A HISTORY OF LEYBOURNE CASTLE
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1. INTRODUCTION

While Leybourne Castle was only a small castle in comparison with those at Dover and Leeds, it is still of major historical interest, as denoted by the English Heritage “Ancient Monument” grading. But of equal interest is the history of the people who have lived on the site from pre-historic times, creating a continuous settlement to this day. The reason for such a long history of the site at Leybourne is its geographical position. Sitting on elevated ground by a stream leading to the River Medway and English Channel beyond, it was of importance to both Roman and Norman invaders from the Continent moving inland.

Evidence of Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Norman and Tudor remains confirm that a settlement has existed on the site for more than 20 centuries, and possibly back to 8500BC.

This booklet seeks to draw together the history that is known, and paint a picture of a site that has evolved since the known history of these islands, and is still in settlement to this day.
2. PRE-HISTORIC HISTORY (8500BC-1066AD)

The history of the site prior to the 14th century is not well documented, but the first castle on the site, probably of wood, was believed to be Norman. However there is some evidence of much earlier settlements on the site, with evidence uncovered with the building of the by-pass in 2005.

Initial research and excavation along the by-pass route by Canterbury Archaeological Trust and Archaeology South East began to reveal the remains in the area for pre-historic, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods.

The earliest finds were flint tools dating to the Mesolithic (8500–4000 BC), Neolithic (4000–2400BC) and Bronze Age (2400–700BC). They included an arrowhead and a fragment of a tranchet axe. These finds and the Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery were scattered across most of the excavation area, showing that the landscape had been lived in for thousands of years. Perhaps the most exciting find was a Bronze Age spearhead.

But the most significant discoveries belonged to the Iron Age, and give us a picture of an area as farmland with a settlement nearby. Excavations revealed the boundaries of fields and possibly stock enclosures, each approximately 50m square. The area has been remodelled time and time again. While no buildings were found, the
quality of the pottery, cattle bone and burnt stone indicate that a settlement lay just beside the new road.

Another part of the by-pass construction revealed a small area with evidence of industrial activity. An impressive collection of triangular loomweights and tools, including a sickle and knife, were found.

Both of the areas appear to have been used continually into the early Roman-British period (43–410AD). Traces of an Anglo-Saxon (410–1066AD) sunken-feature building and a boundary ditch were also found. There were also discovery of the site in the medieval period, notably a 13th century bakery with a thick spread of raked-out ashes still in place by the stone base of the oven.

It is therefore likely that this activity extended to the castle site. Indeed a Roman wall, dating from about 100BC, was discovered along the outside of the gate-house, and the remains of a Saxon wall exist in the pasture outside the gate-house.

The history of the castle site in the following years is more obscure. We do know that Malling is derived from Mealingas (Mealla’s people, who settled in separate farmsteads along the upper reaches of a stream). This stream also supplied the Lilla people (the origins of Leybourne), and further north the Snodda people (Snodland). The settlements used by the Meallas, Snoddas and Lillas people would have been the areas already cleared for cultivation by the Roman and Romano-Britons in the great forest of Andreswolde, which covered the whole area between the
North and South Downs and was 130 miles in length.

The first mention of “Lillieburn” is in an undated Charter signed by Edmund, King of Angles and Mercians, who reigned between 941–946AD. The Charter in Latin reads “so much of my land which is called Meallingas for the relief of my soul” to his beloved Bishop, by name Buhric, to increase the monastery dedicated in honour of St. Andrew.

The Latin script is followed by a description of the boundaries in Anglo-Saxon, “from the south bounds to the King’s Plaine and from thence to the bounds of the Ville of Offham, thence to the Military Way and along the said way over Lillieburn to the bounds of ...... “.
3. THE NORMAN PERIOD (1066-1166AD)

We next hear of Leybourne in 1066 with the arrival of William the Conqueror. He conferred the manor on his half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux and Earl of Kent, who probably built a wood castle on the site.

Bishop of Bayeux, rallies the younger horseman at the Battle of Hastings

The Church and Mill were then in existence, being mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, under the spelling of “Leleburn”.

