



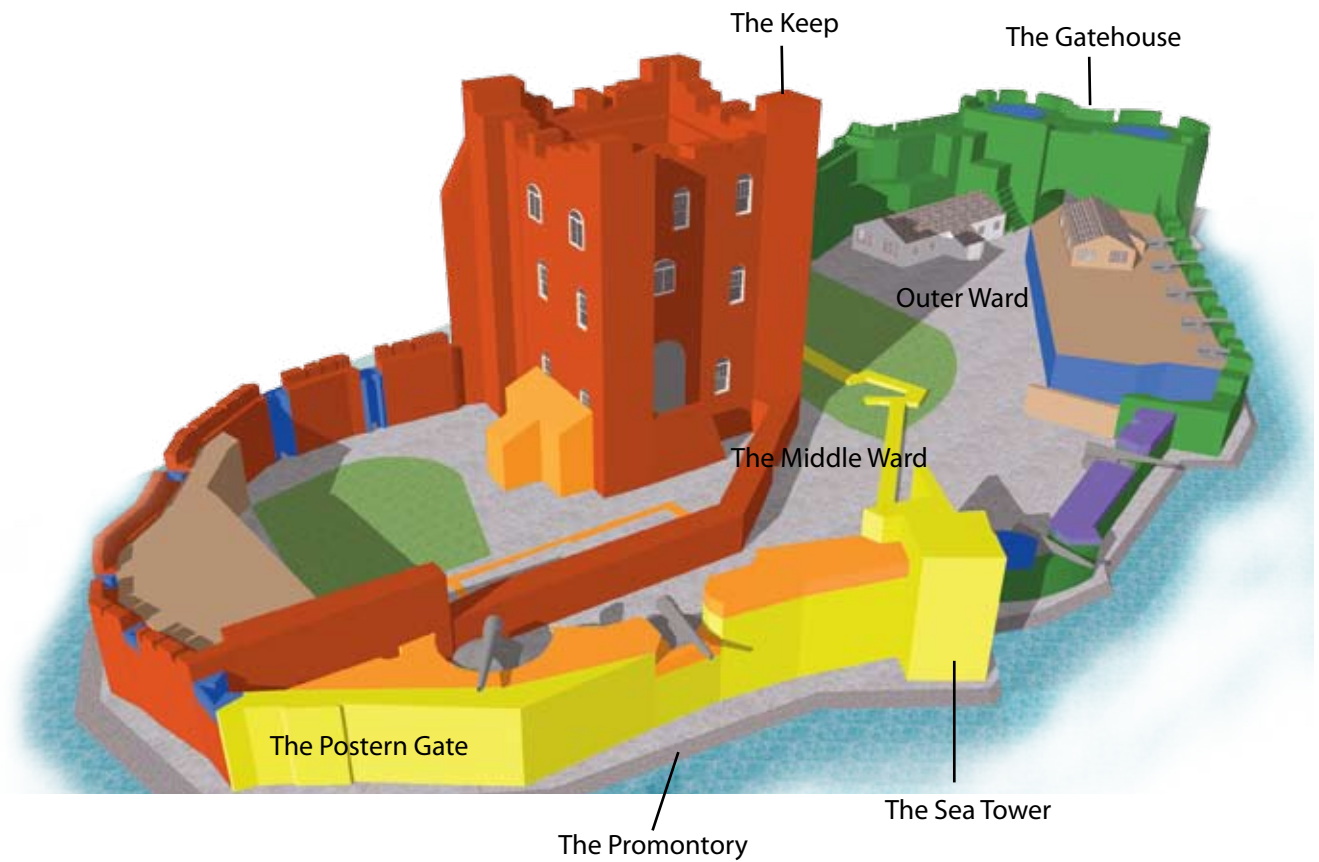
Carrickfergus Castle

Information for teachers

NIEA Northern Ireland
Environment
Agency
www.ni-environment.gov.uk



Map of Carrickfergus Castle



Key



c.1178 - c.1190/1195 de Courcy Construction



c.1216 - c.1222 Constructed by order of the Crown



c.1226 - c.1242 de Lacy construction



1560's Construction of storehouse and refurbishment of gatehouse



c.1714 Construction of barracks building



c.1790 - late 1820's Establishment of the Grand Battery, construction of officers' quaters, guard room and barracks in Outer Ward



Post 1830 - present day



Modern



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Introduction

Carrickfergus is probably the best-preserved medieval castle in Ireland. It is also the castle that was garrisoned for the longest period, as it was only handed over to civilian control in 1928. As such it provides an ideal venue for the study of changes in our history from the medieval period to the present day.



Historical Background









John de Courcy

In 1177 John, the youngest son of a Somerset knight, led an army of 22 knights and 300 foot soldiers from Dublin into Ulster. While de Courcy claimed this invasion was supported by Henry II of England, it appears to have been entirely an independent operation on John de Courcy's part. The site was chosen by de Courcy as his principal residence and stronghold in Ireland as it provided him with the opportunity to communicate with his allies in Northern England and the Isle of Man. (He was later to marry Affreca, daughter of the King of Man). John de Courcy started construction of Carrickfergus Castle soon after his arrival. This was essential due to continual attacks from the native Irish wishing to prevent this Norman interloper gaining control in their domain.

The lower courses of the Inner Ward's defensive wall and the Keep were built between 1177 and 1181. In the years that followed de Courcy appears to have reached an agreement with the local Irish and he was referred to as 'Princeps Ulidiaie' ('Prince of Ulster') in contemporary documents. (This title was a local courtesy only and was never officially granted by the crown.) Thereafter Carrickfergus Castle was completed in more peaceful circumstances.

