

EMAS Easter Study Tour

Castles of North Wales



Beaumaris Castle

24 – 30 March 2016

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Itinerary

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| Thursday, 24 March | Leave London Embankment; Chester Castle; arrive Caernarfon |
| Friday, 25 March | Flint Castle; Ruthin Castle; Rhuddlan Castle |
| Saturday, 26 March | Denbigh Castle; Hope Castle; Holt Castle |
| Sunday, 27 March | Dolwyddelan Castle; Criccieth Castle; Harlech Castle |
| Monday, 28 March | Caernarfon Castle and city walls; Segontium Roman Fort |
| Tuesday, 29 March | Conwy Castle and city walls; Beaumaris Castle |
| Wednesday, 30 March | Leave Caernarfon; Chirk Castle; arrive London Embankment |

N.B. Descriptions of castle in this booklet are listed in order of the sequence in which they are to be visited

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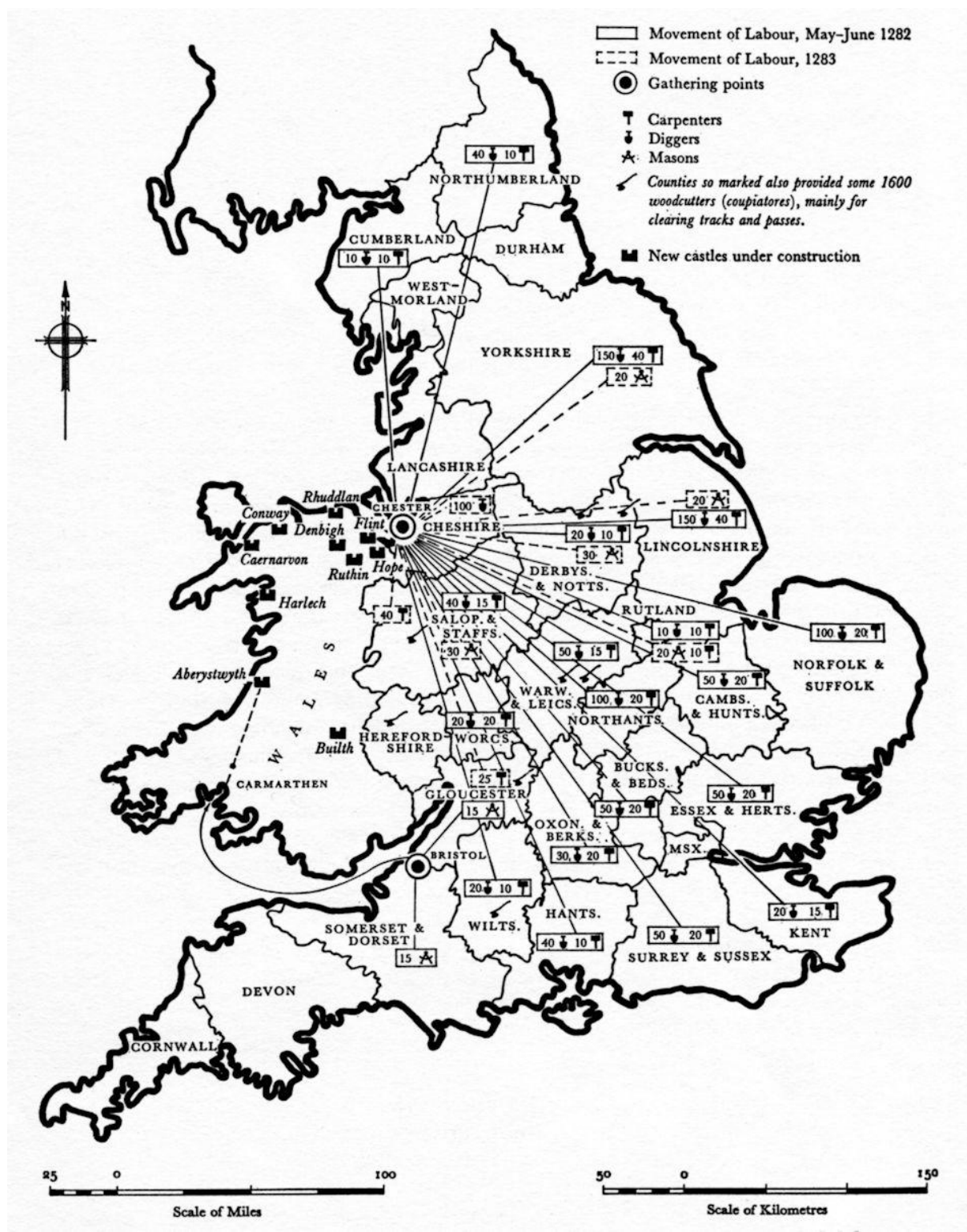


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Impressment of Workmen for the King's Works in North Wales 1282-3



On 17 November 1276, King Edward I announced his decision to go against Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (c. 1223 – 11 December 1282) as a rebel and a disturber of his peace (*Calendar of Close Rolls 1272-9 p.359*).

