

# THE ROYAL CASTLE

THE NORTH EAST VIEW OF CANTERBURY CASTLE.



*To Thomas May Esq<sup>r</sup>*  
*This Prospect is humbly Inscribed by*  
*his most Obedient Serv<sup>ts</sup>*  
*Sam<sup>l</sup> & Nath<sup>l</sup> Buck.*



THIS CASTLE stands in a Valley & is suppos'd to have been built in the time of the Wars between the Danes & Normans Will<sup>m</sup> 1. had it from Lanfranc the Arch Bishop by exchange A.D. 1216. Lewis of Dolphin of France, coming to aid of Barons in these parts had this Castle deliver'd up to him. After w<sup>ch</sup> Hubert Earl of Kent was Constable temp<sup>ty</sup> Hen III. But from his time it seems to have remain'd in the Crown, and after Edw IV. time to have decay'd A.D. 1609. The Skeleton of this castle which courted the Bishop to an Admiration of its former strength, was granted by R. 2<sup>d</sup> 1. to L. Amb<sup>l</sup> Weldon of Swantoncamp in this County R. whose son and heir Ralph Weldon Esq<sup>r</sup> enjoy'd it A.D. 1664. ——— J & N. Buck delin et sculp<sup>ts</sup> 1735.

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Samuel & Nathaniel  
 Buck's view of  
 the castle and  
 Sessions House.  
 Drawn in 1735.

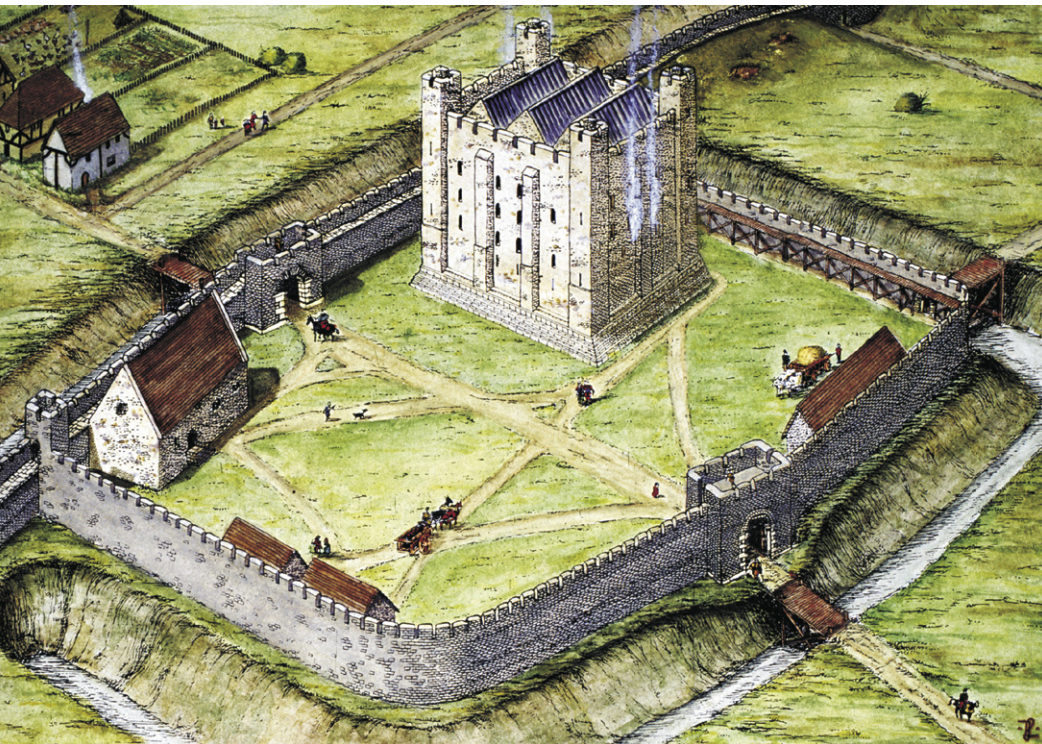


# CANTERBURY CASTLE

Canterbury Castle was one of the three original royal castles of Kent (the other two were at Rochester and Dover) that were all built very soon after the Battle of Hastings. They were all on the main Roman road from Dover to London, the route taken by William the Conqueror in October 1066 and it is more than likely that they were all built originally as motte-and-bailey castles in the winter of 1066–67 to guard this important route.

