

A  
SHORT HISTORY  
OF  
MAXSTOKE CASTLE



## A Short History of Maxstoke Castle

### FORWARD

On 20th June, 1599, Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England, conveyed to Thomas (later Sir Thomas) Dilke the Castle, Manor and park of Maxstoke for a consideration of £5,500. The Dilke, and later Fetherston-Dilke, family have remained in possession and, except for certain short periods, in occupation until the present day.



There have been many changes over the centuries, both in the fortunes of the family and in the state of the Castle, but it has always remained a home, for which purpose it was built six and a half centuries ago.

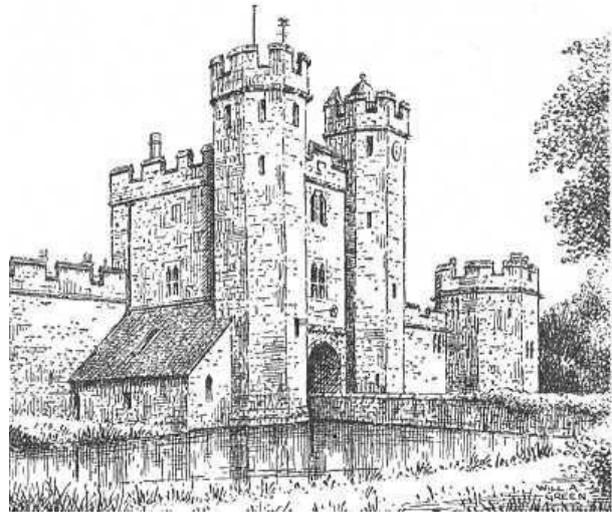
The history of any house of note is shaped to a great extent by the character and achievements of those who created it, and others who subsequently cared for it, altered it to suit their needs and used it as their home. Some of the owners of Maxstoke were men of distinction who left their mark in history and on the Castle and recorded their achievements; others left few momentos of their occupation. But the survival of the Castle for over six hundred years is evidence that, in every century, there have been men - and some notable women - prepared to devote time, energy and resources to ensure that the fabric remained sound, sound enabling this ancient home to be preserved for later generations.

C.B.F-D, M.C.F-D (2000)

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### CHAPTER 1: THE EARL OF HUNTINGDON

In February, 1345, Edward III granted to William de Clinton, Earl of Huntingdon, a licence to crenellate a new dwelling at Maxstoke. The Earl was childless and the licence (1) was, in fact, granted "to crenellate a dwelling place for the use of John de Clynton, nephew of the Earl of Huntingdon". He inherited the Castle on his uncle's death in 1354.



William de Clinton was held in high esteem by Edward III. On the night of 19th October, 1330, he was one of a band of the young King's supporters who entered

Nottingham Castle, arrested Roger Mortimer, Earl of March, and conveyed him to the Tower whence, after trial, he was taken to Smithfield and hanged (2). In the same year, de Clinton was appointed Justice of Chester, Constable of Dover Castle and Warden of the Cinque Ports. Three years later, he was made Admiral of the West. In March, 1337, he was created Earl of Huntingdon. He took an active part in military operations, being present at Sluys in 1340 and the Crècy expedition in 1346.

The building of castles and other major works perhaps came naturally to de Clinton for an earlier member of his family had founded Kenilworth Castle and William himself had built the Augustinian Priory at Maxstoke (3) before he raised the dwelling which was to be his home - albeit for only a few years. Maxstoke was correctly described in the licence granted by Edward III as a "dwelling place" and not a castle. In modern terms, it is a fortified manor house. Though designed and built according to sound military principles of the period, it does not resemble in its siting, nor compete in its scale or construction, with the massive fortresses of earlier times. It does not seek to dominate the surrounding countryside, nor would it have been capable of withstanding a prolonged siege involving sophisticated engines of war. It was a discreet, fortified home, providing comfort and convenience for its owner, yet possessing adequate defences to withstand chance attacks by lightly-armed marauders, such as were common in 14th century England. Its style, therefore, represents the transitional stage between the true castles of earlier times and the undefended houses of later periods.

John de Clinton, who succeeded his uncle, was a soldier by profession and fought at Poitiers in 1356. He was at one time Constable of Windsor Castle. On his death in 1398, his widow, Elizabeth, married Sir John Russell, in whose hands the Castle remained until her death in

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1423. It was thus during the Russell's time that Henry IV visited Maxstoke and held a Council in 1404 (4).

On Lady Russell's death, the Castle reverted to William, Lord Clinton, John's grandson, but, six years after the latter's death in 1432, his son exchanged Maxstoke for two manors in Northamptonshire - Whiston and Woodford - belonging to Humphrey, Earl of Stafford (5). The Castle was Stafford thus obtained differed little in outward appearance from that of the present day. There was, however, at that time an outer wall with defensive turrets encompassing three sides (6). No trace of this now exists. The bridge which today spans the moat was then a wooden structure, with a freestanding drawbridge operated by counterweights rather than the massive chains depicted in the usual scenes of that period.

The approach to the Castle was not at that time by way of the present drive from Castle Lane (made about 1815) but from the west across the park which William de Clinton had created and which encircled the Castle (7).

The buildings inside the courtyard consisted in those days of a stone range on the west wall which, with the Lady Tower at the north-west corner, contained the principle apartments - the Great Hall, Chapel and Banqueting Hall - and, at the south end, the kitchen and some bedrooms. The north range was probably a timber-framed structure, containing at its west end, further quarters for the family and at the east end accommodation for, perhaps, important visitors and their retinues. The high standards of these rooms can be assumed from the numerous windows, fireplaces and privies. Further lodgings, perhaps for the servants of visitors, were available in the three rooms of the Dead Man's Tower in the north-east corner.

