

Hartshill Castle



This photograph was taken about 1910. It shows how the Tudor house was built into the 14th century bailey walls of the Castle. The chimneys have lost their decorative basket tops but the motte is clearly visible on the right.



No other place in Warwickshire has such evidence of continuous habitation since earliest times as this Hartshill/Oldbury ridge.

Stone Age tribes lived here 10,000 B.C. They were nomads, not travelling far, but wandering, always returning to this area for flints which they needed for tools and weapons. They found them in the boulder clay at the foot of the Hartshill Ridge, near to the River Anker. Remains of flints and bones of red deer and woolly rhinoceros have been found in sand and gravel close to the river at Witherley. Fish, honey, nuts, berries, fungi were all plentiful so the tribes became more settled, particularly on hill-tops such as this because the land was better drained and the forest cover was more open. So a settled community developed, first at Oldbury, 550 feet above sea level, then here at Hartshill.

So over the centuries Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans all stamped a way of life on this area.



HARTSHILL MANOR

An impression of the possible appearance
of the original building

In the Domesday survey of 1086 Hartshill is known as Ardreshill or the hill in the Arden Forest. Thirteen families lived here at a time when tracks through the forest were deep and difficult to find.

Hugh de Harðreshill was given the Manor in 1125. It was he who built the first defensive system, a motte and bailey, (a mound and an enclosed yard), here on this Castle site, overlooking Atherstone. The walls were of wood and on the top of the motte was a wooden tower which was home to the Lord of the Manor and his family, as well as being a look-out post.



A corbel
from the
Chapel

The first stone building at the Castle was the Chapel, built in the 13th Century. Little of this remains above ground. A hundred years later the wooden walls of the bailey were replaced by granite walls, four feet thick and fifteen feet high, pierced with cross loops in sandstone.

A section of water-filled moat remains on the West side. The North door survives and there are traces of the West door but no indication above ground of the main entrance which would have been on the South side. One is tempted to speculate that there was a tower in the South West corner.

A late Tudor house was built into the North East corner about 1560 but of this only the South East chimney stack remains with its impressive fire place. The remainder, with its timber frame and mud and wattle walls, was demolished in the 1950's.

A Norman
cross
loop

