

British Castles

November 2023



Welsh Castles

Harlech, Conwy & More



EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear all,

Welcome to this the first edition of 'British Castles'magazine. Every month we'll send you a link to the latest issue, packed with info on those quintessential British fortresses, castles.

In this issue we look at the castles of Wales. Our first article looks at the various different types of castles.

Our quiz see just how many castle photos you can match to the castle's name. Our gallery is, of course, of some of the magnificent Welsh Castles.

Our second feature looks at one of these, Caerphilly Castle, in more detail.

And our final feature is the first profile of the people most closely responsible for building the castles of Britain. This month we profile Edward I, builder of many of the best Welsh Castles.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this first issue.

Until next time

Chris

WELSH CASTLE TYPES

FROM THE PAST 1000 YEARS

Wales is often referred to as “the land of castles,” boasting an impressive total of 427 fortresses scattered across its beautiful landscapes.

From the imposing Norman castles to the native Welsh fortresses and the iconic Edwardian strongholds, the types of castles in Wales are as diverse as the country’s rich history.

Although each castle is different, many can be collected in loosely defined groups. Here are the main collections:



Caernarfon Castle



NORMAN CASTLES: CONQUERORS LEAVE THEIR MARK

The Normans who arrived in Wales shortly after their victory over the Saxons in the famous Battle of Hastings in 1066. As in England they moved quickly to consolidate their victory by importing the continental Europe innovation, the castle.

These fortifications were strategically built mainly in southern Wales and along the border with England, also known as the “Welsh Marches.”

The initial imperative was speed of construction and so most early Norman Castles were the so called ‘Motte & Bailey’ fortress, built primarily of earth and timber.

They comprised a earth mound, or ‘Motte’, on which a wooden keep was often located.

At the bottom of the motte was an enclosed courtyard, or Bailey, on which other buildings, such as soldiers lodgings, were built.

These original constructions are long gone, but over time many were turned into more permanent stone constructions, retaining some of their motte and bailey layout.

A great example is the inner castle in Cardiff.

Other great Welsh Norman castles are Chepstow, Caerphilly (profiled later in this issue), and Pembroke.



Dolwyddelan Castle



Conwy Castle

NATIVE WELSH CASTLES: PRINCES DEFEND THEIR HOMELAND

While the Normans left an indelible mark on Wales, the native Welsh princes and ruling royal houses also built their own castles, often referred to as “native prince castles.”

These fortresses are smaller and less imposing than many other Welsh castles but are in some of the most dramatic and scenic locations in Wales.

Plus a visit offers a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the history and culture of the Welsh people.

Examples include Castell-y-Bere, Dolwyddelan, Criccieth, and Carreg Cenne which are as evocative of Old Wales as their names.

EDWARDIAN CASTLES: A SHOW OF ROYAL POWER

The Edwardian castles, built by King Edward I at the end of the 13th century, represent the most well-known group of Welsh castles.

These formidable fortifications, forming Edward’s so call Ring of Iron, were constructed as a means of subduing the rebellious Welsh princes in the north.

Edward’s castles such as Conwy, Caernarfon, Harlech, and Beaumaris are the most visited in Wales, attracting millions of tourists every year, boast impressive defensive features and grandeur fit for a king.

Such is Edward’s impact on Wales (and other parts of the UK — particularly Scotland) that we’ve chosen him as our featured ‘Castle Person’ this month.

TUDOR CASTLES: A BLEND OF THE OLD AND THE NEW

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, a new type of castle emerged in Wales, known as the Tudor castle.

These castles represented a transition from military strongholds to comfortable residences. They were more like fortified manor houses than the austere military fortresses of the past.

Existing castles were modified or refitted with Tudor-style refinements, transforming them into elegant showplaces for their lords, ladies, and guests.

Carew Castle in southern Wales is an excellent example of this type of castle.



Carew Castle

WELSH CASTLES QUIZ

How many of the following Welsh castles can you match with its photo? Answers on page 24.