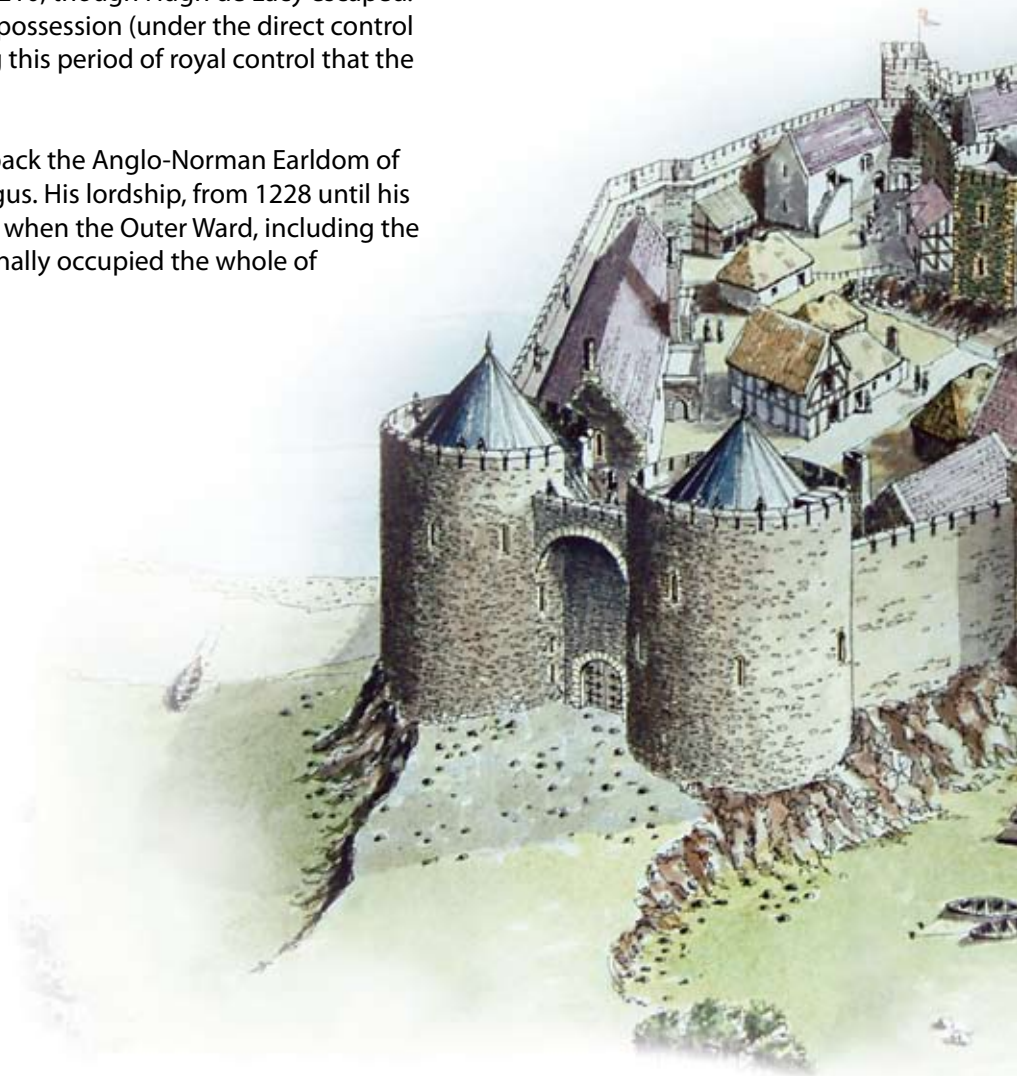
At this time the area controlled by the Anglo-Normans included the coastal areas of south Antrim and north Down. Between the late 1170s and his downfall in 1205, de Courcy and his wife Affreca founded several monastic houses in Ulster. These included Inch Abbey and Grey Abbey both in County Down as well as the construction of another formidable castle at Dundrum, (built to guard the southern portion of the area under Anglo-Norman control). John de Courcy's luck was not to hold. The King, angered by de Courcy's increasing power, sent another Norman knight to remove de Courcy. Hugh de Lacy, Lord of County Meath, defeated de Courcy in 1205.



Hugh de Lacy

When Hugh de Lacy took over as resident lord he too antagonized the Crown to the extent that King John came to Ireland to curtail his growing power. He successfully besieged the castle in 1210, though Hugh de Lacy escaped. The captured castle remained a Crown possession (under the direct control of a Constable) until 1228. It was during this period of royal control that the Middle Ward was built.

In 1228 Hugh de Lacy was able to win back the Anglo-Norman Earldom of Ulster including the castle at Carrickfergus. His lordship, from 1228 until his death in 1242, was probably the period when the Outer Ward, including the Gatehouse, was added and the castle finally occupied the whole of the 'Rock of Fergus'.





Edward Bruce

When Edward Bruce and Scottish forces invaded Ireland in 1315, the army sent to oppose him was defeated at the Battle of Connor in County Antrim. It retreated back to Carrickfergus, pursued by Bruce and his Irish allies. Carrickfergus town was quickly taken and the castle put under siege. The garrison and other occupants of the castle held out for a full year. It is said that a lack of supplies eventually forced them to eat some of their Scottish prisoners, before surrendering in September 1316. Carrickfergus remained Edward Bruce's base in Ireland until his death in October 1318, in battle at Faughart near Dundalk, County Louth.



