

## White Castle and the Dating of the Towers



*White Castle, Gwent . Built by Hubert de Burgh in 1229-31, and the Outer ward circuit towers in 1234-9.*

### **White Castle and the dating of the circuit towers.**

*Paul Remfrey makes a detailed case for dating the towers to 1229-31, and 1234-39, built by Hubert de Burgh.*

The dating of castle masonry is always a hazardous business. In the case of White Castle the surviving evidence appears quite clear as to when major building work took place in the thirteenth century. This is interesting in itself as it shows that the round towers and gatehouse of the fortress are part of the early twin-towered gatehouses that graced Britain in the first third of the thirteenth century - the re-dating of the inner gatehouse at Pevensey castle being a good case in point. To investigate White Castle thoroughly it has been necessary to look at all three castles of the Trilateral and their history. Here the salient points are reiterated to show the most likely conclusion that the main masonry works at White Castle date to the time period 1229-1231

and 1234-1239. For those who want to know the full references for the facts and figures displayed here they need to refer to my works on all three castles of the Trilateral.

The first thing to be done is to examine the history of the site, also known as Llantilio castle, from 1219 to the end of the century by which time most of the refurbishment of the castle would have been completed. During the period 1219 to 1232 the castle was held by the justiciar, Hubert Burgh (bef. 1180-1243). His important career has been much studied and it is certain that from the time of King John (1199-1216) affairs of state must have taken up much of his time. However the demarcation between government and private business was not clear-cut in this era. In August 1220 the government came to Skenfrith and there is substantial circumstantial evidence that this castle was massively rebuilt between then and 1224. Between 1224 and 1227 it was the turn of

Grosmont castle to have major stone additions to its defences. By 1227 the Constable's gate at Dover castle, one of Hubert's major projects, was complete and the building of the FitzWilliam Gate there was well under way. Finally in the period 1229 to 1232 and 1234 to 1239 the circumstantial evidence suggests that the defences of Llantilio (White) and Hadleigh castles were overhauled as Hubert Burgh's final military building projects.

During 1229 Hubert visited the Trilateral, the king authorising the expenditure of 1s 6d for the cost of a messenger 'going to the king's justice at Skenfrith'. Although this suggests that Hubert was residing at the most hospitable of his three Gwent castles, it is also possible that Hubert was here to oversee the initiation of the refurbishment of the defences of White Castle, which would appear to have started about this time. A year after the possible commencement of the new works at White Castle, on 20 November 1230, Hubert was granted ceremonial permission to construct a castle at Hadleigh in Essex. It would therefore be most surprising if Hubert was to upgrade the defences of only three of his four main castles. It is even more surprising to accept this when a contemporary chronicle specifically states that Hubert spent a fortune on all four of these castles and not just on three of them.

On 2 May 1230 William Braose of Brecon and Abergavenny, whose father Reginald had held the Trilateral between 1215 and 1219, was hanged by Prince Llywelyn. In July 1232, the king, following malicious gossip, claimed that Hubert himself had sent the prince information about William's intrigues. On William's death Hubert had added the old Braose estates to his own holdings and in the increased tension resulting from these acts the constable of St. Briavels castle was mandated to let the constable of Skenfrith have 300 quarrels on 27 May 1230. This may have marked the completion of some building

works at Llantilio as previous orders for quarrels seem to have occurred at the completion of work at Skenfrith and Grosmont castles. If Hubert had begun building the new gatehouse and towers at White Castle in the spring of 1228, it is possible that they were nearing completion in 1230.

On 29 July 1232, an exasperated King Henry III ordered Earl Hubert to surrender all his castles to the Crown. Simultaneously Hubert was replaced as justiciar by Stephen Segrave and a few days later the king demanded of him an account of all his expenditures in this reign and the last and all the money that 'had been wasted either in war or in any other way' and also of the liberties by which Hubert enjoyed his lands. To this Hubert replied that he held a warrant from King John which released him from giving any account of any monies he had received or used. The bishop of Winchester correctly replied that this writ had ended with the life of John. Henry then charged Hubert with various pieces of malicious gossip and Hubert was forced to abjure the reins of state. Few it would appear were sorry to see him go, until the colour of the new regime became increasingly apparent.

On 19 September 1232 control of White Castle and the Trilateral were added to the burgeoning possessions of Peter Rivaux, the nephew of Bishop Peter les Roches of Winchester. The next year, on 19 July 1233, the king further granted Peter Rivaux, the treasurer of Poitiers, the manors of Grosmont, Skenfrith and Llantilio (Lentillio) in Wales with their castles for the service of two knights' fees. By this time war had almost broken out in the Welsh borders between on the one part the followers of Walter Clifford and the new Earl Marshall and on the other the government of Bishop Peter les Roches of Winchester. As Henry III and his army marched into Wales at Hay on Wye on 31 August, the sheriff of Gloucester was ordered to receive 10,000 quarrels from the

constable of St Briavels and have them taken to White Castle. Such an order is instructive as to where the king thought so many quarrels might be necessary. In time of peace only 2,000 quarrels were sent to Skenfrith in 1224 and 4,000 probably to Grosmont via Skenfrith in 1226. This perhaps shows that White Castle was seen by contemporaries as the major fortress of the three, the other sites being more residential. This would suggest that White Castle was both defensible and powerful at this time.

