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Adventures at Downton Castle: 18-28 September 1860

The following is an extract from the Travel Journal of Frederica Rouse-Boughton, who was visiting her brother Andrew Rouse-Boughton Knight¹ at Downton Castle. Frederica was the fifth daughter of Sir William Edward Rouse-Boughton and Charlotte Knight (third daughter of Thomas Andrew Knight). She was 22 at the time and unmarried and living at Larden.²

Tuesday Sept : 18 According to our plan, we started of a Tuesday afternoon for Downton Castle, and in addition to the rest of our luggage, the two side saddles and bridles were crammed on somewhere, as Trump and Punch were to make themselves generally useful in carrying us all over the Downton Castle hills and I was already tracing all sorts of projected rides on the ordnance map. We reached DC without adventure, and there found Andrew and Eliza³ (not the baby⁴ – he was at Malvern), Mrs Chambers and Miss Fitzroy, and shortly after arrived Mr and Mrs Uvedale Corbett⁵, and Milly and Lionel Corbett, about as many as the house could hold, for almost all the rooms are broken into and cut up by the building going on – It is still unfinished, but I mean to have a sketch when everything is tidy; as now it is all in too great a mess to give much idea of the place – We had a very merry evening playing *commerce*⁶, cheating frightfully.

¹ The Knight name was added in 1857 just as Andrew was to inherit Downton Castle which hitherto had been held in trust by Sir William Edward Rouse-Boughton for his lifetime. Sir William lived at Downton Hall. Andrew and Eliza moved into the Castle in 1859 after Sir William died and immediately started to make alterations.

² Larden Hall, Shipton, near Much Wenlock. The house was demolished in 1968 with many features being shipped to America. A drawing of the hall by Fanny Stackhouse Acton can be found in Julia Ionides's book *The Old Houses of Shropshire in the 19th Century*.

³ Eliza Rouse-Boughton Knight, née Severne, married Andrew in 1858.

⁴ The baby was probably Charles Andrew born in 1859 who later inherited the Castle.

⁵ Probably of Aston Hall and relatives of the Uvedale Corbetts, Longnor Hall.

⁶ *What is this Game?*

Wednesday – 19 This was a lovely day, quite bright and like real September weather, so directly after breakfast Eliza proposed that we should have a ride, and not feel tied to come in to luncheon, unless it happened to suit. Miss Fitzroy was to ride our little Punch, as she had hardly ever ridden and wanted something very quiet. Theresa had Trump and I a dear little black pony of Eliza's, an Exmoor, and a great beauty, called the "Knight of Exmoor"⁷ – He was just like a little horse, not a pony at all, with the sleekest of coats that you might have seen your face in it, and a long wavy mane and tail – all black, except 3 white feet and a star on his forehead. It is however useless describing him; he is a great deal too pretty for that, and with such a canter – so soft you hardly hear his little feet on the ground and never feel them by any chance. He is generally very gentle and good tempered, only occasionally the turf under his feet is rather more than he can bear, and then without more fuss about it, he begins to dance and jump, and ends by going straight up on his hind legs in a very disagreeable way. This is quite an exception to his general rule, but I have come in for two exhibitions of the kind, once when Mary⁸ was riding him, while he was at Larden and once when I had to manage him myself, and I very much hope I shall never have another encounter of the same kind.

We started this morning by the road rather meaning to go over to Ashford⁹ to luncheon, if time held out. It is about 8 miles by the road, passing through Ludlow, or 5 by the hill, passing over the Bringewood. We saw nothing much on our way, and were passing through the large meadow bordering on the garden at Ashford, when we saw red petticoats in the distance down by the pond, and presently Harriet¹⁰ and Gertrude¹¹ appeared, having just come from feeding the ducks. It was great fun meeting again so soon, and besides we had not in the least expected to see Harriet again. It turned out that Mr Dunne(sic) was out for the day, and had brought Harriet over to Ashford to keep Gertrude company, poor little *Hugh* having been that morning packed off to school after the long summer holidays. Mrs Russell and all the others were still away from home so that the house was almost deserted. We had as usual plenty to see and to talk about, and it was not till half past three that we started for home, Gertrude riding with us part of the way on Warwick. As we paced slowly through the lane to Batchcote¹², after crossing the Wheat Common, Gertrude and I heading the cavalcade, we thought how pretty a little team of ponies would be to run in a miniature drag. Our four ponies almost made a team as they then stood, Warwick with Knight as leaders with Punch and Trump behind and "little John" following on that big Patriarch, almost sufficiently high above all our heads to represent coachmen! We plodded on through the lane, till we came to the pretty little village of Batchcote, on the upper Leominster road. Here we turned to the right towards Ludlow, along a very pretty road with high hedges, and little peeps of the Clee here and there. Then we came to the mouth of the Sunny Valley (or Enchanted Valley)¹³ and wound up it, single file, through the wood, hidden deep in the hollow between