Conwy Castle

Castell Coch

Caernarfon Castle;

Pembroke Castle

Chirk Castle

Raglan Castle

Denbigh Castle

Chepstow Castle

Bodelwyddan Castle

Harlech Castle

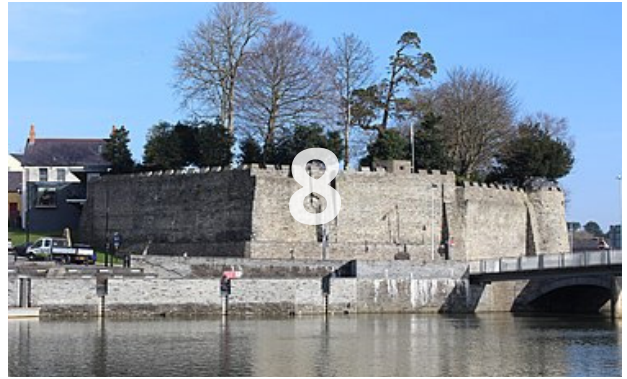
Cardiff Castle

Beaumaris Castle

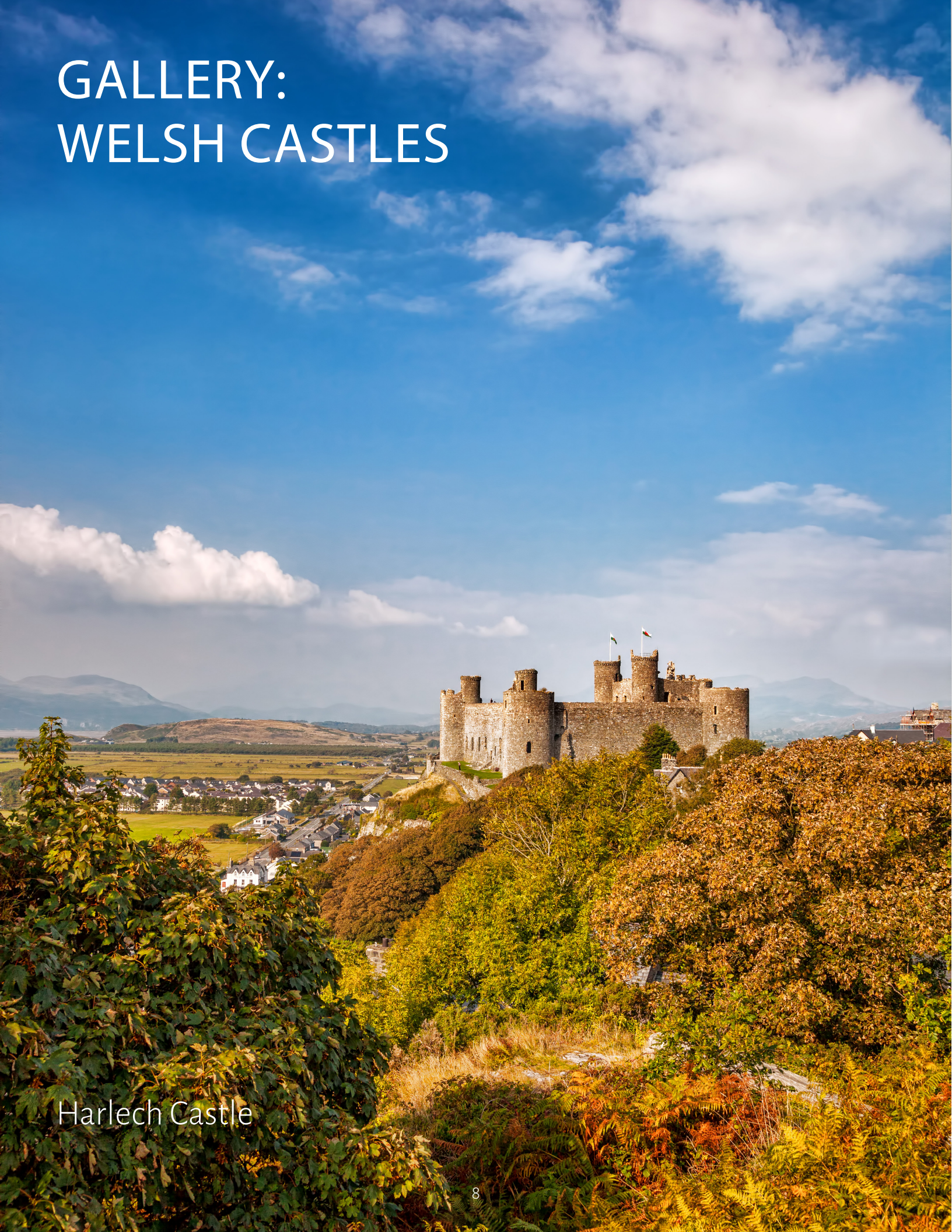
Cardigan Castle

Dolbadarn Castle





GALLERY: WELSH CASTLES



Harlech Castle

Conwy Castle





The Medieval Heart Of Harlech Castle



Swansea Castle



Aberystwyth Castle

Chirk Castle





Castell Bodelwyddan
Bodelwyddan Castle

Gwarchodwr Parcio yn Llawr	Stricely No Parking
Llewyn Gollwg Pŵl Anafol	Diffractad Drop off Area

Bodelwyddan Castle



CAERPHILLY CASTLE

ONE OF THE LARGEST CASTLES IN THE UK

Situated in the town of Caerphilly, in South Wales, this medieval stronghold is the second largest in the UK, surpassed only by Windsor Castle.

What sets Caerphilly Castle apart is not just its size, but also its innovative use of water defenses and the distinction of being the first truly concentric castle in Britain.

Its construction in the late 13th century marked a milestone in military architecture, showcasing the brilliance and ambition of its builder, Gilbert de Clare.



A FORTRESS FIT FOR A PRINCE

The story of Caerphilly Castle begins with the rise of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the Welsh prince who posed a threat to the English crown.

Worried about the growing power of Llywelyn, Gilbert de Clare, Lord of Glamorgan, realized the need for a formidable stronghold to protect his territory and prevent the Welsh prince from gaining control of South Wales. De Clare's vision was to create a castle that would serve as a buffer against Llywelyn's ambitions and secure the region.

De Clare strategically selected the upland district of Senghenydd, where Caerphilly now stands, as the ideal location for his castle. This region, nestled between the valleys and mountains of South Wales, provided a natural defense against Llywelyn's forces.

In 1266, De Clare seized control of Senghenydd from the Welsh, laying the foundation for the construction of Caerphilly Castle.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CAERPHILLY CASTLE

