

In 1316 the old St. Ann's Hill house was vandalised. In an attempted law suit the new owner, Sir John's grandson, claimed that the main building, Geldwin's hall, was worth £50 and the furnishings of its two principal rooms were valued at £62 and £12. A separate kitchen was put at £6 13s 4d and a granary contained corn worth £2 8s 4d. Both the domestic chapel and the one on Court Green were by now disused; the empty structures were rated at £5 each.

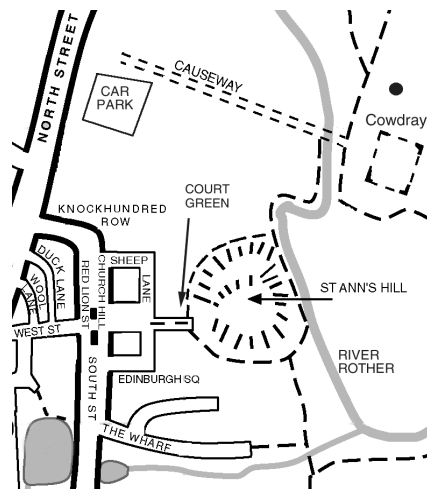
The damage was never paid for and no-one accepted responsibility. The Bohuns may have exaggerated the extent of the destruction and, judging from the finds of 14th century pottery, the hall continued in use, not by them but leased out, perhaps to their steward. The site was abandoned by the 15th century and all traces gradually disappeared.

## THE RUINS

For centuries no-one knew about the structures on the hill. In 1913 they were investigated, together with other historic buildings that formed part of the estates purchased by the first Lord Cowdray. His expert, Sir William St. John Hope, examined the Cowdray Ruins, Easebourne Priory and St. Ann's Hill, interpreting the sites and putting them into context.

The deserted hill was hastily dug over by an unskilled workforce and it was decided to build-up above ground level the wall lines that were discovered. This is what we see today. In 1994 a series of key-hole archaeological searches found further evidence which, unlike that of 1913, was fully reported.

At the southern end of the site is a defended entrance, perhaps the remains of a small motte topped by a timber donjon or keep, later replaced by a gatehouse. Next to it is the chapel with its chancel inset from the nave. The large building was Geldwin's hall with two rooms on each of two floors. The exposed foundations are those of the undercroft; above it was sleeping/living accommodation, reached by a wooden stairway.



On the north-east of the summit are the relatively light foundations of timber-framed structures, identified by Hope as the kitchen. Enclosing these buildings was a curtain wall.

There is much that we still do not know about St. Ann's Hill. It remains a place of mystery, steeped in legend.



The Midhurst Society aims to...

- Stimulate public interest in Midhurst and its neighbouring villages.
- Promote high standards of planning and architecture.
- Encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest.
- Pursue these objectives through meetings, lectures, exhibitions, research and publications.

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# St ANN'S HILL



St Ann's Hill is a scheduled Ancient Monument lying to the east of Midhurst's Market Square. Human activity there probably dates back at least two millennia, even before the Romans came to Britain. In the Dark Ages, pre-Christianity, local people worshipped the sun god on the hill.

The Norman conquerors of England in 1066 constructed a timber and earthwork castle there and a medieval lord of Midhurst built a house, the outlines of which can be seen today. St. Ann's Hill takes its name from the dedication of a tiny chapel that perhaps was the first Christian place of worship in Midhurst. Walk to it along the riverbank from Cowdray or via a lane from the Old Town.