The south range was also a timber-framed structure, providing accommodation of a lesser standard for an occasional garrison or servants and, perhaps on the ground floor, stabling for their horses and storerooms. Whether or not a range continued along the east wall is uncertain - there are indications on the wall walk that provision was originally made for it, but may never have been built.

The gatehouse has changed little since Stafford's day. It contains two principal chambers, to which access is obtained by a spiral stone staircase in the southern turret. The first floor chamber probably served as quarters for the Constable. At the west end are doors leading to the wall walk on each side of the gatehouse, for use by the Constable or sentries. At the east end of the room are the apertures for the murder holes (now blanked). The lower end of the shafts can, however, be seen in the soffit of the gatehouse arch below. The portcullis of former times was, when in the raised position, brought up through the floor of this room. The grooves in which it was raised and lowered can be seen in the gateway below.

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Leading off the Constable's chamber in the north-east corner is a small chamber in the northern turret and a long-drop privy - perhaps for his personal use. On the opposite side of this chamber is a doorway and a flight of stairs, within the thickness of the wall, leading to another small chamber below. This, it is believed, was the prison, whose occupants were thus under the direct supervision of the Constable.

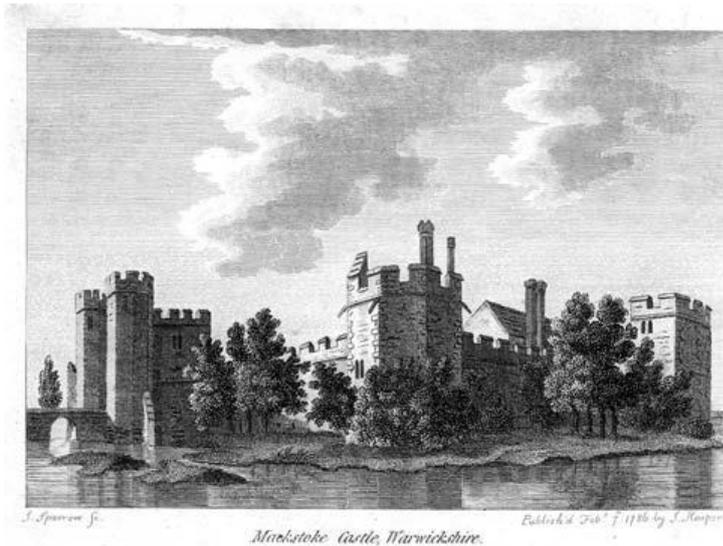
The original purpose and use of the second floor chamber, of similar size to the one below, are uncertain. It also has a small chamber leading off in the northern turret and again a long-drop privy - the deepest in the Castle. The southern wall of the upper chamber is now occupied by a range of nesting boxes made of elm and containing some 230 boxes for pigeons or doves. These were probably installed in the 18th century and were still in use in the 1930s for a flock of white fantail pigeons. There was, according to the 1582 survey, an external, free-standing dovecote, but its style and position is unknown.

The final upper chamber of the gatehouse are level with the flat roof from which access is obtained. The northern one contains the clock mechanism installed by William Dilke (III) in 1757. It has a single hand and strikes the hour. The southern chamber is empty. A final flight of stone steps leads in each case to the top of the respective turrets, the southern of the two containing the flagstaff.

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### CHAPTER 2: THE DUKES OF BUCKINGHAM

Humphrey, Earl of Stafford, was after the Royal Dukes, one of the greatest and richest landowners in England. He found Maxstoke to be a comfortable home and a convenient head quarters for his activities in the Midlands and he used it frequently. There is no evidence that he made significant alterations to the main structure of the Castle, though it was he who plated over the main doors with iron, decorating the northern leaf with the Stafford Knot (which can still be seen) and the southern leaf with the arms of his wife, Anne Neville, daughter of the Earl of Westmoreland.



*Maxstoke Castle, Warwickshire.*

In 1430 Stafford was appointed Constable of France and governor of Paris and, in 1414, was created Duke of Buckingham. A great family occasion took place at Maxstoke in 1458 when there was a double wedding in the Chapel. The Duke's daughter, Catherine, married John Talbot, eldest son of the Earl of Shrewsbury, and John, a younger son of the Duke, married Constance, daughter of Henry Greene of Drayton, Northamptonshire.

Two years later the Duke was killed at the Battle of Northampton. His son and heir having died of wounds after the Battle of St Albans in 1455, the title - though not possession of the Castle - passed to his grandson, Henry, who was still a child. Henry's grandmother remained in possession and often used Maxstoke as her residence until her death in 1480.

Henry, the 2nd Duke, married Catherine Woodville, thereby becoming a brother-in-law of Edward IV, but he did not live long to enjoy Maxstoke. He became involved in a plot to overthrow Richard III and, after a hasty trial at Salisbury, was executed in 1483. The Castle was then forfeited to the Crown. According to Dugdale (8) Richard III visited Maxstoke in 1485 on his way north to Nottingham and ordered that certain parts of the building be taken down and carried there; he was undertaking major works at Nottingham Castle at the time. Luckily for Maxstoke, this order could not be fully executed before Richard III was killed at Bosworth and the Castle was not irreparably slighted.

The new King, Henry VII, restored Maxstoke to Edward, Duke of Buckingham (son of the 2nd Duke), who was still a minor. Until he attained his majority in 1499, custody of the Castle and estate was entrusted to Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and mother of the king. Edward, the 3rd Duke, took little interest in Maxstoke and devoted his attention to Thornbury. The end of the Buckingham connection with Maxstoke came in 1521 when Edward was charged with high treason by Henry VIII and executed on Tower Hill. Thus, for a

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second time, Maxstoke was forfeited to the Crown.