⁷ This pony may well have come from a descendant of Edward Knight, Frederic Winn Knight, who carried on the stud set up by his father John Knight on Exmoor at Simonsbath in the 1820s.

⁸ Mary was one of Frederica's elder sisters by 3 years, 1835-1910. She was absent from this visit.

⁹ Ashford Hall, Ashford Bowdler, the Hall can be seen from the junction of Wheatcommon Lane and the A49. I note that Pauline Beesly who wrote 'A brief History of the Knight Family' did so from Ashford Hall in 1958.

¹⁰ *Was this Harriet Dunn and was she living at Gatley at the time?*

¹¹ Gertrude Laura Russell. Living at Ashford Hall. *How old was she?*

¹² Now known as Batchcott.

¹³ Now known as Mary Knoll Valley.

the Mary Knowl (sic) and the Vinnals (sic)¹⁴, then with a zig zag passed the quarry where we had had such pleasant tea picnics a little earlier in the year, (where we picked up glow worms every where on the grass and wore them like badges in our hats) and then along the top of the Mary Knowl, where the trees lay felled right across the path, and eventually through the last gate that took us out close to Payne Knight's farm¹⁵, of which I have made a sketch (missing). Here we parted company with Gertrude, on the Ashford side of the road, which bit of road is what we generally regard as the boundary between the Downton Castle and the Ashford tract of country, a totally imaginary distinction and which no one recognizes but ourselves. After P Knight's farm, we kept a little bit along the Elton road till a gate on the right leading up a steep lane, and by following this, one comes right on the top of the Bringewood, between the two end peaks, each with its topknot of Scotch firs standing out against the sky. Between there, at the end of the lane, lies Monstay Cottage, where I believe a keeper lives for there are always herds of dogs come out to bark at one just at that spot, frightening back the ponies from the gate, just as one has succeeded in clutching the latch, and tugging the old gate which hangs on its hinges, wide enough open to enable the pony to pass. Once through this gate, the whole view bursts upon you for miles in every direction. I have put in a little sketch(missing) as it then appeared though I cannot tell half the hills by name. In the hollow lies Downton castle, and the woods, with the river winding through them. We could have stood there for ever looking at it all, but we were obliged to get on, as it was not far from dinner time. We wound separately down the hill amongst the fern, through the ruddy cart track, and then across the Castle Bridge, and up the steep cartroad on the opposite side, in the shadow of the great trees, full of leaf. Just as we got under the shelter of the high wall, the rain came on, and the bright side of the Bringewood opposite was in a minute covered with mist and small driving rain. It did not much signify to us then, as a very few minutes more saw us safely under cover of the great arch in the stables, as fresh as when we had started. The people at home had been looking out for us some time, thinking we must have got caught in the rain, but we looked none the worse for wear, and were quite ready to enjoy the evening and *Ghost*¹⁶ Commerce again.

Thursday – Sep. 20. This was a very pleasant day. The morning we spent in writing, in the afternoon Milly, Theresa¹⁷ and I went out riding – Milly had Trump – Theresa, Punch – and I, Knight. We started by the Leintwardine road, through L(eintwardine) to Tripleton, and meant to return by Burrington and over the hill, but finding it was too late, we took the road through Downton village, and got home by the road above the Walks and the river. I do not remember anything more that happened that evening, until we had all separated for bed, where we had a most absurd scene with Rigolet, Eliza's maid. Theresa and I had lately become possessed of some hideous cardboard noses painted bright red and with moustache attached, which when stuck on your face under a hat, have the effect of entirely disguising you. I had once at home, quite unintentionally created an immense sensation amongst the servants by appearing in a mask and black draperies out in the passages one night after I thought every one was gone to bed,

¹⁴ The High Vinalls.

