

# Friday 12 July

## Stokesay Castle and St John the Baptist Church

William the Conqueror, endeavouring to defend the Welsh Marches, installed Roger Montgomery as Earl of Shrewsbury. He gave Stokesay to Roger de Lacy and Robert de Say became tenant at South Stoke or Stokesay. The estate was eventually sold to Laurence of Ludlow, a rich wool merchant, for the price of a juvenile sparrowhawk. He began to build his castle in 1280s. The timber, which came from an unknown source, was cut up on site under the supervision on a carpenter who marked the beams and planks for reassembly. Much of the roof and staircase of the North Tower is original with the treads of the staircase made from whole trunks, likewise the Solar block, and all has been tree ring dated to 1280s. The Great Hall's roof with its three great wooden arches over it is a rare survival. Each is supported by two horizontal collars, supported in their turn by pairs of struts. There is still evidence of the original fire hole with blackened beams above. At the end of the Hall stands the Solar block, which was built for Laurence's living accommodation before he built the South Tower. It was refashioned in the seventeenth century, probably when the Gatehouse was replaced in 1640. The South Tower adjoins the Solar but the original timbers were destroyed in a fire in 1830. All three blocks have the remains of elegant fireplaces.

The Gatehouse, with elaborately carved brackets and lozenge patterns, is similar to many houses in Ludlow. Wonderful ridiculous carving adorns both inside and out. Encircling the castle is a now dry moat.



Stokesay Castle, the great hall, looking towards the medieval timber staircase. *Photo Peter Stone*



Box pews and large canopied squire's pews at St John the Baptist, Stokesay. *Photo Peter Stone*

Alongside is the twelfth-century Norman church of St John the Baptist which was very badly damaged in the Civil War and restored from 1654–64, making it a very rare, nearly complete Puritan and early Restoration church with largely contemporary fittings. The striking canopied pew in the chancel, the oak box pews, pulpit, reading pew and altar all appear original. The wall paintings have recently been well restored.

*Frances and George Allhusen*