

Audley Family History

Compiled for www.audleyfamilyhistory.com

Information about Heighley Castle

Heighley Castle: **Madeley Village, Staffordshire UK**

Heighley Castle - Alternate Spellings:

Healy Heyley Helih Helyh

Build Instructions by: {Z5}Henry de Aldithlege (Audley) (1175 – 1246)

Date Built: 1226 – 1233

Demolition Date: 1640's

Current Condition: Ruined Footings

Grade Listing: 2

Scheduled Monument No: 21537

Location:

OS Grid reference: SJ 7724 4675

Latitude: 53.0173 N

Longitude: 2.3408 W

Elevation: 145m Above Sea Level

Nearest Road Heighley Lane. Little remains of Heighley Castle today and there are no known images of what it looked like throughout its history. By piecing together data from books and notes, it is possible to give a perspective of the various features that are known about and although conjecture, an idea of the building and the grounds.

The extended Audley family, originally of Audley Castle but who later built (or re-built) Heighley Castle, Madeley, Staffordshire in 1226, had several additional households including Red Castle at Hawkstone in Shropshire, Buglawton Manor in Congleton, Newhall Tower at Combermere and a home in Nantwich. In the early 12th Century Adam's grandson William (Was he {Z106} who married Clemence de Bloor?) married Joan de Stanley heiress of Stoneleigh, Staffordshire, thereby becoming William de Stanley of Stoneleigh. This branch of the Audley Family thus took the name Stanley and Thomas Stanley, 1st Earl of Derby was a direct descendant.

Work commenced in 1226 in building a replacement home for the 'de Audley' family who wished to move from Audley Castle. Completion took several years until in 1233; the new Manor House built in Madeley deer park was completed with ¹Motte and Bailey that housed the de Audley's and their retinue of servants.

The manorial base for the de Audley's would stand for several centuries and in that time become a fortified enclosure containing a great hall and kitchen, the private family apartments, and all the

¹ A Motte-and-Bailey Castle is a fortification with a wooden or stone Keep situated on a raised earthwork called a Motte, accompanied by an enclosed courtyard, or Bailey, surrounded by a protective ditch and palisade

usual offices which made a Castle function like a 'Malthous', 'Colehouse' and stabling for the horses.

A focal points in the daily lives of the 'Lords of the Manor was Heighley Castle but not the sole household in which they lived. Red Castle at Hawkstone in Shropshire, Buglawton Manor in Congleton, Newhall Tower at Combermere and a home in Nantwich all served as residences for the extended family.

Built as a hilltop fortress by Henry de Audley, its eventual demolition was ordered by Parliament in the 1640's, to prevent it being used by the Royalist's. In that act, an important part of the Parish of Madeley's history was removed from the face of the earth, giving little idea save the footings, of what the Castle's true features looked like.

General

Fortunately, records still exist that give pointers to the makeup of the building and its transitions and how daily life went on in and around the 'Manor'.

Heighley Castle was considered to be in the Marches, the English defence line against Welsh invasion. The Grange roof was thatched unlike the tiled roof shown at Stokesay Castle, although it possibly received tiles at a later time. Lord Audley had kennels for his deer hounds. Venison would have been one option for meat; the Castle had a cowshed to house cattle for both meat and dairy products. Trees and woodland were managed in regard to the deer park hence the need for a Coalhouse (Colehouse) to store coal which would have been burnt for cooking and heating to preserve the wood.

The remains of Healy or Heyley Castle, in this neighbourhood, are situated on a lofty rock about a mile to the South East (of Betley). Camden tells us that the lands hereabout were given by Harvey Lord Stafford, to Henry de Aldithlege or Awdlege, already mentioned, in the Reign of King John (1166 – 1216). This Henry appears to have been the founder of the Castle. He was descended from William de Bettelegh or, Betley, who besides Audley² left him considerable property in this vicinity. The Stanley's, Earls of Derby were the descendants of this family, who were created Barons of Audley. Both the Estate and Title, however, afterwards went to the Touchet's, and that family still continues to enjoy them.

