

The following text describes the long history of Caldwell Castle and is reproduced here with the kind permission of Mr. Richard Davies. The typeface that was used by Richard in the original document was Baskerville by Kidderminster Type Founder and Publisher, John Baskerville (1706-1775).

Caldwall's Early History

The single remaining tower of the medieval and moated castle of Caldwell survives as a monument to Caldwell's long and fascinating history.

It is believed that the castle was completed about the year 1347, the latest of a succession of buildings which had occupied this ancient site. The Romans were reputed to have had a fort at Sudwale (an ancient Berewick or sub-manor of Kidderminster). "Wal" in a place-name is often an indication of Roman occupation. According to one version of folklore, Caldwell may have been the site of Earl Cyniberht's monastery founded in the 17th year of the reign of Ethelbald, King of Mercia, A.D. 736. The site would certainly have been conducive to monastic endeavour being sheltered, well watered and fertile. Notwithstanding Roman origin, such conditions may have spawned the name of Caldwell, now corrupted from the Latin "Calida Vallis", which translates as "Warm Valley". The Domesday Book records one of the sixteen berewicks or sub-manors of Kidderminster as "Suduuale", possibly translating as south valley or south rampart and there is little doubt that the Berewick of Suduuale and the Manor of Caldwell are one and the same.

The Medieval Years & the Cokesey Family

The Domesday Book records "Chedeminster" as a Royal Manor which it remained until granted by King Henry II to his "Dapifer" or Steward, Manser Byset in c. 1160. During this period, an arcaded hall and probably many other buildings including a moat occupied the site where, later on, the castle was built. That hall's orientation was aligned precisely west to east, a pre-requisite if associated with a religious function and possibly a tantalising link with the fabled monastery of Earl Cyniberht. In 1241, John Byset, Manser's descendant, died without male issue, thus causing the Manor of Kidderminster to be divided amongst his three daughters of whom Marjorie was the eldest. She suffered from leprosy which probably influenced her son, John Rivers, to exchange his mother's inheritance for land in Burgate, Hampshire. The Priory of Maiden Bradley in Wiltshire (a foundation created by Manser Byset), therefore became the new owners of one third of the greater Manor of Kidderminster which included Caldwell. Marjorie probably retired to the safety, care and protection provided by the house for leprous sisters in Maiden Bradley.

By the year 1249, the sub-manor of Caldwell had come into existence. By 1300, the arcaded hall had been demolished and replaced, though not on the same ground plan, by an upper floor hall house.

In 1335, Sir Hugh Cokesey obtained a grant of free warren for the Manor of Caldwell and also held the Manor of Kidderminster on lease. Twelve years later in 1347, the Cokesey family established a moated castle and deer park at Caldwell which with the Manor became their family seat and held in addition to manors in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Warwickshire. The Cokesey family were almost certainly a branch of the Beauchamp Family, Earls of Warwick and it was a Walter de Cokesey who received the custody of the Earldom of Warwick during the minority of Thomas de

Beauchamp. His nephew, Sir Walter Cokesey represented Worcestershire as its Member of Parliament in 1378 and 1384 and as early as 1287, his father, Sir Walter Cokesey, Lord of Witley, presented a certain Hugh de Caldwell to the Church of Witley, therefore indicating connections with Caldwell at that date. Caldwell was to remain a Cokesey possession until the last family member died in 1498.

Caldwall found itself deeply involved in national events during the early years of the 15th century. When a Welsh revolt led by Owen Glendower threatened the security of England, King Henry IV appointed Sir John Phelip, Baron Dennington, to fill the apparent military and political vacuum in the region. In 1405, Glendower, with his Welsh and French armies crossed the River Severn and attacked the City of Worcester. He retreated to Woodbury Hill west of Worcester and then, after an eight day stand off with the King's army where battle was substituted with jousts to the death, Glendower was allowed to retreat having run out of supplies. Over 200 knights from both sides were slain upon the valley of Great Witley, an ancient Cokesey Manor of which Sir John Phelip, two years hence, was to become Lord. (Shakespeare's Henry IV, part one, derives much raw material from the events of this period). Sir John Phelip, a Suffolk man, was a close friend of the King and the Prince of Wales. Three times married, he was secondly married to Matilda, widow of Sir Walter Cokesey and after her death, to Alice Chaucer whose grandfather was Geoffrey Chaucer, the poet. When the military threat from Wales receded, Sir John's skills were deployed against the French in France under the command of his friend and King, Henry V. Ten days after the successful siege at Harfleur, Normandy in 1425, he died of dysentery and his body was returned to Caldwell. He is buried and commemorated by a brass memorial in Kidderminster Parish Church. Sir John's maternal uncle, Sir Thomas Erpingham and his older brother William, Lord Bardolf, continued to campaign in France with Henry V and both played a prominent role in the Battle of Agincourt. Lord Bardolf later became the Captain of Harfleur.