This decision resulted in the commencement of a massive programme of castle-building.

During the next twenty years ten new castles: Builth, Aberystwyth, Flint, Rhuddlan, Ruthin, Hope, Conwy, Caernarfon, Harlech and Beaumaris were started and carried on towards completion.

The majority of these castles were major works, some of them with substantial town fortifications attached.

At the same time, four new 'lordship' castles: Hawarden, Denbigh, Holt and Chirk were constructed.

Royal building on a major scale also took place at three of the native Welsh castles which fell into the hands of the Crown when they were captured: Dolwyddelan, Bere and Criccieth.

Five of the existing border castles: Chester, Oswestry, Shrewsbury, Montgomery and St. Briavel's also had major work undertaken.

The building was undertaken in three main stages, corresponding to the military campaigns of 1277, 1282-3 and 1294-5.

These building programmes required a vast impressment of workmen, the majority of whom entered Wales via Chester. (see the plan on the preceding page.)

Castles of the war of 1277

Builth, Aberystwyth, Flint, Ruddlan, Ruthin, Hawarden

Castles of the war of 1282-1283

Hope, Denbigh, Holt, Chirk, Dolwyddelan, Conwy, Harlech, Criccieth, Castell y Bere, Caernarfon

Castles following the Welsh rebellion of 1294

Beaumaris

Chester Castle



Chester Castle was founded by William the Conqueror in 1070 and became the administrative centre of the Earldom of Chester. The first earth and timber 'motte and bailey' castle probably only occupied the area of the inner bailey. In the twelfth century it was rebuilt in stone and the outer bailey added.

During the reigns of Henry III and Edward I the castle served as the military headquarters for the conquest of Wales and much building was carried out, especially in the outer bailey. In the later medieval period the monarch rarely stayed at the castle, but it continued to serve as the centre for county administration.



An Engraving by Buck Brothers of Chester Castle in 1747

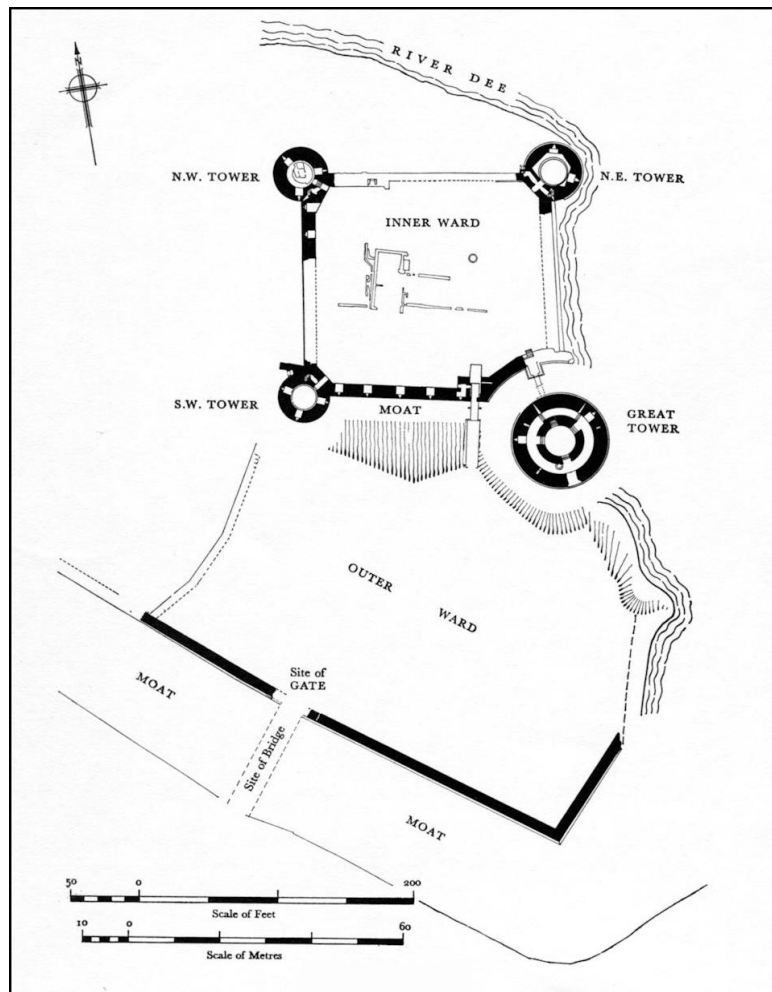
Flint Castle

Building work at Flint began in 1277 under Richard L'Engenour, who later became Mayor of Chester in 1304. The castle and its earthworks were built by 1,800 labourers and masons using local millstone grit ashlar and sandstone.

