

Lancaster Castle



Lancaster Castle. The Henry IV gatehouse from the south-east. The C15 gatehouse subsumes a C12/13 stone gateway, observable inside the gate passage beyond the portcullis. The lower level loops originally had central cross-slits as seen on all the antiquarian prints. A few remain on the outer angles. The keep is directly across the inner courtyard beyond the clock tower. For more views of the castle on this August 2012 open day see Matthew Emmott's castle blogs - <http://www.matthewpemmott.co.uk/>

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Lancaster Castle starts to unlock its secrets

H M Prison, Lancaster Castle, which once employed 300 staff, looking after about 240 inmates, finally closed its doors, or should it be emptied its cells, in March 2011. The Castle prison, which sits on land owned by the Duchy of Lancaster, has been a prison since the 17th century. Whilst this chapter of the castle's history has closed, a section of the castle - the Shire Hall area - still continues to function as a Crown Court.

The prison area of the complex - substantially a variety of unique 18th and early 19th century buildings - also incorporates a number of much older, and externally unscathed, medieval structures: the striking gatehouse of 1402-20 built for Henry IV; the Norman keep or great tower, dated traditionally to the early 12th century, and a wall tower - the Well Tower, part Norman and part 14/15th century. Whilst these buildings have always been inaccessible to visitors, other parts of the castle have been open for many years, under a scheme operated under the auspices of Lancashire County Council. The property has now been repatriated to the Duchy of Lancaster, who have been considering how to best develop the complex whilst preserving the integrity of the various cell blocks and medieval sections.

In the interim, the Duchy have been occasionally opening up the prison courtyard and some cell blocks for public access, and the writer had the opportunity to visit the castle at the end of August 2012, primarily to get closer views of the keep and interior of the gatehouse. There is still much 20th century institutional prison detritus to be cleared, but the following images clearly show how much has been done. Unfortunately the interior of the keep is still off-limits to visitors, but plans are in place to open it up. The CSG has made a request for a special viewing when opportunity affords, before any serious interior presentational make-overs hide structural features that will be of great interest to members.

One medieval structure that can be visited on most days is the so-called 'Hadrian's Tower', and the associated undercroft that leads northwards from the basement of this round tower, which is in the north-west corner of the complex. This area was constructed for King John in 1209-10. Whilst the upper, first-floor medieval hall has been replaced by a sequence of rooms relevant to the functioning law courts, the interior of Hadrian's tower still incorporates fascinating late-Norman decorative features.

The Keep

The Norman keep is probably the last great 12th century tower that has never had a close architectur-

al survey or detailed dating analysis. The only façades that can currently be seen externally are on the east, with the upper section of the south facing the interior of the prison courtyard. The lower south, and full north and west faces are embedded or hidden in other buildings that wrap around the outside. For example, the west wall now forms the interior east wall of the Shire Hall complex, notably the Crown Court and Grand Jury Room, and any visible features that may have studded this wall were plastered over c. 1800. These features may still exist internally within the keep. On the south wall, the male Debtor's wing of 1796 conceals an original staircase ramp that may have risen up to the original entrance on the first floor in the south-west corner.