All that remains today are the footings and a small section of wall with all the stonework being removed from the site shortly after demolition. During wintertime, the remnants of the small section of wall and arcading are just visible from the (A531 Nantwich Road), above Heighley Castle Farm. The Castle site is on private land owned by Lord O'Neill and is not open to the general public.

Close by Newcastle –under- Lyme, only some four and a half miles away to the west is the site of the Castle of Heighley, on a high rock, made more pronounced by the excavation of its base and sides to produce an isolated peak. A large fosse was also produced, in places 30 feet deep and 50 feet wide, and because of the rocky nature of the terrain, it has often been said the material for the castle was provided by the contents of the fosse.

² Audley, a small village about two miles to the north, is distinguished, as having given name, as well as title, to the noble family of Audley. This Manor according to 'Camden' was conferred upon Henry de Aldethlege or Awdllegc, by Theobald Verdun. 'Plot' informs us, that traces of a very old Castle could be discovered here in his time, which had either been built by the Bettelegh's, whom Nicholas maintains to have been in possession of it before the Audley's or the Verdun's, from whom he says they received it. All vestiges of this edifice are now lost.

The area is about three and a quarter acres, but, like Newcastle – under - Lyme, little remains to give the inexperienced eye an idea of what once stood there dominating the area for miles around. All that remains to be seen are two pieces of broken wall and a length of arcading which is now almost entirely obliterated by earth. It is also just possible to get a rough idea of where the moat was crossed by the bridge. The date of the building of Heighley is given variously as 1215; the 1220's or 1233. I think it is safe to say that it was constructed in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, and by Henry de Audley, who is also credited with the construction of ³Hulton Abbey.

A Charter of King Henry III in 1226 made to Henry de Aldithele stated:

‘Henry de Audley had of the gilt of William de Betthelih and his heirs,
all the land of Helih with its appurtenances; of the gift of Hervey de
Stafford all the land which lies under the Castle of Helyh.’

The land for the Castle came from William and Henry de Betley in exchange for Knolwood, which was in the Rye Hills area, and King Henry III gave him twelve hinds from Cannock Chase to help him stock his new park.

The Audley family were staunch supporters of the King and took part in every Crusade and War that they could! The first Henry de Audley was a major landholder in North Staffordshire and was Constable of the new Castle, but gradually the family began to develop more and more influence as their holdings spread through advantageous marriages, careful purchases and gifts, and Heighley was their main residence when they were in North Staffordshire.

The castle is known to have contained a great hall and kitchen, the private family apartments, and all the usual offices which made a castle function like a ‘Malthous’, ‘Colehouse’ and stabling for the horses.

The Assize Rolls of 1271-2 recount a tragedy perpetrated by two of ⁴Lord James Audley's men, who killed a man in a case of mistaken identity:

Geoffrey the Clerk of Lek, William the Chaplain of the same place and Thomas the Forester of Lek went over to inspect the Quarries of the Preceptory of Leke in Grytwode and suddenly Roger Hyde and Richard, son of Robert the Miller who were Parkers of the Lord James de Audethel at Heleigh fell upon them thinking that they had come to steal the game and beasts in the park of the same James and they laid hold of the same Geoffrey and cut off his head and carried him to the castle of Newcastle – under- Lyme, and then instantly fled, they are suspected and are in the exigent and outlawed.

In 1276 ⁵Henry de Audley died, almost certainly while he was at Heighley. He was only twenty-five, but had been in for some time, and three months before his death he and his Mother had made a gift to Trentham Priory. The gift was dated March 1276 and was sent from Heighley, one of the witnesses being Henry's Seneschal at Heighley, Geoffrey de Schesington (Shavington).

³ *The Cistercian Abbey of St. Mary at Hulton, a daughter-house of Combermere Abbey in Cheshire, was founded by Henry de Audley for the souls of himself and his family. The site, in what was then a remote part of the County, is just over 2 miles east of Burslem in a valley beside the Trent not far from its source

⁴ Could he be {Z6} Sir James de Aldithley (1220? – 1272?)