¹⁵ Probably the old Mary Knoll House, no longer standing. (*Is there a picture? What happened to it?*) Richard Payne Knight and his mother moved there from Wormsley after his father died in 1764 and before he built Downton Castle.

¹⁶ Perhaps she meant Ghosts *and* commerce.

¹⁷ Theresa Louisa Rouse-Boughton, another elder sister to Frederica, 1833-1872.

and as my disguise was very easily got up, I bought the mask with me to DC, and Theresa brought her great nose, so that we might make ourselves as appalling as possible, and take an opportunity of frightening some body there. Miss Fitzroy was the first victim but she took the fright a great deal too calmly to be satisfactory, so we decided on trying how Rigolet would stand the shock. We therefore, with the help of Miss Fitzroy and Eliza, got ourselves up in great style, Theresa with a hat and great coat in addition to her nose, and I in a black silk skirt and shawl, drawn up over my head, with the black mask and black gloves, and a poker in my hand – the effect of both was most horrible – We hid ourselves in Eliza’s room. I behind the bed curtain, and Theresa behind the door, quite out of sight – then the bell was rung, and presently Rigolet appeared – for a few minutes we left her in peace, but then – a slight groaning began behind the bed curtains, like a dog or a person in pain – From my position I could not see Rigolet’s face, but heard her say, “ Qu’est cequi c’est donc, ce bruit?” – still I kept on moaning sepuchrally _ Rigolet got more frightened, but was afraid to look – Eliza kept on in vain “allez voir, donc!” – “ Ah, Madame, je n’ose pas ! “ – After a good deal more urging, she screwed her courage up, and came on tip toe towards the bed, and at length very timidly raised the curtain – as she did so, I flew out on her, (as represented in the sketch), squealing horribly – she merely put her finger in her ears, and with all her might screamed – “Ah! C’est le Diable!” as if in full belief – She rushed towards the door

ears still shut and mouth flat upon Theresa, a fit meme”- Of course she flew out of the room, the success of our plot – in look after her, and show Diable and his friend, and recovering, and so much fun I put in a small sketch and me after the poor



wide open, when she came satellite for “le Diable roared a little louder, and leaving us delighted with a few minutes we went to ourselves in the guise of le there she was , gradually amused as we were at the of the alarm, with Theresa wretch. After this, we

went quietly to bed, having had excitement enough for one day – Rigolet evidently got over the fright, and next night brought us all sorts of old costume things hoping to tempt us again.

Friday , Sep. 21. This morning all the Corbetts left by the early train¹⁸, and in the afternoon it was settled for us all to go out riding, and for Andrew to show us some new paths over the hills – So we started after luncheon, Miss Fitzroy riding Knight, and I Punch – We started on the road to Downton Village, through the grounds – There were a good many felled trees lying about, and as I had always had a great fancy to learn to jump, Andrew let me try on one of these – he went over first, and I followed on Punch, but whether it was that Punch was not used to jumping, and stood still before he attempted the log, and then cleared it with a sudden bound, or that the saddle was all on one side, or that it was my first attempt at leaping, and I was very awkward at it, (the most likely reason of all) but the fact is, off I came, shot right out of the saddle, and came quietly down on my side, not being even a bit bruised – I scrambled up, but Punch was out of reach, and would not let me come up to him, so I held Andrew’s

¹⁸ Ludlow station was already 8 years old by this time having opened on Wed 21 April 1852.

horse, while he got down and coaxed little Punch to stand still, and let me get up again – Then we went on our way rejoicing, all except Miss Fitzroy, who was by no means happy on Knight's back, for he kept fidgeting about, arching his pretty neck, and giving himself sundry airs which she did not much enjoy. The end of it was, that she and I changed and were both much happier in consequence; We kept on through Downton Village, then turned to the left, and got on to the walks just at the