In Canterbury this original castle was almost certainly in the southern angle of the third century Roman city walls in the area of the present public gardens. The great mount, known as the Dane John, which was landscaped to its present form in 1790, would have been the motte (Dane John is a corruption of the Norman word for a motte 'donjon') while the outer bailey extended northwards and part of its outer ditch was excavated in 1981 where it was to be covered by a block of new housing (see plan). Less than 20 years later the castle was moved to a new site just inside the Roman south gate (called the Worthgate), and Domesday book (1086) tells us that fourteen of the houses of tenants of St Augustine's Abbey had to be demolished for this and the King gave them the churches of St Andrew and St Mary *sub castellum* (ie the nearby St Mary de Castro church) in exchange. We also learn that eleven more houses were destroyed for the castle ditch, presumably in the area outside the City walls as Domesday book says they were in *fossato civitatis*.

Early in the twelfth century, during the reign of Henry I, the great stone keep was built. This massive structure, which has dimensions of about 98 by 85 feet externally at the base, was originally probably at least 80 feet high. It is mainly made of



Tentative reconstruction of Canterbury Castle in the early twelfth century.  
Drawn by John Bowen and Laurie Sartin.



Engraving by W. Deeble c1815 showing internal cross-walls, now destroyed.

flint and sandstone rubble (the walls are 14½ feet thick at the base), but had quoins and a plinth of Caen and Quarr stone (from Normandy and the Isle of Wight respectively). On its north-west side was the original entrance at first-floor level and accessible by a great external staircase (only the foundations of which now exist); the keep originally had no entrances at ground level. At first-floor level was the great hall, a principal chamber and the kitchen (in the south-west corner) and two very fine fireplaces still survive in the walls. Above this was a second floor which was sadly mostly demolished in 1817; it can be seen with its windows in earlier prints and drawings. The very dark basement (originally for storage only) was lit by three windows very high up in the east wall, but in the thirteenth century (probably when the castle was already mainly used as a prison) a new large doorway and gatehouse was built on the east side. This has now been demolished but its foundations are marked out with granite sets and the doorway into the keep (now blocked again) is still visible.

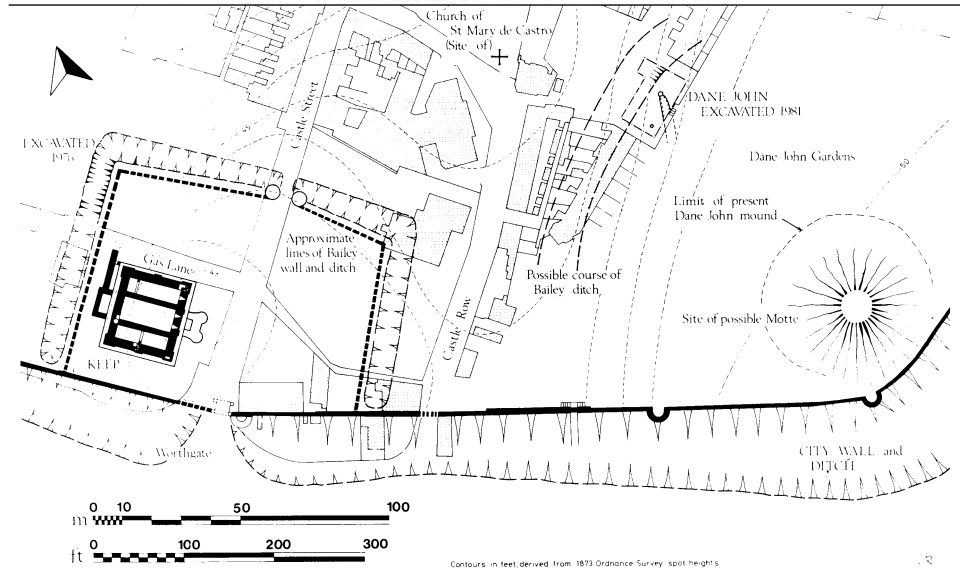
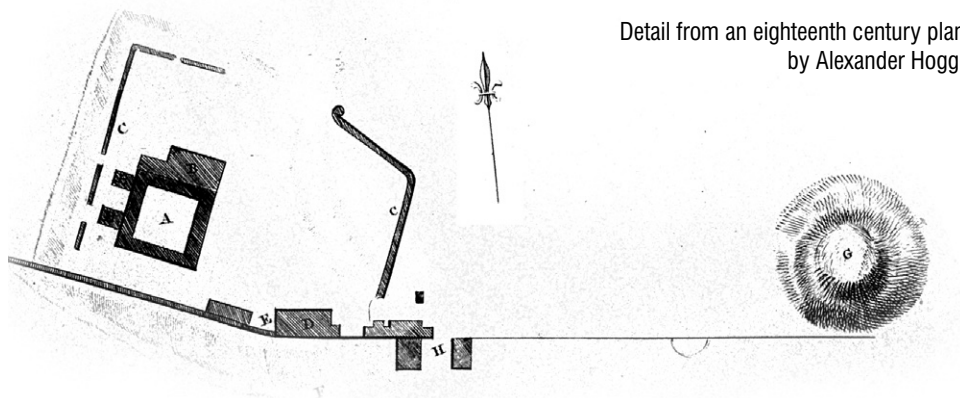
From the twelfth century at least the Castle's main use was as a prison for the County of Kent and it was under the control of the Sheriffs. Apart from the keep, there was an outer bailey (of about 4½ acres) which was enclosed by a wall and ditch and had a main gate with two drum towers facing up Castle Street into the City. On the south side the old Roman Worthgate was still in use and, as today, people could pass through the bailey on their way to Wincheap. In 1548, however, this Roman gate was blocked and Castle Row / Worthgate Place was created to bypass the Castle. This street, which went around the bailey on the east, had a new gate – the Wincheap Gate – created for it in the City walls. On the north-west side of the bailey another street ran past St Mildred's churchyard and out through a postern in the City walls. These two streets came together again at the top end of Wincheap (called Wincheap Green and now covered by a roundabout) where there was a gallows, which is clearly shown on a map of Canterbury in c1640.