In November 1280, the Savoyard master mason James of Saint George began overseeing construction at Flint for Edward I. He remained at the castle for 17 months. James of Saint George then moved onto Rhuddlan to oversee its completion.

The plan of Flint Castle is rather less advanced than the castles that were built later. Instead of the proper concentric layout used in

Ruddlan, for example, Flint relies on a massive great keep, or donjon, situated within its own moat, similar to the layout of Pembroke Castle.



Ruthin Castle

The construction of Ruthin Castle was started in 1277 by Dafydd, the brother of Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, but he forfeited the castle when he rebelled against King Edward I with his brother.

Edward's queen, Eleanor, is recorded as being in residence at Ruthin in 1281.

Very little now remains of this castle, as a hotel has been built on the site.

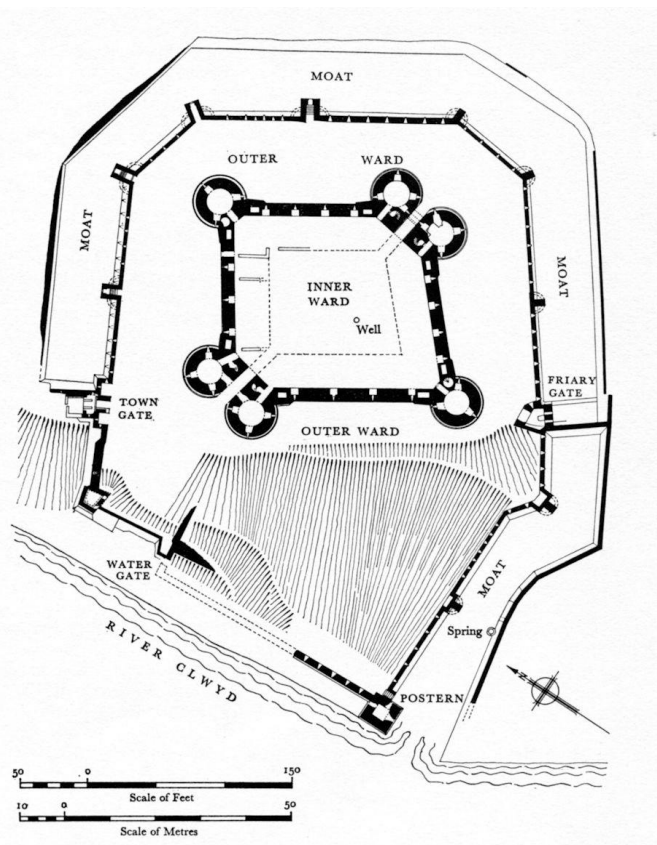


Rhuddlan Castle

Building began at Rhuddlan in 1277. The castle was built at an important crossing at the mouth of the river Clwyd and Edward had the river straightened and deepened to allow ships access right up to the castle walls.

Rhuddlan was designed by Edward's chief castle builder, James St. George and is a fine example of concentric castle construction.

The low, open-backed towers on the outer curtain wall give no defence to an enemy should they be taken, while the massive inner curtain wall with its strong towers gives enormous protection and the double gateways allow for an attack to the rear of a besieging army.



Denbigh Castle

Denbigh Castle, was built in two phases; the first period started in 1282. However, in 1294 Denbigh was attacked and taken during the revolt of Madog ap Llywelyn halting the work on the incomplete town and castle.

Denbigh was recaptured in 1295 and Henry de Lacy substantially revised the plans in the second phase of building work. This time the inner ward's curtain wall was refortified with thicker and higher walls.



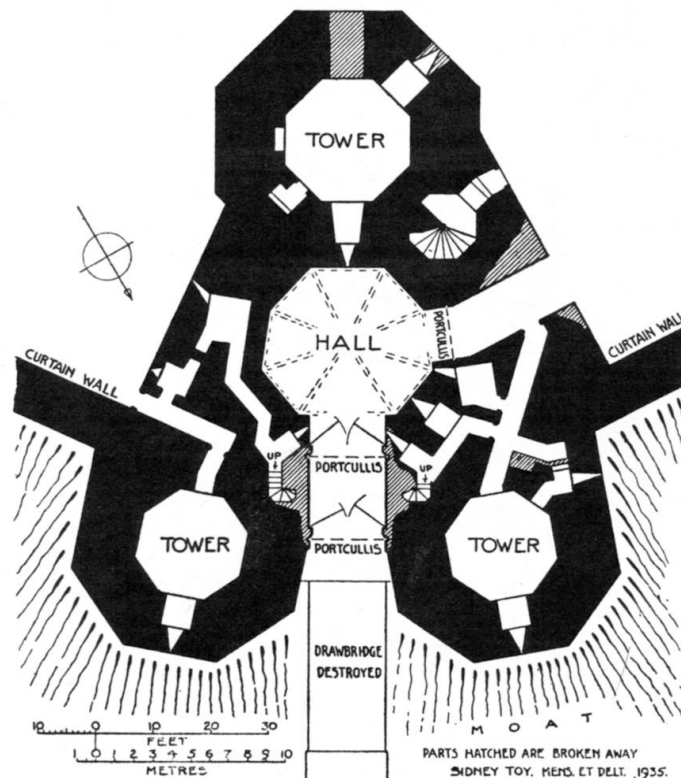
The main gatehouse of Denbigh Castle was built during the latter years of the thirteenth century. It is now in ruins, but was a powerful and skilfully designed structure. It consisted of three towers in a triangular form, grouped around a central hall.

