

boar and deer. It was regularly used for hunting by the lords and their guests, and as a source of meat for the table. In 1244 for example the keeper of the honour of Pontefract was ordered to take 10 bucks in the park of Pontefract and the hay of Rothwell and carry them to the king at York.

Initially the park provided excellent sport for the medieval kings and royal visits were regular occurrences. King John stayed at Rothwell castle in 1212, as did Edward II in 1319 and 1323. Unfortunately over-hunting diminished the stock of game and in 1399 John O'Gaunt reputedly killed the last wild boar in the district on Stye Bank. This is why a wild boar appeared on the old Rothwell Urban District Council coat of arms.

### *What happened to the castle?*

In the first part of the 14th century the castle still remained the administrative centre for the district but from at least 1361 the site was leased out. This change, coupled with its loss of status as a base for hunting led to the diminishing importance of the site and by the late 15th century the manor was said to be in 'great ruyne and decay.' Henry VII leased the site to Roger Hopton on condition that he erected a new building. The survey of 1628 stated that 'the Manor house...hath longe since been decaied and a little one builded instead'. This farm continued in use until 1977 when all the buildings were demolished. The only surviving stonework on the site may be the remnants of the medieval building.



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# Rothwell ROTHWELL CASTLE PROJECT Castle

*In partnership with:*



Local Heritage *initiative*



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# Rothwell ROTHWELL CASTLE PROJECT



## What was Rothwell like in Norman Times?

Rothwell is an ancient settlement. It is first mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 which states:

'In Rodewelle and Loftose, Carlentone, Torp and Mildtone, there are 24 carucates of land and one oxgang to be taxed, and there may be twelve ploughs there. Harold, Bared, Alric and Stainulf had halls there. Ilbert has now two ploughs there and 16 villanes, and one bordar with eight ploughs, and one mill of two shillings, and nine acres of meadow. Wood pasture two miles long and one broad.'

It is clear that Harold, an Anglo Scandinavian landlord, had lived in a hall, probably on the castle site. Some time after 1069 William the Conqueror granted this land to Ilbert de Lacy, a Norman baron who had fought alongside him at the Battle of Hastings.



Photo: ©Eric Wright

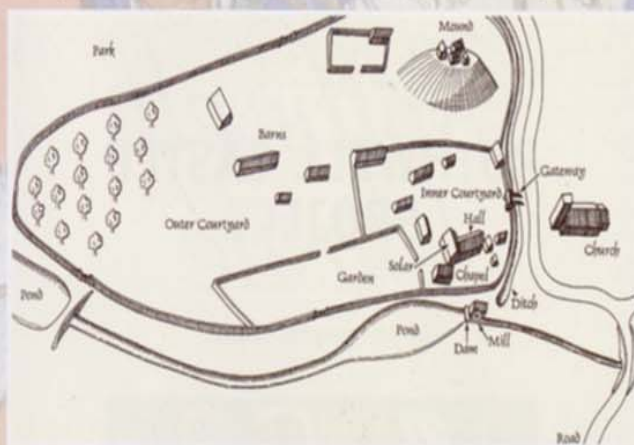
## Was it a castle?

Ilbert made Pontefract Castle the base for the vast estates he held in this part of the country. It seems likely that he was also responsible for constructing a small motte or mound at Rothwell on which a wooden keep might have

been built. This could have formed a safe base for dignitaries, including royalty, and became a key administrative centre for the de Lacy family, being of greater importance than its nearby neighbour, Leeds.

## What did the castle look like?

The documentary evidence indicates that the site was at least in part enclosed by a stone wall. There was certainly a section of walling opposite the parish church including an



Plan: ©West Yorkshire Archaeology Services

entrance gate with a bridge spanning the ditch. To the north there was another gate leading into the hunting park, whereas to the south the stream and mill ponds made excellent natural boundaries.

Inside the enclosed area there were extensive residential quarters along with food preparation and storage buildings, stables and smithy, gardens and orchards, plus a chapel. The most important structure was the hall with the 'solar' or main private chamber of the owner at first-floor level. In 1439 there is even reference to the 'king's chamber.'

The survey of 1341 gives a delightful description of the manorial residence along with its ponds and its mills



Photo: ©Rothwell and District Historical Society

There is a certain Manor House, hall, chapel, kitchen, bakehouse, brewery, barn, oxstalls, stables, and other houses necessary for the residence of the lord, built and enclosed with stone walls, the site of which, with easements to the house, the herbage, garden fruit, together with the mill pond under the manor house, and the easements of the dam and the fishponds are worth nothing beyond the expenses of enclosure, and this on account of the waste caused by the wild animals of the wood.....

## Why did medieval kings visit Rothwell?

Under the de Lacy family the vast wooded district of Rothwell Haigh became a vast hunting park. Peasant labour was used to dig a huge seven-mile long boundary ditch around the park surmounted by palisade fencing. During the early part of the medieval period the park was rich in wildlife including wild