



Fig. 7. The Great Chamber.

A door led from the chapel (L on fig. 4) into the Great Chamber (K). The constable would have used this as an office and have entertained his visitors here (see fig. 7). We know that this room was special because it had a fireplace set in the wall with a chimney and a marble washbasin. Next to this chamber was the Privy Chamber (I on fig. 4) or private living room where the constable would have slept and where his family would have lived if he had brought them with him to the castle (see fig. 8). A decorated doorway led from the privy chamber into a short wall-passage which led to a spiral stair in the corner of the building (C on fig. 4). Another door led into a lobby (J) next to the privy chamber. In the passage wall between the two doorways was a small recess where a sentry could stand to guard the door into the privy chamber. This was particularly important when the king was staying here.



Fig. 8. The Privy Chamber.

Beneath the first floor, at the level of the ground outside on the mound, was a basement. Its floor was nearly 2m (about 8 ft.) below the present wooden floor in the keep which did not exist in AD 1200. On either side of the central dividing wall were stone arches which supported the first floor. The bases for some of these arches are still there below the wooden floor. Most of the basement was used for storage of food and arms. There had to be large stocks in case of a siege. Everything had to be carried down the two spiral stairs (C on fig. 4) which were the only way into the stores. Beneath the chapel (L) and the well-room (M) were two small rooms used as dungeons. In 1200 the only way into these two rooms was through trapdoors in the floors of the rooms above. There must have been long ladders from the chapel and the well-room down to the floor of the dungeons, which were some 6m (20 ft.) below the first floor. The basement was lit by narrow slit windows about 3m (10 ft.) above the ground. Those on the south side (the bridge side) of the keep are still in use.

The stone keep is one of the largest Norman keeps in England. The length north to south is about 28m (nearly 93 feet) and about 33m (nearly 108 feet) east to west including the Bigod Tower (see fig. 4). It is nearly 21½m (about 70 feet) high to the top of the battlements. The walls, which are about 3m (10 ft.) thick, were built of flint and mortar. 18th century drawings show that the lower parts of the keep wall were faced on the outside with flint, while the upper parts were faced with stone brought from Caen in Normandy. The same type of stone was used to build Norwich Cathedral. Over the centuries the walls of the keep became very decayed, and in 1834 the county authorities, who were then responsible for the building, arranged for the outside walls to be refaced with new stone. This work was finished in 1839 and is why the outside of the keep is in such good condition today. It seems that the original carved decoration on the keep walls was reproduced fairly accurately.

In the 13th century the castle lost its importance as a military stronghold and its use as the County Gaol was its main function, although it also remained a centre of administration for Norfolk. It was used as a prison for over 600 years until 1887. In 1345 the king gave the castle fee, except for the Shirehouse and the keep and its mound, to the citizens of Norwich. People gradually filled in the great ditches and quarried into the banks for sand and gravel. In 1738 most of the surviving bailey defences were flattened to make the area more suitable for a livestock market. New prison buildings were added on top of the mound in the 1790's and rebuilt 1822-28. The city of Norwich bought the keep and the prison buildings in 1887. They were opened as the Castle Museum in 1894.

Norfolk Museums Service Information Leaflet
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Reconstruction drawings by Nick Arber.

Plan of the Castle Fee drawn by Sally Brown based on information from Norfolk Archaeological Unit (Norwich Office) and plan of first floor of keep based on plan by P. J. Drury.