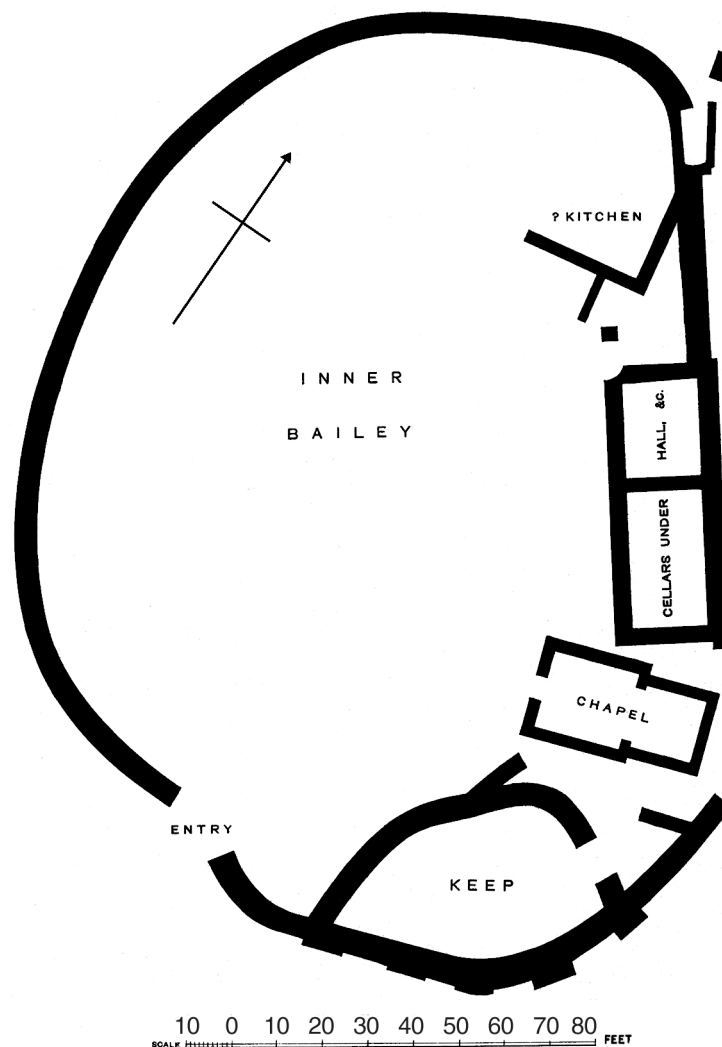
## BEFORE RECORDED HISTORY

The hill, essentially a promontory with views over the Rother valley, is a likely site of a late Iron Age hill fort, part of a chain stretching from the Adur to east Hampshire. Another clue to the past is the folk-name of Tan Hill. There are several of these in England and they are believed to have been where the pagan festival of Beltane was celebrated on 1st May by lighting fires in honour of Belenus (or Bel) the god of the sun and of fire. The ancient Celtic word 'tan' means 'fire': Bel's tan hill or Bel's fire hill.

Adjacent to St. Ann's Hill is Court Green, probably the meeting place of the Saxon-originated law court of the local hundred (the surrounding area). Nearby, it is said, was a tiny chapel dedicated to St. Ann, deliberately sited near the old pagan centre, like many of the new Christian churches. (By the 12th century a new parish church had been endowed in Market Square.)

## NORMAN DEFENCES

After the Conquest in 1066 a motte-and-bailey castle was built on St. Ann's Hill by order of Robert de Montgomery, to whom had been entrusted the defence of western Sussex. A motte was a flat-topped mound, either natural or thrown up from an encircling ditch. On the summit a palisade surrounded a two- or three-storey wooden tower. Around the motte another ditch encircled an outer courtyard or bailey. At Midhurst, below the castle site, are the remains of concentric ditches. Are these Norman or the relics of Saxon fortifications? No-one knows.



Midhurst developed at the junction of the Roman road to Chichester and the Saxons' route to their capital at Winchester. The purpose of the Norman castle was to safeguard the river-crossing and the strategic crossroads. Similar castles were built at Arundel and Chichester: later at Lodsworth, Selham, Pulborough and possibly Loxwood.

## THE BOHUNS

In about 1106 the manor of Midhurst and Easebourne, plus estates south of Arundel, came into the possession of Savaric fitzCana. He and his successor, his eldest son Ralph, lived in their manor house at Ford, not at Midhurst. When Ralph died in 1159 the lands were divided between his two brothers. Savaric II got the Arundel properties: Geldwin, the Midhurst.

Needing a home in an area where his family had not previously lived, Geldwin built a house for himself on St. Ann's Hill. This was just outside the flourishing borough of Midhurst. When he and his brother died in 1187, the estates were reunited under his son Frank who chose to live at Ford.

His descendants began to call themselves De Bohun (later Bohun), taking their name from their homelands in the Cotentin. They were related to the Earls of Hereford and by a series of judicious marriages gained property elsewhere in England and Ireland, acquired a baronetcy and a seat in parliament and became minor nobility.

Geldwin's thirty years was the only time that the family made its home on St. Ann's Hill, afterwards used only when they had occasion to visit their Midhurst estates.

When Sir John Bohun inherited in 1273, he built a new house and moved away from Ford. It was sited across the river from the Hill and he named it Codreys: Norman-French for the hazel grove in which it stood. Later this became the magnificent Tudor mansion of Cowdray.