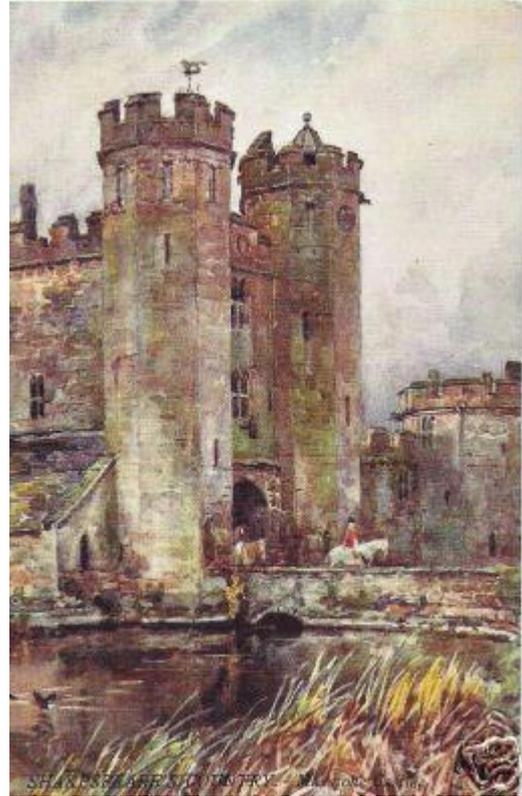
It is convenient at this stage to consider the state of the Castle and the alterations which were made during the period of ownership by the Dukes of Buckingham. Maxstoke was doubtless in excellent condition until the death of Anne, Duchess of Buckingham, in 1480. There was then, it seems, a period of neglect, aggravated by the depredations of Richard III. It certainly required some expenditure by the Countess of Richmond to repair the dilapidations and, in 1487-88 and again in 1495-96, she undertook considerable work (9). It was shortly after this period of restoration that, in 1502, certain of the buildings in the courtyard were demolished. It is uncertain whether this was the east or the north range, but it is apparent from the survey (10) carried out in 1521 that it was the Countess of Richmond who rebuilt the north range - or part of it - though it was not until some eighty years later that it was completed and decorated by Sir Thomas Dilke.

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### CHAPTER 3: THE COMPTONS

After the execution of Edward, Duke of Buckingham, King Henry VIII, by Letters Patent (II) dated 20th October, 1521, granted the Manor of Maxstoke, together with the Castle and park, to Sir William Compton in return for military service.

Sir William Compton (1482 - 1528) was, when still very young, appointed a Page to the future King Henry VIII and they were close friends. On ascending the throne in 1509, the King conferred numerous honours and privileges upon him. He was appointed bailiff, steward or keeper of many manors in the southern half of the country, awarded custody of seven castles and made ranger a score of parks with their sporting perquisites. He was thus extremely powerful, immensely rich and a very busy man. He found time, however, to build Compton Wynnyates, which remains the home of his descendant, the Marquess of Northampton.



It may be that Sir William was, understandably, more attracted to the great house he had recently built than to Maxstoke and it seems that neither he nor his descendants used the Castle very much. Whilst there is no evidence that they deliberately neglected Maxstoke, nothing was spent on repairs between 1525 and 1547 and it is apparent from a survey (6) carried out in 1582 for his grandson, William, Lord Compton, that its condition had badly deteriorated.

In February, 1597, the said William, Lord Compton, conveyed Maxstoke to Sir Thomas Egerton for a consideration of £4,000 (12). It seems likely that the latter's duties required him to spend much of his time in London and it may be that he purchased the estate mainly as a speculation. Whatever his motive in acquiring it, he decided eighteen months later to sell it for £5,500 to Thomas (later Sir Thomas) Dilke of Coleshill.

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### CHAPTER 4: THE DILKE FAMILY

The origins of the Dilke family are uncertain but it is believed that they came to England from southern Denmark, or what is now Schleswig-Holstein, and settled, with others from



that region, in the east Midlands. The first member of the family of whom there is anything known is Thomas Dilke (I), who was born about 1500. He held the post of Bailiff to the Abbot of Leicester and it seems that, by wise speculation in land, he amassed a considerable fortune. His son, Richard, was born about 1535 and died in 1594. A memorial to him can be seen in the church at Kirkby Mallory in Leicestershire, depicting him with his first and second wives and thirteen children. Richard's eldest son, Thomas (II), later Sir Thomas, married Anne, daughter of Sir Clement Fisher of Packington and, in 1599, purchased the Castle and estate from Sir Thomas Egerton. A portrait of Anne hangs in the Oak Drawing Room and she and Sir Thomas appear carved in effigy at the top of the mantelpiece.

The first few years of the 17th century must have been a period of great activity at Maxstoke for the new owner was engaged in restoring the Castle and carrying out extensive alterations to adapt it to the style of living of the period and to his personal taste. The principal works undertaken were the division of the Great Hall into two storeys, the completion and decoration of the principal rooms of the north range and the enlargement of the Banqueting Hall windows. It is possible that, at this time, the Castle was re-roofed with large, red tiles, replacing the small, stone tiles of earlier years (examples of both were recovered during the restoration of the Castle in the 1970s).

Sir Thomas Dilke (II) died in 1618 leaving two sons, the elder named Thomas (III) (1589-1632) and the younger, Fisher (1595-1660). The latter, a physician by profession married Sibell, daughter of Nicholas Wentworth of Lillingston Lovell, Oxfordshire. It was from this Fisher Dilke that the Victorian statesman, Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, Bart., was descended and that branch of the family - and the name Fisher - survives to the present day in the direct male line.

Thomas (III), the elder son, married twice - his first wife being Howard, daughter of Edward Devereux of Castle Bromwich. She had one son who died young. He married secondly, Elizabeth Bonham who, having borne him four sons and two daughters, outlived him by 56 years.