Five years after returning White Castle and the Trilateral to Hubert Burgh, King Henry III again moved against his old mentor. This resulted on 29 October 1239, in Earl Hubert Burgh of Kent submitting himself to the king's liability and grace and surrendering to him the three castles of White Castle (*Blancum castrum*), Grosmont, Skenfrith and the castle of Hadleigh (*Haetfeld*) with its town and park. In return for this the king granted Hubert and Margaret his wife, for the duration of their lives, all the other lands they held. One contemporary chronicler commented that this was the greatest blow to Hubert as he loved all four castles and had spent a fortune on rebuilding them, though he bore this tribulation with his customary patience.

He resigned four castles into the king's hand, namely White Castle and Grosmont in Wales and Skenfrith and Hadleigh (*Hauefeldiam*). In the rebuilding of these castles Earl Hubert had spent a boundless sum of money.

This statement helps confirm that it was Hubert who was responsible for building the bulk of White Castle, its round towers and outer ward, and not the impecunious Lord Edward twenty years after him in his relatively short and often interrupted tenure between 1254 and 1267. Otherwise why would Matthew Paris state that he had rebuilt all four castles rather than just two or three? In short is it best to accept an original highly informed source, or accept

a modern educated guess, which, as I hope to show, is unsupported by an historical evidence.

On 14 October 1241, Walerand Teuton, the royal keeper of Skenfrith, Grosmont and White Castle, was allowed various expenses from the lands he held in bail. These included 7s 9d on repairs carried out on the three bridges in the outer bailey of White Castle; 5s 7½d for two brass pots and pans for the king's kitchen of White Castle and finally £1 for ten wooden crossbows bought and placed in the garrisons of the Three Castles. These moneys were on top of the sixty marks (£40) allowance Walerand had to maintain the castles. Over two years later on 20 May 1244 the king allowed Walerand, from the issues of the lands of the Trilateral, £15 10s spent in making a hall for the king at White Castle together with a pantry and a buttery. This probably marks the construction of the buildings along the internal face of the castle's west curtain. These internal building works could well be taken to mark the final completion of the castle after the building of the round tower defences.

A few weeks after the allowance Prince Dafydd rebelled once more and White Castle was again placed on a war footing. By 1245 Prince Dafydd and his supporters had generally been beaten back into North Wales. As the war ground to a halt, on 6 September 1246, Walerand was allowed a further £5 which he had spent on building a chamber anew within White castle.

For the next few years White Castle seems to have remained a quiet backwater. Then, on 20 June 1248, the king ordered the sending of eighty marks (£53 6s 8d) to Walerand Teuton, the keeper of Trilateral. A further order on 23 November 1249 allocated Walerand a further £20 from the issues of the Trilateral bailiwick. The final payment in this series occurred on 20 May 1251 when Walerand was

granted forty marks (£26 13s 4d), 'his yearly king's gift for his maintenance'. This seems to be the last mention of White Castle under royal jurisdiction until 14 February 1254 when the king finally disposed of the castle as part of the apportionment he made to his eldest son and heir, the Lord Edward.

The other lands passed over to Edward's control in Wales included the whole county of Chester with its castles and towns together with the king's conquest of Wales in these bounds, to wit Rhuddlan, Dyserth (Dissard) and Degannwy (Gunnoc) and the other land of the Perfeddwlad; Bristol, the Trilateral, Montgomery, Carmarthen, Cardigan and the castle of Buellt. The same summer, on 23 July, the constable of St Briavels was ordered to send 6,000 quarrels to Gilbert Talbot, Edward's constable, to munition the castles of Grosmont, Skenfrith and White Castle. Such an action would seem to have been intended to let Edward have some of the king's stock for his own usage in his now semi-independent state. It hardly seems likely that this could have been related to the completion of any defensive building works at the castles as we have already seen how any major royal works would have appeared in the pipe rolls as these lesser works at White Castle already had. We are therefore left with the same question of did the great rebuilding happen earlier under Hubert Burgh or later under the Lord Edward?

It is to be presumed that the three castles of the Trilateral were handed over to the young Lord Edward in good condition. Certainly the order for the 6,000 quarrels to be sent to Gilbert Talbot to munition them suggests that they were defensible. However in 1256 their contemporary, Hadleigh castle in Essex, was reported by its royal constable to be in a very bad state of repair. Its buildings were unroofed and its walls broken. Presumably this had occurred because Hubert Burgh had not been in residence since 1239 and without a lord the

castle, in totally pacified land, had been allowed to fall into decay, even though it was no more than twenty years old.