Two of the towers flank the external gateway while the third is located within the bailey.

The gateway passage is in two sections, the first leading from the external gate to the central hall, and the second from the hall to the bailey gate.

The hall was a large octagonal apartment with stone vaulting and the construction is such that a right-angled turn must be made to reach the second passage.

The outer section of the gate was defended by two portcullises and two doors. On gaining the central hall, one is under fire from five meutrières in the surrounding walls, the one in the south tower directly facing the entrance passage.



Hope Castle (Caergwrle Castle)

Hope Castle (also known as Caergwrle Castle) was probably first built by Dafydd ap Gruffydd, in lands given to him by Edward I after the first Welsh campaign of 1277, in recognition of his help in their capture from his brother Llywelyn.



A single curtain wall, which survives on the east, is fronted by a substantial ditch with an outer counterscarp bank; there are towers of English pattern on the north and south-east and a round keep at the south.

Holt Castle

Work on Holt Castle began in the 13th century during the Welsh Wars, the castle was sited on the Welsh-English border by the banks of the River Dee.

In the medieval period, the five-towered fortress was actually known as *Castrum Leonis* or Castle Lyons because it had a lion motif carved into the stonework above its main gate.



In the 17th century, almost all the stonework was removed from the site; only the base of the sandstone foundation remains.

Dolwyddelan Castle

In the opening weeks of 1283, Edward's armies moved from the Clwyd to the upper Conwy, their main objective being the castle at Dolwyddelan. The site had symbolic significance, as it was believed to be the birthplace of Llywelyn the Great.

The castle consists of two rectangular towers linked by an irregular curtain wall on the highest point of a narrow rocky ridge.

Dolwyddelan fell to the English on 18th January and rebuilding work started the same day. The first construction was a complete lodging, which almost certainly refers to the two-storey apartment in the North West corner of the courtyard.



Criccieth Castle

Criccieth Castle was built originally by Llywelyn the Great. Edward I's forces took the castle some 50 years later and made a number of improvements, including remodelling a tower to take stone-throwing engines.



Owain Glyn Dwr sealed Criccieth's fate when his troops captured and burnt the castle in the early years of the 15th century. This was to be the last major Welsh rebellion against the English.