On Thomas (III)'s death in 1632, his eldest son, William (I) (1615-1669) inherited Maxstoke and was thus in occupation during the Civil War. For a time, until 1648, the Castle was garrisoned by Lord Brooke with fifty soldiers and on two occasions the Council of State considered rendering Maxstoke untenable. It must have been a difficult and anxious time for William (I) and in 1651 he was obliged to "give security in 2000 pounds that his house

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called Maxstock Castle shall not be used of or possessed by our enemies". In the event the Castle was not seriously slighted, though it probably suffered to some extent from military occupation. It seems unlikely that any further improvements or major works were carried out during this period.

William (I) was twice married - first to Lettice, daughter of Robert, Lord Digby. She died in 1656 without issue. His second wife was Honor, daughter of humble, Lord Ward of Birmingham. She outlived her husband by 30 years having borne him four sons and a daughter - the youngest son being born after his father's death.

In 1660, William (I) was commissioned a Lieutenant in No. 2 Troop of the Warwickshire Militia (14). (The Quartermaster of that Troop was Francis Fetherston who, in 1682, was slain by a trooper in Kensington Fields after an argument. The coat he wore that day hangs in the Banqueting Hall.)



William (I)'s eldest son, Ward, was only seven years of age when his father died in 1669 and so, not for the first time, a widow was left in charge of Maxstoke. Shortly before Ward came of age in 1681, a robbery took place at the Castle, the culprit being a coachman who had served the family for many years. With an accomplice, he swam the moat and surprised the family and servants in their beds. Having bound them

hand and foot, the robbers encountered the jester, Tom Grainger, bound his hands and forced him to show them where the plate was kept. The robbers then swam the moat and escaped. The jester gave the alarm and released the occupants of the Castle who gave chase and caught up with the thieves at Uxbridge. Many years later, some of the silver was recovered from the moat when it was being cleaned out. A portrait of Tom Grainger hangs in the library.

In 1697 Ward Dilke married Mary, daughter of Sir Edward Littleton of Tamworth, at one time Lord Chancellor. Mary Dilke's portrait, painted in 1691 by Goddard Dunning, hangs in the library with that of her father, her husband, painted in 1688 by Sir Godfrey Kneller, and two of their three children William (II) and Frances (1700-1740).

There are no significant alterations or additions which can be definitely attributed to Ward Dilke, though a plaque in the angle of the north and west ranges indicates that some work was done in this area. It seems, probable, however, that it was this time that the drawbridge was done away with. There is a reference to it being lowered in 1704, but no mention of it in later years. The present stone bridge was probably constructed around the middle of the

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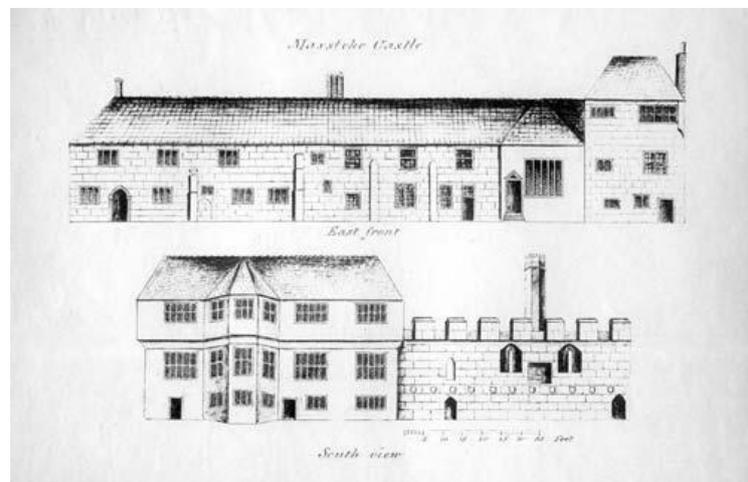
18th century.

Ward Dilke (1662-1728) owned the Castle during what must have been a fairly prosperous period in the family fortunes. The Dilkes were by now well established in Warwickshire and had been Justices of the Peace since the early 1600s. In March, 1708, the name of Ward Dilke was picked by the Queen as High Sheriff for that year.

The relationship between Ward Dilke and his wife seems to have been a difficult one - certainly in the later years of their marriage. Their daughter, Frances, left home and lodged for some years with the Wolferstan family at Statfold Hall in Staffordshire where she died in 1740. This was the home of her maternal aunt who had married Stanford Wolferstan, a member of an ancient Staffordshire family. Some indication of the conjugal state which Ward and Mary lived is revealed in a letter and bill for services sent to Ward Dilke in 1723 by his lawyer (15). The latter had to be summoned to the Castle one night to reason with Mrs Dilke who had packed up certain of the family silver plate and was about to leave with it. On another occasion he was sent for to make provisional arrangements "to confine my Lady, she threatening to murder Mr Dilke". Ward Dilke died in 1728 and is buried at Shustoke. His eldest son, Dudley Ward (1705-1722), had died at the age of seventeen so the Castle passed to the younger son, William (II) (1706-1753).

The fate of Ward Dilke's wife, Mary, is something of a mystery. There is no record of her burial in the registers of Shustoke or Maxstoke but, amongst the archives of the Castle, is a receipt signed by her dated 1733. It appears from this that she outlived her husband. It has long been supposed that she is the ghost of Maxstoke, it being said that she had a violent quarrel with her husband on the staircase of the Lady Tower as a result of an argument over money. It was said that in a fit of anger - to which she was clearly prone - she threw out of the window a bag of coins and that in her rage, she missed her footing and fell downstairs, breaking her neck. But clearly this cannot be so if she outlived her husband. (Some coins of the period were undoubtedly found in a corresponding position in the moat in later years, so part of the tale appears to be true). Without doubt, there is some "presence" in the first floor bedroom in the Lady Tower which has been confirmed by a number of visitors to Maxstoke who, knowing nothing of the legend, have felt uneasy in the room. It may be that Mary Dilke like her daughter, left Maxstoke. It may be that she became insane - or perhaps she committed suicide. The mystery remains to be solved.