Bow Bridge which we crossed – This is a sketch of the Bow Bridge, and the River – After this we kept sharp up to the right on the opposite bank, by a beautiful lane through the wood, over the spur of the Bringewoods, and down to Burrington Pool – then along the side of the Bringewoods, crossing the top near Monstay, and so on home – It was all too lovely for description, and I enjoyed it all the more for being on such a delightful pony, and such a perfect saddle – I had several little jumps over the fallen timber, and found Knight a very different thing to Punch. Dear little beast! He flies over without appearing to notice anything in his path – it would be impossible to come off, whether you would or no – We now wound down the hill home, in order to deposit Miss Fitzroy, who was rather tired, and having seen her safely indoors, Andrew, Theresa and I started in the other direction, across lanes and fields to Leintwardine – We went one way and came back by another, a lane through fields in which at one part brought us straight up a steep hill across turf, where there was nothing more than a footpath, and no indication of a road – From the top of the hill, we had a glorious view towards Wigmore and that country, in fact, the whole ride was so tempting, that we settled to try the same road again the first day we went out alone – We returned home through Downton Village having enjoyed the ride immensely – This afternoon the Baby was expected from Malvern, where it had been staying since the Worcester Festival – so in due time the break returned from the station, and the creature was brought up stairs with its two nurses in attendance – He did look very clean and pretty and if he had been a little older his head must certainly been turned by the praises and hugs he received – Mrs Shea, his nurse, seemed very proud of him, and certainly tried to show it by talking twenty to the dozen whenever “her baby” was noticed.

Saturday. 22. This morning was too rainy for us to attempt a long ride, but as it cleared in the afternoon, Eliza, Mrs Chambers, Miss Fitzroy and we two set off for a walk to see some poor people in the Leintwardine direction – We came home by a round, over paths that I had never been before, and it was most enjoyable – But we had no adventures, so I will skip on to the next day.

Sunday.23. Church morning and afternoon at Downton – Sometime I hope to get a sketch of the church – it is a very pretty, picturesque old building¹⁹.

Monday.24. This was a fine day, so we had all the ponies ready for the afternoon, with a view of riding into Ludlow by the Lanes. Andrew came with us – We set out by the old lodge²⁰ and down the dingle to the Forge Bridge then followed a very narrow, dirty lane running along the foot of the Bringewoods, which brought us into the high road from Wigmore to Ludlow close upon the town, just opposite Ludford²¹ – The sketch (missing) is of Ludford turnpike, a pretty black and white house²²



– After the turnpike we cross the Teme at Ludford bridge and then up Broad Street into Ludlow – The town is so full of bits of old timber houses and other pretty sketchable objects, that I shall have to leave all that out, as it would make a book in itself – We only wanted to speak to the photographing (sic) man in the town, and our business was quickly over – We turned homewards by Ludford Bridge and through the turnpike over Whitcliffe, where there is one of the most beautiful views to be seen round the country – Down a steep bank, with the river at the bottom, and on the other side the town and castle, and the Clee Hills in the distance. It would be a very difficult sketch, but nothing would be prettier. Instead of winding down at this point to regain our old lane, we kept on the straight road along the top of the hill (the Elton road) which in due time brought us just close to opposite the Mary Knowl (sic) farm on the left, and the lane to DC over the hill on the right – As Miss Fitzroy was tired, it was settled for her

¹⁹ Clearly the Medieval Downton Church, now a ruin, was still in reasonable condition. However two years later Andrew Rouse Boughton Knight had built, in 1862, at his own expense a new church, St Giles, which is in use today. Designed by the architect Samuel Pountney Smith of Shrewsbury. Pountney Smith built and restored many churches, and also had his own contracting business, whose high standards of craftsmanship may be seen at Downton. The church has a delightful conservatory-like porch with stained glass, and is tiled throughout with the products of Godwin's of Lugwardine. Plain red and black tiling in the nave changes to a decorative encaustic pavement in the chancel, and - unusually - a colourful, mostly geometric tiled dais. Quoted from 'Tiles' by Lyn Pearson.

²⁰ Now Castle Bridge Cottage and over Castle Bridge and then sharp left through the wood on the South Bank of the Teme.

²¹ One wonders why Dinham Bridge was not used.

