

A photograph of the ruins of Totnes Castle, a Norman motte and bailey castle, situated on a grassy hill. The castle's stone walls are dark and weathered, with several square openings along the top. A flagpole with a flag is visible on the left side of the castle. The foreground is dominated by tall, green grass. The sky is bright with scattered clouds.

TOTNES CASTLE

By Lucille Watts

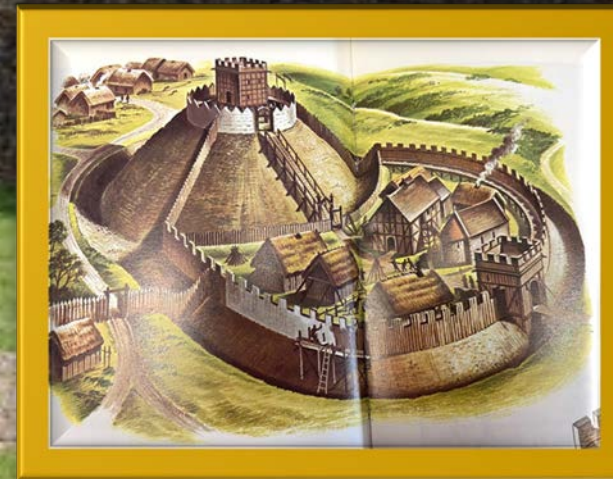
Totnes castle is one of the best preserved examples of a Norman motte & bailey castle in England!

What type of castle and how do we know?

Totnes castle in Devon is a motte & bailey castle. We know Totnes castle is this type as it has a stone keep (fortified tower) on a large manmade motte. Digging out the earth for the mound created a ditch that made the castle moat. The bailey is a large pear shaped courtyard surrounded and protected by the moat and once would have had a palisade (wooden wall) but is now a stone wall. The shell keep, rampart walk and crenelations are still intact today!

Did you know ?

Motte & bailey are French words for 'motte' meaning 'turfy' and 'baille' meaning low yard!



History of the castle I

The castle was first built by Judhael of Brittany, one of William the Conqueror's lieutenants, shortly after the Norman conquest of Britain in 1066AD. It is on high ground near to the River Dart and overlooks Totnes town which dates to Anglo-Saxon times. This was a good place to build the castle because it is up high, and you can see all the surrounding three valleys clearly.

A good, strong stone keep



Totnes was a well-known port town and one of the best places to harbour a boat. Totnes was an important market town and the river meant that it would have been easy to access for the Normans. The castle was positioned so that the motte is just inside the line of the town wall on the north-west and the pear-shaped Bailey just beyond it.

History of the castle II

The main purpose of this castle was to protect the people who lived there and to show the Anglo-Saxon Totnes townsfolk how important the Normans were. The castle shows that William the conqueror thought the Anglo Saxons of this area were a real threat.

William the Conqueror granted land and titles to his supporters and the Feudal barony of Totnes was granted to Judhael of Brittany in 1068. The castle was built to show his control over the area.



History of the castle III



Devon and Cornwall saw lots of rebellions with lots of Anglo-Saxons refusing to swear an oath to William the Conqueror and instead supported Harold Godwinson's family and claim to the throne. Totnes castle was meant to impress and keep the local people under Norman control. When King William I died, Judhael lost his lands as he had supported the rebellion in 1088.

The Barony then passed to Roger de Nonant for the next three generations until the late 12th Century.

Development of the castle

After this the castle and Barony passed to William de Braose who was a descendent of Judheal of Brittany. He probably changed it from a wooden construction to a stone keep and walls.

By 1326 the castle had fallen into ruin and was under control of the De La Zouche family. A royal order was made for the repair of the fortifications and so a new shell keep using Devonian limestone.

In 1385 the castle was attacked and captured by Richard II supporters who were against King Henry IV's power. The castle remained in rebel hands until 1388 when it was taken over by Royalists.

In 1485 after the battle of Bosworth the land was given to Richard Edgecombe of Totnes. In the 16th Century the Edgecombes sold it to the Seymour family who was the Duke of Somerset.

The keep was used during the civil war (1642-46) by royalists.

In 1646 it was captured by parliamentarians and most of the castle was destroyed to prevent it being used again.

The castle was used as a courthouse and prison until 1825 when it was restored, and it became a tourist attraction. Today it is looked after by English Heritage.



Did you know?

There is only one small room remaining in the castle - the Garderobe (a French word like wardrobe), but the room was used for lots of things and mostly a toilet!