William (II) married Anne (1707-1749), daughter of Charles Russell of Thetford. Her portrait hangs in the library next to that of her husband who was High Sheriff of Warwickshire in 1740. By him she had three sons and two daughters. Of these only William (III) (1731-1801) and Dudley Ward (1738-1758)



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survived infancy. In 1759, William (III) married Mary (1734-1768), second daughter and co-heiress of Thomas Fetherston-Leigh of Packwood House, Warwickshire. This marriage united two ancient and adjacent Warwickshire families, though it was not until many years later that the name of Fetherston-Dilke was formally adopted. Portraits of William (III) and of his wife, Mary, hang in the Banqueting Hall. (She was a great niece of Jane Lane who was one of those who assisted King Charles II in his escape after the Battle of Worcester in 1651. Jane Lane later married Sir Clement Fisher of Packington, who rebuilt the Old Hall, now the residence of the 11th Earl of Aylesford).

On 12th August, 1762, a serious fire broke out at the Castle (16). It started due to a chimney fire in the nursery and destroyed about a third of the west range, including the nursery quarters, servants' bedrooms and the kitchen and storerooms. Fortunately the fire did not spread along the whole roof of the west range and it was the thick, southern wall of the original Great Hall which acted as a firestop. The part which was destroyed was not fully rebuilt but a single-storey range of rooms was constructed in the burnt out void and used as servants' quarters until the middle of the 20th century. In 1983, these were demolished and replaced by further modern reconstruction.

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### CHAPTER 5: THE FETHERSTON FAMILY AND PACKWOOD HOUSE (1769-1853)

The roots of the Fetherston family were in Northumberland where there is a castle of that name. The family is recorded in Warwickshire as early as 1468, when John and Emmot Fetherston are members as members of the Guild in Knowle, a few miles from Packwood. The Fetherstons acquired the manor of Packwood at the end of the 16th century, but it was not until some fifty years later that the house and gardens as we know them today were built and laid out. These were the work of John Fetherston who succeeded his father in 1634.

Like the Dilkes, the Fetherston family were reluctant to take sides during the Civil War. A measure of their impartiality can be gauged from the fact that General Ireton slept at Packwood before Edgehill and King Charles II is said to have received refreshment there after the Battle of Worcester. Thomas Fetherston was commissioned a Lieutenant (14) in the Militia in 1660.

The male line of the Fetherston family ceased early in the 18th century, after which Packwood passed by marriage to Thomas Leigh of Aldridge in Staffordshire, who had married as his first wife Dorothy Fetherston and assumed the name of Fetherston-Leigh. The house and manor of Packwood passed to the Dilke family in 1769 when Catherine Fetherston Leigh, half-sister of William (III)'s wife, Mary, bequeathed it to William (III)'s second son, Thomas (IV) (1761-1814). It thereafter became the practice for the younger son of the Dilke family to occupy Packwood and call himself Fetherston and for the elder son to live at Maxstoke and call himself Dilke. On occasions, the younger son succeeded his elder brother at Maxstoke and went to live there, changing his name to Dilke and thus tending to confuse later chroniclers.

Packwood House was sold out of the family in 1869 and eventually came into possession of Mr Graham Baron Ash who made it his life's work to restore it. In 1941, he gave the house and contents to the National Trust.

William (III)'s wife, Mary, died in 1768 at the age of thirty-four having borne her husband four sons and a daughter. The heir was William (IV) (1760-1797), who predeceased his father, but not before he had married, in 1795, Louisa, second daughter of Richard Geast (afterwards Dugdale) of Blyth Hall, Coleshill, whose estate marched then, as now, with Maxstoke. Louisa Dilke (1771-1849) had two sons in quick succession, William (V) (1796-1837) and Thomas (V) (1797-1853) before she was widowed two months after the



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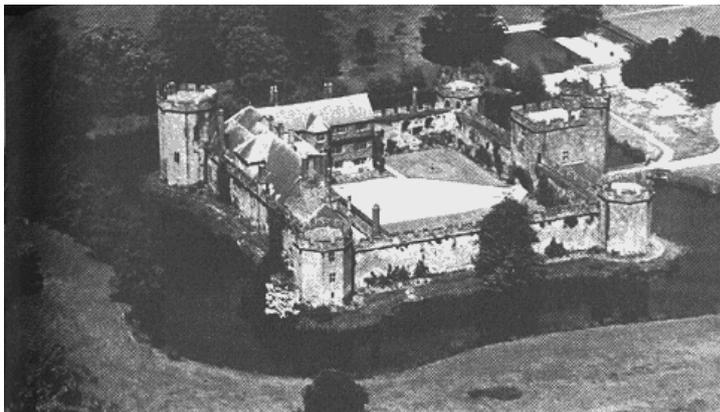
birth of her second child.

Some idea of the conditions at Maxstoke about this time can be learnt from the account (17) by Lord Torrington of his visit to the Castle in 1779. He describes his reception by "the old gentleman, Mr Dilke" (who was then sixty-six years old) and how he was greeted by "the young knights of the Castle, who were truly attentive and, finding my eagerness of curiosity, indulged it amply by showing me the cellars, hall, kitchen, turrets, etc." He then goes on to describe the conditions of the Castle, "an old hall, ill kept up and without furniture, in great dirt and disorder, the old man has had his day". The young knights referred to were the sons of William (III) who were then in their twenties.

Whatever faults he may have had - he was said to have been something of a spendthrift - William (III) left his mark on Maxstoke and in Warwickshire, of which county he was High Sheriff in 1758. In 1757, he installed the clock in the northern turret of the gatehouse at a cost of £20 and ten years later the existence of a bill for a vast quantity of bricks suggests that it was he who built (or at least lined with bricks) the walled garden enclosing just under two acres.

