

## RUTLAND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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### Visit to SAUVEY CASTLE 9th June 2013: Background Notes

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#### Sauvey Castle - A magical place

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The Society last visited Sauvey Castle in May 2007. In my report on the meeting I wrote:

*"High in the remote headwaters of the River Chater where the feeder streams have cut deeply into the Jurassic bedrock lies a very special and little-known place steeped in medieval history. This is the impressive motte and bailey site of Sauvey Castle where the Normans built a fortified stronghold during the reign of King Stephen in the XII century. All that now remains are the steep-sided grass-covered knoll of the main earthwork, the surrounding site of a large moat and a high dam-bank which impounded the waters of the Chater to fill the moat. Below the now breached dam-bank the Chater cuts a deep gorge through woodland on its way to Launde. This wild partly wooded romantic and unfrequented spot is now the domain of sheep."*

#### History

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There is uncertainty over the early history. There are indications that the castle was constructed during the reign of King Stephen shortly after the Forest of Rutland was created by Henry I about 1100. However, Cantor suggests that the castle was built in 1211 for King John when he acquired Withcote although Farnham thinks that John acquired Withcote because of its proximity to Sauvey. It always seems to have been associated with the Royal Forest of Rutland. The foresters were the Lords of Allexton (the Nevills) and Sauvey was generally granted to them. It seems essentially to have been a Royal Hunting Lodge and was probably the headquarters of the verderer. Even after the Leicestershire part of the Forest was disafforested in 1235 the area continued to be forest. A chapel was built (or rebuilt) in 1244/45. Sauvey Castle is mentioned regularly through much of the XIII century as it changed hands. By the XIV century it is mentioned only as a plot of land in Withcote and the castle seems to have become disused.

#### Points of Interest

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**Geology:** The local geology is Middle Lias mudstone and marlstone. Fossiliferous marlstone is exposed in a small quarry behind the ruined barn on the east side of the moat(1). The rocky face has Parsley Piert, Wall Speedwell and Cut-leaved Cranesbill. Liverwort-covered mudstone is exposed

in the stream gorge along the the eastern entry to the site(2) (good for ferns).

Moat Bed(3):damp grassland good for grasses, sedges and bog plants. Also for snails, butterflies and other insects.

Bailey(4):two platforms on spur divided by deep ditch. Rank grassland with Crosswort,umbellifers,speedwells and trefoils. Good for butterflies.

Dam-Bank(5): high artificial bank with ancient oak. Good for birds (formerly breeding area for Redstart).

Damp Pasture beyond Dam-Bank(6):on sunny days very good for butterflies and other insects. Good ferns including Hard Shield Fern on steep bank of stream.

Clive.R Jones 14.3.13