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NORWICH CASTLE

A GUIDE TO THE CASTLE AS IT WAS IN ABOUT AD 1200

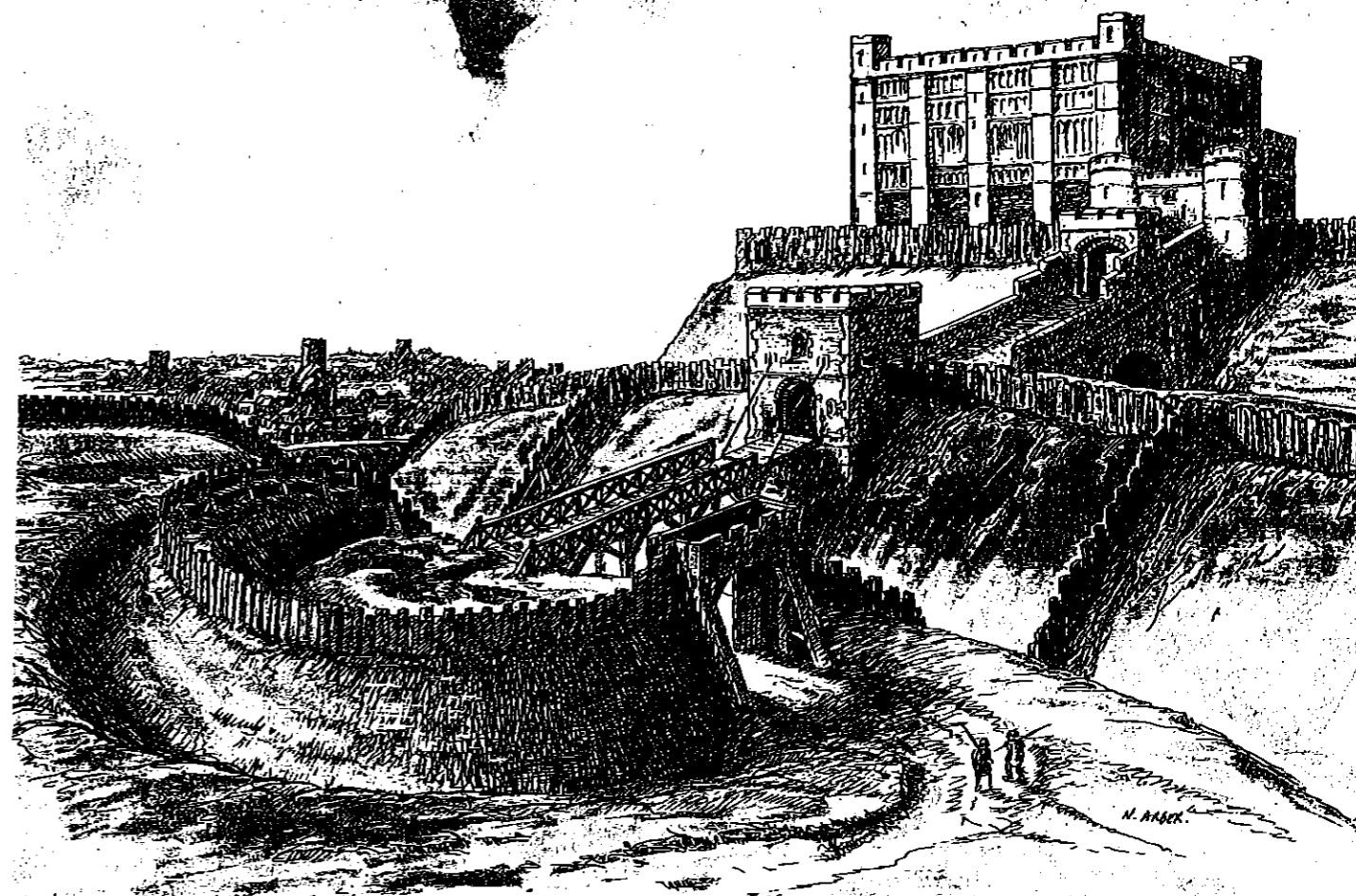


Fig. 1. The barbican and other defences of the castle soon after 1200.

When local people talk about 'the Castle' today they usually mean the square stone tower or keep which forms part of the present museum buildings. Originally, however, this keep was only one part of a much larger stronghold. The stone keep stood at the heart of an elaborate system of defences and was the last refuge at the time of attack. The first castle on this site was put up soon after the Norman Conquest of 1066 and was built of earth and timber. However, about 1100 they began to build the present stone tower; it took about 20 years to complete. We have a fairly clear picture of the castle and its surroundings in about 1200 although there are still many facts which we do not know or which are uncertain.

Norwich Castle was a royal castle, the property of the king and paid for by him, and it was not, therefore, under the control of the city. It was built as a fortress, but it was also a palace where the king could stay when he visited Norwich, and the administrative centre for Norfolk and East Suffolk (a sort of medieval county hall). The man in charge of the castle was the constable. He was appointed by the king and was in charge of the soldiers. In 1193 there were seventy-five knights and men-at-arms (horsemen and foot soldiers) stationed in the castle, but

we do not know if this was the usual size of the garrison in peace-time. The Sheriff of Norfolk and of Suffolk was responsible for the administration of the two counties. Sometimes the sheriff was also constable, but often the posts were separate.