The main features of the castles defence

There are 34 merlons (arrow slits) on top of the castle and crenels (gaps in-between). The crenels and merlons formed the castles battlements from where bowmen could fire at invaders and keep watch from the crenels. The steep sided moat and bank would have been an important defense for the entrance.

Originally there would have been a wooden tower on the top of the Motte. Any enemy trying to capture it would have had things thrown at them from the top as well as arrows falling on them like rain! The motte would have been very hard to charge up and impossible to ride a horse up.

Once the castle was reinforced with stone rather than wood it would be stronger and more able to resist attack. The stone wall would have been more effective against battering rams. The stone was also more difficult to set fire to than wooden walls.



A 'License to Crenellate' (fortify) was needed to be granted by the King!

What was it like to live in a castle in the middle ages? I



The castle was a home as well as a defensive military building. The Lord would have had many homes which he toured around.

Medieval castles would have been very cold and dark. The thick stone was good at making the castle strong but could never be properly warmed by the sun so were cold and damp. The windows were just narrow slits so there wasn't much light. The only other light came from tallow (fat) candles.

What was it like to live in a castle in the middle ages? II



Did you know?
The kitchen was locked at night to stop the servants stealing fat to eat!

There would have been a big castle kitchen to cater for these events with lots of cooks and servants preparing food such as peacocks, swans, larks, herons as well as rabbits, deer, beef, pork and mutton. The kitchen would have been hot and noisy with a very big fireplace for spit roasting meat.

Castles were very busy and not very private. As castles were built to impress and show the owner's power there was a lot of entertaining in the Great Hall, such as dances, plays and huge banquets where lots of rich food would have been served on long wooden tables. There would have also been a large open fire in the main hall to provide heat and light. There would have been a hole in the roof for smoke to escape before stone chimneys were constructed.

What was it like to live in a castle in the middle ages? III

The Lord of the Castle would have had a private bed chamber and often a private chapel too. These were usually the safest part of the castle where only trusted servants and honoured guests were allowed.

Herbs were scattered over the floor and on the straw mattresses to sweeten the air. Furniture was a luxury in the medieval age. There were beds, but chairs were uncommon, the most important person at any meeting always had use of the chair 'chairperson'. The basic items of furniture were a chest where clothes and valuables were kept. Nobles who moved around the country staying at their different castles took their chest with them.



Soldiers lived in the castle to defend it. They would patrol, guard the entrance and keep watch. They slept in dormitories.

What was it like to live in a castle in the middle ages? IV

There would have been lots of servants. The Pages and Damsels were the children of wealthy families who worked for the Lord to learn good manners. Ordinary servants ranged from the important Steward and groom down to a small boy who turned the roasting spit. Lowly servants slept anywhere they could and in summer started work at 5.30am until 7pm. They had few days off and little pay but were given uniforms called liveries in the Lord's colours and were given meals.

Castles had jesters, minstrels, jugglers and acrobats to entertain the Lord and guests.

Cooks were very busy cooking for banquets and the baker made daily bread - fine white for the Lord and Lady and rough loaves for the servants and horses.

A 'Gong farmer' lived at the castle to manage the poo! The 'gong' dropped through into the moat. The gong farmer would shovel it into baskets and take it off to bury it or spread it on the fields.

The toilets in a medieval castle were just a wooden board with a hole in it, often overhanging outside wall !



My visit to Totnes castle



The steps were put in, in Victorian times; the original steps would have been much steeper.



My visit to Totnes castle II

Did you know?

- Norman comes from 'North-man' or 'Norse-man'.
- The mound or 'motte' is man-made from earth or rock.
- In the 1920s there was a tennis court and garden here!
- In WW2 evacuees camped here and Italian prisoners of war did grounds maintenance.
- The granite pillars at the entrance gate are from an old fruit market house!