²² *Is it one of these Houses? Was there a charge? Or had the Turn-Pike regime ended by 1860?*

to go home by this lane with Theresa, while Andrew and I rode on to Petchfield on some business of his. I was very glad to get a longer ride, and we got on at a good pace, through the valley, with the Bringewoods on the right, and the Vinnals and the little Juniper Hill on the left and stretching away at the end of the Vinnals, the dark blue solid ridge of gatley with the row of firs along the top – Croft Ambrey is hidden by Gatley seen from down in the hollow, but on in front is the open valley towards Leinthall and Wigmore, with Shobdon Hill and Wigmore Roles (sic) as the furthest point (in blue.) This seen on a very clear September day, with an endless scope for colouring in the changing tints of the trees and the deep fern on the hill sides and the sun just thinking about setting into the bargain, makes a very glorious picture, but hardly one that could be squeezed into the small compass of these little scraps – We rode on to Petchfield Farm²³ and I found Andrew’s business was to see a little pony which the old farmer²⁴ had reared and destined as a present for the “little son” at DC – The old man said he would not give half a present, so the saddle and bridle were to be added, and as the pony was then about 2 years old, and a very handsome little beast, he reckoned it would be about ready for use by the time the small child would be able to ride it. We did not stay long at the farm, and got home by a short cut across the hill, turning off to the left at Elton, and keeping up through a narrow wood path strewn with timber till we came out on the hill side, and found our way by little sheep paths till we were again in the lane on the DC side of the hill, and close at home – We had no more adventures that day.

Tuesday – 25. In the afternoon Miss Fitzroy, Theresa and I went out riding, and disdaining a groom, we struck out into the fields by the way Andrew had lately shown us to Leintwardine. I rode Trump, and Theresa, Knight – We had a little trouble going through the first field with some dreadful loose horses threatening to follow up, but we happily steered clear of these, and kept our way to Leintwardine. In time we came to the field, in which the steep hill occurred²⁵ – Theresa was for turning back at this point or going down zigzag, but I, more fool hardy, declared nothing could happen, and they unfortunately trusted me, and on we went. At the very beginning, the ponies began to fidget and amble down the steep descent of turf, and I thought it would be safest to lead Miss Fitzroy and Punch down the bank, leaving my pony in Theresa’s charge – I got Punch down safely, but only just, when I heard a shout from Theresa at the top “Oh Frederica, come back quick! The ponies are beginning to rear! – “ I sped up the hill at a great pace, and found Knight evidently in an embryo tantrum, longing to show off a little – I managed to lead him down the hill with a great deal of coaxing, but I was hardly at the bottom, and he had still the advantage of a little rising ground, when he took his opportunity and reared right up, with his fore feet high over my head, and the whites of his eyes glaring at me most disagreeably – I held him with all my strength, at arms’ length, and close to his mouth, so that he could hardly get away, but till then I had no idea of his strength – It did not strike me to be frightened at first, for I though a little patting and smooth words would bring him round again and that I should be able to get up presently.

²³ Petchfield Farm, Elton.

²⁴ *Who was this old Farmer? Did he own Petchfield or was he a tenant of Andrew?*

²⁵ Probably Church Hill.