On April 11, 1268, the construction of Caerphilly Castle began. However, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was not willing to let De Clare succeed without a fight and in 1270 launched an attack on the castle, determined to stop its construction.

Despite his efforts, the castle was finished in 1271 and completed without hindrance. The message it sent to Llywelyn was clear – his southward ambitions had been thwarted.

Caerphilly Castle is unique in that it was built on a virgin site, allowing for a unified and cohesive architectural plan. The castle is a double-skinned parallelogram, surrounded by extensive water defenses.

This concentric layout gave the castle flexibility and rapid access to any part of its structure. Mural passages, wall-walks, towers, and gatehouses were strategically positioned, allowing defenders to maneuver efficiently while maintaining strong defensive positions.

The castle's cellular structure is a testament to its strength, with numerous portcullises and defensive features designed to thwart attackers.

The outer ward, formed by a low battlemented curtain wall, is separated from the inner ward by high curtain walls, circular corner towers, and two massive gatehouses.

The southern and northern lakes surrounding the castle acted as formidable barriers, further enhancing its defensive capabilities.



Caerphilly Castle

THE TRANSFORMATION INTO A PALATIAL HOME

After the threat of Welsh independence was quelled, Caerphilly Castle underwent a transformation. It became not just a fortress, but also a palatial home fit for its noble inhabitants. The castle passed through different hands over the centuries, each leaving their mark on the structure.

In the early 14th century, Hugh le Despenser, a powerful and ambitious figure in the court of Edward II, took possession of the castle. Despenser made significant alterations to the castle, including the remodeling of the great hall and the addition of other domestic features.

The hall was transformed into a sumptuous space, with raised timber roofs, decorated ogee-shaped windows, and rich moldings.