All the land closely surrounding the castle belonged to it and was called the Castle Fee (see fig. 2). The boundary of the fee was possibly marked by a ditch or by posts. Those who lived within this boundary were tenants of the Castle Fee and enjoyed certain privileges. If, for example, a tenant of the fee committed a crime in the city he was entitled to be tried by a special jury made up of other tenants of the fee, who would very likely acquit him. Naturally the citizens of Norwich resented these privileges. On the other hand, if the castle were attacked, the tenants of the fee were expected to join the garrison and help in its defence.

If we had visited the castle in about 1200 we would first have passed through a large gateway near the Eastern Counties Newspaper building (E.C.N. on fig. 2). We would have found ourselves inside a large horse-shoe shaped area called the bailey, which was protected by a

bank and ditch. All this area, right up to the castle ditch, forms part of the Castle Mall Development.

Archaeologists have been able to excavate this area, but they will have to study the finds before they know what buildings stood in the bailey in 1200. There were several banks and ditches between the entrance gatehouse and the keep on its mound or motte. The barbican, a large horse-shoe shaped bank and ditch, probably crossed by a drawbridge, was another line of defence which protected the bridge leading to the top of the motte (see fig. 1). This drawbridge was controlled from a gatehouse, originally of wood but rebuilt in stone probably soon after 1200. All around the great motte was a dry ditch which never held water. The earth taken from this ditch was used to build up the mound. Through the ages most of the ditch has been filled in, but one section remains where the Castle Gardens are today.

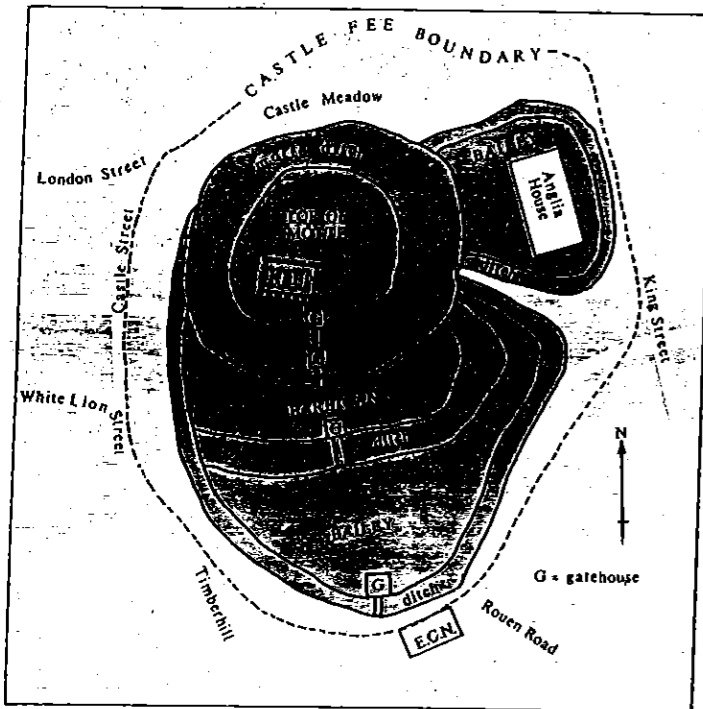


Fig. 2. Plan of the Castle Fee and defences.

After going through the barbican gateway we would have begun to cross a bridge over the motte ditch. Only the first part of the surface of this bridge was fixed. Halfway across the bridge was a gatehouse. Between this and yet another gatehouse, which stood on the edge of the mound, the bridge was hollow. Here the roadway of the bridge was formed by a drawbridge which could be pulled up during an attack, leaving a 6m (20 ft.) gap in the bridge and a deep pit below.

The big stone-built gatehouse which stood at the top of the bridge was new in about 1200. The bases of its towers can still be seen on either side of the bridge. The last three of the dungeons which you can visit today were underneath the gatehouse and were part of its structure. Originally they were probably used mainly as stores. Around the top of the mound, roughly where the iron railings are now, was a wooden palisade. This was replaced later by a stone wall and towers. The mound or motte was very large and the keep was built in one corner where it could overlook the new Norman market-place. There were other buildings on the mound. Their stone foundations have been discovered but nobody knows exactly what these buildings were used for. One was probably the stone chapel of St. Nicholas. The sheriff may have had a special building there, until a Shirehouse

was built near the main gateway in 1271. The other buildings were probably workshops and perhaps the kitchen. Medieval kitchens were often away from the main building (even in stone castles) because of the risk of fire.