⁵ {Z8} Henry De Aldithley {1251 – 1276}

Heighley Castle, like all the Staffordshire Castles, acted as a Garrison and Muster Point in times of trouble and with Civil Wars, and Wars with the French, Welsh and Scots, there weren't many periods when peace broke out!

Every fit man aged from Sixteen to Sixty was obliged to become a soldier at the King's call. Some of the names of the Knights have come down to us as signatories and witnesses on documents – Giffard de Brumsfield and Hugh de Audley, both members of the Audley family; Richard de Delves the Seneschal William de Mere; Peter de Limesi... Richard de Delves and Peter de Limesi had been yet others who had been involved in the downfall of Piers Gaveston, who must really have been an obnoxious little upstart to incur the enmity of almost every member of the Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage! These two were actually pardoned and were able to continue as faithful Knights in the Audley household.

In 1316 ⁶Baron Nicholas Audley died aged only twenty-seven and his Heir, ⁷James, was only three. The boy was also the Heir to several other families, and as such was a very powerful pawn in the power game. Edward II gave the right to arrange James' Marriage to the Daughter of his new favourite, Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, who later became the Queen's lover and helped to kill Edward.

When James was fourteen Mortimer had him Married to his own Daughter, Joan The Wedding took place at Hereford and was so prestigious that the Queen and the young King Edward II attended. As the ambitions Mortimer made sure that all his Daughter's were Married to men of wealth or power or influence, preferably all three, it followed that the young owner of Heighley had some mightily powerful in-laws.

In 1320 Roger, Son of Roger de Swynnerton, lodged a complaint that the same Peter de Limesi this time accompanied by Thomas Tooth, Thomas de Grenewy and Roger de Grenewye and others had committed an assault upon him at Newcastle-under-Lyme, but earlier that year, ⁸Joan, the Widow of Nicholas de Audley had made complaint that some of her men had been attacked in her park at Heighley, so was the assault on Roger de Swynnerton in retaliation for his breaking into Joan's park?

All this fighting spirit in 1322 became channelled into the rebellion by the Earl of Lancaster, and the Audley's chose to support Lancaster, probably because of family ties – Joan, Lady Audley had been Countess of Lincoln on her first Marriage, which had given her a Stepdaughter who had subsequently married Lancaster. The rebellion was quashed, and Lancaster and his principal supporters were executed, the rest suffering severe fines and the loss of their lands.

Peter de Limesi, was captured at Burton Bridge and suffered the loss of his lands in Herefordshire, which were given to Roger Mortimer. The Audley lands were also confiscated and Joan was forced to leave Heighley and go to Tutbury Castle. Peter de Limesi had been given his freedom and now commanded her escort, most necessary as she took seven cartloads of treasure with her – silver, cloths and the gold and silver chapel ornaments to the value of £300. At this period 2½pence per year would have paid the rent of a cottage.

The convoy reached Tutbury on the Vigil of the Epiphany, and Joan chose to stay for two days at the Priory before she went to the Castle. Somehow, between the Priory and the Castle, seven cartloads of treasure vanished The Prior denied ever having seen it, and the occupants of the castle

⁶ {Z12} Baron Nicholas de Aldithley (1289 – 1319?)

⁷ {Z13} Sir James Aldithley (1313 – 1386)

⁸ Wife {Z12} Joane (Johanna) Audley (nee Martyn)

said it had never reached there. Its true destination is still a mystery – but someone must have become considerably richer!

By 1330 Mortimer was dead and ⁹James Audley gained control of Heighley and the rest of his lands again. James was a fighting Knight like the rest of the Audley's for generations before him and he joined Henry, Earl of Derby in the Gascony campaign and was away from April to November in 1345, and spent most of 1346 in France fighting at Crécy and Calais.

James died in 1386 aged sixty-eight and was succeeded by ¹⁰Nicholas who was his only surviving Son, and with whom he had spent the best part of his life quarrelling. In his Will which he had made the previous year styling himself 'James Audley Lord of Roug Castle and of Heleigh...' he left his Son, Nicholas £100; one dozen silver vessels '...and all the armour for my body...' and to 'Fulk Fitzwarren and Phillip his Uncle all the rest of my armour of plate and mail...'. Lord Audley was a Marcher Lord, and Heighley Castle considered to be in the Marches, that wild land that divided England and Wales, and if he died 'In the Marches...' he wished to be buried in the quire of my Abbey at Hulton...

