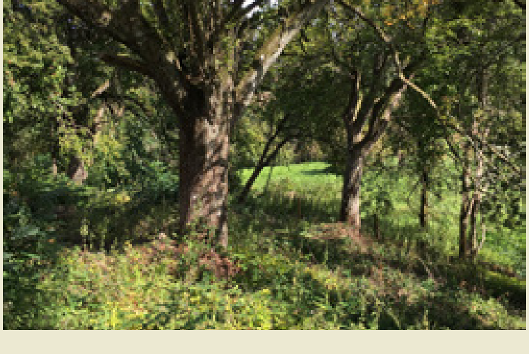
The perry pear orchard

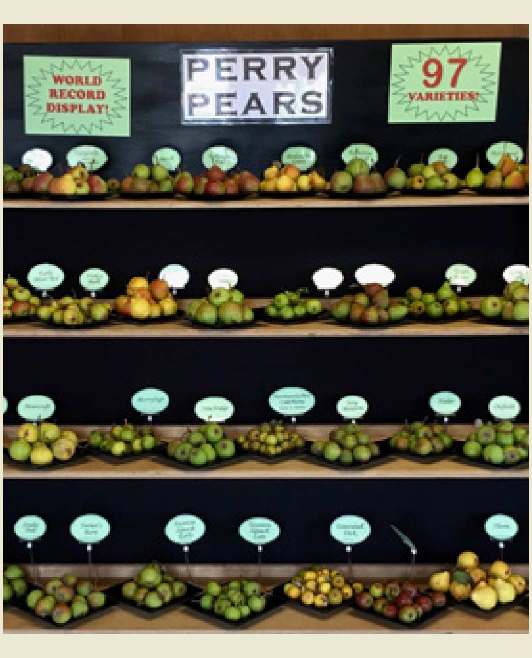
Beyond the Keep, sloping down the hornwork to the outer bailey beyond, lies a largely forgotten pear orchard of which ten trees remain. The orchard is sketchily marked on the 1904 OS map, but who planted it and for what purpose is another of Snodhill's unknowns.
What isn't unknown now, however, is the variety of pear.

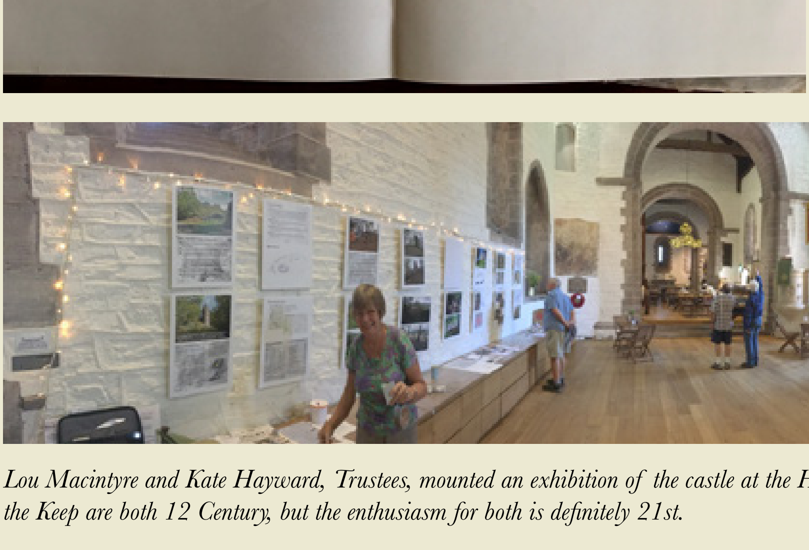
Identifying pear varieties without the fruits is apparently as tricky as sexing chicks, so we had to wait for autumn and then it was off to Hartpury and the National Perry Pear Centre for formal identification by Jim Chapman, the curator.

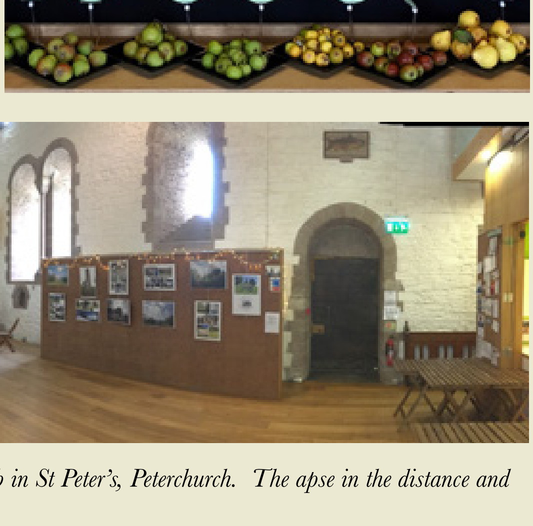
The variety is Red Longdon, which originated in the Forest of Dean and was grafted and domesticated by local farmers as early as the 1400s. Pretty inedible (and we're tried) it was pressed for its juice and certainly drunk as an alcoholic beverage (bacterially healthier than most medieval water) in the sixteenth century. Though these trees can't be more than 150 years old, there are at least two stone cider mills within half a mile that may have been used to crush the crop. According to the definitive Perry Pears (1963) Red Longdon is *'a very old variety which although widely dispersed, is now represented by only a few scattered trees. Knight, at the beginning of the 19c considered this variety to be nearing the end of its useful life.'*