The Later Medieval and Plantation Period

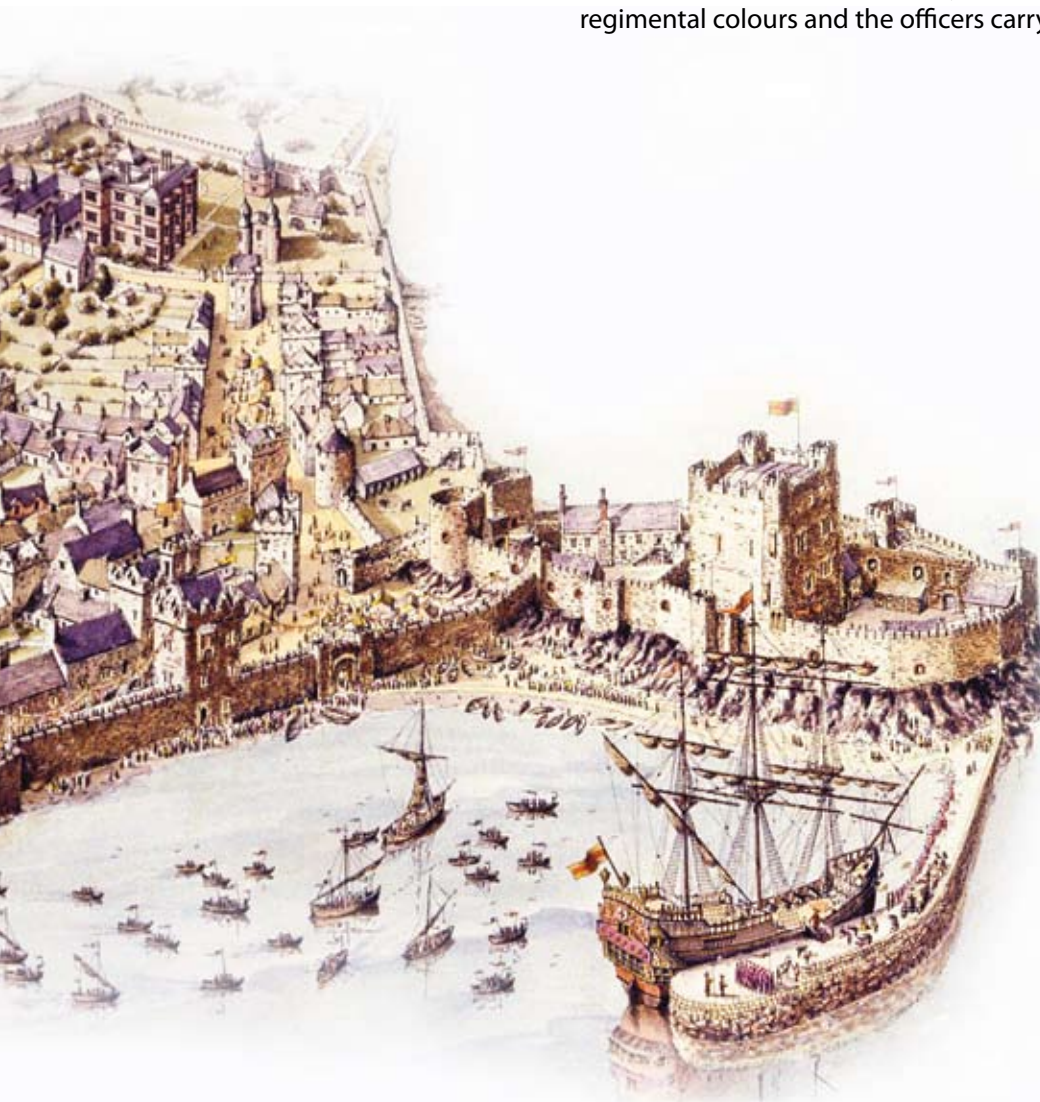
The later medieval period saw resurgence in the power of the Irish Lords in Ulster. This, coupled with the murder of Richard de Burgh, the last Earl of Ulster, in 1333 meant that Carrickfergus Castle was often the only fortification of any significance held by the crown in Ulster. Its garrison was surprisingly small. In 1549-50 the castle is listed as having only four horsemen. In the 16th century, alterations were made to the castle to make it suitable to mount artillery. These alterations included gun ports for cannon squared off with red brick (the first example of its kind in Ireland) inserted into the east and west walls. In addition the Gatehouse towers were lowered and the shape of the towers themselves radically altered.

Despite this, in 1575 Somhairle Buidhe (Sorley Boy) Mac Donnell captured the town and castle in revenge for the massacre of 600 people, mostly women and children, by the Earl of Essex on Rathlin Island. The town of Carrickfergus was attacked by the Irish and Scots several times during the later 16th century. Between 1608 and 1615, Sir Arthur Chichester, Governor of Carrickfergus, had a defensive town wall constructed to enclose Carrickfergus. These defences were connected to the outwork defences of the castle. In 1689 the Jacobite garrison in the castle surrendered to the Williamite general, Frederick Schomberg, after his army stormed the town.