The entrance to the keep was in the Bigod tower (B on fig. 4) at the top of an external staircase leading to the first floor level (A on fig. 4). When the castle was attacked it was a great advantage to have the entrance at this level. The original staircase was pulled down about 1800, but in 1978 a new staircase was built so it is again possible to enter the keep through the great round-headed doorway (see fig. 3).

After passing through the doorway we would have found ourselves at last inside the keep. Where the wooden balcony is now there was a floor going right across the keep. In the early days all the living quarters were on this floor. Overhead was a two-pitched roof, the same shape as the present roof, but in those days it was covered with lead. There were spiral staircases in the two opposite corners of the keep (C on fig. 4) going from the basement to the battlements. Linking these stairs is a passage running through the walls at about 3m (10 ft.) above the level of the first floor. The passage was used to get from one side of the building to the other without going through private rooms. It was also the only way people could get at the great wooden shutters of the windows which lit the first floor rooms. From the battlements the soldiers had an excellent view of the city and could watch all the approaches to the castle. The battlements you see today are not the original ones. These were removed soon after 1700.

Returning to the first floor, the visitor would have seen a solid wall across the centre of the keep, instead of the big open 19th century arches we see today. The first floor on either side of this wall was divided into a number of rooms. There is evidence that the builders changed their minds about the size and shape of some of these rooms after they had built up to the level of the first floor.

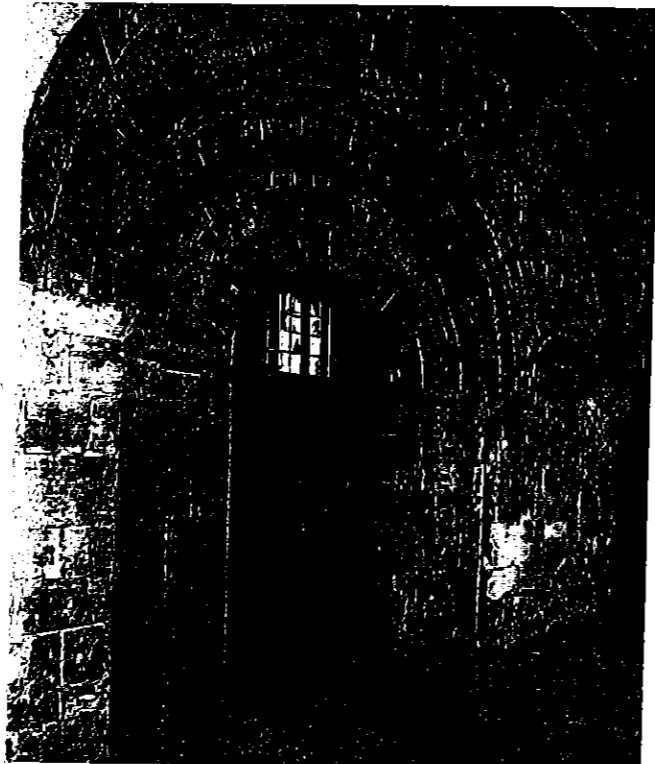
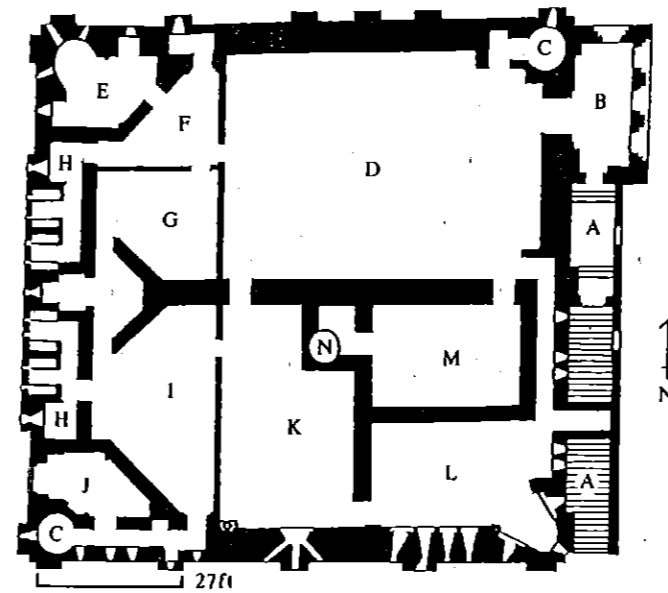


Fig. 3. The grand entrance in the Bigod Tower.



