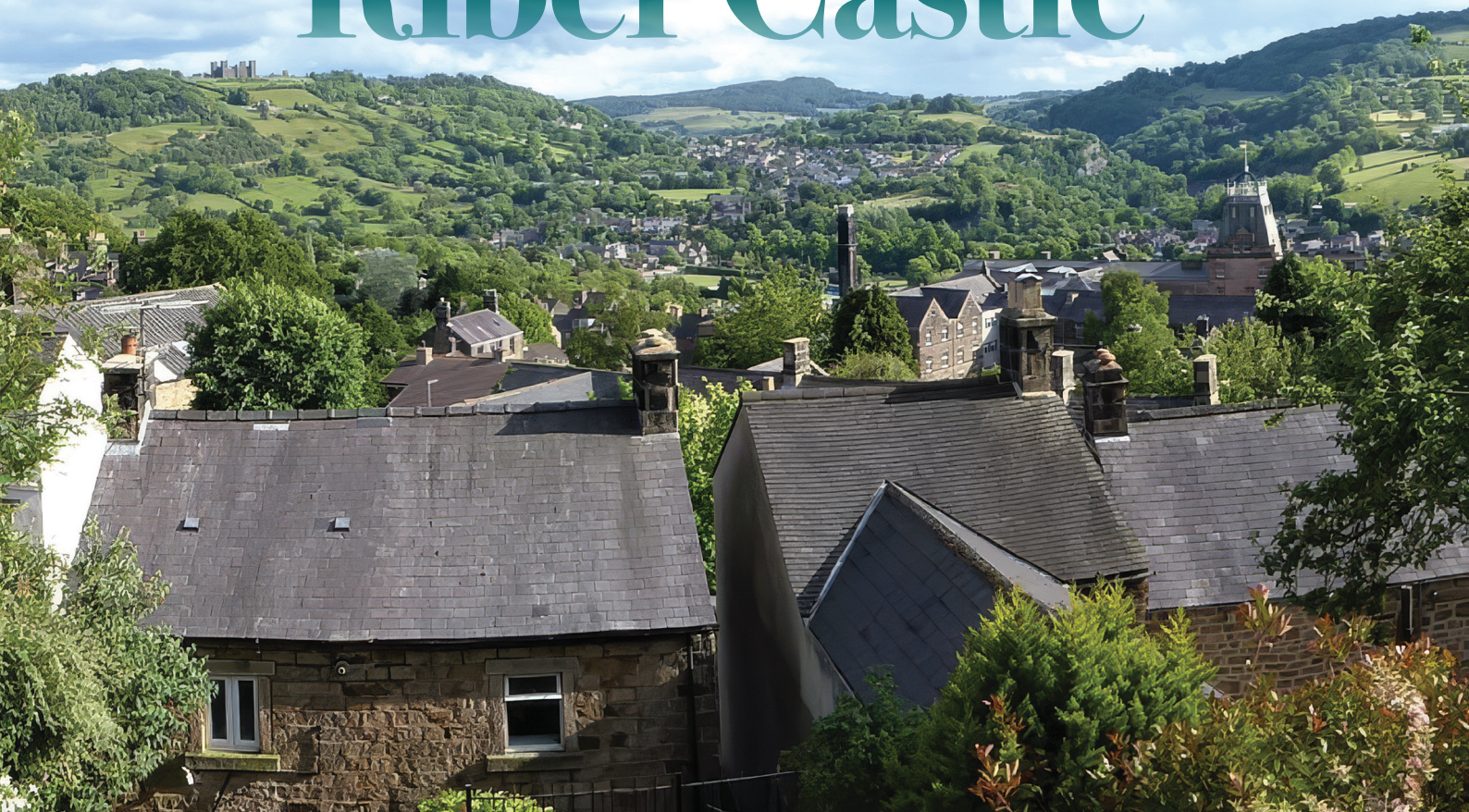


The story of Riber Castle

View across
Matlock with
Riber Castle on
the left skyline



For well over a century, Riber Castle has fascinated visitors to Matlock, its distinctive outline silhouetted against the sky. *Ken Parker*, secretary of Matlock Civic Association, shares an insight into this well-known landmark ahead of a free presentation – *The Story of Riber Castle* - this month



RIBER CASTLE was built in the 1860s as a family home by John Smedley, a wealthy local businessman.

He designed it himself, with battlements and towers as his version of a castle. Jane Middleton-Smith, archivist at John Smedley, has traced the story from its origins to the present day and has been advising the Wright family - the current owners – during Riber’s restoration as apartments.

