



*Fig. 1. Flint Castle, completed in 1284, is one of Turner's greatest Welsh landscapes. Joseph Mallord William Turner's painting of Flint Castle with its vivid light and shade depicting the Dee estuary suffused in an orange sunrise was more than 10 years in the making. The watercolour sketch, over pencil, was composed in the early 1830s. Regarded as a landscape classic, he completed a second watercolour of the castle in 1835, which is now owned by the National Museums and Galleries of Wales (NMGW). The painting was sold at Sothebys, London, in 2010 for £541,000 to a purchaser who wished to remain anonymous.*

### **Flint Castle**

This castle was the product of King Edward I's first Welsh war of 1276-7, built a day's march from Chester. Work began on it and the adjacent new town on a fresh site in the summer of 1277, making it the first of the king's castles in north Wales. By 1284 most of the castle had been built, at a cost of about £7,000, but the building accounts suggest that there was not one continuous building programme, and that the castle may have been damaged in the war of 1282-3.

The town was certainly damaged in 1282, during the second Welsh war, and again in the revolt of 1294-5 when the constable of the castle set fire to it to prevent the Welsh from using it. In the civil wars of the 1640s, both

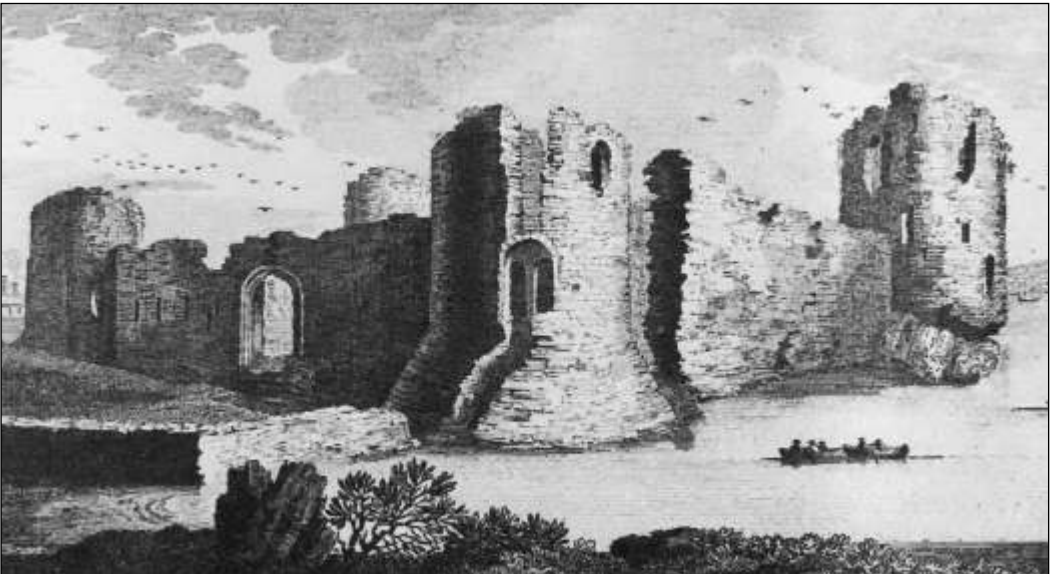
sides held the castle at various times, and, although garrisoned by Parliament after its capture in 1646, the castle was made unusable the following year.

The castle, originally set within a moat fed by the sea, has a large outer bailey, with some of the curtain wall surviving, and the remains of the outer gate has been excavated archaeologically. There are circular mural towers at three corners of the square inner ward; their upper floors provided accommodation. Arrowslits can be seen in the towers and also those parts of the curtain wall that still survive to a reasonable height. The traces of internal buildings evident in the inner ward date to more recent times; the original medieval buildings are likely to have been of timber, and built against curtain walls.



ABOVE: Fig. 2. Flint, from the east. Donjon left; NE Tower near right; NW Tower far centre; wall to SW showing three niche embrasure. Drawn by H. Gastineau; engraved by S. Lacey. From Woodward, B. B.: "History of Wales" (1853). plate 63.

BELOW: Fig. 3. Flint Castle, From the Buck bros, 1742, (detail). Flint from the south-east, with the Great Tower in the foreground. Notice how the waters of the Dee river come up much closer to the wall and towers and at this comparatively late date. Also that the east wall is still virtually up to full height (but completely missing on the Gastineau print). Buck also shows the embrasure / loop in the Great Tower - the south - as a properly formed postern-type door, which may be a misreading of the apparent visual evidence. (cf. figs. 4 & 5).