Bishop Odo amassed an immense fortune when he was left as Regent of the Kingdom when William returned to Normandy. But Odo was an ambitious priest who set himself to attempt to purchase the Papacy. Though Pope Gregory was not old, Odo put so much faith in the prediction of an astrologer that he fully reckoned on the Pope’s death
and on obtaining, by intrigues and bribes, the Papal throne.

Resolving to send as much of his wealth as possible to Italy, Odo
persuaded some of the richest barons to do the same, promising them
that when he succeeded, he would bestow on them greater honours and
dignities than they possessed in England.

King William heard of his plans and ordered Odo to be arrested.
The officers did not dare to obey the King because the Church claimed
immunity from civil law. King William was forced to come to England
himself and with his own hands take Odo into custody. William got
around the Church’s immunity by claiming he was not arresting the
Bishop of Bayeux, but the Earl of Kent.

Odo was sent as a prisoner to Normandy, and his estates confiscated.
The King gave the manor of Leybourne to another knight, Sir William
d’Arsick.
4. THE WARRIOR LEYBOURNE’S (1166–1389AD)

In 1166 a Yorkshire connection arises. Philip and Michael de Laibron, a family of Breton origins, who lived in Leyburn in Yorkshire, came to Kent and owned “7 Fees in Kent”. Leyburn is an important market town in Wensleydale.

Philip changed his name, and built Lillebourne Castle on the site in 1166 during the reign of Henry II. The arms of the Yorkshire Leybornes are still basically the same as the Kent Leybournes (note the continued different spellings), namely “Azure Six Lions, 3,2,1, Argent”. The only difference being a red background for Yorkshire and blue for Kent.

Arms of the Yorkshire Family
Lillebourne means “Lilla’s stream” and what relationship there is between the name and that of “Leyburn” in Yorkshire is uncertain. But it is perhaps not without significance that in the course of the 12th century the old form of the Kentish name gives way to Layburne and Leybourne as if the Yorkshire name had influenced it. Later variations of the name include: Laburn, Layburn, Layborn, Layborne, Laybourne, Laybourn, Leiburn, Leyborne, Leyburn, Leyburne and many more.

Philip died in 1194, leaving an only son, Robert.

Sir Robert de Leybourne, Lord of Bures, was in the service of Richard the Lion-heart and may have fought with him at the Battle of Acre in 1191.

He died in 1199, also leaving one son, Roger.

Sir Roger de Leybourne (“Roger 1”) was credited with being one of the barons who forced King John to sign the Magna Carta at Runnymead in 1215. Also in that year he was one of 140 barons who held Rochester Castle against the King. However they had to eventually surrender, and Roger’s estates were confiscated. But in 1216 the estates were purchased back by the family for a payment of 250 Marks. By his wife Allinore de Thurnham he was father to a son, also called Roger.

Sir Roger de Leybourne (“Roger 2”) was born in 1220 and developed a reputation as one of the most turbulent of the turbulent barons, and seems to have changed sides between the King and the barons several times.
The following quotations are from the Dictionary of National Biography

“He was one of the most stirring and distinguished warriors of the day, whose whole life was passed between the tilting and the battlefield”.” In 1251 he came into his inheritance on the death of his father. In that year he treacherously killed an opponent at the jousts, but he assumed the Cross and took out a pardon from the King. In 1253 he accompanied Henry III into Gascony, and was the friend and steward of Prince Edward. He served against Llewellyn in Wales and narrowly escaped being killed”.

He appears to have built the first stone castle in about 1260.

He was active in the baronial wars against Simon de Montfort. He was sent by the King to secure the south-east counties, and became Constable of Rochester Castle. Roger led the defence of Rochester in 1264 against the baronial armies of Simon de Montfort and the Earl of Gloucester. Siege engines were used and the Castle took a constant battering for a week. However the rebels eventually fled on hearing news that King Henry and Prince Edward were advancing against them with a strong army. Roger was badly wounded during the siege, but recovered.