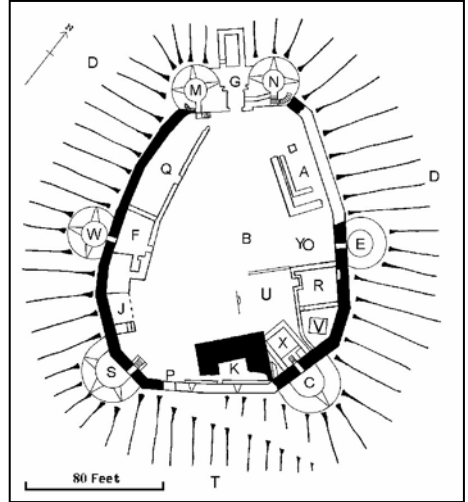
The castles of the Trilateral in the Welsh Marches seem to have been kept in good repair under the Lord Edward. Indeed, just as the new Welsh war begins, we are lucky to have the steward's account for the lordship of White Castle for the year from 29 September 1256 to 29 September 1257. This deals mainly with economics of the lordship, but it also contains some expenditures which throws further light upon the status of the castle. After accounting for various farming activities in the lordship, Reeve Adam claimed moneys for iron bought to repair the drawbridge at 3s 9d; three pairs of manacles for the prison and iron bars for the window at two shillings; roofing the barn and other buildings at 4s 5d; lead and tin for the tower (turrus) at 3s 2d and for making a portcullis for the castle at a cost of £1 7s. Next there was a charge of one shilling for making an 'outer gate' and a further shilling for the carriage of timber from Monmouth. These minor expenditures brought the total expenses at White Castle to £23 5s 4½d, to this was added £30 0s 6½d which was handed over to John Briton who at Christmas 1256 had been sent to Abergavenny to organise the resistance to Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in the district. In total it was discovered that Reeve Adam had spent 2s 7¼d more than he had received and that consequently he personally was owed this amount. In all this suggests that the lordship of White Castle was well-ordered and running at a useful profit.

After Reeve Adam's account comes the account of John Briton which ran from 8 September 1256 to 30 November 1257. This gives some idea of how the Lord Edward was arranging his military affairs in the district. What is very noticeable is that the garrison troops seem confined to Abergavenny and to a much lesser degree Grosmont. From this we can see that

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John's account contains many details which are not strictly relevant to the history of White Castle, so only the salient points will be picked out here. John accounted for £1 12s in his taking seven hostages from the land of Buellt and taking them to White Castle where they were no doubt incarcerated. It might be interesting to know what became of them during the repeated attacks upon Buellt until the castle's fall in July 1260. Also five shillings were expended in carrying quarrels from St Briavels to White Castle. In the presumed local White Castle garrison £8 6s was spent on two men-at-arms with barded horses staying there from 28 October 1256 [the outbreak of rebellion in Gwynedd] to 12 January 1257. To augment this force between Christmas Eve and 13 January 1257 Osbert Giffard was paid 27 shillings for remaining at the castle. A further two buckets of quarrels were sent from St Briavels to White Castle, which obviously indicates that defensive preparations were in hand. An account was also rendered for £2 spent on making 'a certain new bridge' at the castle. These figures, with those for the tower roof and drawbridge repairs, are altogether minuscule when considering that Briton in this period spent £507 15s 2½d on preparing his position at Abergavenny for war. The defences of White Castle must have seemed satisfactory and an attack on the castle seems to have been considered quite unlikely.

Altogether these figures supply us with an interesting view of life in a medieval Marcher barony in the mid-thirteenth century. It also strongly suggests that there was no decay at White Castle as had been witnessed at Hubert Burgh's other castle at Hadleigh. Here in 1275 it was declared that the castle houses were in ruins and the fortress itself was badly built (*castrum debilititer aedificatum*). The survey from White Castle clearly shows that little rebuilding was going on and certainly that no great refortification had occurred since 1254, otherwise these would surely have shown up in



this set of trifling repairs to the fortress. We can see from these figures, and especially the paltry sum spent on lead and tin for a tower roof, that the castle was in a good state of fortification in the mid-1250's.

In 1302 merely repairing and amending one gutter between the great hall and the prince's old chamber in Chester castle cost £1 6s 3d in the payment of workmen, carpenters and plumbers. This included the cost of working with the boards and timber and soldering tin for the lead. We can therefore see that the expense of just over three shillings in 1257 was merely for repairing a small leak somewhere in one of the tower roofs, which were then probably around twenty years old. The statement should not be read as showing that the old Norman keep (K) was still standing as has been suggested. Also in 1302 at Chester castle the cost of totally rebuilding the chapel and roofing it with over five sheets of lead after a major fire cost £13 14s. Similarly the costs of setting seven great beams in various rooms in Chester castle and strengthening the walls and setting stone corbels within the structures cost £5 15s 2d. In the late 1270's the building of Builth castle in the Middle Marches cost over £1,600. In the amount of masonry built and towers and gatehouses constructed

Builth would have been somewhat smaller than White Castle. Such costs again show with a fair degree of certainty that White Castle was not modernised by the Lord Edward, but that it was constructed with some 'of the infinite amount of money' spent by Earl Hubert Burgh before 1239.

The year 1258 saw a bloodless revolution in England and the curtailing of the power of the monarchy for a time. One of the results of this was the limiting of the power of the Lord Edward. Subsequently on 15 May 1260, through the advice of the king's council, the Lord Edward transferred the custodianship of Bristol to Philip Basset, Montgomery to John Lestrange Junior, and the Trilateral to Gilbert Talbot. Indeed with the deteriorating relationship between father and son about 6 June 1262 the Lord Edward was persuaded to exchange his hold on many of his lands. These included Grosmont, Skenfrith and White Castle. In return he was to receive the king's Jewry of England with all the issues, profits, debts and customs for the next three years. In other words Edward was only in charge of White Castle from 1254 to 1262 and for six of these eight years Edward was totally cash-strapped fighting a losing war in Wales. It is therefore quite ludicrous to suggest that his energies were spent in re-fortifying an isolated castle in South Wales while it was his North Welsh possessions that were being attacked and overrun. Further it is impossible that the castle was rebuilt in the period 1254 to 1256 as we partially have the account of the lordship which show incontrovertibly that no major rebuilding was going on.