John Smedley was born in 1803 and was apprenticed to his father, the owner of a hosiery business at Lea Mills. He took over the management of the enterprise with the aim of making the best yarn and the best underwear.

The mill became very successful, growing to 1000 employees. Smedley’s character was described at the time as

‘originality bordering on eccentricity’ - he had tremendous energy and determination.

He married late, in 1847, and his wife was 20 years younger. Their honeymoon was in France and Switzerland and, at some point, he became very ill.

He attributed his eventual recovery to new-found religious zeal combined with hydropathic treatment at a luxurious hydro hotel at Ben Rhydding in Yorkshire.

Hydrotherapy involves treatment of the body with water applied through a variety of ingenious devices (showers, baths, massages etc). He installed hydrotherapy at his mill and he experimented on his workers with various treatments. He then started his own Hydro enterprise on Matlock Bank in the 1850s - which also became spectacularly successful. It is now County Hall.

Deciding he needed a grand house midway between his two businesses, Smedley bought land at

Left: Riber Castle from Crown Square



Above: Riber Castle c1915

Right: Riber Castle under restoration in 2015

Riber. In just six years Riber Castle was finished and occupied.

The accommodation was focused on a spectacular saloon the full height of the building with rooms off galleries on either side. It was gas lit with its own gas works and had its own deep well - and a cistern to collect rainwater too. But no WCs!

There was lavish decoration, Italian plaster statuary and a library of 1000 books - mostly on religion and hydrotherapy.

John Smedley died in 1874. His businesses were inherited by John Thomas Marsden (the son of a first cousin) but his widow Caroline lived on at the castle for a further 20 years.

Then the castle was sold to a schoolteacher from Giggleswick in Yorkshire, who established a new boys' school. This use continued into the 1920s and, in 1930, Matlock UDC bought it for just £1,150.

But the building remained empty until 1939 when the Government requisitioned it as a wartime food store. In 1946 the castle was returned to the UDC which still couldn't decide what to do with it. Theft and vandalism followed and



very quickly the castle was a roofless, windowless, gutted and dangerous ruin.

Eddie Hallam, a zookeeper at Chester Zoo, was searching for a location for a new Fauna Reserve to specialise in endangered European wildlife (especially Lynx). He bought the ruin and established a series of enclosures in the castle grounds - opening in 1962. Eddie later sold the business to a new owner who broadened the scope to become Riber Zoo with wallabies and other animals.

In 1999 Alan Wright bought the



Above: Riber Castle from Bailey's Tump in the recent snow

castle and, progressively, the ruin has been stabilised. A new roof and replacement windows were installed and the internal saloon with galleries has been re-created with access to new apartments. Sympathetic decorations have followed and a lift has been installed.

So, Riber is now a luxurious house

again with 26 stylish apartments. No longer a roofless ruin but an illuminated landmark on the hilltop once more. ■

Pictures courtesy of Ken Parker

The Story of Riber Castle,

organised by Matlock Civic Association, will be on Thursday 12 February (7.30pm) at the Imperial Rooms.

Jane Middleton-Smith, archivist at John Smedley, will use historic photographs to bring the castle's intriguing story to life. Advance bookings for this free event are being taken.

To reserve seats, email pearsonr225@gmail.com with your contact details.

COHABITATION – DISPELLING THE MYTHS

by Victoria Walsh, Specialist Family Solicitor at Lovedays incorporating Brooke-Taylor's Solicitors

Research has shown that over half of the general population believe that a cohabiting relationship affords the parties the benefits of a common law marriage.¹ With over 6 million couples now cohabiting in the UK, it is vital that couples seek independent legal advice, before embarking on a dependent cohabitee relationship, in order to separate the fact from the fiction.

Despite it being such a widespread view, there is no such thing as a common law marriage in the UK. When a cohabiting relationship breaks down, cohabitees do not have the same financial rights or obligations over each, as would be the case if they were married. That is why it is essential to seek the help and expertise of a family solicitor before entering such a relationship so steps can be taken to protect yourself in the event of relationship breakdown.

Documents such as cohabitation contracts or deeds of trust are legal documents clearly setting out a couple's intentions regarding finances and property from the outset. These documents can assist greatly should the relationship break down in the future and can often prevent difficult and lengthy legal proceedings later down the line.

Here at Lovedays incorporating Brooke-Taylor's Solicitors we offer a free 20-minute consultation to help you understand what would best meet your needs and protect you for the future. We are Derbyshire's local solicitors, and pride ourselves on having that personal touch.

¹ www.resolution.co.uk
Statistics taken from the Office of National Statistics

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If you wish to find out how you can book a free consultation, please contact us at law@lovedays-solicitors.co.uk