Nicholas did not survive his Father by many years, dying in 1391, and considering the constant ill feeling that had existed between the two it is odd that in his Will, Nicholas wanted to be buried near his Father. He made his Will at Heighley calling himself Lord of Rough Castle (Rougemont), which is obviously Red Castle in Shropshire, and Heighley. He wanted '...my body to be buried in the Church of our Abbey at Hulton at the end of my Father's tomb, in a marble tomb as my Father hath...'

Nicholas had been the Brother-in-Law to Lady Eleanor Plantagenet, who was a direct descendant of Henry III. She had Married the Brother of Elizabeth Beaumont, Nicholas's Wife. Elizabeth was well connected being the daughter of Alice Adeline de Beaumont, Countess of Bogham, the Heiress of Alexander Comin Earl of Bogham, the Constable of Scotland. Elizabeth died in 1400 and was buried beside her husband Fulk Fitzwarren, who was James Audley's Great Grandson, held Heighley Castle until his Death when the Barony passed through the female line to John Touchet.

Although the Battle of Blore Heath in 1459 was fought only a short distance away, Heighley remained unaffected. ¹¹James Touchet, Lord Audley was the Commander of the Lancastrian forces and a monument stands to him on the spot where he is reputed to have fallen. The original wooden cross was knocked over by a cow using it as an itching post, and was replaced by a more substantial stone memorial in 1765 by the Lord of the Manor, Charles Boothby Skrimsher.

The Castle was mentioned by Leland in his itinerary as one of ten Staffordshire Castles still in existence in the sixteenth century but by then was '...old and ruinous...' according to Sir Brian Tuke, the Father-in-Law of the then Lord Audley, who was using the dissolution of the Monasteries to try and get Hulton Abbey lands returned to the Audley family; but two cases which were heard in the Court of Star Chamber in the sixteenth century show that despite being 'ruinous' some parts of it were still inhabited. Eventually the estate was mortgaged, then sold and the Audley's finally left North Staffordshire.

In the seventeenth century the Parliamentary Committee at Stafford, fearful that the Castle could be used as a Royalist stronghold, ordered 'Mr. Edward Mainwaring Jnr. Mr. Samuel Terrick and Mr.

⁹ {Z13} Sir James Aldithley K.G.

¹⁰ {Z16} Nicholas de Aldithley (1329 – 1391)

¹¹ {Z37} James Touchet (1398? – 1459)

Simcox, or any two of them..., to go and visit Heighley and organise Masons and their labourers to demolish what was left of the Castle as cheaply as possible! ‘...To demolish and pull down the said Castle and walls for feare lest an enemy should possess himself of it...’

The local men were slow to comply with these orders, and there was great difficulty in collecting the money to pay them – but perhaps that was why they were so slow! Heighley was only worth a mention on two more occasions: in 1694 when Celia Fiennes noted its existence with ‘...ruinated walls...’ and in the 1840’s when rumours flew that the Chartists were attempting to fortify it to provide a refuge for their rebellious followers!