On 18 July 1262 Gilbert Talbot, in his capacity as constable of the Trilateral, was ordered to help defend South Wales for King Henry III. That same winter of 1262 disaster overwhelmed the Marches of Wales. Roger Mortimer and his allies were defeated at Cefnlllys in late November and towards the end of December were forced to retreat headlong out of Wales, while the

lordship of Brecon was overrun. As a consequence of this the government of England ordered Gilbert Talbot to make good the munitions of the castles of Skenfrith, Grosmont and White Castle 'by all means lest disaster occurs' on 24 December. Gilbert seems to have succeeded in his task and the defeat by the Marchers of 10,000 Welshmen at the battle of Abergavenny on 3 March 1263 brought the Welsh threat to the district around White Castle to an end. During this period the Lord Edward was seeking loans in the towns of Shrewsbury, Ludlow and Hereford 'for certain urgent business of the king's in the Marches'. However we may presume that this had much more to do with the relief of Deganwy and Dyserth castles, than for the unnecessary re-fortification of the Trilateral. In May 1264 Edward was taken prisoner at Lewes and as has been seen there can be little doubt that no major building work had been undertaken by him at White Castle during his years of lordship. Indeed no more is mentioned of the Trilateral during the rest of the disturbances which climaxed with the defeat and death of Earl Simon Montfort at the battle of Evesham on 4 August 1265 and ended with pacification after the dictum of Kenilworth at the end of 1266.

It therefore remains to be seen whether White Castle was rebuilt under the rule of Edward's brother, Edmund Croachback. On 28 December 1266 Edmund was granted Builth castle and its appurtenances, which had previously been part of the patrimony of his brother the Lord Edward until it was seized by Prince Llywelyn in 1260. To retake this fortress Prince Edmund would obviously need a base and what was more natural than to give him the reasonably nearby and conveniently vacant old lordship of his elder brother at Grosmont? This of course included White Castle. Consequently on 30 June 1267, just three months before the treaty of Montgomery was signed with Prince Llywelyn

ap Gruffydd, the Lord Edward restored the honour of Monmouth and the castles of Grosmont, Skenfrith, and White Castle to the king so that he could in turn give them to Prince Edmund and his heirs. Prince Edmund seems to have made Grosmont his caput at an early date. Consequently he may not have spent much time or effort on the great military fortress of White Castle, although it is apparent that Grosmont was remodelled around this time. Prince Edmund accompanied his brother on crusade, being out of the kingdom from soon after 13 February 1271 to early in 1274. At this time an extent was made which described the state of White Castle's contemporary, Hadleigh castle in Essex. This was found to have been badly built and its houses were consequently much ruined. The state of the poor workmanship may have been overstated, for no repairs were carried out until the end of the 1280's and then only some £41 was needed to patch the fortress up. The castle then paid host to the king on two occasions in 1293 and 1305. This hardly made it a royal favourite. Despite this the castle was much used by King Edward II and surveys of the time mention two towers, a main gate and barbican and a postern. Hadleigh was later massively rebuilt between 1360 and 1370 with two great round towers being added to the older castle which appears to have had rectangular towers like those found at Dover castle. In total over £2,000 was spent on the works. The large round tower by the gate and two square towers may have been part of the original design of Hubert Burgh.

After returned from crusade Prince Edmund, on 6 June 1275, claimed that he had only received £600 of the 2,600 marks (£1,733 6s 8d) granted to him by the king for his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Consequently the king ordered the Exchequer to inspect the relevant rolls and pay any balance due. Such large amounts of money might always be used to start the refurbishment of what Edmund was making into his

family home at Grosmont. There seems little evidence that any of it was spent at White Castle, which it has been argued above was the most recently refurbished of his three local castles (1229-32, 1234-39).

