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### *INTRODUCTION TO CASTLES*

### Britain is strewn with ruins of castles, rubble from the centuries of her existence. Castles are tangible relics of a remarkable past, a lengthy heritage etched in stone, as well as with the blood and sweat of those who built, labored, fought, and died in their shadow. Ruins stir up in us a profound awareness of those past lives. Castles have a timelessness that is awe-inspiring. That they have endured centuries of warfare and the effects of weather is a testimony to the creativity and power of their medieval owners. How many of us will have such long-lasting success?

### As with gardens castles have had innumerable books written about them quoting design, styles, ages and so on. I think that one or two notes are helpful in distinguishing the various types and the logical development. The castles that we use as our standard are those built between the 11th and 16th centuries in Great Britain and Northern Europe. The English castle whose design was imported from Normandy following the Norman invasion of 1066 was essentially defensive. The Normans had to hold down a belligerent conquered people and their way was to build a network of castles. William the Conqueror has a ring established around London, including Rochester, Windsor and Berkampstead. These in conjunction with the Tower of London - the White Tower then - acted as a screen around the capital.

### As it was said these castles were essentially defensive, designed to protect the Norman families who were granted the land by William. They originally consisted of a mound of earth thrown up with a tower or 'keep' on top, possibly surrounded by a palisade around the bottom and in turn frequently surrounded by a moat. The palisade contained the bailey. The keep was not living quarters normally but a last line of defense in case of attack and the main living area was the bailey where the Lord had a comfortable hall and where there were houses for his soldiers and retainers and their families, stables for the animals as well as the various necessary service buildings, blacksmith, farrier, armourer, etc. In the case of sustained attack the whole countryside include villagers and their beasts could be taken into the bailey for protection and in dire necessity the whole would be withdrawn into the keep.

Originally because of the urgency needed to get them erected these structures were of wood but, as they were vulnerable to fire, quite soon the King insisted that they be built of stone. One of the first of these was the White Tower in the center of the Tower of London. These more substantial buildings soon became home to the Lord and his retainers. It is an axiom of military design that each improvement in design creates its own destruction as the attacker soon learns to overcome the latest technology. Thus castle building became a never ending program of updating to create defensive protection. The keep had its own curtain wall with watchtowers. These were originally built square but it was soon found that it was easy for an attacker to use the square shape to protect himself against defenders and also undermine the corners of the tower. A corner would be undermined and the whole area filled with wooden props to support it. Then pigskins filled with oil and fat would be placed in the cavity and ignited. As the flames destroyed the props so the tower crumbled. An example of this can be seen at Rochester where the undermining of one square corner tower is quite clear before it was rebuilt as round tower.

Castle building grew apace and it became necessary to protect the original curtain wall with its own wall culminating in castles like the Tower of London where there are several concentric rings. England became more settled and by the middle of the fifteenth century in Southern and Middle England except for the King and powerful barons the smaller landowner had found that a more peaceful country made the castle unnecessary. He had had found the castle drafty, cold and uncomfortable and created 'fortified manor house'. This still had strong walls for defense but also had larger windows and more doors while the interior was of wood, rather than stone, to make the whole warmer and a less confrontational design. From then on we get the development of the 'stately home' and palace without any defensive capabilities and from these in turn produced the great Tudor mansions of which Hatfield House and Penshurst Place are typical and in which defense has no part. Peace was now assumed and the history of English castle building reached its end.

In the north of England it was not so easy and until the reign of Henry VIII there were still border attacks. The castles remained strong and well defended until well into the sixteenth century. Thus for hundreds of years the Duke of Northumberland remained influential as much because of the soldiers he could muster as his personality.