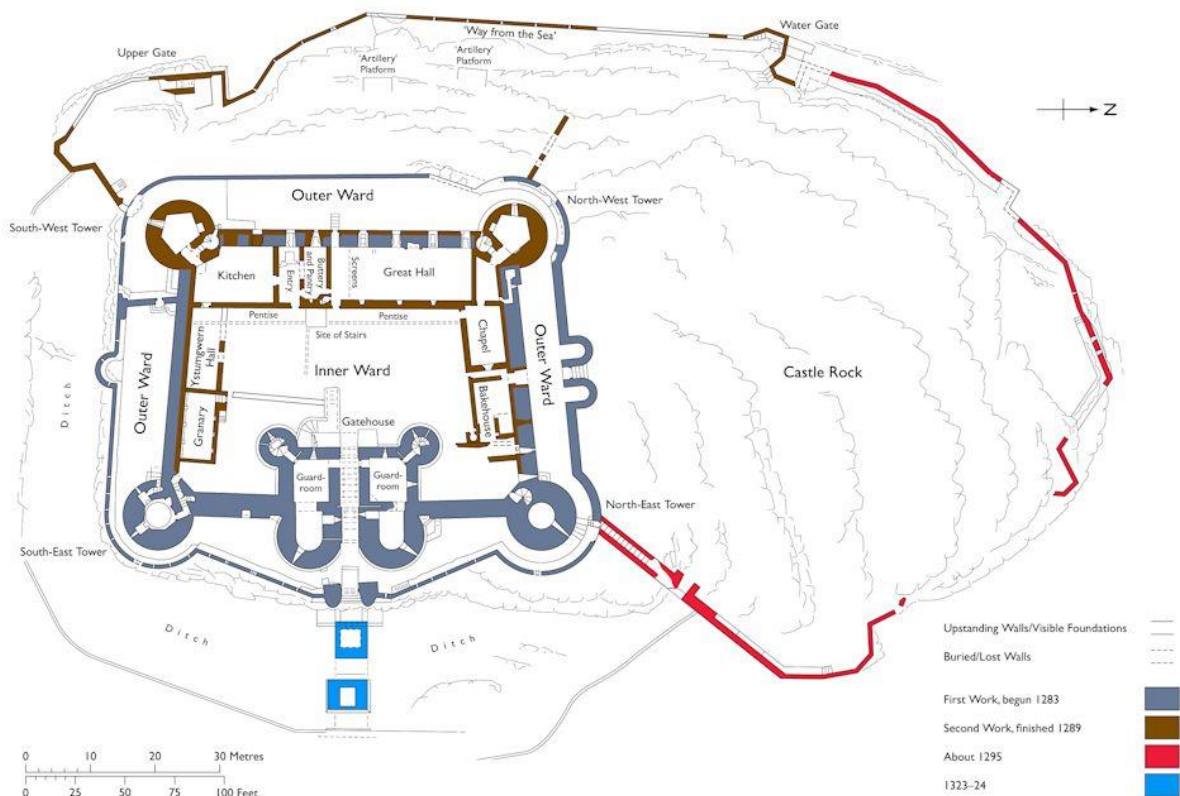
Harlech Castle

Harlech first appears in the records towards the end of April 1283, when a force of 560 infantry led by Sir Otto de Grandson marched there from Castell-y-Bere. Work on the castle probably started soon after this as there is a record of two panniers containing £100 being sent from Cymer Abbey to Harlech “for the works there”.

Edward’s works at Harlech continued until 1289, the final cost being £8,190 – an enormous sum in the late 13th century.



The gatehouse at Harlech represents a considerable advance in plan. The approach from the east was over a bridge with a drawbridge at either end. Then there is the outer gate and then the main gate with its long tunnel entrance protected by three portcullises, two doors and eight wide machicolations.



Caernarfon Castle

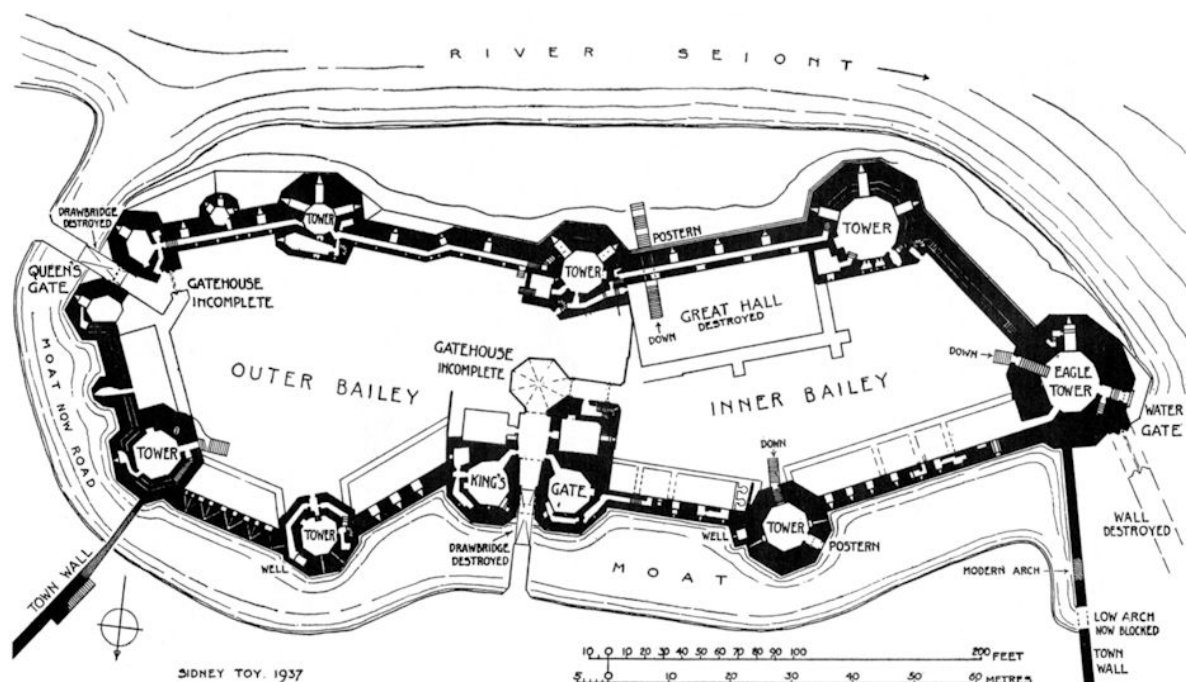
In 1283, after defeating Llywelyn, Prince of Wales (d.1282), and Llywelyn's brother Dafydd (d. 1283), Edward I set about consolidating his gains in Wales by building a series of immense castles, including those at Caernarfon, Conwy and Beaumaris.