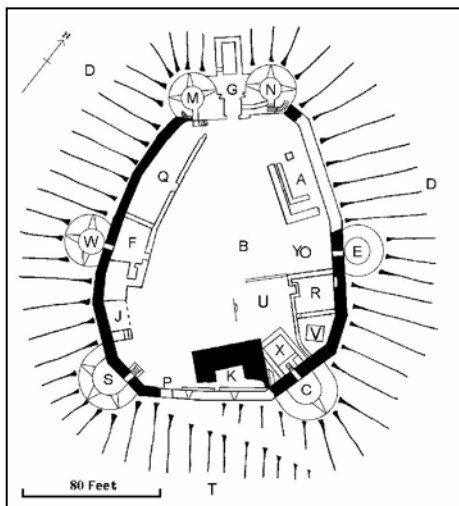
### **The Masonry Defences**

The bulk of the masonry at White Castle belongs to five distinctly traceable phases. The earliest is the keep (K), of which just under half of its foundations remain. Flanking and surrounding this are the remains of the curtain walls probably constructed under the aegis of Ralph Grosmont in the two building years of 1185 and 1186. Next came the addition of four great drum towers with the gatehouse in the northern half of the inner ward probably in the period 1229 to 1231. Around the same time the keep (K) was demolished and a new curtain wall with postern (P) built over its site. Its style seems different from the rest of the masonry and this may have been the final major work at the fortifications. Despite this it seems likely that the construction of the two southernmost towers and the outer ward occurred last, probably between 1234 and 1239. These later three phases, the bulk of the present remains at White Castle, has generally been stated to be the work of the Lord Edward, or his brother, Edmund Plantagenet, when they were lords of the Trilateral between 1254 and 1296. However there is no documentary evidence to back up this claim. Conversely there is evidence, as has been seen above, to place the work within the ambit of the 'boundless sum of money' Earl Hubert Burgh had spent at the Trilateral before 1239. The similarities between work at Dover castle and the Trilateral really clinches the case on the grounds of probability.

### **The Gatehouse (G)**

It would seem that some 28 years passed after White Castle first came into the hands of Hubert Burgh in 1201 before he began his refortification of the site in the period 1229 to 1232. Since the 1950's it has be-

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come acceptable to date the additions to the inner ward to the period after 1254, though there are problems with this which seem not to have been adequately considered. Contemporary evidence shows that an outer gatehouse was standing in 1257 when it needed a new gate. Unless the castle had been recently attacked, or the workmanship was defective, of which our record shows no evidence, this would suggest that the building was of some antiquity. Further the towers of both the inner and outer wards show every indication of being more in line with the smaller towers built by Hubert Burgh at Skenfrith and Grosmont, than those of the larger ones of the later era of the Lord Edward at Caerphilly, Rhuddlan or Flint. Similarly the work of Hubert Burgh at Dover can be seen to be similar to that at White Castle in more than a simple, superficial manner. Therefore it can be reasonably accepted that Hubert was responsible for the refortification of White Castle, and that this was carried out after he had finished rebuilding the other two castles of the Trilateral as the historical evidence recounted above suggests.

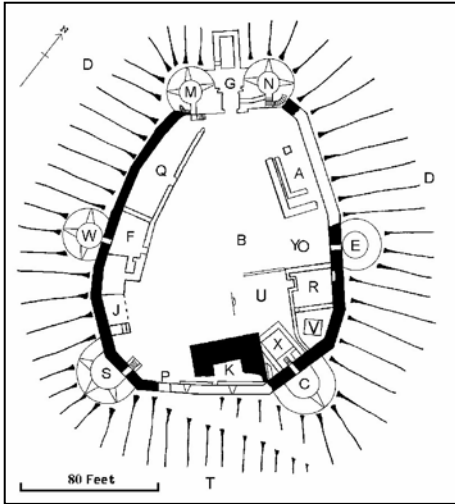
White Castle gatehouse is remarkably similarly to the one at Whittington castle which was built in the early 1220's. The gate passageway to White Cas-

tle is heavily fortified. First came a portcullis of unusual design. Most portcullis are built into the gatehouse, but at White Castle it seems to have been added to the design as an afterthought. This is strange for one appears to have existed at the earlier Grosmont castle, unless of course this is a later insertion. An internal portcullis also existed within the vaulted gatechamber of the Constable gatehouse at Dover castle. At White Castle a row of projecting quoins were added in front of the outer gate arch. Normally these would have been within the first section of wall. Further, if partially external, it would have been expected for the quoins to form an arch above the gateway so that the portcullis would have been hidden from view when raised. At White Castle the quoins continued apparently to battlement level. Here there must have been a projecting chamber from where the portcullis could have been operated. This is a singular and unusual design in Wales and the Marches.

The gatehouse at White Castle is a unique structure and contains several features which suggest that it is an early twin D-shaped entrance. At Dover castle the north gate looks quite similar to White Castle in many respects, although the Dover castle gatehouse was heavily rebuilt after its destruction by the rebels and French in 1216. Like White Castle it has an impressive batter spreading a considerable distance down the scarp. Unlike the Gwentian castle though, it has two or three long, unsighted loops, without oilletts, in both its remaining lower floors. It also has an external offset at floor level. This is quite similar to the round towers at Chepstow castle which are now accepted as late-twelfth century. The FitzWilliam gate at Dover, which replaced the north gate around 1227, also bears some comparison with White Castle gatehouse. Both are rectangular structures with twin protruding towers set on sloping plinths. However the FitzWilliam gate led to a covered postern which passed through



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the ditch and the next bank of the castle defences to an outer gate which is now mostly destroyed. Internally the gatehouse had two windows on first floor level overlooking the bailey. On the floor above at Dover were a set of twin loops in each tower, with a further loop set above the gate archway between them. Both gates should also be compared with Criccieth castle gatehouse. This gatehouse, which probably dates to before 1239, has three loops on its ground floor and none on the floor above. These two early thirteenth century structures again suggest that the gatehouse at White Castle dates to the period 1229 to 1232 and this enhances the historical evidence suggesting this era divined from the study of both Skenfrith and Grosmont castles and the history of the Trilateral.

At White Castle the upper floors of both gatehouse towers and the east (E) and west (W) towers are externally blind. Presumably this was the received wisdom after the building of the towers at first Skenfrith and then Grosmont. This tower (M) should also be compared with the twin towered Fitzwilliam gate built under Hubert Burgh's constableness and the older, but much rebuilt north gate, both at Dover.