Again in 1264 he was taken prisoner at Lewes, and on regaining his liberty joined the King’s men once again. He took part in an attempt to rescue Prince Edward at Wallingford Castle, but when summoned to Windsor by the King, refused, whereupon he was sentenced to banishment for one year and a day. However he received a safe conduct
to visit the imprisoned Prince Edward, where he no doubt arranged his escape, which was effected soon afterwards.

The Lanercost Chronicle also gives account of Roger’s services at the Battle of Eversham where he saved the life of King Henry III.

“Henry having lost his helmet was recognised, and the King truly is saved by the late Baron of the Marches named Roger de Leybourne.”

He was sent by the King to London, where he received the submission of the citizens in Barking Church, and conducted the Mayor and forty of the chief men to Windsor. He then reduced Winchelsea and Sandwich to obedience to the King, and received the custody of the castles of Dover, Rochester, Nottingham, and the Tower of London. He became Sheriff of Kent and Warden of the Forests beyond the Trent.

Acting as Edward’s steward in 1266 he hanged some of the servants of the Earl of Gloucester in the Welsh marches (unjustly and without trial, it was said) whereupon the Earl quarrelled with Prince Edward. In the same year he accompanied the Prince to France, and at Paris he received a grant of the Manor of Elham, Kent”.

Queen Eleanor, angered by Leybourne’s association with the barons, stirred up Prince Edward against him. An account of his stewardship was demanded, and he was declared by the Exchequer to be £1,000 in arrears, though the accusation is said to have been false.

Being stripped of his revenues, Leybourne took to marauding, and with Roger de Clifford and others associated himself with Simon de Montfort.
However he was won over by the Prince and executed a Deed of Reconciliation with him. He was once again made Steward of the Households of the King (Henry III), the Queen, and Prince Edward.

In 1270 he paid 1000 Marks to go on the Crusade with Prince Edward. He appears to have travelled with the Prince as far as Tunis and Sicily, but was then ordered back to Gascony to serve as King’s Lieutenant and maintain order. While in France he left a connection that survives to this day.

Parts of France were English through the marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II. However these lands were constantly under threat from the French King and needed to be defended. Sir Roger helped to construct a fortified settlement ("bastide" or Bastion) at an important strategic site at Forzera and Condat, commanding the passage of the River Dordogne towards Bordeaux. He became Governor of the fort and gave it his name, “Libourne”. The town remains the second most important town in the Gironde, being today surrounded by the most important wine estates of Chateau Mouton Rothschild, Latour and Margau.

Sir Roger died in 1271, but not before he set down a wish that his heart should be embalmed and sent to “his beloved church”. It is commonly thought that his heart was embalmed and now rests with a monument in Leybourne Church to this day.

However, there is now some doubt on this belief.

On his death he left the estates to his eldest son, William.
Sir William de Leybourne was also a famous soldier. In 1265, for his services, he had a grant of lands forfeited by the Montfort rebels. He served in Wales in 1277, and in 1282 was Constable of Pevensey. In 1294 he was appointed captain of the fleet gathered at Portsmouth, with the title Admiral of the Sea of the King of England, and so became the first English admiral.

In 1299 he served in Scotland at the head of 5 knights and 59 esquires, and in 1300 was at the Siege of Caerlaverock. Sir William has a verse to himself in William of Exeter’s epic poem of the battle, a translation of which, reads “William de Leybourne also a valient man with no “buts” or “ifs” a banner had there, with large pennon, blue with six lions rampant”.

He became very wealthy by marrying Juliana, heiress to Sir Henry de Sandwich, amongst his vast estates is said to be Leeds Castle. Sir William gave Leybourne to his eldest son, Thomas, and retired to live at Preston, near Wingham in Kent. He died there in 1309.

Sir William’s other son, Sir Henry, distinguished himself in battle against the Scots. But he later became a notorious outlaw and was dispossessed.

Thomas died in Scotland before his father in 1307, while fighting with his father against Robert Bruce. He left the property to his daughter, Juliana.