However he had no idea of the kind, and there we stood, he every two minutes making a desperate effort to get loose, retreating a few steps, and then springing on me with a sudden rush that almost knocked me down. The others dared not pass me, for that only made matters worse, I only heard Theresa say – “Oh! He’s kicking her to death!” – However before this catastrophe occurred, she managed to crawl round by the hedge, and get out at a gate into the high road, in search of a man – It must have been quite ten minutes before any one appeared, during which I tried soft and harsh words in turns, but every minute felt my arms would give way, and then I imagined the pony tearing away loose, trying to jump the hedge, probably catching his forefeet in the bridle breaking his knees, and a clear end of my peace of mind for ever after – I almost meditated taking off the saddle, but it would have been impossible to make him stand a minute, so I contented myself with putting the reins over the pommel, just to keep them out of the way of his feet, in case he got the best of it before help came, and not so tight as to prevent him jumping in case he had a fancy to clear the hedge, the saddle, I knew, must take its chance. Thus prepared for the worst I waited, and after some time saw a farm house girl cross the field in search of a man – they were all up in the cornfields, and ten more dreadful minutes passed before she came back saying not one was to be found – Then another scout was sent out, and all with the same success – It felt so like Bluebeard’s wife crying out “ Are they coming, sister Aime?” – but I only got the same answer, that no help was to be found, and I had been in this plight for a full half hour – The farmeress (sic) whose scouts had been on the search all this time presently appeared, offering to hold the pony, but happily he had got much quieter lately, and I had therefore not so much compunction in trusting another person in reach of his heels. Besides which my hand and voice shook so perceptibly that I knew he would soon see his advantage and no doubt have the same fuss over again. It was a greater relief than I can describe to sit down on the bank, and rest – My arm seemed pulled out of its socket, but the work was luckily at an end, for to my great joy, I saw a man and boy appear at last, who offered to lead the pony home – We decidedly preferred the man’s help in this case, and started off, with many thanks to the good old woman for her trouble – I would not get on his back, so went home ride and tye, the man following with the pony – but before we got into the road, we had to cross the field with the loose horses, and here the whole scene began again – How thankful I was to see that strong man at his head – he kicked and reared with all his might, and the extra horses increased the difficulty – At last the field was passed, but the man declared it was all he could do to hold him at all, and had had no idea of the pony’s powers, when he suggested the boy’s leading him home – This at least was satisfactory to me, for the man had begun by making light of my terrors, and saying “the young lady was easily frightened –” and I was really glad

he should have been for a few minutes in the young lady's predicament. The pony no sooner felt the hard road under her feet, than all his airs forsook him, and he tramped along so meekly, that for the last bit we got again on his back, and had no more trouble – and to see the little hypocrite go into the stable yard with his little downcast face, no one would have believed the story, on less good authority than ours! We were very glad of rest that night, though every time I tried to sleep, I awoke clutching the bed clothes, in mistake for the bridle, and Miss Fitzroy found herself starting up frantically in her sleep seizing the rail at the bottom of the bed dreaming she was helping me out my dilemma.

Wednesday – Sep. 26. We had sent a note by yesterday's post to the Russells, asking if some of them could meet us at Monstey, that we might join forces for a good long ride together – Of course we had not yet had an answer, but Theresa and I started on the chance, with our own ponies this time, but found no trace of the other party – We kept on slowly to meet them, but had almost reached Ashford without any sign of them – Being so near, it was a pity not to go on, so we trotted on to Batchcote, up the lane, and boldly turned into the stables, to the astonishment of Jones, who told us that "Miss Katherine, Miss Gertrude, and Master Lechmere were gone out riding and had started directly after breakfast. However it appeared from the direction they had taken, that it could not have been in search of us, so we made our minds easy, and went on foot round the house, to the red room window, where we heard the sound of Sophy's²⁶ concertina – she was delighted at the unexpected descent, and we amused ourselves for the next few hours wandering about and giving and taking the last news on both sides – as the afternoon wore on, we started home, Sophy with us to show us the way over the Vinnals – We returned by the Hanway leaving the Hay Park on the right, and passing along the hill sides (where Sophy left us) under the High Vinnals, across the road, and so into the road across the Bringewoods – We had to wade through some deep mud, but the rides along the Vinnals repaid us well cantering through the deep fern, all golden in the sunset along little sheep walks with here and there a stunted bush or thorn tree right in the path – We got home in good time, by the old Bringewood road.

Thursday. 27. Nothing particular happened – There was an agricultural show in Ludlow, but I did not go, and amused myself better at home –

Friday. 28. This was the day fixed for us to go back to Larden, and as we were to take Mrs Chambers and Miss Fitzroy home with us Andrew drove us over in his break, being capacious enough to take us all. The servants and luggage started beforehand in our own break – Andrew and Eliza, and Mr Benson sat on the box, and we others inside – The wind was bitterly cold, but with a bright sun, and Corvedale looked as pretty as usual. We found Mary at home, waiting for us. She had returned about a week before from Llandudno. Andrew and Eliza were obliged to go home the same day, and we spent the afternoon lionising Mrs C and Miss F over our treasures – The dear ponies looked very sleek and nice and none the worse for their holiday.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives Service for their permission to reproduce this extract and the sketches and photos all of which can be found in the Orlebar Archive. (5518 words)

²⁶ Sophia Margret Russell, of Ashford Hall.