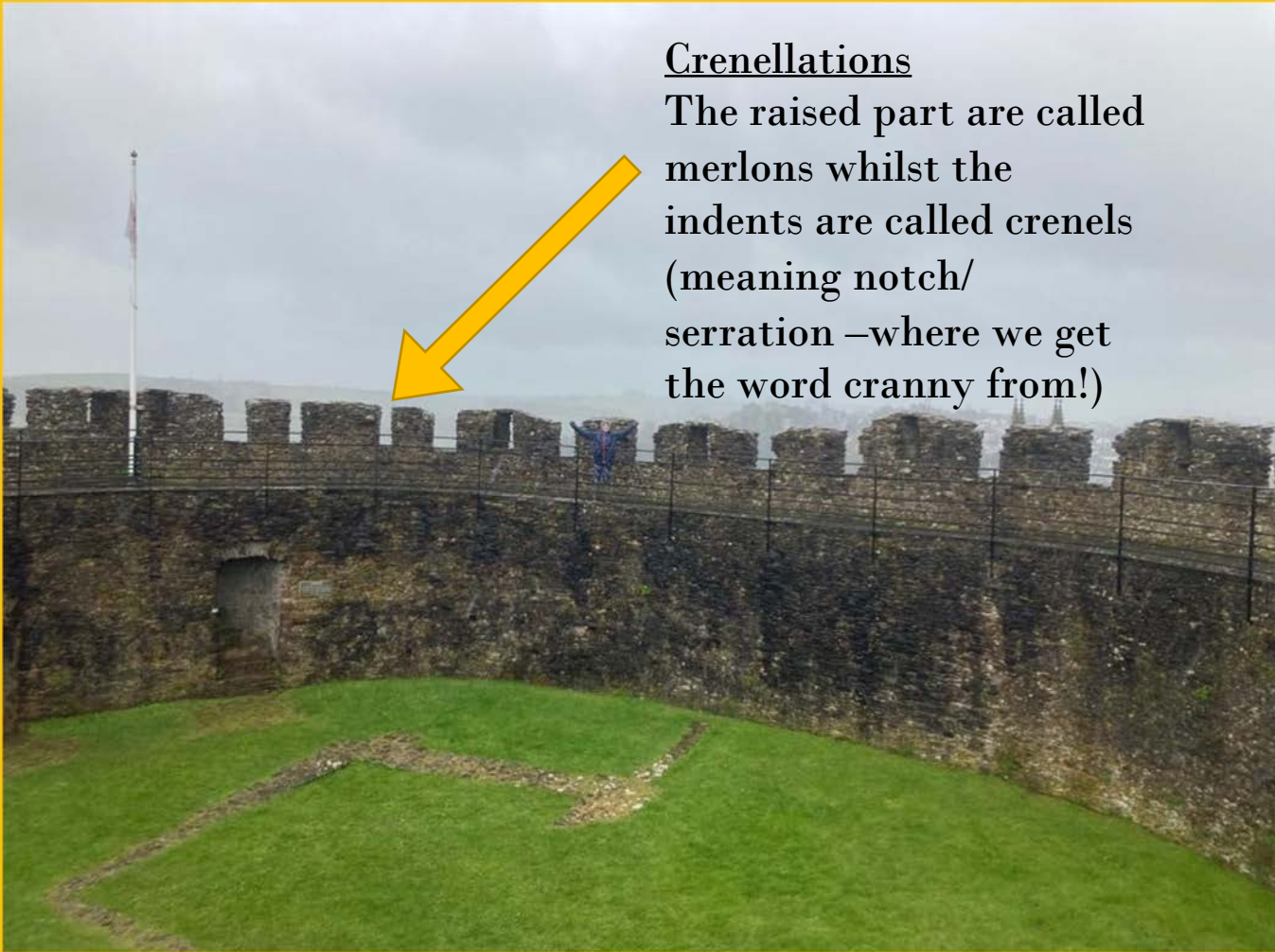


Good view of the river from the top of the castle!

My visit to Totnes castle III

Crenellations

The raised part are called merlons whilst the indents are called crenels (meaning notch/ serration –where we get the word cranny from!)



my visit to Totnes castle IV



A photograph of Totnes Castle ruins on a grassy hill. The castle is a Motte & Bailey style, with a central keep and surrounding walls. The ruins are made of dark stone and are partially overgrown with green grass and some purple flowers. A flagpole with a flag is visible on the left side of the castle. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Conclusion

Totnes castle is a very good example of a Motte & Bailey castle. It is unique because what is left today was built a very long time after the Motte & Bailey style had gone out of fashion. Much larger and stronger castles were being built by then. The keep is not very high and would not have been able to withstand attack by weapons of the day – catapults and trebuchets. This shows that the castle was built for political reasons, as a status symbol, rather than military reasons as the Anglo-Saxon people of the town were not supporters of the Normans. Totnes castle has never seen any fighting; if it had it probably wouldn't still be here!

FINAL FUN FACT ...TOTNES CASTLE HAS A LINK TO KENILWORTH CASTLE!

In 1326 the castle was owned by William de la Zouche ([link to Ashby de la Zouche in Leicestershire](#)). He was part of the barony that helped the Earl of Lancaster imprison King Edward II at Kenilworth Castle. It was whilst the king was at Kenilworth Castle, that he ordered for the keep to be refortified to make himself more important.

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