

## **Bridgwater Castle: How It Was Built and Who Built It**

This presentation was based on the writer's research into Bridgwater Castle as part of his Ph.D. in archaeology and history on Bridgwater and its morphology from its origins to 1700. The castle was originally built by the ambitious Devon magnate, William de Brewer. De Brewer gave Bridgwater its status as an Anglo-Norman borough, and received a license to crenellate with the town's charter in 1200. He built it as part of a Norman landscape scheme comprising a castle, park and town, similar to that at Devizes. The archaeological evidence, from Ellis' 1985 excavation of the West Quay, for example, is for a developed stone castle. The historical evidence suggests that this was the last of two phases of construction. The castle appears to have originally been a motte and bailey castle that was rebuilt in stone in the late fourteenth century.

The castle mound, turrets and a palisade are mentioned in 1242 and 1246, suggesting it was a motte and bailey castle. The castle's chapel to St. Mark was stone, and other buildings may also have been. The towers excavated in 1985 at the West Quay were stone, as was the Watergate. Combined stone and timber defences have been found in other castles, such as Launceston.

By the late fourteenth century the motte and bailey castle had been replaced by a stone enclosure castle. The castle was now held by the Mortimers, who used it to administer their estates. It now had a stone curtain wall, corner towers, and an inner and outer bailey. Dividing the inner and outer bailey was a stone wall running along the eastern edge of King Square. Traces of the wall of the inner bailey have been found in Crowpill Road and Queen Street. This wall was protected by two moats running either side of it and a keep-gatehouse. This had two drawbridges leading to the outer and inner baileys. The castle also had an oak palisade. The main entrance lay across the castle ditch in what is now the York buildings. It may have had a barbican. This led across a drawbridge to the outer bailey. The castle also had a horsemill, kitchen and oven, dungeon, cellar, chambers for visitors, stable, barn and dovecot. It also had a hall, as well as a lodge by the gate and animal pound, a well, and possibly kennels for dogs and weasel hutches. The constable occupied another lodge in what is now King Square.

Its rebuilding occurred in the late fourteenth century, probably around 1394-5. The castle was described as in ruins in 1360. Some of the changes simply followed general changes in castle design. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century the lords and their families generally moved out of the castle keep into more comfortable halls. Mottes were generally levelled and most castles also had two baileys. It may also have been built in preparation for an attack on the aristocracy by the king. Richard II's reign was marked by tension between the Crown and the aristocracy. In 1394 Richard launched an expedition to restore English rule in Ireland. Bridgwater had extensive trade connections with Ireland. The castle may have been strengthened in order to support Richard's campaign, or alternatively protect Bridgwater from invasion from Ireland should the peace and *rapprochement* between the King and the aristocracy end.

In the event, Bridgwater was not attacked and the castle experienced a long period of gradual decline before it was slighted following during the Civil War. Its keep-gatehouse was turned into the castellated mansion depicted by John Chubb, occupied first by Henry Harvey and then by Duke of Chandos' steward and a school teacher in the early eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, the history of Bridgwater's castle shows not only the processes through which castle's changed and developed, but also their importance as a vital part of medieval town planning and display.

I would like to thank Miles Peterson for his help in reconstructing the Castle's history.

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