The new castle at Caernarfon was designed to be the seat of Edward's government in Wales and as his official residence. In keeping with its special role the design of the castle differed from that of the other castles being built at the time. Its great stone walls with bands of a different colour and its hexagonal towers were in the style of the great Roman city of Constantinople.

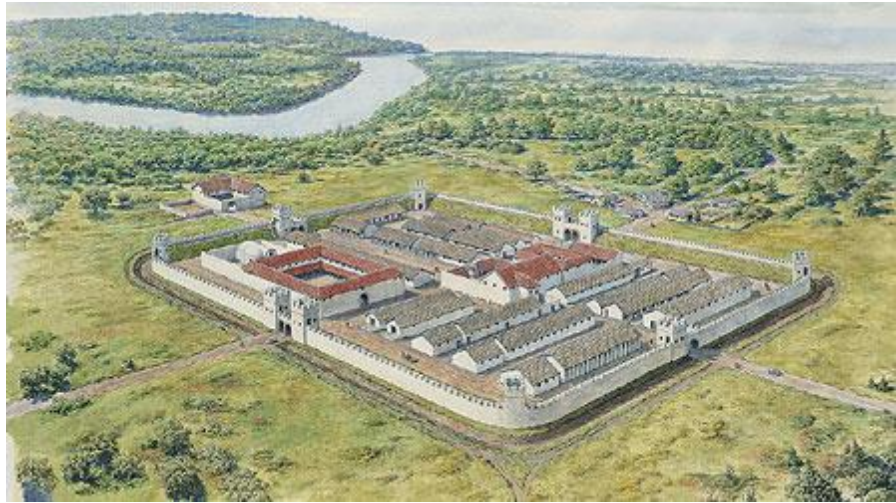
Caernarfon Castle is shaped like an hour glass, originally divided into two wards by a cross wall at the narrowest point. The massive castle walls are honeycombed by continuous wall-passages at two separate levels. These are well equipped with arrow-loops.

The curtain wall is punctuated by nine towers and two great gatehouses, though neither of the two gates was ever fully finished. The defences of the castle were formidable. In order to gain access to the courtyard, visitors had to cross two drawbridges, pass through five heavy doors and walk under six portcullises, the entire way protected by arrow slits and murder-holes.



Segontium Roman Fort

Sometime in the late 70s AD a Roman auxiliary fort was established on a high hill overlooking the Menai Strait, looking across towards Anglesey. The location makes Segontium the most north-westerly fort in the Roman Empire, and headquarters for north west Wales.



The Romans had only just managed to subdue rebellious Welsh tribes in the north west of Wales, and wanted a strong military presence to reinforce their control over the area. The fort was extended and modified over the next 3 centuries and was not finally abandoned until about 394, making it the longest-occupied Roman fort in Wales.

Excavations have revealed the remains of timber barrack blocks dating to the late 1st century, with space for up to 1000 soldiers. By 120 AD the garrison had been sizeably reduced. In the middle of the 2nd century a large courtyard was built, with its own bath house, perhaps as an official residence for an important local official, perhaps one responsible for overseeing mining in the area.

It is known that by the 3rd century the fort was garrisoned by the 1st Cohort of Sunice, an infantry regiment with about 500 men. The garrison continued to shrink during the 3rd and 4th centuries, when Segontium was used mainly to counter the threat of pirates in the Menai and along the north Wales coastline. Segontium is generally considered to have been listed among the 28 cities of Britain listed in the History of the Britons traditionally ascribed to Nennius either as Cair Segeint or Cair Custoeint.



