

Norwich Castle as a Landmark

Henry I

Opinions about the son of William the Conqueror vary. Described as a peace-making, witty and genial man by writers of his time, modern historians have since suggested he was cold, greedy and ruthless. During his reign, Henry developed government, promoting justice and the rule of law. A great patron of the Church, he also contributed to a massive cathedral building programme.

Married twice – to Matilda in 1100 and later to Adeliza of Louvain in 1121, Henry fathered at least 20 illegitimate children. When William (his only legitimate son) died in a shipwreck, it was said the king never smiled again. Henry died in 1135, allegedly after eating lampreys – an eel-like fish forbidden by his doctor.

Norwich Castle keep was built as an awe-inspiring symbol of the king's power and military might.

The mound and keep remain today but are only a small part of the original castle complex. The Normans embarked on earthworks on a huge scale to construct the largest castle mound (motte) in the country and a complex that originally covered 23 acres (9 ha).

The ditches and baileys (open areas between the ditches) still dictate the shape of the modern landscape in roads such as Castle Meadow and Cattle Market Street.

The baileys were used for grazing livestock and housing the industries and dwellings associated with the castle.

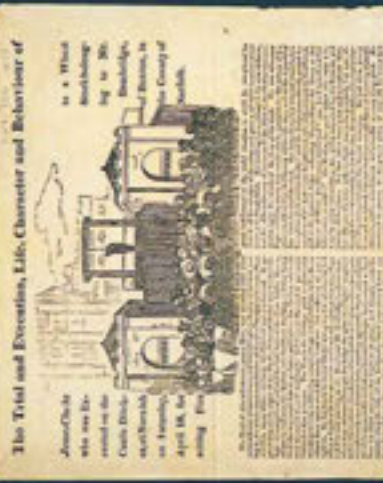
ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT Views from the battlements showing Norwich Cathedral and Norwich City Hall
BACKGROUND Norwich Castle (detail) 1738, S & N Buck engraving

FAIR RIGHT Early 20th-century view of Norwich Castle showing the livestock market in front
FAIR RIGHT BELOW Execution broadsheet advertising an execution outside the castle

The area would have looked rural compared to subsequent urban development. As the city spread, the south bailey became the cattle market, with drovers bringing livestock from around the region.

The Castle Mall, built in the early 1990s, created the 'largest hole in England' by digging out the south bailey. It was an exciting opportunity to understand more about history. The archaeological excavations were the biggest urban archaeological excavations in Europe, taking over two years to complete and covering five acres (2 ha).

Following the keep's demise as a centre of administration, it became a gaol – a symbol of law and punishment for the county. Ensuing centuries eroded the Normandy limestone and from 1834–9, architect Anthony Salvin refaced the castle with Bath limestone. Whilst largely keeping the form and detail he scored mock joints into its surface, transforming the building to how we see it today.



Building the Castle



Lady Emma

Emma was the daughter of William fitz Osbern, a loyal follower of William I. At her wedding in 1075, Emma's new husband, Ralph Guader, the Earl of Norfolk, plotted a rebellion with her brother. William heard of the plot and had Norwich Castle besieged whilst Ralph was abroad raising an army. His young wife bravely defended the castle for three months until she was granted safe conduct out of England.

At the time of the Norman Conquest, Norfolk and Suffolk were the most densely populated counties in England. From about 1067 the Normans demolished at least 98 Saxon homes in Norwich to make way for the castle earthworks within which they built a wooden fort, surrounded by deep, defensive, dry ditches. They installed a garrison of soldiers to keep law and order and prevent rebellion against William the Conqueror.

Once the motte, or mound, had settled and been extended, William (Rufus) II, began the stone keep in about 1094. Following William's death in 1100, his brother Henry I succeeded him and completed the keep by 1121.

Norwich Castle keep was designed to be a lavish royal palace rather than a fortification. The only palace in the region, it was the centre of Norman administration.

Limestone was shipped from Caen in France at vast expense, brought up the River Yare on barges and hoisted up onto the mound using treadmills and a complex system of pulleys.

Originally the external walls of the ground floor were faced in

FAR LEFT TOP Detail of the exterior of the keep showing the lower flint wall
BELOW LEFT Wooden scaffolding was erected using 'put-log' holes in the keep's internal walls
BELOW An artist's impression of Norwich in 1121. The keep was part of a much wider castle complex. To the left is the new Norman French quarter of the city



ABOVE A mason dressing or cutting stone whilst an assistant mixes mortar in a mortar pit

dark flint in contrast to the white limestone of the royal palace on the upper level. The lower floor acted as a pedestal, lifting the palace high above the city. The foundations of its columns can still be seen inside the keep.

The upper floor was divided into two sections. On the north side was the Great Hall, and on the south were the royal quarters comprising a large parlour, bedrooms and a private chapel. Within the outer walls is a walkway (fighting gallery) where soldiers could patrol the building.

The stone keep was just one part of the castle complex. Inside the protective earth banks and ditches were houses, industrial areas and grazing meadows.



Using a plumb line to check the walls are straight: the remains of the columns which once supported the keep's main floor can also be seen





Although the keep was built as a royal palace, no Norman kings ever lived in it. The king's constable and a garrison of soldiers were stationed here and probably lived in buildings outside, surrounded by grazing land.

The keep has been much altered over time but fireplaces, a small kitchen, a washbasin, garderobes (toilets) and an intriguing carving in the chapel remain, offering an insight into daily life in the keep.

Visitors would have been led through the outer gatehouses and up several flights of stairs to the elaborate, carved archway leading into the Great Hall.

The main floor (now a balcony) was a mixture of public and private spaces.

The day's business, feasts and entertaining took place in the Great Hall and if there was a large gathering, people would also have slept here on straw mattresses.

The king's constable had luxurious private chambers with the comfort of a wall fireplace in the main chamber, walls painted with lavish decorations, fitted washbasin and separate bedchambers and garderobes.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle recorded the only time Henry was known to visit Norwich (1121):

'On the eve of the Nativity, there was a very violent wind all over the county and the effects were very noticeable. In this year, King Henry spent Christmas at Norwich and Easter in Northampton.'



Carved bone pin

This exquisite object, possibly a bobbin used for embroidery, was found beneath the floor of the castle keep when a new drain was laid in 1972. Made of walrus ivory, it has a human head at one end and a dragon's head at the other. These heads are Romanesque and date the object to around 1100-25.

FAR LEFT Computerised reconstruction of the lavish decoration in the Great Hall in 1121

BELOW A Stunning copper alloy belt buckle decorated with animal heads found at Bromholm Priory



FAR LEFT

Communal toilet facilities – the Norman garderobes

LEFT The king's musicians. A detail showing some of the figures in the giant model of the keep

FAR LEFT BOTTOM Knights fighting – an unusual choice of carving in the chapel

BELOW One of the spiral staircases in the Norman keep



ABOVE Finding out what the Norman chapel originally looked like
RIGHT Using the touchscreen to discover what the keep was like in 1121