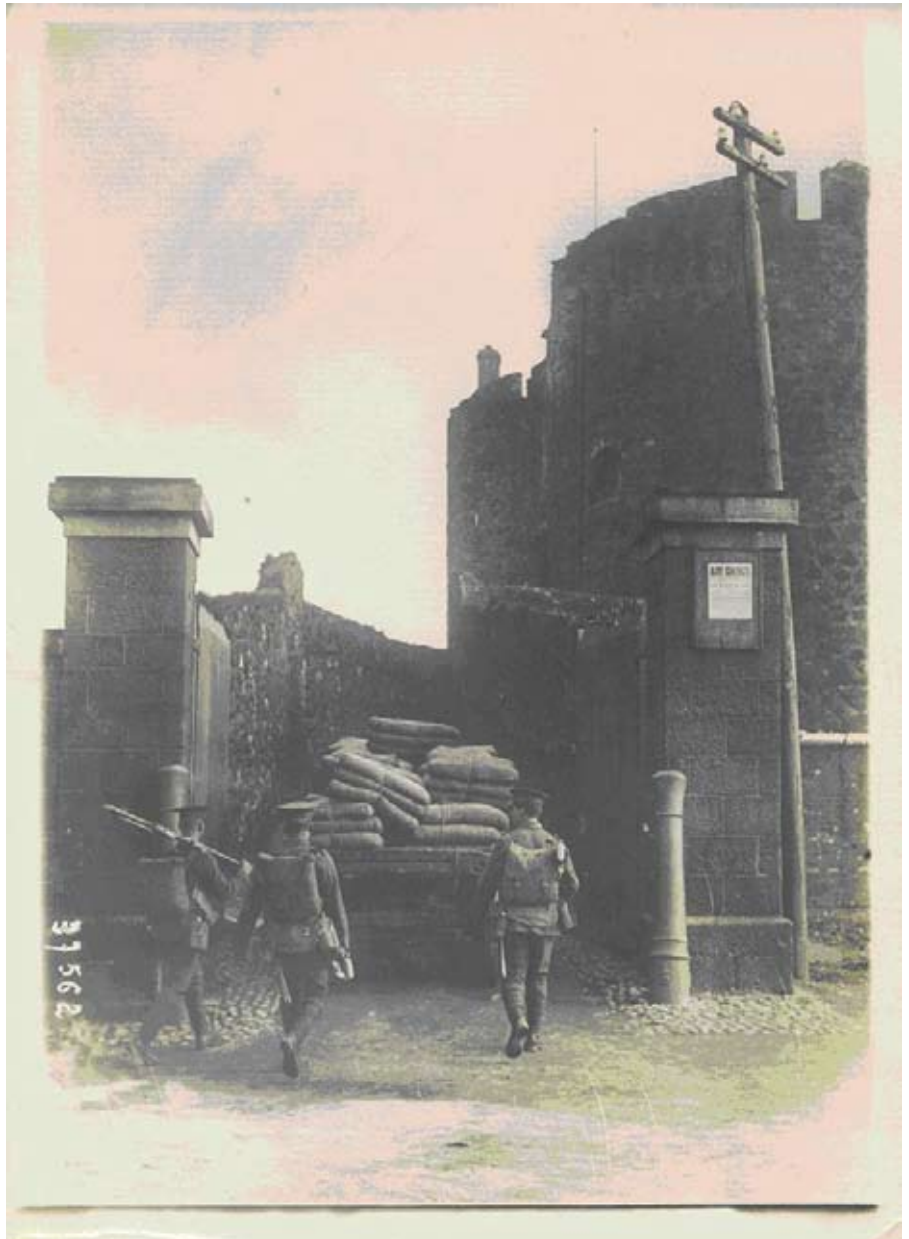
The French are in the Bay!

In January 1754, a 15m section of curtain wall on the south of the castle collapsed. This was not properly repaired and had serious consequences several years later. In 1760, three French warships and 800 men under the command of Commodore Thurot landed at Kilroot, just north of Carrickfergus. The French force attacked Carrickfergus (breaching the North Gate and Scotch Quarter). There was a desperate battle for control of the castle. The French soldiers stormed the walls three times, but were repulsed on each occasion with great losses. As ammunition ran low, the five officers and 230 men of the 62nd Regiment of Foot, who were garrisoning the castle, were forced to use buttons from their coats as musket balls. When these were expended, fighting was carried out hand-to-hand before the garrison was finally forced to surrender. This was the last time that Carrickfergus Castle was captured. The French soldiers were so impressed with the courage of the garrison that they were allowed to vacate the castle with their regimental colours and the officers carrying their swords.



Later History

During the 18th century the castle was used as a county and state prison. In the 1798 Rebellion, it was used as a prison for United Irishmen, including Luke Teeling and William Orr. From the 19th century the castle was used as an armoury and magazine. In the early 20th century, during World War I, anti-submarine guns were mounted within the castle on one of the platforms for the defence of Belfast Lough along side Grey Point and Kilroot in the north and south of the Lough respectively. Finally in 1928, after 750 years of continuous military occupation, the longest of any castle in Ireland, the War Department transferred the castle to the Ministry of Finance for preservation as an ancient monument. During the Second World War, the basements of the Keep were used as air-raid shelters.