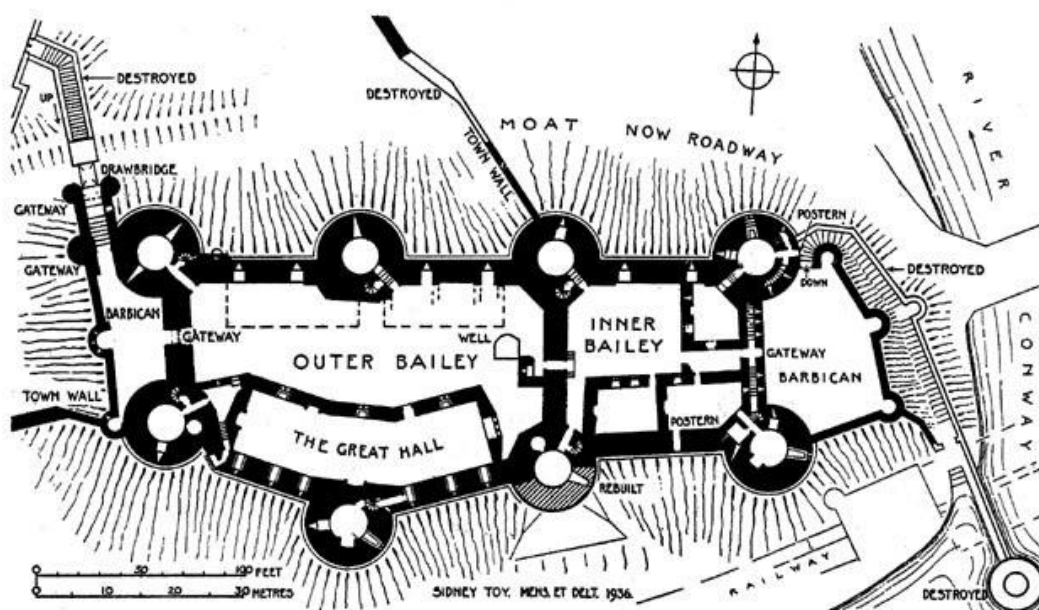
Conwy Castle

Edward's troops reached Conway in the second week of March 1283. As far as we know, there were only two groups of buildings of importance here at the time. One was the Cistercian abbey of St Mary, which was the main royal foundation of the northern princes and the burial-place of Llewelyn the Great and others of his lineage. The other site of importance was the princes' residence, or Hall of Llewelyn as it was referred to in later documents.