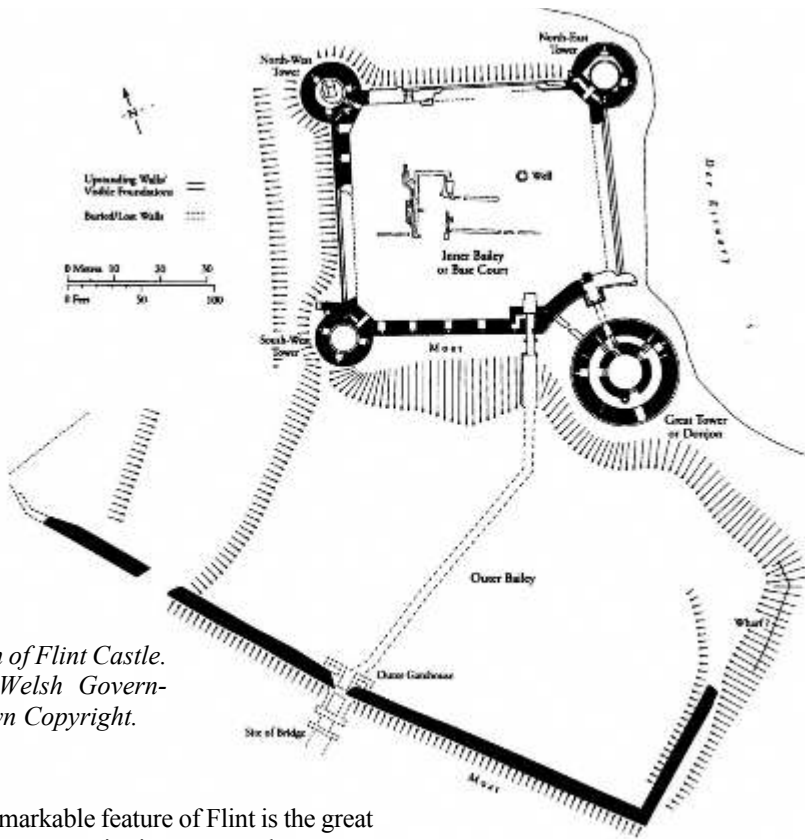


Fig. 4. Plan of Flint Castle.  
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The most remarkable feature of Flint is the great circular keep, even in its truncated state. It stands detached from the main body of the castle, possibly in its own moat. There is nothing comparable to it in Western Europe, let alone Britain. A bridge with a drawbridge would have provided access to the doorway (no portcullis), and steps lead down to a mural gallery with arrowslits, and a well. A hole in the roof over the well shows that water could be brought up by bucket to the floor above. Vertical chutes in the walls were for the latrines on the upper floor(s), which emptied into the moat, to be cleansed by the tide. A circular basement sits in the centre of the tower, now open to the elements. The first floor is the only upper level that survives, but there must have been at least a second storey. On this floor five chambers run off from the centre of the tower, one of which was a chapel. When in 1301 the castle passed into the hands of Edward, prince of Wales, the future King Edward II, a new timber structure was added to the top of the keep.

The town was only ever defended by an earthen rampart and timber palisade; the streets of the town today still reflect the grid pattern as laid down in 1277.