The castle exuded opulence and grandeur, reflecting the status and taste of its occupants.

However, the castle's active history was relatively short-lived. By 1283, Edward I had successfully subdued the Welsh, rendering the need for Caerphilly Castle obsolete.

The castle saw minor Welsh attacks in later years, but its significance as a military stronghold diminished.

Over time, Caerphilly Castle fell into disrepair and was subjected to further damage during the English Civil War.



THE DECLINE AND RESTORATION

In the late 16th century, during the period of the Tudor monarchy, Thomas Lewis of The Van, located near Caerphilly, was granted permission to use the castle's stone to build his own residence. This accelerated the castle's dilapidation, and by the 18th century, the castle's lakes had dried up, houses were built against the foot of the dam, and the castle was in ruins.

Its restoration and revitalization began in the 19th century, thanks to the visionary efforts of the Bute family. The 3rd Marquess of Bute undertook extensive clearance and restoration work on the castle, breathing new life into its crumbling walls. Additionally, in the 1950s, the lakes surrounding the castle were reflooded, returning the castle to its former glory.

EXPLORING CAERPHILLY CASTLE TODAY

Today, Caerphilly Castle stands as a captivating historical attraction, drawing visitors from near and far. Its imposing walls, towers, and gatehouses offer a glimpse into the past, allowing visitors to imagine the castle in its heyday.

The castle's unique defensive features, such as hidden passageways and portcullises, provide an immersive experience, transporting visitors back to a time of knights, sieges, and epic battles.

Exploring the castle grounds, visitors can marvel at the engineering marvels of the southern and northern dams, which served as formidable obstacles for any would-be attackers.

The southern dam, an earth platform revetted in stone, and the northern dam, with its high outer wall and three great towers, showcase the medieval engineering prowess that went into constructing Caerphilly Castle.

The inner ward of the castle is particularly impressive, with its corner towers and the imposing east gatehouse. The east gatehouse, with its twin D-shaped towers, central passage, and circular stair turrets, offers panoramic views and a glimpse into the castle's defensive strategies. The great hall and state apartments, though partially ruined, provide a glimpse into the lavish lifestyle enjoyed by the castle's noble residents.

Today, visitors can immerse themselves in the history of Caerphilly Castle through guided tours, exhibitions, and interactive displays. The castle also hosts various events and activities, such as jousting tournaments and medieval reenactments, bringing the castle's rich history to life.

NEARBY ATTRACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

While Caerphilly Castle is undoubtedly the star attraction in the area, there are plenty of other fascinating sites and activities to explore in and around Caerphilly. The town of Caerphilly itself offers charming streets, local shops, and a vibrant atmosphere. Visitors can also explore the nearby Castell Coch, another stunning castle built by Gilbert de Clare, or take a leisurely stroll through the picturesque countryside surrounding the castle.

For nature enthusiasts, the Brecon Beacons National Park is within easy reach, offering breathtaking landscapes, hiking trails, and outdoor adventures. The park is a haven for outdoor enthusiasts, with activities such as hiking, mountain biking, and wildlife spotting.