As mentioned above, many of the rectangular Angevin towers of King Henry II at Dover, built in the period 1179 to 1189, appear to be of a similar design. These much altered towers of the inner ward seem to have three ground floor embrasures and no openings in the upper storeys. Again these features taken together at White Castle seem to point to this structure dating to the work of Hubert Burgh in the 1230's.

The suggestion that the portcullis and drawbridge apartment, like the hoardings around the walls, were wooden offers interesting possibilities. What is immediately apparent is the sheer height and inaccessibility of the machinery set on top of the gatehouse (G). There could have been no comfortable constable's chamber set here to vet those entering the inner ward of White Castle. The mechanism set in a probably wooden hoarding would also have been incredibly vulnerable to artillery fire. We are therefore left with an early twin-towered gatehouse which is very lacking in respect to later Edwardian examples such as St Briavels, Goodrich, Rhuddlan, Caernarvon or Harlech. Indeed the gatehouse is virtually devoid of external features except for four crossbow loops in each tower, the battlements and hoardings. As such this again suggests that the refurbishment of White Castle dates to the first half of the thirteenth century rather than to the second half as has been previously accepted.

### The Inner Ward

The two flanking towers of the inner ward have similarities to the two gatehouse towers although both lack stairways. The exterior of the west tower (W) is perhaps the most photographed part of the castle, giving fine reflections as it does in the moat below. It currently consists of three storeys, though there may be a deep circular basement as has been found in the east tower (E) and at several of the towers at Skenfrith and Grosmont castles. The ground floor of the west tower (W) is currently entered through a broken doorway cut into the earlier curtain

wall at current ground level. Of this structure only a few of the lower jambs now remain and these have the Hubert Burgh style doorstops that are found so often at the castles of the Trilateral.

The first floor of the west tower (W) was unlit and it seems possible that there was no entrance into it, except possibly from the floor above. The next floor of the tower was accessed from north and south via the wallwalk, though there were no loops or any other feature at this level. It is very noticeable that by the second stage the tower has assumed a D-shaped appearance, rather than the round structure of the floors below. Again there are no lights in the three surviving sides of this tower. To the east the straight side of the D-shaped chamber appears to have been either open or wooden backed. Certainly the surviving sides of the opposite east tower (E) is in finished masonry. The final level of the tower was a fighting platform reached from the wallwalk level via a dozen or so straight steps up from the wallwalk to the south. This is a similar layout to that found at Skenfrith.

Opposite the west tower (W) is the east tower. The only real difference between the two buildings is that the east tower had a deep Skenfrith and Grosmont style basement. Like these comparable towers the ten feet deep basement of the east tower (E) also has no obvious access point. The first floor was entered some three feet above current ground level by a now mostly destroyed slightly pointed doorway inserted in the older curtain. Again the similarities with Skenfrith, Grosmont and the rear of the gatetowers at White Castle are to be noted.

In all, these four round towers seem the larger twins of those found at the neighbouring castles of Skenfrith and Grosmont. It therefore seems unnatural to ascribe them to different eras of ownership and construction as has recently been done.

### The Southernmost Towers

The southern (S) and south-eastern (C) towers are similar to one another and seem to belong to a slightly later phase than the other two pairs of towers just described to the north. These towers differ from the others by being D-shaped in their entirety rather than boldly projecting circular towers with D-shaped upper floors. They are also slightly larger than the other four towers being some 32 feet in external diameter with walls seven feet thick above the batter. The D-shaped chambers within the tower have a diameter of eighteen feet. Like the east and west towers (E&W) they form a butt joint with the curtain, but in this case the craftsmanship seems less certain and there has been a certain amount of slippage.

The history related above suggests with some exactitude that they were constructed by Earl Hubert Burgh, probably early in the period 1234 to 1239 and before the building of the outer ward (O). This is suggested because their loops do not end in top and bottom ball oilets like those of the outer defences. These towers also differ from the east and west towers in having loops on two, or, in the case of the chapel tower (C), three floors. That the towers are of a similar age to the rest is suggested by their loops and battlements which seem similar to all the rest that survive. The towers are also dissimilar to the Lancaster modifications at Grosmont which were probably built within twenty years either side of 1300. However, the approach (J) to the upper storeys of the south tower (S) at White Castle bares some similarity to that to the approach to the great tower at Grosmont.

There seems little doubt that the battlements followed a similar arrangement on all six of the inner ward towers. This probably indicates the towers were built reasonably contemporaneously, or that all the wallwalks and battlements were refurbished near-simultaneously at a later date. It should also be noted that the lower layout of

## White Castle and the Dating of the Towers



*White Castle, Gwent . Gatehouse into the Outer Ward , probably built by Hubert de Burgh in the 1230s.*

three loops in the basement and two loops against the curtain in the floor above mirrors the west tower of Hubert Burgh at Grosmont castle. This arrangement has many similarities with the corner towers at Skenfrith castle. There are no towers of a similar nature to the south (S) or chapel (C) towers at Dover castle and those at Hadleigh have been too heavily damaged to make useful comparisons.