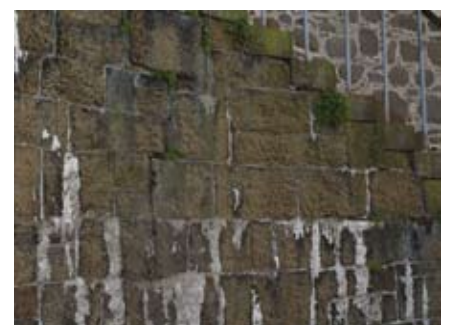
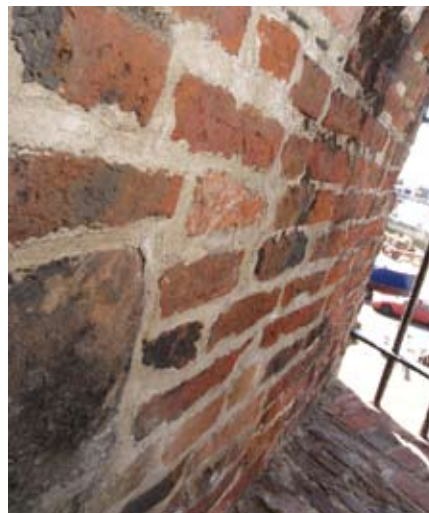
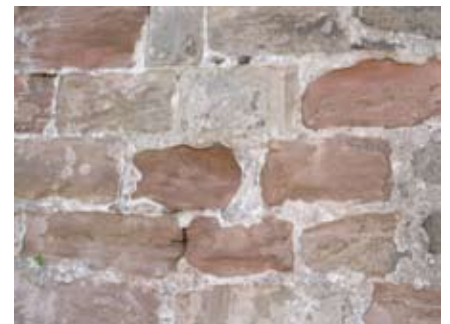
Carrickfergus Castle Timeline

531	King Fergus is ship wrecked on the rock
1177	John de Courcy begins work on the castle.
1205	John de Courcy is expelled by King John. The castle is granted to Hugh de Lacy.
1210	Hugh de Lacy is expelled by King John. The castle is now under crown control. Construction of the Middle Ward takes place.
1227	Hugh de Lacy returns to Carrickfergus castle
1228 - 1242	The castle is expanded by Hugh de Lacy.
1315 - 16	The castle is besieged and eventually occupied by Edward Bruce
1318	Edward Bruce dies at Faughart near Dundalk
1575	Somhairle Buidhe (Sorley Boy) Mac Donnell captures the castle
1689	The Castle is besieged by King William III men, lead by General Schomberg.
1760	The French army capture Carrickfergus Castle.
1914 - 1918	World War I: the castle is used to store weapons, ammunition and artillery.
1928:	The castle is declared a historic monument and handed over to civilian control.
1939:	During the Second World War the vaults of the castle keep are used as an air raid shelter

Description of the Castle

Building Materials

The basic stone used in the fabric of the castle buildings was local basalt. Red sandstone and limestone, quarried from across the lough at Cultra, were also used for decorative details, especially in the Keep and Inner Ward. Red brick seems to have been used for new work and alterations from the 16th century onwards. Large, dressed granite blocks were also used along the east wall and for gun platforms in the 19th century, when the castle's defences were again strengthened.





The Keep

The Keep (or Great Tower) is the strongest and safest place within the castle, and is located in the north-west corner of the Inner Ward. Constructed probably between 1177 and 1181 it stands over 20 metres high with walls between 3 and 4 metres thick. The Keep was obviously a defensive stronghold, used to defend this Norman outcrop in Ireland by land or sea. However while it was a fortress it was also a home for the lord and his family and anyone allowed inside would also have been impressed by the grandeur of their surroundings.

The Keep has four storeys; each floor reached by a single spiral staircase. The ground floor was only accessible from within the Keep and consists of



a vaulted storage cellar which also contained the fresh-water well. To protect the upper floors against possible fire and attacks, the ground floor has no windows. The Keep is entered by an external stone staircase, rising up from the courtyard of the Inner Ward to a first floor entrance in the east wall. This stone staircase was unusual in a time when temporary wooden staircases would have been the norm. However, since excavations in 1993 found the remains of original Cultra sandstone steps, there can be no doubt that these steps were part of the original keep construction.



This staircase leads to the first floor. This housed a guardroom for soldiers and a latrine (toilet). The floor also served as a “waiting room” for those seeking an audience with the Lord or Steward of the castle. Originally the second floor was one large room with a fireplace and private latrine. It was mainly used as a place of business, where taxes were collected, disputes between farmers resolved and punishments dealt out to law breakers. Although today this room is dressed as a banqueting room such feasts were originally held in the great hall, located in the Inner Ward.





The third floor contained the Lord's private chambers where he and his family lived and slept. It would be unusual for any outsiders to enter this area. This floor contains large windows, a fireplace and a private latrine. The room was heightened and a spanning arch added in the 16th century.