Juliana inherited all the vast wealth and estates in Kent. She was only four years old when her father died, and wardship was granted to her...
grandfather in 1308. On his death, a year later, Sir Aylmer de Valance paid £1,500 for the rights of her wardship, and married her to his nephew, Sir John Hastings, in 1321. She became a widow after three years of marriage and re-married to Sir Thomas de Blount, who himself died four years later.

She then married Sir Thomas de Clinton, Earl of Huntingdon.

Through these three marriages, Juliana became even wealthier and her estates were now so vast that she was called the “Infanta of Kent”.

Although most of her estates were held in trust, she held Leybourne Manor and Castle in her own right. Her last years were spent at Preston, near Wingham, where she died in 1367, leaving a massive estate for the time of £3,160.13.4p.

She was buried on the North-side of St. Augustine’s Abbey in Canterbury.

The estates passed to the Pembrokes (through her only son, Laurence Hastings) who held them till 1389, when the line failed through the death of her great grandson without issue.

The family line was therefore broken and the estates passed to the Crown.

They were given to a newly-founded Cistercian Abbey of St. Mary Graces, near the Tower of London. They rented them to Sir Simon de Burleigh, Warden of the Cinque Ports. Unfortunately he was arrested and executed for high treason, and the estates passed back to the Abbey.
However, they passed back to the Crown with the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII and the castle was abandoned in 1397 with the seat of the manor passed to Leybourne Grange.
5. THE YEARS OF CHANGE (1389 – 1766 AD)

After the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII the
Crown passed the estate to Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury. He then
later gave them back to the Crown, who gave them to Sir Edward North,
Lord Chancellor.

Then follows a period when the estates passed through a number of
families, including:-

   Robert Grofold
   Robert Godden
   Sir John Levefon
   Henry Clerke, Recorder of Rochester
   Sir Frances Clerke
   Gilbert Clerke of Derbyshire
   Mr Saxby of the Grange

The following view, by Badeslade, shows both the Castle and now
demolished Grange probably during Mr Saxby ownership.
After this period the Castle fell into ruin, but on part of the site a dwelling house appears to have been built on the original castle ruins in Tudor times, and later converted into a farmhouse.
An entry in the Leybourne Church Register records “1656. November 12th” Elizabeth Aiherst, the youngest and most hopeful daughter of Mr Aiherst of Leybourne Castle was buried in the Church. This farmhouse appears to have been the home for several generations of the Golding family (Thomas Golding was Sheriff of Kent in 1703).

The farmhouse appears to have been destroyed by fire, probably in the 18th century.

The ownership of the Grange and Castle estates seem to have come together again, through marriage, in 1656.

In 1724 the Grange, Castle and Manor were sold to Francis Whitworth, who left them to his son, Sir Charles Whitworth. He was married to a Miss Shelley, and became Lieutenant Governor of Gravesend and Tilbury and eventually Envoy Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary to the Court of Russia. He eventually sold them to Dr James Hawley. When he died in 1777 he was succeeded by his son Henry Hawley (2nd Bart.) and daughter Elizabeth, who is buried in a vault in the Church.

On his death in 1831, the estates passed to his son Sir Joseph Hawley (3rd Bart.), who was a great horse racing character (see following chapter).
6. THE HORSE RACING YEARS

Sir Joseph Hawley (3rd Bart.) established a racing stud at the Castle in 1846 (now known as the Paddocks). He bred 4 Derby winners there:

- Teddington 1851
- Beadsman 1858
- Musjid 1859
- Blue Gown 1868

He was a great betting man and spent some of his winnings on improving the estate to celebrate his Derby wins.

- Leybourne Pump, after Beadman win. The Pump was built over an existing well, and has the inscription:
  “Drink, weary pilgrim,
  Drink and Pray,
  For Living Waters,
  They Only They,
  Can Satisfy Earth’s Sons and Daughters”

The correct wording should not have “can” in the last line.

- Stone Wall, following the win of Musjid in 1859, from Junction of A20 with Pump Close, passing the Church and down Park Road to an oak tree that stood at the village boundary below Leybourne Way.
- Restoring the Church bells.