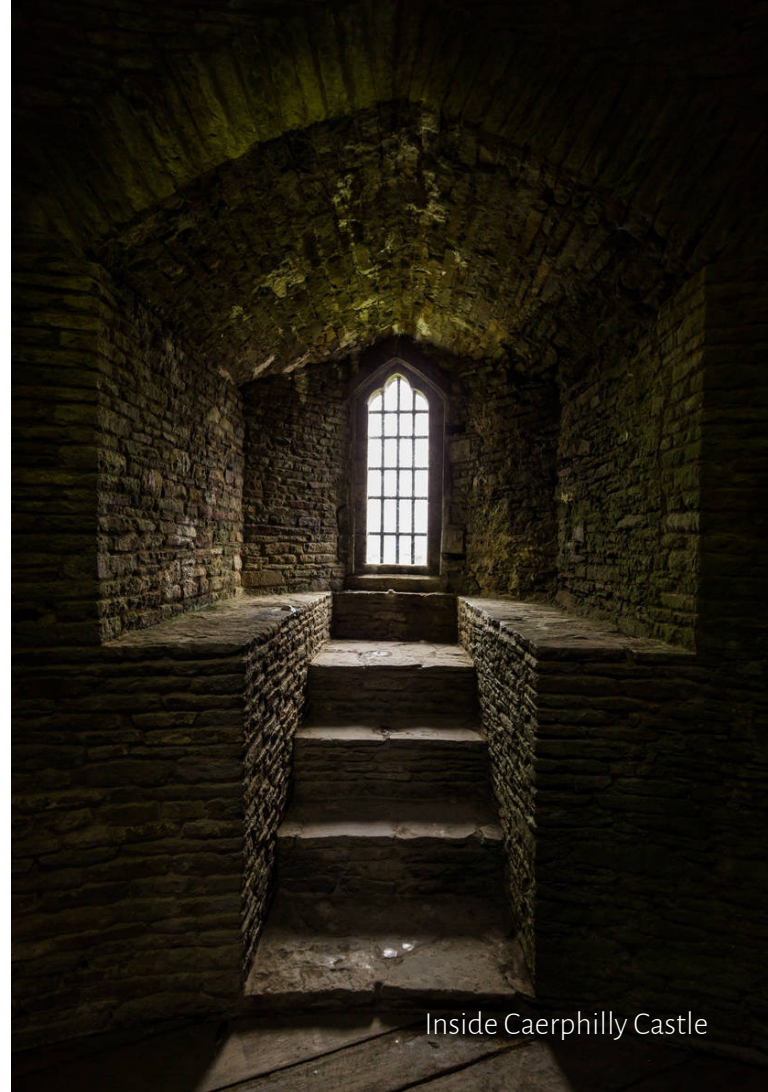


HOW TO VISIT CAERPHILLY CASTLE

Visiting Caerphilly Castle is a must for anyone with an interest in history, architecture, or simply a sense of adventure. The castle is easily accessible by car, with ample parking available nearby. There are also public transportation options, including train and bus services, that connect Caerphilly to other major cities in Wales.

The castle is open to the public throughout the year, with varying opening hours depending on the season. Admission fees apply, with discounts available for children, seniors, and families and guided tours are available for those who wish to delve deeper into the castle's history and stories.

It is advisable to check the official website of Cadw, the organization responsible for the preservation and management of Caerphilly Castle, for the most up-to-date information on visiting hours, admission fees, and any special events or exhibitions.



CONCLUSION

Caerphilly Castle stands as a testament to the power, ambition, and architectural genius of its builders. Its grandeur and unique defensive features make it a truly remarkable castle, ranking among the finest medieval fortresses in Europe.

From its early days as a military stronghold to its transformation into a palatial home, and its subsequent decline and restoration, Caerphilly Castle has witnessed centuries of history and continues to captivate visitors with its rich heritage. Exploring this magnificent castle is like stepping back in time, immersing oneself in a world of knights, nobles, and Welsh legends.

Whether you're a history enthusiast, an architecture lover, or simply seeking an unforgettable experience, a visit to Caerphilly Castle promises to be an adventure filled with wonder, discovery, and a deep appreciation for the past.

GREAT CASTLES BUILDERS FROM BRITISH HISTORY

KING EDWARD I WELSH CASTLE BUILDER & HAMMER OF THE SCOTS

Each month we'll bring you a profile of the people most responsible for creating the great castles of Britain.

This month we feature Edward I, builder of many of Wales' finest castles including Conwy, Caernarfon and Beaumaris...

INTRODUCTION

King Edward I, also known as Edward Longshanks, reigned from 1272 to 1307.

Born on June 17, 1239, in Westminster Palace, Edward ascended to the throne upon the death of his father, King Henry III.

He played a crucial role in the unification of England and Wales, as well as in conflicts with Scotland.

(Not for nothing was he also known as 'Hammer of the Scots' - he was the main villain in the movie Braveheart for example).

Here then is more on this larger than life figure responsible for some of the finest castles in Britain.