Before he died in 1797, William (IV), together with his younger brothers, Charles and John, the 4th Earl of Aylesford and others founded a society known as the Woodmen of Arden whose members perpetuate the art of shooting with the longbow. The society, formed in 1785, has its headquarters at Meriden, some five miles from Maxstoke, and members of the Dilke and Fetherston families have belonged to it up to the present day.

With the death of William (III) in 1801, the care of the Castle and estates devolved to Louisa, his daughter-in-law and widow of William (IV). Thus, once again, a widow was left in charge. Fortunately for Maxstoke, she was a lady of firm character, energy and enterprise. Her two



sons, William (V) and Thomas (V), were only six and five years old respectively so she could expect little help from them, but she enlarged and administered the estate, brought the Castle into a decent state of repair and made improvements to it until her sons grew up. In particular, she planted a great many trees, not only in the park but also in shelter belts and spinneys and kept meticulous

records of her planting which have survived to this day.

In view of the deplorable state in which she found the Castle, it seemed to Louisa that it would be sensible and appropriate, as part of the refurbishment, to carry out some alterations and additions to make the place more habitable and convenient. It was she who altered the front of the west range by building a brick extension to form a new dining room and, on the first floor, two new bedrooms. She also added a further bedroom on the second floor over-looking the park. The dining room which she built is now the Morning Room, on

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the right side of the front door. Her portrait shows the Castle with its roof of red tiles, but it was during her lifetime that these were replaced with slates which remain today. It was also in the early years of her widowhood that the approach to the Castle was altered and the present drive laid down, about 1815, when the New Road (now called Castle Lane) was built.

By this time, her sons were of age. William (V) initially busied himself by helping on the estate until 1817 when he was sent on a Grand Tour of Europe, travelling as far as Naples, via the low Countries, France and Germany. It would appear that he was provided with ample funds and that he was endowed with good taste, for he brought back a number of articles of armour and weapons from the Medici Armoury. This had been broken up in 1770 and many items had presumably come into the hands of dealers throughout the Continent. He was accompanied on the tour by one manservant, Charles Davis, and their joint passport (18), signed personally by Viscount Castlereagh, the Foreign Secretary, hangs in the Lady Tower.

Thomas (V), the younger son, who had meanwhile joined the Royal Navy in 1814 aged 17, made good progress. His Captain in H.M.S. GANYMEDE reported (19) to the Admiralty that Thomas had behaved himself "with diligence, sobriety and obedience to command".

By 1818 he was a Lieutenant. His most exciting and rewarding experience in this rank was then he was appointed Flag Lieutenant to Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Codrington, K.C.B. and in that capacity took part in the Battle of Navarino on 20th October, 1827.

Admiral Codrington had commanded H.M.S. ORION at the Battle of Trafalgar and had previously served under Lord Howe at the Battle of The Glorious First of June. At Navarino he was Commander-in-Chief of the combined British, French and Russian fleet. It was Lieutenant Thomas Dilke who was sent from the flagship, H.M.S. ASIA, to deliver an ultimatum to the Egyptian Commander-in-Chief. He was lucky to return alive. His interpreter was shot alongside him in the boat on their way back to the ASIA but Thomas was unscathed and, after the battle, wrote a stirring account (20) of it to his brother, William, at Maxstoke. For his services that day, Thomas received immediate promotion to the rank of Commander and, on the following day, was appointed to command H.M.S. ROSE (21).

Having served in the Mediterranean and in the West Indies in command of several of His Majesty's ships, he retired in 1837 in the rank of Captain and settled at Maxstoke. His brother, William (V), died that same year aged only 41. Thomas was appointed a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant for the County and in 1848 served as High Sheriff of Warwickshire. In the following year, Louisa Dilke, William (IV)'s widow, died at the age of seventy-eight after a lifetime of caring for Maxstoke. Thomas Dilke was a popular squire who endeared himself to the people of Maxstoke during the 16 years he spent amongst them and his death in 1853 was greatly lamented. In the following year, his executors held a nine-day sale at the Castle. Many of the lots were bought in by the family but virtually the whole library of books was sold together with many objects of vertu. It is no reflection on the habits of Captain Thomas Dilke that almost one entire day was taken up in the sale of the contents of the cellar!

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### CHAPTER 6: THE FETHERSTON FAMILY AND PACKWOOD HOUSE (1853-1940)

The inheritance of Maxstoke by successive generations of the Dilke family had hitherto followed strictly the principle of primogeniture but, with the death of Thomas Dilke (V) who never married, the direct line came to an end.

In order to follow the succession it is necessary, therefore, to retrace the Dilke pedigree to William (IV). He had three younger brothers Thomas (IV), who had inherited Packwood from his aunt and changed his name to Fetherston. Charles (I) (1763-1832), who inherited Packwood



from Thomas (IV) on the latter's death in 1814 and likewise changed his name to Fetherston in accordance with the aforementioned custom and John (I) (1764-1819).

Charles (I) married Elizabeth Dixie and had two daughters, Frances (1809-1871) and Elizabeth (1812-1891). A portrait of them with their father hangs in the Morning Room.

John (I) had a son, John (II) (1809-1876), who married his cousin, Frances. She bore him six sons and three daughters. John (III), the eldest son, inherited Packwood and retained the name of Fetherston, Charles (II), the second son (1836-1877), inherited Maxstoke and assumed, by Royal Licence, the name and arms of Fetherston-Dilke. In 1866, he married Rosamond, daughter of Sir Beaumont Dixie, Bart. of Bosworth Park, Leicestershire.

Charles (II) redecorated the Castle interior throughout in typical Victorian style in readiness for his bride. He inserted a new fireplace in the Banqueting Hall which he inscribed with the family motto (and a quotation from Proverbs 26 v.20) and plastered over the ceiling timbers which he decorated with badges and coats of arms of the Fetherstons, Dilkes and Dixies. His general scheme of decoration, though fashionable at the time, introduced an air of darkness and gloom into the house. Charles' major constructional work, was the erection of a coach house bearing his coat of arms.