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| A. Stairs to keep | H. Garderobes |
| B. Bigod tower | I. Privy chamber |
| C. Spiral stairs | J. Lobby |
| D. Great Hall | K. Great Chamber |
| E. Private kitchen | L. Chapel |
| F. Lobby | M. Well room |
| G. Pantry | N. Castle well |

Fig. 4. Plan of the first floor rooms in the keep.

The main doorway opened into the Great Hall (D on fig. 4). This was a large room where the ordinary soldiers lived and had their meals (see fig. 5). Usually the constable would join them for dinner, normally eaten between 10 am and noon. Meals were served on trestle tables which could be cleared away afterwards. The soldiers would have slept on straw mattresses laid on the floor of the great hall. The hall was heated by a great open fire in the centre of the room, but the room was cold and draughty as it was open to the roof and there was no glass in the windows. It would have been lit at night by oil lamps and probably rushlights.

At first the builders intended the area at the far end of the hall to be a single large room with a small lobby and a spiral staircase in the corner of the building. But plans were changed. The large room was divided into a pantry (G on fig. 4) and a lobby (F), while the original lobby became a small kitchen (E). The stairwell became the kitchen fireplace. If you visit the castle you can see how the stairs stop at first floor level. This kitchen was used to prepare food for the constable and his family or for the king if he was staying here. The soldiers' food was prepared in a separate kitchen, perhaps on top of the mound or even in turrets on the battlements. Along the west wall of the keep, where a low wall sticks out, was a set of garde-robos or lavatories (H on fig. 4). The lavatories were divided into cubicles for four people to use at once! Chutes ran from the lavatories through the outside wall and emptied into a pit dug into the mound at the base of the wall. On the other side of the central dividing wall was another set of lavatories.

A narrow passage led from the east end of the hall into the Chapel (L on fig. 4) on the other side of the central dividing wall. The chapel was in the south-east corner of the keep (see fig. 6). The altar would have stood in the curved apse in this corner. On the archway into the apse are two carved capitals. On one you can see two Norman soldiers. (There are other carvings inside the apse, but these were done later, after the castle became a prison). Almost certainly this was a private chapel for the

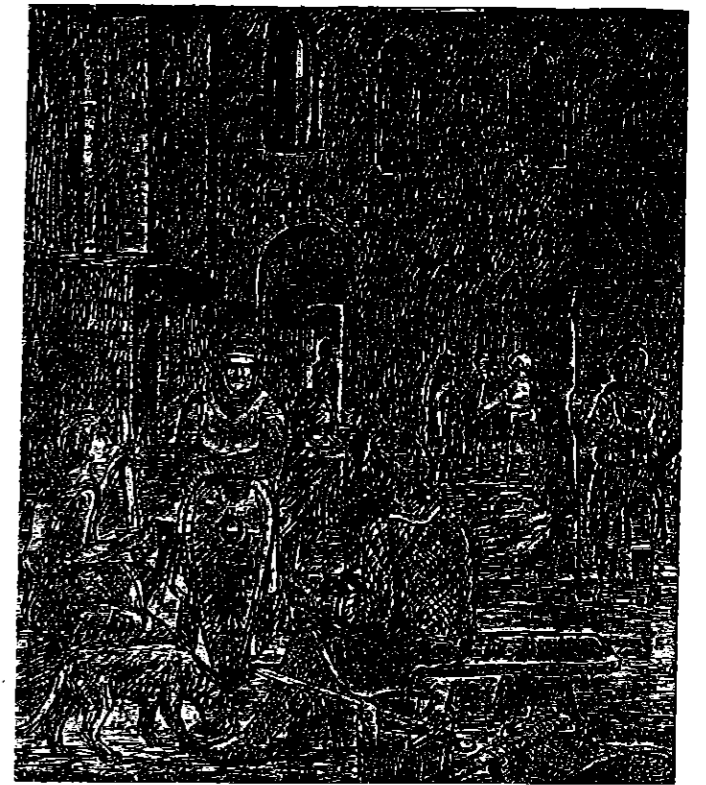


Fig. 5. The Great Hall.

use of the constable and his family and senior members of his staff. The room was too small to hold a garrison of 75 people for a service. The soldiers would have attended services in the chapel of St. Nicholas which we think stood on the motte. Between the chapel and the central dividing wall was a small store-room which had no windows (M on fig. 4). Its door probably opened into the hall. At one end of the room was the well (N), and servants would have had to go in here to pull up buckets of water. It was about 40m (about 130 ft.) from here to the bottom of the well.



Fig. 6. The Chapel.