Edward I In 'Braveheart'



EARLY LIFE AND MARRIAGE TO ELEANOR OF CASTILE

Edward I was born to King Henry III and Eleanor of Provence, who named him Edward after his favorite saint Edward the Confessor, on June 17, 1239.

As a child, Edward was delicate and faced health challenges but grew up to be a tall and imposing figure, standing at six feet two inches.

In 1254, at the age of 15, Edward married Eleanor of Castile, the half-sister of King Alfonso X of Castile. This marriage served a political purpose, aiming to resolve disputes over land in Gascony.

Despite its initially political nature, Edward and Eleanor developed a deep attachment to each other, and their marriage produced 16 children.



EARLY MILITARY EXPLOITS AND DEFEAT OF THE BARON REBELLION

During Edward's early years, England was plagued by a rebellion led by Simon de Montfort, a powerful baron.

Edward initially supported the Provisions of Oxford, which aimed to limit his Father the King's power and give more rights to the barons.

However, he later reconciled with his father and helped defeat the rebel barons at the Battle of Evesham in 1265.

Edward's victory marked the end of the rebellion and the reestablishment of his family's rule.

CONQUEST OF WALES AND BUILDING OF CASTLES

One of Edward I's most significant achievements was the conquest of Wales. In response to frequent rebellions there, Edward launched a military campaign to subdue the Welsh princes and assert English control.

He built a network of castles (the main reason for this profile), starting with Flint Castle and including famous castles such as Conway and Caernarvon, to solidify English power in Wales. These castles served as symbols of Edward's military strength and political authority.

The Welsh campaign also led to the establishment of the title "Prince of Wales" for the heir to the English throne, a tradition that continues to this day. Prince William holds this title now.



Edward I



Ruins of Flint Castle

CONFLICT WITH SCOTLAND AND WARS OF INDEPENDENCE

Edward I's ambitions extended beyond Wales, as he sought to assert English dominance over Scotland as well.

He claimed ultimate power in Scotland and demanded homage from Scottish nobles. However, his attempts to impose his authority were met with resistance, led by Scottish figures like William Wallace and Robert Bruce.

(The struggles with the former were portrayed in the film Braveheart).

The Scottish Wars of Independence ensued, with both sides engaged in a fierce struggle for control.

Despite his initial victories, including the capture and execution of Wallace, Edward was unable to fully subdue Scotland. The conflict continued even after his death, and Scotland ultimately retained its independence.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

While Edward I was renowned for his military exploits, he also made significant contributions to governance and administration. He implemented reforms in criminal and property law, strengthening the government's ability to maintain law and order, and played a pivotal role in the establishment of Parliament as a permanent institution.

This helped pave the way for the development of the British state and the role of Parliament in future centuries.

PERSONAL LIFE AND MARRIAGES

Beyond his political and military endeavors, Edward I had a complex personal life. He was deeply attached to his first wife, Eleanor of Castile, and her death in 1290 deeply affected him.

Edward erected memorial crosses along the route of her funeral procession, with one of these crosses giving rise to the name "Charing Cross" in London.

After Eleanor's death, Edward married Margaret of France, the daughter of King Philip III. Despite their significant age difference, the couple had a harmonious relationship, and Margaret gave birth to several children.

LEGACY AND CONTROVERSIES

Edward I's reign left a lasting impact on English history.

He is remembered as a strong and determined king who sought to strengthen the monarchy and assert English dominance. His conquest of Wales and conflicts with Scotland shaped the destinies of these nations.

However, Edward's legacy is not without controversy. His treatment of the Welsh and Scottish populations was often brutal. Nevertheless, his contributions to governance and administration, as well as his military achievements, cemented his place in history.

And of course we still get to enjoy his main legacy: his magnificent castles.

(Quiz Answers: 1. Chepstow Castle; 2. Castell Coch; 3. Caernarfon Castle; 4. Pembroke Castle 5. Conwy Castle; 6. Denbigh Castle 7. Harlech Castle; 8. Cardigan Castle; 9. Cardiff Castle; 10. Raglan Castle; 11. Dolbadarn Castle; 12. Bodelwyddan Castle; 13. Chirk Castle; 14. Beaumaris Castle)



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