The Church was restored in 1874. The architect, Sir Arthur Bloomfield found the bell tower in ruinous condition. The upper part had collapsed and been rebuilt with bricks some sixty years before. Instead of restoring it, the architect unfortunately encased the old tower with the present Victorian tower, cutting new windows, but leaving the old Norman and Early English stone within.

Originally there were three bells, but only two were retained when they were re-hung in a new wooden frame in 1874. One of these bells was very old, having been cast in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I with an inscription “Thomas Golding, gentleman, Robert Oliver Youngman 1585. Today there is only one bell in the tower. A fire in 1966 destroyed all the timbers and the two bells were recast into one, but retaining the original inscription of 1585.

These features still exist to this day.

There are many stories of Sir Joseph. One is regards to the railway. The old drive to the mansion journeyed straight for about 400 metres, swept right passing the north side of Leybourne House, joining the road from Birling which turned left across the park arriving at Castle Way just above the Church.

In 1855 Snodland railway station was opened. Sir Joseph had Park Road put down and his drive altered from sweeping right to left to join
Birling Road where the gates of the hospital now stand. Always leaving things to the last moment and waiting for a train to arrive was not for him, and often told his coachman to leave the drive and travel direct from the front door to the gate. So hurrying to catch a train has been going on for over a hundred years!

He died in 1875 without family, with the estates passing to his brother, Henry James Hawley. He died himself in 1898 without leaving a son, and the property passed to his nephew, Sir Henry Michael Hawley (5th Bart). He died and the estates were sold and started to be broken up in 1920.
7. RECENT HISTORY (1920 to date)

During the Victorian period the site became a popular picnic area, as evidenced by the graffiti carved on the stonework around the gatehouse. In the 1920’s the ruins were purchased by Mrs I Ogilvy of Birling, who hired the architect Walter Godfrey to design a house using the original Kentish ragstone remains.

Walter Godfrey had a reputation for sensitive restoration work at houses such as the Tudor Horselunges manor (1925), Hellingly, and Herstmonceux Castle (1933). However his designs for Leybourne Castle were far from a diligent restoration of the original. Rather than attempting to rebuild the castle, as he did at Herstmonceux, he opted for a much more daring solution. A new Arts and Crafts house was created to the south-east of the ruined gatehouse and directly grafted on to the medieval fragments, so that the curve of the eastern tower carries through into a concave gable on the new building, described by Adrian Tinniswood in his book as “brutal, startling and innovative – as though the massive stones of the old castle were caught in the act of transforming themselves into something wholly new”.

This aerial view shows both the old and new buildings, and how they marry together.
The exterior of the house is “rustic”, but the interior is a rather odd blend of Gothic and Arts and Crafts. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner in his famous travel book describes the house as “a sophisticated essay in a free Cotswold vernacular. Godfrey related his house to the old ways in a way both daring and successful”. The drawings of the original designs are shown later in this booklet.

An extensive set of photographs recording the building of the house are held by the Ancient Monuments Office. However, the house was not fully completed to Godfrey’s design, as revealed by comparison of the original plans with the current house. The current “annex” or servant’s wing appears to have been completed later and modified from the
original plans.

Mrs Ogilvy died in 1963, and her grand-daughter, Miss Foster lived in the house for some years.

In 1972 it was sold to Commander A.S.C. Harris and Mrs T.Harris. The house was sold to an ex-footballer, Nigel Short, in the late 1980’s.

During his ownership, the house was gutted with the intention of extensive restoration. However, due to financial problems, this was not completed and only the billiard room and a few other rooms were updated. During this time English Heritage were not given access to the property and a number of changes were made that did not comply with Listed Building Regulations, such as the fitting of stainless-steel flues.

After being empty for many years, and in a state of disrepair, the Castle was purchased in 1995 by Mr and Mrs Albert.