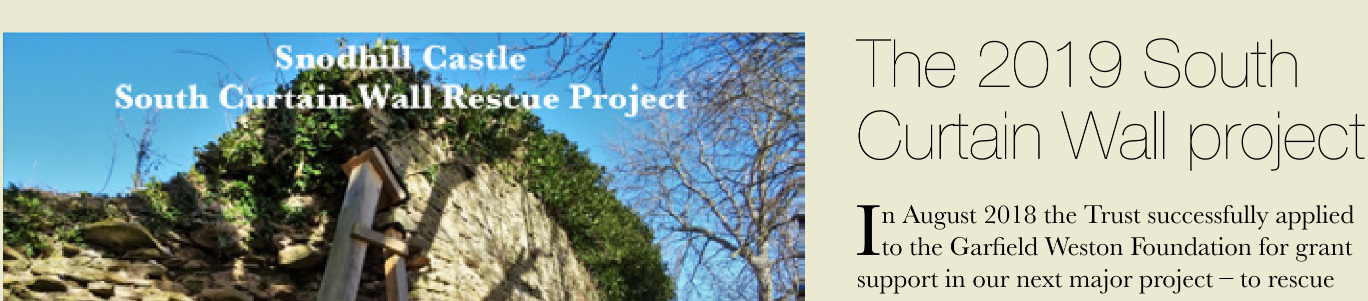
The juice is pleasant enough, but the crop is insufficient to make it worth producing Snodhill perry. However, the venerable trees stand as a reminder of how much of the Golden Valley was laid to orchard in times gone by.



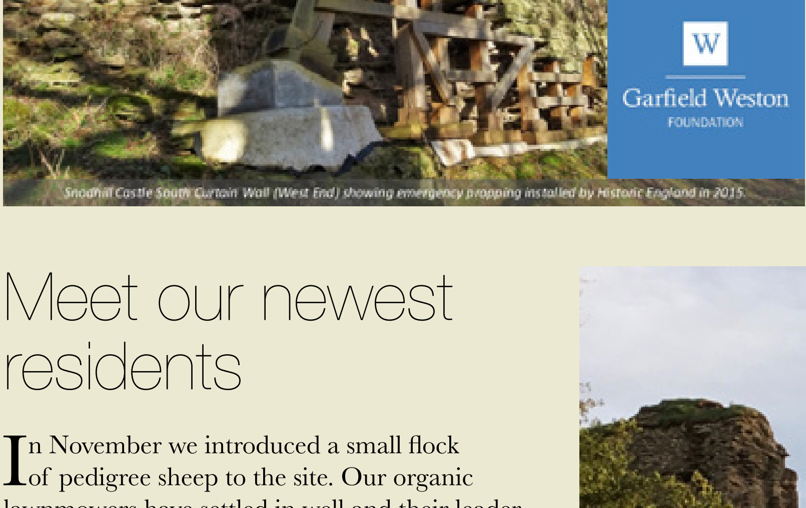








Lou Macintyre and Kate Hayward, Trustees, mounted an exhibition of the castle at the Hub in St Peter's, Peterchurch. The apse in the distance and the Keep are both 12 Century, but the enthusiasm for both is definitely 21st.



The 2019 South Curtain Wall project

In August 2018 the Trust successfully applied to the Garfield Weston Foundation for grant support in our next major project – to rescue and restore the South Curtain Wall. As we go to press, tenders are being invited for this work under the Trust's appointed architects Nicholas Joyce and Associates. The work will take place during the summer and we hope that when complete we will be able to conserve newly exposed portions of the wall.

Meet our newest residents

In November we introduced a small flock of pedigree sheep to the site. Our organic lawnmowers have settled in well and their leader, a Jacob's (with horns), seems to enjoy lording it over the rest of us from the castle's high points.

The Trustees thank our Friends for your continuing support.

SNODHILL CASTLE PRESERVATION TRUST

Be part of the discovery

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