Rosamond Dilke was, by all accounts, an attractive and vivacious woman, Charles, her husband, appears to have been somewhat of an introvert - certainly in later life - and in 1877 he committed suicide, having broken a leg at Ilfracombe. His widow subsequently became involved in an acrimonious divorce and libel case concerning the Aylesford and Blandford families and her brother-in-law, William (VI).

William (VI) (1837-1892) succeeded his brother Charles, who had died childless. He was the

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archetypal Victorian squire and landowner - he had his portrait painted depicting himself wearing a bowler hat and with a double-barrelled shotgun under his arm. A tenant related how her grandfather had been presented - as were all tenants - with a framed photograph of William with strict instructions that it was to be displayed in the house.

William served in the Warwickshire Militia, attaining the rank of Major, was a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant for the County and a member of the first County Council of Warwickshire. In 1877, he married Fanny, daughter of John Starkey of Springwood Hall, Yorkshire, and died without issue in 1892.



The Castle then passed to a third brother, Beaumont (I) (1839-1918). He never married and seldom used Maxstoke, which he leased furnished to two successive tenants - Sir Lincoln Tangye, Bart, and the Reverend D.L.Lee-Elliot, Vicar of Maxstoke. Beaumont (I) always called himself Fetherston (he

had been born at Packwood and had a great affection for the place). He followed no particular profession and lived mainly in London. He was a keen cricketer and played regularly for the Free Foresters (22). For a period, he served as Private Secretary to the Earl of Hopetoun in Australia. He travelled widely and in 1889 set off on a world tour - part business and part pleasure - which lasted until 1892. He was commissioned by the Daily Graphic to send regular dispatches to London, which helped to defray the cost of his journey. He brought back a number of articles of native origin, particularly from the East and Pacific Islands.

During his absence, some modernisation was carried out by the tenant, Sir Lincoln Tangye, who installed electric light, generated at 110 volts, D.C., by a dynamo in the stables which fed a massive battery. This installation remained in use until 1933 and much of the original wiring remained until 1968, when the Castle was rewired. It was during the tenancy that the Lodge and the Coachman's House were built at a total cost of £800. On his death in 1918, Beaumont (I) left Maxstoke to his nephew, Beaumont Percival, eldest son of his sister, Edith Fetherston who, in 1872, had married Theodore Percival of the India Office. A condition of the inheritance was that Beaumont (II) should take the name and arms of Fetherston-Dilke and this he did by Royal Licence (23) in 1918.

Beaumont (II) (1875-1968) was a doctor and, after leaving St. John's College, Cambridge to which he had obtained a scholarship, he served in London, Colchester and Northampton. Soon after the turn of the century, he joined the Colonial Medical Service and was

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appointed to a post in Trinidad. In 1912 he was transferred to Nigeria where he served until 1916. In March 1915, whilst returning to Nigeria after leave in England, his ship, the S.S. FALABA, was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat in the Irish Sea (24). Beaumont was lucky to be one of the survivors.

In 1916, he was transferred to Gibraltar and, whilst serving there, was married the following year to Stella, youngest daughter of the Reverend Canon W.C.R. Bedford, Rector of Sutton Coldfield.

In 1919, Beaumont was awarded the M.B.E. for his services in Gibraltar - being one of the first to be appointed to this Order, founded by King George V.

Although he inherited Maxstoke in 1918, Beaumont did not immediately take up residence. During the closing years of the First World War and for a short period afterwards, the Castle was used by the Red Cross as a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers. Beaumont (I)'s tenant, the Rev. Lee-Elliott, was still in occupation and remained there until 1923 when Beaumont and Stella moved in.

After his marriage, Beaumont continued his medical service and returned again to Nigeria, where he served until his retirement. He came back to England from time to time and Stella - who remained in England - bore him four children. Mary (1918 - ), Charles (III) (1921 - ), Catherine (Kitty) (1924 - ) and Timothy (1926 - ). The last two were born at Maxstoke - the first Dilkes to be born there for over 120 years. It must have been a daunting task for Stella to take on the Castle unaided, but she quickly made the place a happy home.

Beaumont retired from the Colonial Medical Service in 1928. The previous year, whilst he was still abroad, Her Majesty Queen Mary paid a visit to Maxstoke and spent the afternoon there on 20th August, 1927. She was accompanied by the Countess of Bradford, the Marquess of Cambridge (her brother) and Lady Cambridge and Lady Joan Verney, her Lady-in-Waiting. It was a predominantly female occasion and Stella was supported by her sister, Esme, and her niece Betty Armes. After walking in the grounds, tea was served to the Queen in the Oak Drawing Room where she was seated in a William and Mark chair on a cushion later made from Stella's wedding dress. The following day, Her Majesty visited Packwood House, owned by Mr. Baron Ash.

Until the early 1930s, Maxstoke was Beaumont and Stella's home. They lived quietly, attended by a considerable staff. Beaumont was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1928 and otherwise



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occupied himself by getting the estate into fair order, since it had been somewhat neglected by his uncle Beaumont (I), who had rarely visited it.

In 1934, the financial state of the country and the fact that he had four children to educate led Beaumont and the family to leave Maxstoke and move to Leamington Spa. The Castle was then leased to a syndicate who turned it into a country club. They spent a great deal of money on the house and grounds but, with the threat of war and its eventual outbreak in 1939, the club went into liquidation. The Castle and out-buildings were requisitioned by the War Office as accommodation for an army unit. During their occupation there was a minor fire in the Lady Tower as a result of which there came to light the original floor of 15th century - probably Coventry - tiles which had been covered with parquet flooring some 80 years previously.