With English Heritage approval they started a long-term restoration project. The roof was restored to cure a damp problem from the years when the property was unoccupied and neglected. The house was connected to main drainage and new utility services laid under a new driveway. This work was carried out under a watching brief with Canterbury Archaeology Society. It was during this excavation work that a Roman wall was discovered outside the gate-house, and the remains of a Saxon wall in the trees by the dove-cote. The Roman wall was reburied, while the saxon wall was left exposed.

The work on the utility services also involved a piece of more modern
history. A high-pressure oil pipeline from the Isle of Grain passes under the site along the line of the South Downs to Gatwick Airport and on to Heathrow Airport. It apparently was originally constructed in World War II to supply the RAF fighter station at West Malling. In 2001, as a major project, the original castle walls were “consolidated” with a new cement cap and repointing.
8. THE “REMAINS”

The current ruins consist of the remains of an “enclosure castle”, probably dating from about 1200, with many later additions, including the gateway from the reign of Edward III. It is surrounded by a partially in-filled circular moat, although it is now thought to be possibly part of the Tudor-period landscaping.

An “Enclosure Castle”

An “enclosure castle” is a defended residence or stronghold, built mainly of stone, in which the principle or sole defence comprises the walls and towers bounding the site. Some form of keep may stand within the enclosure, but this is not significant in defensive terms and served mainly to provide accommodation. Some larger sites have more than one line of walls. Outside the walls a ditch, either water-filled or dry, crossed by bridges may be found.

The first “enclosure castles” were constructed at the time of the Norman conquest. However, they developed considerably in form during the 12th century when defensive experience gained during the Crusades was applied to their design. The majority of examples were constructed in the 13th century, although a few were built as late as the 14th century. Some represent reconstruction of earlier medieval earthwork castles of the motte and bailey type, although others were new creations. They proved strongly defended residences for the king or leading families and
occur in both urban and rural situations.

“Enclosure castles” are widely dispersed throughout England, with a slight concentration in Kent and Sussex supporting a vulnerable coast, and a strong concentration along the Welsh border, where some of the best examples were built under Edward I.

“Enclosure castles” are still rare, with only 126 examples recorded nationally. They are therefore considered of national importance with Listed status.

In the case of Leybourne Castle the enclosed central area contains the remains of the enclosing wall, which constituted the castle’s main defence, with the gateway entrance on the north-east side. The principle remains are of the gatehouse, which survives to about two-thirds its original height, It is notable for the chute over its gateway, emerging internally in the sill of a large window above the gate. The gate passage was originally vaulted, and the corbels supporting the stone roof still remain. Although the original doors have gone, the iron bolts on which they hung still survive.

The gatehouse has one other feature, unique to Kent castles. The portcullis groove, instead of connecting to an upper room in the gatehouse, is here continuous on the outside of the gatehouse. When the portcullis was raised, therefore, it remained on the outside of the castle, passing in front of the window above the gatehouse.

Within the eastern tower is a well. On the south-eastern edge of the enclosed area are the remains of a mural tower, which appears to be
contemporary with the gatehouse.

On the west side of the interior inside wall of the enclosing wall is a rectangular building, recently described as a “Chapel”, although its purpose and age is now in some doubt. Excavation of the floor has revealed a foundation wall slightly inset from the building wall. Also photographic evidence taken in the 1920’s reveal that there was no building at this point. Therefore it would appear that this is some type of folly, re-created from original stone to reflect an original structure. However it is still a mystery why so much work went into creating various styles of stonework and pointing to give the impression of age.

There are many stories told at most castles about tunnels existing below ground, but most are confined to folk memory alone. However, at Leybourne, the stories can be substantiated for at least two tunnels did survive until recent times. They were believed to have once connected to Leybourne Church and Malling Abbey. One is situated in the ruined tower near the house, but was blocked off when the house was built in the 1920’s. The other can be found beneath the right hand tower of the gatehouse and extends a little distance before it too becomes blocked. Some locals still remember picnicking in the castle ruins prior to 1930 and playing in the tunnels.
Elevations of the House
APPENDIX A: TIME LINE
APPENDIX B: LEYBOURNE FAMILY TREE