### **The Postern Gate (P) and South-Eastern Curtain Wall**

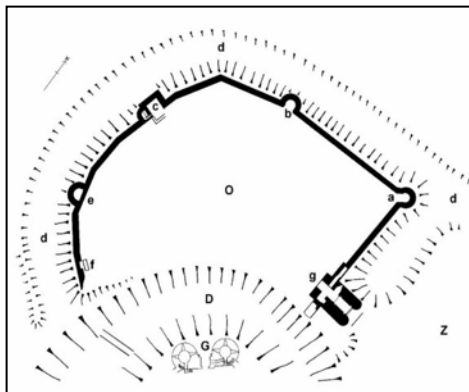
East of the south tower (S) is an external round-headed segmental relieving arch. Under this was the apparently round-headed postern (P) of which the jambs have now totally disappeared, though two drawbar slots remain. Internally is a short four foot gate passageway and behind this is another robbed-out gateway, topped by a segmental relieving arch. It is possible that this gateway was the original entrance to the castle, now encased by the later wall. Superficially

there are similarities between this gate and the smaller water gate at Skenfrith which may date to 1187. Internally at White Castle, immediately west of the site of the postern gate (P), is the thinning of the curtain marked by the remains of a fine quoined joint. This matches similar features on the east side of the gatehouse (G) passageway and externally by the north-east tower of the twelfth century inner enceinte at Dover castle. The purpose of these features are uncertain, but they would appear to be decorative. It certainly makes a symmetrical match with the gatehouse (G) quoining and having two such features built in such a manner seems deliberate. Similarly the example at Dover seems to have little military logic about its construction.

### **The Outer Gatehouse (g)**

To the north of the inner ward lies the irregular outer ward. This too has been dated to the Edwardian era with little reference to the castle's history as described

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above. The castle is currently entered through the outer gatehouse (g). The east and west walls of the gatehouse (g) have mostly gone leaving only the north and south walls as two jagged fragments. Within this stood the gate passageway. The west exit into the ward (O) once had an archway in which was a gate. This was probably similar to the layout at Montgomery castle inner gatehouse which was built in the 1220's. Only the lower steps of the White Castle gateway remain. At the eastern, turret end of the possibly earlier rectangular gatetower, was a further gate of which the door stops also remain. None of these door stops would look out of place at Skenfrith or Grosmont. As at Grosmont castle, the early drawbridge pit seems to have been later encased by two projecting walls added to the front of the older gate-tower. At Grosmont, however, the facing of the projections were square, while those at White Castle have rounded faces. These solid turrets show some similarities to the twin-towered gatehouses at Montgomery and Longtown castles. It has been suggested that White Castle outer gatehouse (g) was only constructed in the mid-1250's when, money was spent on making a portcullis, an 'outer' gate and a 'new bridge'.

However the shilling spent on a gate was surely for a wooden replacement of an earlier castle gate rather than the building of this expensive masonry struc-

ture which at this time would have easily cost between £300 and £500. All this actually proves is that a new portcullis, outer gate and a bridge were made somewhere at the castle. Indeed the large sum of £2 paid for the bridge might well suggest that it was partially the stone bridge abutment to the outer gate (g) that was constructed now. If it were, it would again suggest nothing, except that the outer gatehouse (g) was standing in 1256 and needed a new gate and portcullis. Indeed the money spent on repairing the drawbridge could well also relate to the outer gatehouse and suggest that the two rounded turrets had been recently added to the older gatetower and that this consequently required the addition of a new portcullis and gate.

### The North Curtain Wall of the Outer Ward

At the end of the mostly collapsed east curtain wall was a backless circular mural tower (a) of two storeys. This is about twenty feet in external diameter. The tower is joined to the curtain on the west side by a short section of wall which is obviously part of the original plan. Probably it indicates that the architects did not plan the wall and tower properly with the result that there was a gap of several feet between them which had to be filled with this little section of wall. Externally a sloping plinth is still evident around the tower. Such plinths are lacking on the outer ward curtain wall. Apparently this is because the walls stand on top of the bank of the outer ditch (d), while the towers protrude down the slope into the ditch. On the ground level of the corner tower is yet another 'blind' room. Above is a room with three crossbow loops. This is the standard layout in the outer ward towers, a reversal of what is seen in the inner ward both at White Castle and Dover castle, but similar to the Skenfrith towers. There appears to be no doorway into the ground floor, or the floor above. There is merely an aperture, which may once have been

blocked with a wooden wall similar to that of a 'black and white house'.

On the first floor are three staggered cross loops set in wide embrasures. These have angular roofs and are quite shallow, due to the thinness of the walls. Externally the embrasures supported three similar split sighted crossbow loops with ball top and bottom oillets. This layout, apart from the open back, is reminiscent of the towers at Skenfrith castle. Indeed the embrasures with their pointed segmental arches, three to a floor above a basement, are pure Skenfrith. It is uncertain how access was gained to the upper floor. Possibly it was via wooden steps to the rear, or even a wooden stair down from the wallwalk at second floor level. It is interesting that the ground floor would have been left literally undefended by crossbow fire. This is the opposite to the inner ward at White Castle. Two-thirds of the way along the north curtain stands a half round tower (b), otherwise similar in design to its corner companion to the east (a). This is the most ruined of the towers of the outer ward. The bulk of its first floor loops have been stripped from their embrasures and looking into this tower you could be forgiven for mistaking it for one of those at Skenfrith. Within the tower the ball base oillets of the north and west loops are still in situ showing that the tower originally had similar loops to the others. The rear wall of this tower has been gouged out at ground level and the basement walls robbed of their facing. The upper floor, however, is externally perfect at the rear and this shows that the tower was either open to the air or wooden backed. Although the top of the tower is now gone, it presumably had a fighting platform similar to the other towers at the castle.