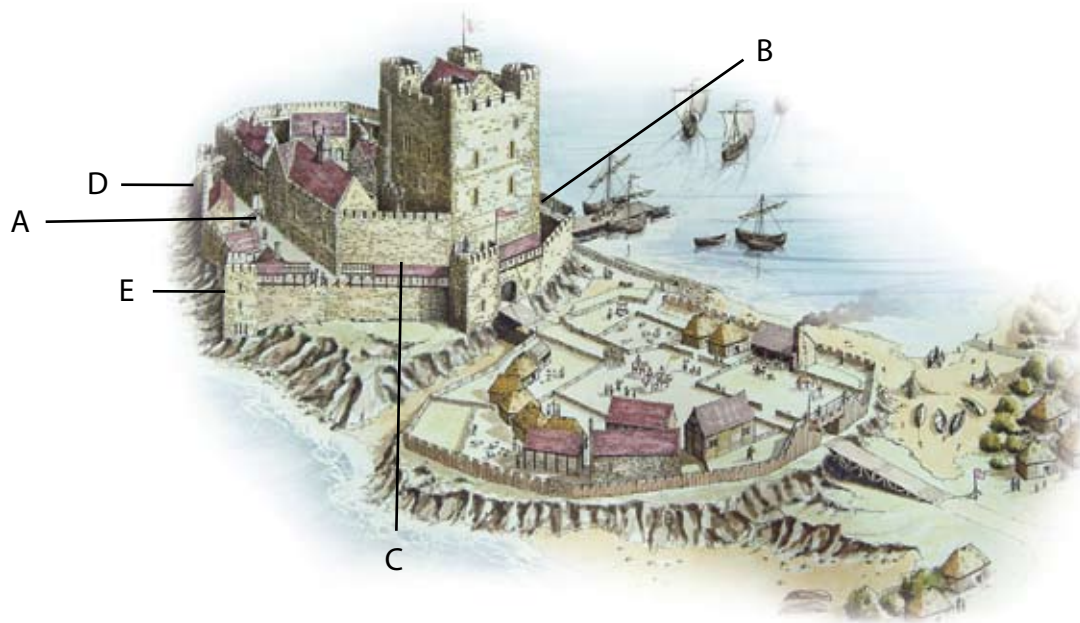
The Inner Ward

The Inner Ward (an open court or area of a castle enclosed by walls) was, along with the Keep, the first part of the castle to be built between 1177 and 1181 by John de Courcy. It consists of a high curtain wall enclosing the Keep and a small bailey.

Within the courtyard and opposite the entrance to the Keep are the remains of the Hall. The Hall was located beside the original entrance gate into the Inner Ward. This was a two-storey building with fine windows overlooking the sea. It is in the Great Hall that the lord of the castle would have entertained rather than in the Keep.

The area between the Keep and the walls of the Inner Ward would probably have contained several other buildings constructed of wood and stone. These included the kitchens, a small chapel, and a barn and stables for the horses of the lord and his knights. The ward would have been a place bustling with activity at all times.





The Middle Ward

The castle was enlarged between 1217 and 1222 when it was a Crown possession and there was no resident lord. The new wall was primarily created as a defensive feature but it also provided more room for activity at the castle. Although this wall has now been reduced to the foundations there are enough masonry remains left to show that 4 towers were incorporated into the middle of the northern side of the new wall to provide extra protection to the gate into the castle (point A). A latrine tower is located in the wall, close to the junction with the west wall of the Keep (point B). The gate through the wall of the Middle Ward dates to the 19th century (point C).

The Postern Gate

The Postern Gate (point D) could have been used as an escape route from the castle and perhaps to allow supplies to be unloaded from the sea. Gates like this are also known as Sally Ports, because they allowed soldiers from the garrison to rush out and suddenly attack enemies who were laying siege to the castle.

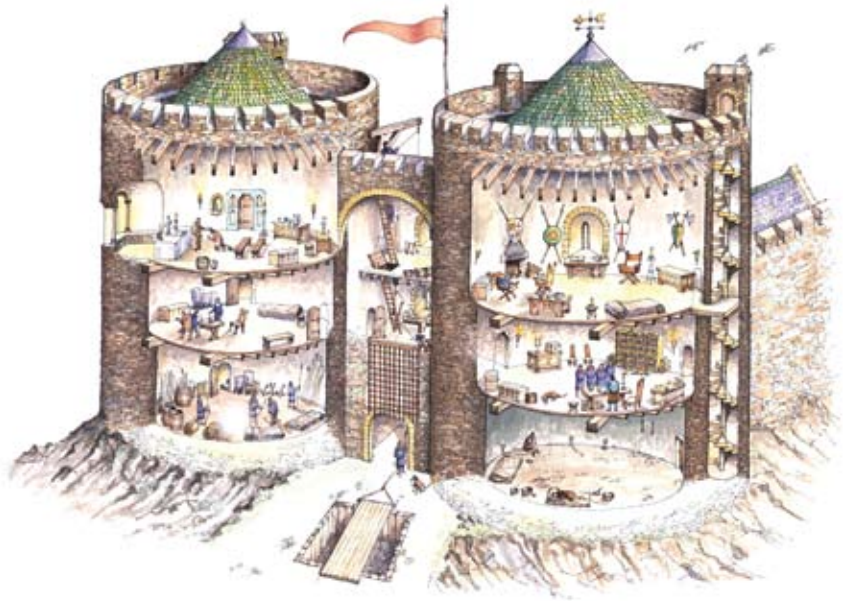
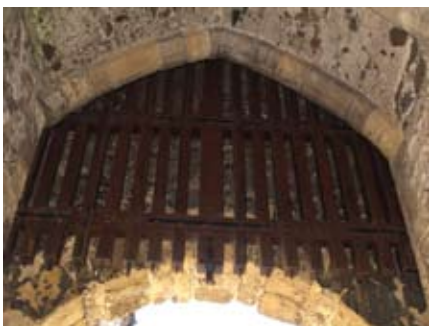
The Sea Tower

The Sea Tower (point E) was part of the new defences constructed when the Middle Ward was created. The sea tower is one of 4 towers built to provide greater defence to this new outer wall. It helped protect the castle from attack from the sea and the surviving arrow slits, of very high quality construction, seem to have been designed for crossbow fire. The Castle's prison was located on the floor above. This prison was known as the 'Oubliette' or "the forgotten". It was from here that the lord of Clondeboye, Con Ó Néill, made a dramatic escape in 1602.