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### CHAPTER 7: THE FETHERSTON-DILKE FAMILY (1940-PRESENT)

In 1940, the Castle was taken over by the Ministry of Aircraft Production and used for



storage of aircraft engine components made in Coventry which might otherwise have been destroyed by bombing. The Castle remained in their hands until January 1946 and later that year Beaumont and Stella returned to their former home. They were met by a scene of dirt, disorder and dilapidation both inside and outside the house. The grounds and garden had been totally neglected and a prisoner-of-war camp, established in 1940, still remained in the park. The compensation awarded by the Government for the damage to the house sufficed to redecorate one room.

By this time, Beaumont was 71 years of age and Stella sixty-two. The rehabilitation of the Castle was a slow process but, within the limitations imposed by their age and the difficulties of the post-war period, they had to adapt to the conditions of the time which were very different from those of the 1930s - particularly as regarded the number of staff employed.

Beaumont had been elected to the Leamington Spa Borough Council in 1936 and, in 1937, to the Warwickshire County Council. In 1945 and 1950, he served as Mayor of Leamington Spa. In 1953, Maxstoke received a further Royal visit from Her Majesty Queen Louise of Sweden, who was staying privately in England. She planted a sycamore tree on the north lawn outside the Castle.

All four of Beaumont and Stella's children served in the Royal Navy during the Second World War. Charles had entered the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth in 1935, Mary joined Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service in 1942, Kitty served in the Women's Royal Naval Service and Timothy went to sea in 1943. On leaving the Royal Navy, Timothy joined H.M. Coastguard becoming HM Chief Coastguard; on his retirement in 1986, he was awarded the C.B.E.

In turn, Mary reached the highest rank in her profession - that of Matron-in-Chief of Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service and was awarded the C.B.E. and R.R.C. for her services.

In 1943, Charles (III) married Pauline, younger daughter of Major Horatio Stanley Williams, D.S.O. They have two children, Anne (1945-) and Michael (1948-).

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The park, which for many years had provided grazing, was leased to Maxstoke Park Golf Club (formerly Castle Bromwich Golf Club) in 1946. Initially they used the stables as their clubhouse but, in 1969, construction was started on a purpose-built building in the field which had been the site of the prisoner of war camp.

Beaumont (II) died at Maxstoke in 1968, at the age of 92, and Stella survived him by only 9 months and died two days after her son, Charles (III) retired from the Royal Navy and took over the Castle to which she had devoted so much care and affection. In this she might be said to have followed the example of Louisa Dilke 120 previously. She and Beaumont were both buried at Shustoke where most of the Dilkes lie.

On inheriting Maxstoke, Charles (III) retired at his own request in the rank of Captain. He had served throughout the Second World War and in the Korean War and had commanded Her Majesty's ships afloat and ashore. He settled at Maxstoke and he and his wife, Pauline, embarked on a major programme of restoration of the whole Castle and its contents. This lasted ten years and was carried out despite the very heavy death duties which were levied on Beaumont (II)'s estate.

In 1971-72, the moat was dredged for the first time for around 150 years. Some 200,000 tons of mud were removed and spread in the park and adjoining fields. No objects of great value were recovered; the main items of interest consisted of accumulated kitchen rubbish which had been consigned to the moat on the west side since the early 19th century.



In the park, a new wood (the Captain's Wood) was planted along the north boundary and, in 1984, a further plantation was established in the big meadow to the north of the Castle.

On his retirement from the Royal Navy, Charles (III) was appointed a Justice of the Peace and, in 1970, was elected to the Warwickshire County Council. He served as High Sheriff Warwickshire in 1974 - the first naval officer to do so since Thomas Dilke (V) in 1848 - and, in the following year, was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant in the county. In 1978, he was elected chairman of the County Council. After 47 years in the public service, afloat and ashore, he did not stand for re-election in 1981 and devoted his time to farming land around the Castle and to a number of charitable organisations. He served as Vice Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire to Viscount Daventry from 1990 - 1996.

Charles (III)'s daughter, Anne, was married in 1964 to Captain Jeremy Hopcraft of the 22nd

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(Cheshire) Regiment and had two children, Charlotte (1966-) and Rupert (1968-). Her husband died in 1917 and, in 1980, she married Colonel Antony Griffiths, T.D., A.D.C., J.P., D.L. of Sutton Coldfield.

Michael, a chartered accountant, has pursued a career in industry and commerce; for some years he was with the BET group of companies and travelled extensively abroad and now has a range of business interests in the Midlands. In 1983, he married Rosemary, elder daughter of Michael Keith of Hoe Hall, Norfolk; he has two sons, George (1985-) and Edward (1986-) and a daughter, Sarah (1989-). In 1999, Michael was sworn in before Mr Justice Owen as High Sheriff of Warwickshire, exactly 25 years since his father had occupied this appointment.

In 1989, after more than twenty years living in and caring for the Castle, Charles (III) and his wife moved from the Castle to a house in the park. Michael and Rosemary thereupon undertook a programme of restoration and alteration to suit the living quarters of the Castle to a young family in the last part of the 20th century. In so doing, they made a number of internal structural alterations, the most important of which was to remove the main staircase installed when the alterations were carried out by Louisa Dilke early in the 19th century. A new main staircase was built, made of English oak, and fitted almost exactly where the original stone staircase had been along the west wall, following the line of the Gothic window which is such a feature of the west aspect of the house.

In the Castle grounds, the swimming pool built by the country club, which had occupied the Castle and grounds during the 1930s, was filled in and the process begun of creating a formal garden in this area.

In 1990, Michael and Rosemary moved with their family into the Castle, thereby continuing the pattern of family ownership and occupation of Maxstoke which has been its hallmark for so long - and of which the Dilke and Fetherston-Dilke families have been part for nearly 400 years.

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