- 1215/1220’s Built by {Z5} Sir Henry de Audley or de Aldithley.
- 1226 A Charter of King Henry III made to Henry de Audley gifted all the land which lies under the Castle of Helyh.’
- 1251 {Z8} Henry de Audley or de Aldithley, born.
- 1276 {Z8} Henry de Audley and his Mother make a gift to Trentham Priory.
Henry de Audley died, aged twenty-five.
- 1289 {Z12} Nicholas de Audley, or Baron Nicholas de Aldithley born.
- 1316 {Z12} Baron Nicholas Audley dies aged twenty-seven.
- 1316 {Z13} James, aged only three is Heir, Sir James Aldithley
- 1327 {Z13} James aged fourteen marries Joan on instruction of her Father Mortimer.
- 1330 {Z13} Mortimer was Dead, James Audley regains control of Heighley and the rest of his Lands.
- 1345 {Z13} April to November, James joins Henry Earl of Derby in the Gascony campaign.
- 1346 {Z13} James in France fighting at Crécy and Calais.
- 1352 {Z13} James two eldest ¹²Sons led some of his own men on a foray attacking their Father’s Castle at Heighley and the Redcastle in Shropshire.
- 1356 {Z27} James was very badly wounded at the Battle of Poitiers.
- 1386 {Z13} James, Dies, aged sixty-eight, Buried in the Church of our Abbey at Hulton.
{Z16} Nicholas his only surviving son is Heir.
- 1391 {Z16} Nicholas, Dies, buried in the Church of our Abbey at Hulton.
- 1400 Wife {Z16} Elizabeth Wife of Nicholas, Dies and is buried beside her Husband.
Husband {Z20} Fulk Fitzwarren, who was James Audley’s Great Grandson, held Heighley Castle until his death when the Barony passed through the female line to {Z36} John Touchet.
{Z37}? James Touchet born. Married
1. Margeret d. of Lord Cobham (two daughters)
2 Elenaor, d. of Edmund Holland Earl of Kent and Lady Constance Platagenet (d. of Edmund Langley Duke of York, the G,Father of Richard Duke of York.
- 1422 {Z37} James Touchet, Lord Audley, returned to England with King Henry V’s body from France
- 1457 {Z37} James Touchet, Lord Audley received a commission to summon, if necessary, the Sherriff and ¹³posse comitatus of Herefordshire to suppress any designs formed by the King’s enemies in that County.
- 1459 Audley was chosen by the Queen to uphold her cause in the Midland Counties in September.
Battle of Blore Heath. {Z37} James Touchet, Lord Audley Commander of the Lancastrian forces killed. Veteran of the War in France.

¹² {Z16} Nicholas & {Z17} Roger

¹³ Power of the County

- 1497 {Z39} The Son of the {Z38} Lord Audley, who turned Yorkist and fought against his Father's friends, rebelled against Henry VII, was captured at Blackheath and beheaded on Tower Hill.
- 1500's Leland in his itinerary mentioned Heighley Castle in existence but by then was '... old and ruinous...' Court of Star Chamber records show that despite Heighley Castle being 'ruinous' some parts of it were still inhabited. Heighley Castle sold and the Audley's finally left North Staffordshire.
- 1535 The Manor of Buglawton belonging to the Audley's was surrendered to the Crown.
- 1559 The Manor of Hawkstone, the site of Red Castle was held by Sir Rowland Hill.
- 1577 Audley was sold to Sir Gilbert Gerard. Sir Gilbert was then Lord of the Manor.
- 1600's Parliamentary Committee order Heighley Castle demolished to prevent it becoming a Royalist stronghold.
- 1617 George Lord Audley was created Earl of Castlehaven. (Was he {Z57})?
- 1777 {Z119} Earl of Castlehaven dies and the old Barony of Audley passes to George Thicknesse {Z120}

Heighley Castle, now a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Grade 2 listed was completed as a hilltop fortress by Henry de Audley in 1233. Its demolition was ordered by Parliament in the 1640's to prevent it being used by the Royalist's. No records of how the castle looked exist, however it is believed to have a close similarity to Stokesay Castle near Craven Arms in Shropshire, although the idea of perching it atop an outcrop originates from Beeston Castle. From excavations at the site the ground plan shows that there was a kidney shaped ring ditch running North, North West to South, South East with an earth ramp to twin entrance towers to the West. After its initial construction a request for castellation walls was put forward, hence the belief that the original fortifications were of a basic wooden construction with a ¹⁴Fosse.

(**Heighley Castle** was not the sole household in which the Heighley Castle Audley's lived, there was **Red Castle**, at Hawkstone in Shropshire, **Buglawton Manor**, in Congleton in Cheshire, **Newhall Tower**, at Combermere, and a home in Nantwich, Cheshire. The Audley's also had interests in various Counties of Ireland, County Armagh, County Antrim, County Down, (*where there still remains an **Audley's Castle***). and County Tyrone.

¹⁴ Moat