Sir John Phelip's stepson, Sir Hugh Cokesey, was brother-in-law of John Talbot, first Earl of Shrewsbury, and with him was involved in many affairs of the state including the Duke of Suffolk's second mission to France in 1444, charged with bringing the new queen, Margaret of Anjou to her kingdom and her king, Henry VI. Sir Hugh Cokesey, with his wife, is buried in a magnificent canopied tomb in the chancel of St. Mary's Church, Kidderminster. He was succeeded in the lordship by his sister Joyce Beauchamp, also buried under a fine canopy in the same church.

The Wyntour Family and the Gunpowder Plot

When in 1498 the Cokesey line became extinct, their kinsmen, the Wyntour family of Huddington inherited their Caldwell estate. Supporters of the Roman Catholic cause were nowhere more numerous than in Worcestershire and the Wyntour family were amongst their number. Catholics suffered persecution and crippling fines year after year which possibly contributed to George Wyntour's decision to sell the Caldwell Estate in 1589 to Francis Clare. George's three sons, Robert, Thomas and John spent their childhood at Caldwell Castle. Determined to rid England of Protestant zeal and intolerance during the reign of James I, Robert and Thomas were amongst the principal conspirators of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. It was led by Robert Catesby and immortalised by Guy Fawkes, a Catholic mercenary from Yorkshire, who was recruited and repatriated to England by Thomas Wyntour. Thomas also helped in the excavations of tunnels under the Houses of Parliament. When the plot failed, the conspirators were hunted, taken prisoner; tried and condemned to death. Robert and Thomas Mere hanged, drawn and quartered at St. Paul's, London in January 1606 and John at Redhill, Worcester the following April.

The Clare Family and the Civil War

The Clare family owned the Caldwell Estate from 1589 until 1777. Francis Clare was married to Mary Sheldon whose grandfather was renowned as the pioneer of commercial tapestry production in England and using this technique, produced an enormous map of his own county, Worcestershire - now in possession of the Victoria and Albert Museum. In June 1608, Francis Clare died leaving his son and heir and arguably the most prominent of the Clare family of Caldwell, Sir Ralph. He was a zealous supporter of the King and an opponent of the radical preacher, Richard Baxter who described Sir Ralph Clare as thus, "a courtier noted for his eminent civility and a churchman very zealous of conformity the ruler of the vicar and all business in Kidderminster". Sir Ralph was a member of Parliament for Bcwdley and created a Knight of the Bath at the coronation of King Charles I. When the King granted a new charter to the town of Kidderminster, Sir Ralph Clare of the Manor of Caldwell was appointed as the town's First High Steward. During the Civil War, he took a prominent part in various West Midland's campaigns including the defence of Worcester in 1642 and 1651. In defeat he was for a short time afterwards committed to Worcester jail with other Worcestershire gentry who supported the crown. Sir Ralph was a devoted servant of Charles II, both in his banishment and at the restoration. Caldwell itself was involved to some degree in the Civil War and an entry in the parish register states that on March 11, 1644, was "burried John Windie, alias Walker who was slain at "Caldwall". By 1690 the greater part of the medieval castle was demolished, possibly as a result of bombardment or war damage and within ten years a new mansion had been joined to the tower which still exists.

The 19th & 20th Centuries

Caldwall Estate had a number of owners during the 19th and 20th centuries. It passed from the Clare family to the Jeffries brothers in 1777 and then to George Turton, a local ironmaster, in 1864. He operated a foundry on the Caldwell Estate where castings for the construction of the piers at Southend, Margate and Ramsgate were produced. Mr. Turton was a respected Kidderminster Councillor and Town Mayor. At his death in 1897, the Corporation of Kidderminster purchased from his estate the castle and its immediate grounds (at this time also referred to as Caldwell Hall), in order to build a road between New Road and Park Lane. During the 20th century, Caldwell was put to a number of civic uses which included a School of Domestic Science, Offices of the Medical Officer of Health, and Board of Education. Part of the gardens were separated and used as sites for the municipal swimming baths and the town's fire station. During the Second World War, Kidderminster's headquarters of the Air Raid Protection Service were located in the undercroft of the surviving tower. In 1961 the brick mansion was declared unsafe and demolished, leaving the tower which underwent a programme of improvement works. By the 1990s the building had again fallen into disrepair and was purchased by Richard and Nely Davies in 1998 who undertook a comprehensive restoration programme during the following four years.

Still remaining within the grounds is a most beautiful tulip tree, thought to be around 300 years old and the oldest in Great Britain.

The Manor of Caldwell still exists today and the Manor House is Caldwell Castle. Few of the feudal obligations and privileges survive for any practical purposes but the present owners retain the ancient titles of Lord and Lady of the Manor of Caldwell.