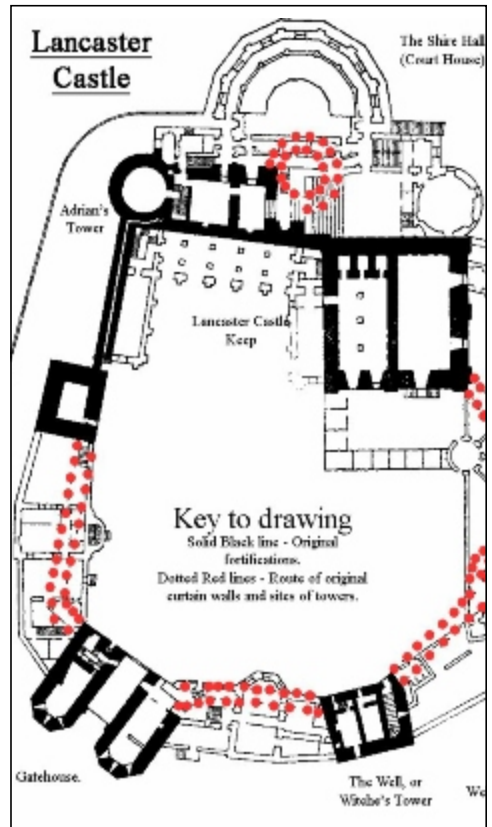
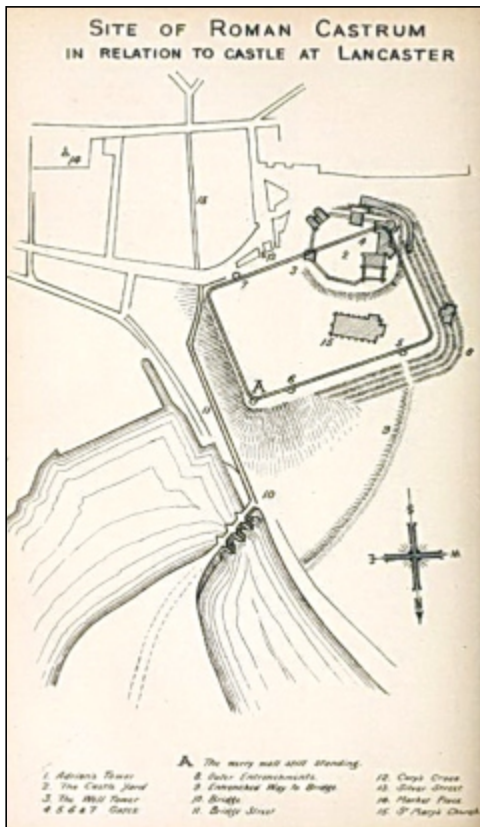
The very early dating of this important Norman tower to c. 1102 appears to be based entirely on tradition (Renn, 1960, 'The Anglo-Norman Keep 1066-1138', in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, third series Vol. 21, pages 1-24). The only reference identified that appears to place the construction of Lancaster to this date is E. W. Cox ('Lancaster Castle', in *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Volume 48*, 1896, pp. 95-123 - an online version is available), where it is stated that Roger de Poitou completed the tower prior to 1102 when he was banished. Cox provides no supporting evidence for this statement; it appears to entirely rest on tradition and there is no historical documentation that actually makes reference to such an early date. Hopefully, a thorough survey will help to fix the castle's time-scales more accurately. The images that follow probably indicate a keep of the Henry I era, comparable to Barmburgh and Carlisle, perhaps *circa* mid 1120s, although there are certain aspects of the keep that remind the writer of the early Norman hall at Chepstow, so an 1102 date would not be impossible. Its straight-sided plinth is notable, and the floor levels on either side of the east-west spine wall appear to have been set at different levels at one time. There is a blocked arch on the east wall at first floor level, which may have been the original entrance (just left of the extractor vents), but more likely to have been a window. The upper floor level is marked by a horizontal offset, although this marks the start of a later heightened top floor. The buttresses do not clasp or 'wrap around' the corners but meet the corner without allowing for the 'third edge' to appear, similar to Chepstow. There are in-filled crenellations at one, possibly two levels as the keep developed. It was originally a two-storey building. This article is meant to be a brief illustrated interim report.

A fuller examination of the Norman keep, the Gatehouse, Hadrian's (or Adrian's) Tower and the Well Tower will be reported in the next Journal.

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Lancaster Castle. ABOVE: Buck's view of 1727 from the north-west. From L-R: Hadrian's Tower; Dungeon Tower (now demolished); the Keep or Great Tower; Gatehouse and Well Tower. BELOW LEFT: E W Cox's 1897 drawing of the castle overlaid onto the Roman camp. BELOW RIGHT: Plan of Lancaster Castle from the Victoria County History, 'A History of the County of Lancaster': Vol. 8, William Farrer & J. Brownbill (eds); 1914, pp. 4-22 (detail). East at the bottom.



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Lancaster Castle. The square keep from the south-east. There is a courtyard inside the clock-tower building that allows direct access to the east face of the keep where there are two doors into the basement. All the square and round-headed barred windows are later insertions, or at least enlargements of earlier narrow loops.

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Lancaster Castle. The east façade of the keep. The north basement door at the top of the steps led to the chapel. The springing of an arch can be seen to the left of the air intake/outlet vents in the large rectangular window.

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Lancaster Castle. The east facade. The different stone coloration probably marks building seasons. The lower extensions to the two round-headed windows on the right, breaking through the string course are 19th century insertions. Below: Plinth and, left, entrance to the south section of the basement. Both doors appear to be 13th century.



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Lancaster Castle. The rear of the 1402-20 gatehouse. The outer turret door (left) (in what appears to be older masonry) leads to a spiral stair up to the wall walk. The inner arched door (right of main entrance behind some 20th century prison apparatus) also leads to a spiral stair to the two main floor levels. The two doors with shouldered arches are of uncertain date. There are many affinities to the Dunstanburgh gatehouse, especially the rear configuration.

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Lancaster Castle. The vaulted 15th century entrance passageway. The masonry in the rear section of the passage is distinctly different in quality to the first 4 metres, probably indicating the current gatehouse contains the shell of an earlier early 13th century twin-towered gate. The side doors within the passage appear 15th century original.



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Lancaster Castle. The Well Tower from the east. Originally it projected substantially beyond the outer walls. Probably early 14th century with crenellations added in the early 15th century to match the gatehouse.