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| CASTLES OF ENGLANDDover Location: *Kent*  When William the Conqueror defeated Harold II at Hastings he headed towards Dover where the Angle-Saxons had already raised a burh. William improved this fortification by erecting a motte-and-bailey. Dover Castle has the most massive tower in Britain, an almost 100-foot cube with walls from seventeen to twenty-one feet thick. In 1216 the castle was besieged by Louis, son of the French king but saved when Louis returned to France.  Overlooking Dover Harbour, the shortest sea-route to the Continent it barred the way of anybody trying to invade England. Early in the 19th century Napoleon stood opposite on the cliffs of Calais and through his telescope surveyed Dover. With the British navy controlling the seas and the steep cliffs beneath the castle he decided against an invasion of England, immediately turned round and invaded Russia instead. Hitler followed the same pattern and again after contemplating the problem decided to invade Russia instead. Beneath the castle are the secret wartime passages where the evacuation of Dunkirk and the Channel sea battle was controlled.   Warwick Castle  |  |  | | --- | --- | | Location: *Warwick Country*  Warwick Castle was founded in 1068 and was rebuilt and updated a number of times. Today it combines castle ruins, largely of the fourteenth century with one of the finest great houses in England. Two small projecting towers, which date to the late fifteenth century are said to have built as artillery platforms. Warwick Castle rises like a precipice above the River Avon. On this natural cliff William I founded a motte castle in 1068, on lands seized from a nearby Saxon convent. A wooden tower built on the motte was evidently still there in the reign of Henry II, by which time a polygonal shell enclosure had been raised round the motte top. Only fragments of the shell enclosure now remain, incorporated in the rebuilt shell, which is of much later date.  Late in the fourteenth century, by which time some additional buildings such as the great hall and residential blocks had been put up in the bailey, the castle passed to Earl Beauchamp who initiated a fresh programme of works. These were substantially what can be seen today. They included restructuring the great hall and a range of other buildings on the south-east, a water-gate, and on the west front a high and stout defensive curtain leading from a gatehouse to a very tall polygonal tower, known as Guy's Tower, which is 39.4 metres tall. The gatehouse is a remarkable building: a pair of towers above the doorway passage, which had portcullises and murder-holes. Projecting from the east side of the gatehouse is a tall rectangular building leading to another tower.  This latter tower is 45.2 meters tall and capped by a two-fold system of battlements with machicolation all round below the battlements. It is called Caesar's Tower. The three main storeys in the tower are each vaulted, and have stone fireplaces.  The castle is completed by curtain walling and further, much smaller, flanking towers. The wall at the west leads up the motte to the restored shell enclosure and down again southwards to the south range. The whole is thus a powerfully defended enclosure Leeds Castle   Location: *Kent*  Leeds Castle, acclaimed as the most romantic castle in England, is located  in south-east England, built on two adjacent island in the river Len.  Leeds Castle was originally a manor of the Saxon royal family possibly as early as the reign of Ethelbert IV ( 856-860). The first castle was an earthwork enclosure whose wooden palisade was converted to stone and provided with two towers along the perimeter. This is now vanished. Traces of arches in a vault thought to be Norman were found at the beginning of this century.  Around 1119 Robert Crevecoeur started to build a stone castle on the site, establishing his donjon where the Gloriette now is. Stephen, Count of Blois, and his cousin the Empress Matilda contested the crown of England. In 1139 Matilda invaded England with the help of his brother Robert, Earl of Gloucester, who held Leeds castle, but Kent was loyal to king Stephen and following a short siege he took control of the castle.  The castle came into the possession of Edward I (1278) . He rebuilt much of the castle as it stood at the beginning of his reign, and enlarged it, providing an outer stone curtain round the edge of the larger island, with cylindrical open-backed  flanking towers and a square-plan water-gate on the south-east. The gatehouse at the south-west, a single tower pierced by an arched passage was improved. Later on, King Edward, the Confessor granted the manor to the powerful house of Godwin.  Henry VIII, the most famous of all the owners of Leeds Castles, expended large sums in enlarging and beautifying the whole range of  buildings. At the same time, he carefully retained the defenses of the castle for he often had cause to fear invasion from either France or the Spanish . The king entrusted the work of alteration to his great friend Sir Henry Guidford.  Leeds has been constantly inhabited and rebuilt since then. Most of the castle today is the result of the nineteenth-century reconstruction and addition. In 1926 Leeds was bought by the Hon. Mrs. Wilson-Filmer, known as Lady Baillie. Immediately she began the restoration of the castle that took her over 30 years to leave it as it stands today. MEDIEVAL SIEGE There are many myths and legends surrounding castle sieges. Knights in shining armor riding up to the castle, doing hand to hand combat. Or maybe hundreds of guards streaming out of the castles to meet their enemy. None of this is true, except in fairy tales and movies.  