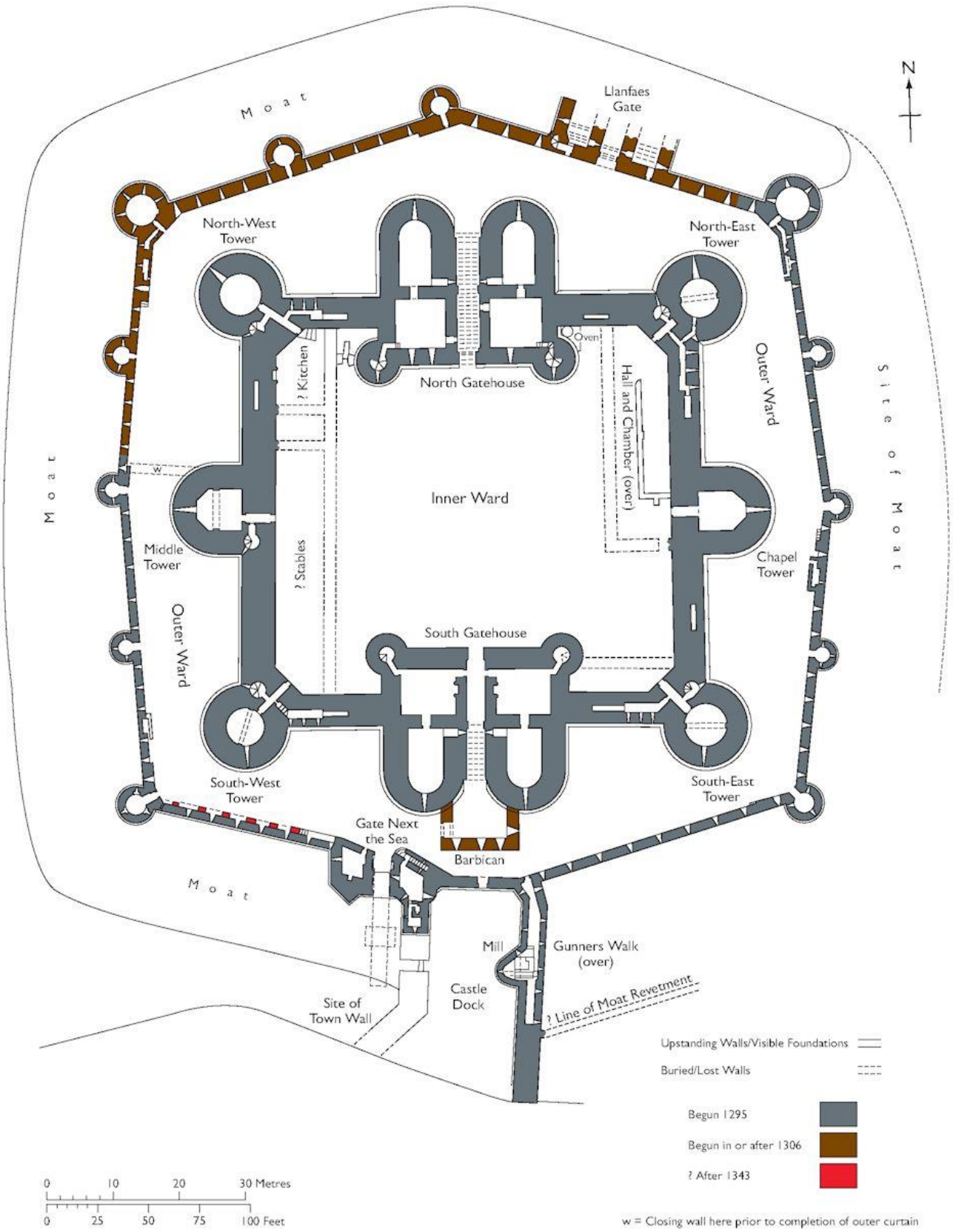


In addition to the political significance of the site, the east side of the abbey site sloped gently to the river Conwy, with its sheltered anchorage on tidal water. Close to the confluence of the river Conwy and the river Gyffin the ground rose steeply, to end in a narrow spur of rock. From this point the high ground controls the crossing of the river Conwy, at the eastern edge of Gwynedd. As such, it was an ideal situation for the founding of a castle and its associated town. Moreover, the Hall and the abbey buildings provided accommodation for the occupying forces.

Edward I personally oversaw the planning of the castle and town early in 1283, and the work was supervised by Master James of St George. In summer 1285, 1,500 workmen were employed, and two years later the work was largely completed. In such an exposed position, the building soon began to decay. In 1332 it was said to be not fit for the king to stay in. In 1346 the buildings were re-roofed in lead. In the great hall range, stone arches strong enough to support a lead roof replaced the previous timber trusses. The castle was seized by followers of Owain Glyn Dwr in 1401. Little maintenance seems to have been carried out until the castle was repaired by supporters of the king in the Civil War. After that, the roof was removed.



Plan of Conwy Castle.



Beaumaris Castle

Beaumaris Castle

In the 13th century the principal port and commercial centre of Anglesey was the Welsh royal manor of Llanfaes near the northern end of the Menai Strait. In 1237 Llewelyn the Great founded a Franciscan friary here and under Llewelyn ap Gruffydd (1246-82) the town achieved considerable importance.



Sir Roger Pilsdon, the sheriff of Anglesey, was one of the victims of the Welsh revolt of 30 September 1294. The reoccupation of Anglesey took a foremost place in the king's plans which included the construction of a castle in order to put English rule there on the same basis as the other shires. Late in 1294 a force of 500 men in 12 ships landed in Anglesey. On 19 February William of Dogmersfield and Robert of Rye were sent from Conwy to Chester to recruit 300 diggers, 30 carpenters and 20 masons to begin the work. On 17 April Master James received 60s for necessities 'for the new castle'. In the course of the next six months an amazing £6736 was spent on 'the new castle of Beau Mareys'.

Because Beaumaris stands on level ground on the sea shore, the layout of the castle is much more regular than castles that have had to be adapted to fit the available defensive high ground. For this reason, Beaumaris has often been referred to as the epitome of concentric defences, and Arnold Taylor described it as Britain's "most perfect example of symmetrical concentric planning"

It consists of two lines of fortifications which form the inner and outer baileys and it is surrounded by a moat except at one point on the south side where the sea enters to form the castle dock.



John Speed's map of Beaumaris 1610

The inner bailey is almost square with walls that are c. 4.75 m (c. 15 ft 6 in) thick and is defended by six towers and two opposed large 'Harlech-type' gatehouses. Each gatehouse was defended with two doors and three portcullises, with machicolations in the gateway passage. The south gateway is further protected by a barbican. The wall walk is continuous, except at the gate houses where there are doorways on each side. Both the gatehouses contained large halls and rooms.

Chirk Castle

Chirk Castle, has been occupied virtually continuously as a castle and stately home for almost 700 years.

The castle was built in 1295 by Roger Mortimer de Chirk, uncle of Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March as part of King Edward I's chain of fortresses across the north of Wales. It guards the entrance to the Ceiriog Valley and is the successor to two mottes that were in the area. It was the administrative centre for the Marcher Lordship of Chirkland.



The castle may have originally been envisaged as a rectangular enclosure with towers at the corners and halfway along each side. If so, only the northern half of the design survives, stopping beyond the central towers on the east and west. The simple gate through the eastern part of the north wall is probably original. Additional outer defences were dismantled during later landscaping.



The south curtain was completed on the present line early in the 15th century, under Thomas, earl of Arundel, probably against Owain Glyndwr's forces, who had strong local support. The chapel in the present south-east corner, possibly begun in the later 14th century, and the adjoining hall are the earliest surviving stone rooms outside the towers. Timber structures probably stood against the other walls.