The Outer Ward

The Outer Ward was added in the second quarter of the 13th century, after Hugh de Lacy returned to Ireland. This extension of the defensive features included curtain walls with substantial gate towers on either side of the gate. The new fortifications meant that the whole of the promontory was occupied by the castle and that potential attackers would have to fight their way through three heavily-defended gates before they even reached the Keep. The extra space allowed a larger garrison to be housed within the castle as well as a wider range of buildings.





The Gatehouse

The Gatehouse originally consisted of two circular towers with linking masonry above the gate. Both of the towers were three storeys high with spiral staircases between the floors. The Gatehouse had to be particularly strong as it was the only part of the castle not protected by the sea. Although the original Gatehouse was built as part of the Outer Ward extension to the castle, it was later improved by Richard de Burgh in the early 14th century. In the eastern tower (on the left as you enter the castle), the ground floor was used for storage, including weapons. The first floor was accommodation for the Gatehouse guards and the upper floor, with its fine window, probably served as a private chapel for the resident lord. In the western tower (to the right of the gate) the ground floor may have been used to house prisoners. The second and third floors were for use by the Constable, the military manager of the castle. Amongst the improved defences for the gate were arrow-slits, a machicolation, a portcullis for trapping enemies within the gate passage and a 'murder hole' for dropping objects on the enemy. The original circular Gatehouse towers were cut back during the Elizabethan period in order to strengthen them and to allow cannons to be mounted on top.

The Grand Battery

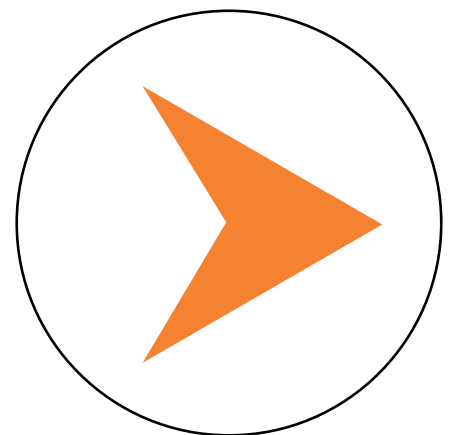
The castle armaments were improved during the Napoleonic period in the early 19th century, when there was a real fear of French invasion. Six guns on the eastern battery date from this period. Three of the cannon are 24-pounders and three are 32-pounders, though they all rest on 24-pounder gun carriages. There is further evidence of remodelling in the mid-Victorian period; on the south east defences here we can see the area has been changed to accommodate 4, 68 pound cannons (these canons are rare in the British Isles).

Educational Approaches

To prepare pupils for a visit they need to understand:

- the range of defensive features normally found in a castle
- how and why the design of castles changed
- the variety of people who lived and worked in the castle
- how the castle functioned as a community
- the range of domestic buildings normally found in a castle

Before visiting, your pupils need to practise those skills which you expect them to use on site. This could involve observing, describing and recording (on tape, as notes or through diagrams), map work and ways of looking for change. Give pupils a map beforehand to help them orientate themselves around the different wards and to understand the layout of the castle. (This can be found on the inner cover of this booklet.)



History

To help pupils understand how areas of the castle were used ask them to identify spaces used for:

- living or storage
- basic accommodation
- superior accommodation
- public or private business
- the defence of the castle

Pupils will soon see that the twin roles of defence and accommodation were integrated into the same structure. This is clearly shown in both the Gatehouse and the Keep.

Given that the castle remained a military garrison until 1928 this is an essential topic of study. You could ask pupils to:

- Identify potential weaknesses in the layout and position of the castle; explain what measures have been taken to compensate for these weaknesses. (It might be useful if pupils create a visual record of these features through labelled sketches to aid memory and understanding)
- Assess the protection given to the medieval entrances (remember there were three distinct phases in the development of this castle in medieval times; try comparing the advantages and disadvantages of each.)

Providing a context or a problem-solving activity can motivate pupils' more than fact-finding tours. You could ask them to be:

- A medieval architect who has been instructed to produce a report on the castle. They need to identify strengths and weaknesses in the defences. Different groups could investigate the three accessible wards assessing:
 1. Height and thickness of curtain walls and the provision of arrow slits etc.
 2. Contribution of natural features.
 3. Position, strength and size of towers. Do they enable defenders to cover the surrounding area with flanking fire?
 4. Size and positioning of arrow slits and windows in the towers.
 5. Towers, gates, portcullises protecting the entrances to each ward.



- A spy on a mission to make a plan of the castle to prepare an attack. This could be set against the siege by King John in 1210 or Edward Bruce in 1315. (It would be key to remember what fortifications were in place during these periods). Give pupils a plan of the outer wall (again this will depend on time period.) All other features should be deleted and ask them to record all internal features.

English

You can include language development in your visit by introducing target language, and by allowing pupils work in pairs or small groups you will also be enhancing their oral skills. Tasks can easily be set which support learning in history while at the same time allowing pupils to communicate their findings to different audiences and to write for a variety of purposes. Pupils should be aware of their task beforehand so that they can plan in advance. They could produce:

- A guidebook for younger children which explains how people lived and worked in the castle during the medieval period.
- A health and safety report on health and hygiene in the castle.
- A board game based on a prisoner escaping from the Prison Tower. Use actual hazards that may be encountered on site. Include penalties and rewards. Write instructions for playing the game.
- A press advert, poster, radio commercial or leaflet which publicises the site. It should appeal to different groups of people, persuading them to visit the castle.
- A leaflet produced by an estate agent trying to sell the castle in medieval times. Give accurate descriptions and explanations of the defensive and domestic features.
- A series of newspaper or TV reports about the siege in 1760. Present this as a series of 'on the scene' reports as a war correspondent and include interviews with the defenders and attackers and perhaps a statement from the French commander or other persons of interest.
- Scripts for conversations between different castle inhabitants about

an event at the castle. Aim to include accurate detail about buildings. Include different parts of the castle and involve specific people such as servants, guards and knights. Pupils could use the escape of Con O'Neill as a starting point for this task.