From the north tower (b) the curtain makes three irregular sweeps, leaving a vulnerable unflanked angle, round to the largest tower in the outer enceinte (c). The unflanked angle is not buttressed with

quoins, unlike the south-east wall of the inner ward. Presumably this suggests that the south-east curtain post-dates the outer ward (O). There is a similar unflanked angle as this at Wigmore castle which was probably built in the early to mid-thirteenth century. There are no features in the rest of the outer ward curtain that differ significantly from the rest of the structure in style or date.

### Conclusions

One feature that ties the Trilateral castles together, and therefore suggests that they were constructed as part of a single building scheme, is the access to the wallwalks. This would appear to have been gained mainly via the two individualistic stairways in the gatetower, although there were likely stairs in the chapel tower (C) at White Castle and in the west tower at Grosmont. The profusion of wooden steps to wallwalk level which are occasionally suggested would simply seem to be imaginary, especially when the number of buildings clustering against the curtain walls are taken into consideration. At Skenfrith there is no obvious method of reaching the wallwalk, though it must be suspected from the rest of the remains, that the original stairway was in the gatehouse. At Grosmont a straight stair can still be made out in the gatehouse, although a short stairway in the west tower appears to allow access to the mid-floor of the west tower, if not the wallwalk.

Finally, at all three castles of the Trilateral, the lack of sanitation is immediately obvious. At White Castle garderobes only certainly exist in the outer ward and these were obviously built with a fair amount of people in mind, with two or three in the outer gatehouse (g), two in the west tower (c) and one against the curtain (f). The pit (V) in the inner ward is of uncertain purpose. The latrine block by the side of the great tower at Grosmont may also be an addition to Hubert Burgh's

work, while at Skenfrith the only garderobe, a corbelled out latrine, is set in the second floor of the king's tower. Perhaps Hubert had taken to heart the lesson of the loss of Château Gaillard by a common soldier scaling the undefended latrine shaft. Certainly his provisions for sanitation and light for the common soldier seems singularly lacking at all three inner fortresses.

This study has revealed much new data about the history, building and operation of White Castle. It is also interesting to see how the perceived history of the site has see-sawed over the years. The great G. T. Clarke believed that the inner curtain was built during the late 1180s and that Hubert Burgh was responsible for the rest of the masonry. In 1961 this view was overturned and the dating of the later masonry was adjusted to the 1250s or 1260s. As I hope to have shown, this reinterpretation was based upon slim evidence that does not stand up to detailed scrutiny. Certainly the singular reference to roof repairs of 'a tower' in 1257 cannot be taken as evidence that the old keep (K) was still standing, nor can the inexpensive works possibly carried out on an outer gate be tied to the refortification of the outer ward (O).

What can be firmly deduced is that the rectangular keep (K) could have been built at any time between 1067 and 1160, though perhaps the first push into Gwent by the earls of Hereford in the late 1060s and early 1070s or the Anarchy of Stephen's reign would have provided most motivation. It also seems likely that this keep (K) was built simultaneously with the hall block of Grosmont Castle, Grosmont being the caput and White Castle the major fortress of the honour. With this in mind it should also be noted that the only early Norman pottery to come from all three castle sites is from Skenfrith where a single sherd came from a silted ditch which was said to have lain under the Hubert Burgh masonry castle. It is therefore eminently possible that the later castles of the Trilat-

eral began as the castles of the Bilateral, and that Newcastle/Skenfrith was a late-comer to the scheme.

Secondly the northern four towers of the inner ward at White Castle can be reasonably assigned to the work of Hubert Burgh, probably in the era 1229 to 1231, and that the two southern towers and also much of the outer ward probably date to his work in the period 1234 to 1239. The work carried out to 'the tower' of Walerand Teuton and his immediate successors in the mid-thirteenth century was far more likely concerned with the adjustments to the larger south tower (S) than to the obsolete keep (K) which had most likely already been demolished by Hubert Burgh when the two great southern flanking towers and joining curtain were constructed. Certainly parts of the old keep (K) appear to be reused in the chapel tower (C). It can therefore be seen that the dating of the construction of White Castle is reasonably secure and supported by the works of Hubert Burgh at other fortresses.

In total it can be seen that White Castle as it now stands is primarily an early to mid-thirteenth century enclosure castle built on the site of an earlier keep and bailey structure. Its great size shows the determination of the Crown and later Earl Hubert Burgh of Kent in denying this district to the native Welsh. As such it stands as a masterpiece of military engineering to the second quarter of the thirteenth century, just as the Edwardian castles of North Wales stand testament to the abilities of the last quarter of the century.

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This paper is an abbreviated summary of his essay on White and readers should consult Paul's full document: *White Castle, 1066 to 1438* (ISBN 1-899376-42-9), a 310 page detailed history and analysis; also review his online essays at: [www.castles99.ukprint.com/Essays/white.html](http://www.castles99.ukprint.com/Essays/white.html)