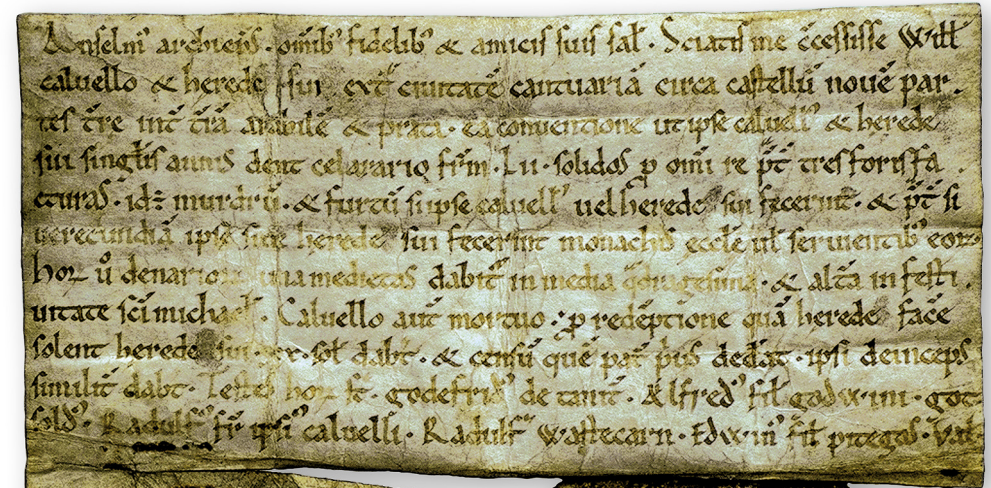
Detail from an eighteenth century plan by Alexander Hogg.



Canterbury Castle and the Dane John area.

The Castle remained a County Gaol even after Canterbury became a County Borough in its own right in 1448 (the area of the Castle was a detached portion of the County of Kent right up to the nineteenth century). In 1730 a fine new County Sessions House was built which still survives and was probably on the site of the old Great Hall. Sadly, the eighteenth century also saw the end of the Castle's life. By this time the keep was already a ruin and partial demolitions took place in 1770 and 1792. The later year also saw the demolition of much of the outer bailey walls and also of the Roman Worthgate to allow an improved Castle Street once again to run through the area. In 1817 much of the upper walls of the keep were pulled down and in 1825 the newly formed Gas, Light and Coke Company bought the keep and pulled out the two internal cross walls so they could use it as a coal and coke store. An Iron tank for water was also put on top of the keep, and it was only in 1928 that the keep was acquired by the City and preserved.

Tim Tatton-Brown  
September 1985.



Charter of the early twelfth century (with the seal of St Anselm) mentioning the 'New Castle'.



The Castle area from the CALC Map 123 (c1640).