- Detailed plans for a banquet in the Great Hall. This could include guest lists, seating plans, entertainment, menus for food and drink, instructions for servants and kitchen staff, decorations for the hall, and the preparation and serving of food.

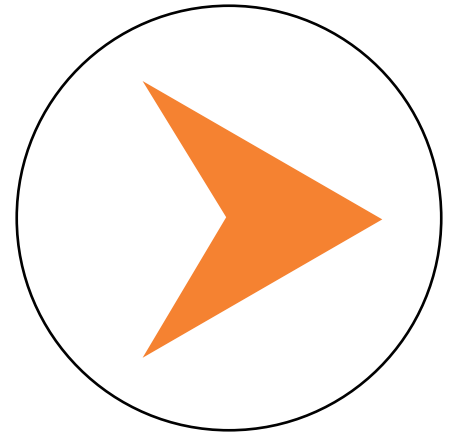
Creative Writing

An excellent stimulus for creative writing is to ask pupils to record their impressions in different parts of the site such as the basement or the solar room or perhaps the view from the top of the sea tower. Ask pupils to collect short sentences or words to describe what they see, hear, smell and feel and use these observations in their work.

Technology

There are many examples of structures to demonstrate medieval technology. You could ask pupils to use photographs, or diagrams to explain:

- how fireplaces were integrated into a wall of the castle
- how different types of windows were constructed
- how floors and ceilings were supported (look for corbels, joist holes and ledges)
- why there are different shaped towers and what were the advantages and disadvantages of the different designs
- why different types of stonework were used
- how the ceiling in the vaults was shaped (wattling)



Mathematics

Take measurements and use estimation and calculation skills for reconstructions of various parts of the castle.

- Groups of pupils could be assigned different areas such as the outer Gatehouse or the Curtain Walls. Record the thickness of different walls in the castle, suggesting why some parts are much thicker than others.
- Measure or estimate the dimensions of the different types of windows. Calculate the angle of fire of archers at different parts of the castle.
- Use measurements to compare the amount of living space for the lord of the castle and that available for his household.

Health & Hygiene

To help pupils appreciate the living conditions in the castle and their consequential effects on people's health you could ask them to look for evidence of the provision of heating, cooking, water supply and sanitation. Ask pupils to find how these needs were met, and then to explain the advantages and disadvantages of the:

- Castle's water supply - how was it obtained, distributed and disposed of?
- Latrine system. What happened to the waste? Direct pupils to the latrines, how is the disposal of waste in this castle different from others they have studied.

Change & Development

- Direct the pupils to the areas of the castle that have changed since Medieval times. How has military technology impacted on the castle? (Look closely at the Gatehouse Towers or the Grand Battery)
- What about building materials used on the castle. How have they changed? (Look at the red brick on the windows).

Recommended Reading

Lets Explore Carrickfergus Castle EHS, ISBN 1-905127-23-5

Carrickfergus; The Story of the Castle and Walled Town Ruairi O Baoill

ISBN 9780337089565

Tales from the Castle Gate Charles Mc Connell

Ramparts; The Defence of Carrickfergus. Charles Mc Connell

'Carrickfergus Guide Book' (other languages available, including Polish, Irish and Ulster Scots)

Available Tours

Foundation/Key stage 1

This tour is an hour in length it is centred on the Keep. Pupils have the opportunity to dress in medieval costume and hear a story based on the castle.

Key stage 2

The Knights Quest. This involves a general tour of the castle, pupils a split into teams when they arrive, there guide will ask questions and award the group with the best answer a token. At the end of the tour the winning group will receive a prize.

Key stage 3

The Key Stage 3 tour can vary in length according to the time of year. (Between March and June tours are limited to a maximum of 2 hours.) From September to February tours can take up to 4 hours and teachers can chose the focus of the tour. A full list is available on request.

Free Educational Visits

For information on educational visits to Carrickfergus Castle contact the on site Educator on 028 9335 1273. Bookings can be completed through reception.

Maximum Party Numbers

It is advised that there should be an adult for every 15 pupils.

How to get there

Road

Take the M5 from Belfast and follow the sign posts for Carrickfergus. When you reach the roundabout beside the Co-Operative Supermarket take a right and then immediate left into the large car park (parking is free). A foot path leads you across to the castle.

Train

Trains from Larne and Belfast stop at the main Carrickfergus station and Downshire station, both of which are about 10 minutes walk from the Castle. Details of train times can be found from Translink/NI Railways. Access for the disabled: The entrance to the castle is via a steep ramp. Once inside there is a foot path around the outer and Inner Ward. However, entering the Keep would be challenging or impossible for wheel chair users.

Parking

A public car park is situated a short walk from the castle. Parking is free at present.

Toilets

On site. There are also public toilets in the car park.

Picnics

School groups can book the vaults for lunch. As this is an NIEA managed property we recommend a Waste Free Lunch.

All litter should be taken home.

Teachers Notes



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