Most of the time, the attacking force would send a messenger to the lord of the castle and give notice of their intentions to attack. This notice allowed the castle to surrender. Sometimes the lord surrendered, but most often the castle was restocked and made ready for the siege. They would restock themselves with food, supplies and drink, and add men to the garrison.  There were three ways to take a castle. The first is not to attack the castle at all - just avoid the castle altogether and seize the lands around it. The second is direct assault, or laying siege to the castle. The last is besieging.  Here is an account of a siege. Stone throwing mangonels attack the towers and walls every day. The walls of the castles would hopefully be breached, and towers damaged. The enemy erects wooden towers called belfries, taller than the castle towers, to conceal and enable bow men to shoot arrows down into the castle. While this is going on, miners would be tunneling under the walls and towers of the castle in preparation to collapse them.  To counter the mining, anti-mining tunnels could be dug by the castle soldiers, which insured a ferocious hand-to-hand battle underground. Inside the castle, the guards would place a pot of water near the castle towers and walls. When the water rippled, they would know enemy miners were at work underneath them.  The barbican is next assaulted and taken, with a loss of men on both sides. Then the bailey is attacked, and more men killed. Animals and some supplies would be captured. The auxiliary buildings containing hay and grain for the castle are burned. By now, miners have succeeded in collapsing a wall of the castle. The attackers have broken through and seized the inner bailey. More men on both sides would be lost in this phase of the attack.  By this time, the castle defenders would have retreated to the keep. Miners would now be setting fire to the mine tunnel under the keep. The  keep. Smoke and fire are rising into the keep, and cracks appearing in the thick walls. The defenders of the castle are forced to surrender as the castle falls to the enemy.  The third method, called besieging, would require the enemy to wait and starve the castle garrison into surrender. This method was preferred by an attacking side. Some sieges of this type would last from six months to a year. Sometimes, the enemy would hurl dead animals into the castle grounds in hopes of spreading diseases. And, sometimes the lord of the castle would toss dead animals outside his castle, to convince the enemy they had enough supplies to carry on a siege for months.  .   |  | | --- | | CASTLES WITH GHOSTS What story would be complete without a haunted castle. Here is some of the castles that are reportedly haunted in England.  *Berry Pomeroy Castle, Devon* Said to be haunted by the daughter of a wicked baron who, as a consequence of an enforced relationship with her father, bore him a child, which he strangled.  *Dover Castle, Kent* Dover Castle is associated with numerous ghosts and strange sounds. In the King's bedroom, the lower half of a man has been seen walking through the doorway. The specter of a woman dressed in a red dress has been seen at the west stairway of the keep. The sounds of a creaking doorway opening and closing where a door used to be, but isn't anymore, have been heard.  *Featherstone Castle, Northumberland* The castle is associated with a ghostly bridal party. Baron Featherstonehaugh had arranged for his daughter to marry a relative of his choice, even though the daughter was in love with someone else. The wedding party left for the "traditional hunt" after the wedding, leaving the baron behind to make arrangements for the banquet. When the party failed to return by midnight, the baron began to fear the worst. Sitting alone at the table, he heard horses crossing the drawbridge. The door opened and the party entered. But, they made no sound and passed through furniture. The wedding party had been ambushed and killed. On the anniversary of the wedding, the party can still be seen heading towards the castle. .  *Lowther Castle, Cumbria* Haunted by Sir James Lowther. He was very unhappy with a prearranged marriage, and fell in love with a farmer's daughter. When she suddenly grew ill and died, Sir James refused to believe she was dead and left her on the bed. She was finally moved and placed in a coffin with a glass lid, which he set in a cupboard where he could look at her. She was finally buried, and Sir James died unloved and unmourned. At his funeral his coffin began to sway as it was lowered into the ground. His spectral coach and ungroomed horses can be seen being driven through the parklands of the castle.    *Tower of London* In 1816, a guard saw what he described afterwards as "a shadowy bear walking up the stairs in the twilight." He lunged at it with his bayonet, which shattered against the wall. The ghostly presence walked on unaffected and the guard, having told his unlikely story to others, died of shock a few days later.  *Windsor Castle, Berkshire* Queen Elizabeth I's ghost has been seen in the library. A young guard shot and killed himself and another guard on duty saw him afterwards. | | |

###### *SOURSES*

1. www.castles.org
2. www.castles-of-britain.com
3. www.castlesofengland.com
4. www.heartofeurope.com