#### Further Reading

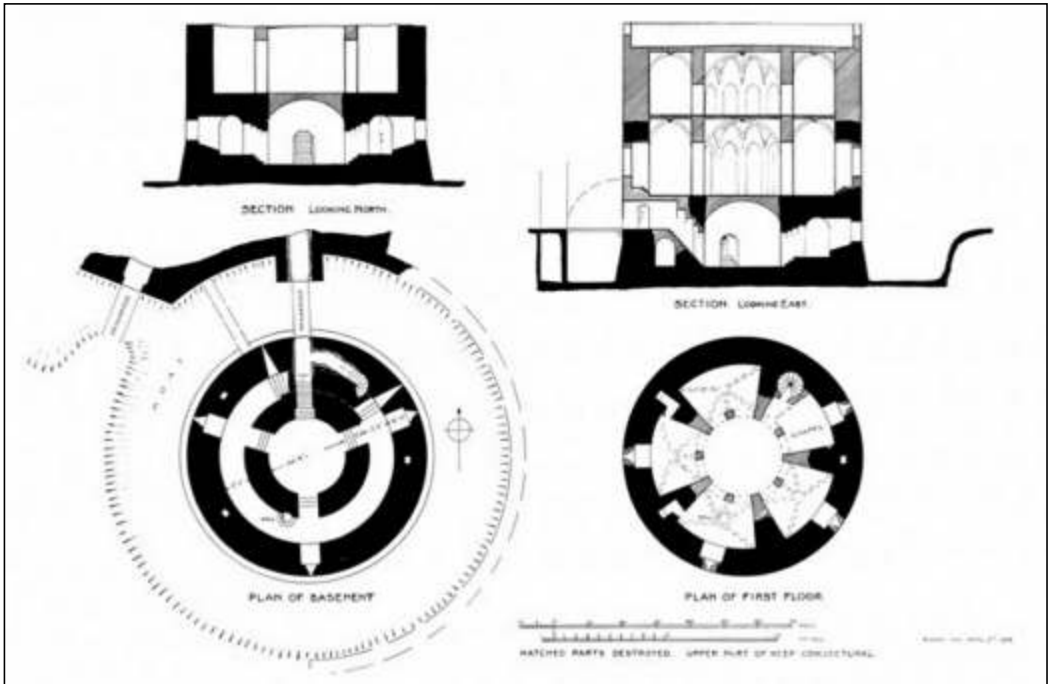
D. F. Renn and R. Avent, *Flint Castle, Ewloe Castle*. Revised edition. Cardiff: Cadw, 2001.

Philip Dixon, 'The Pacification of the Castle', in *The Medieval Great House*, Malcolm Airs and Barnwell (eds.), 2011, Shan Tyas, pp. 31-32.

Rick Turner, 'The Life and Career of Richard the Engineer', in Diane M. Williams & John R Kenyon (eds.), *The Impact of the Edwardian Castles in Wales*, 2010, Oxbow Books.

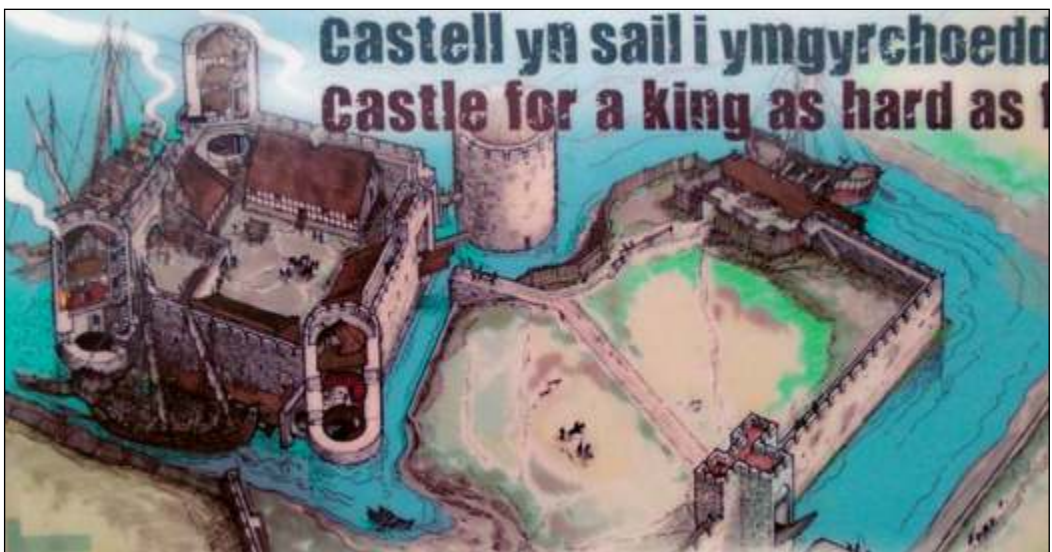
Perfect, V., *Flint Castle: the story of Edward I's first Welsh castle*, 2012, Cilcaïn: Alyn Books.

Diane M. Williams & John R. Kenyon (eds.), *The Impact of the Edwardian Castles in Wales*, Oxbow Books, 2010, *passim*.



ABOVE: Fig. 5. Scaled plan and section drawing of the keep at Flint Castle (Toy). © Copyright reserved; RCAHMW. Coflein database. The hatched parts represent destroyed, or, in the case of the upper part of the Great Tower, the third storey, probably conjectural, never built in masonry, as the plan legend notes. The south basement loop is shown on plan as an embrasure with an arrow-loop, whereas the current Cadw plan shows this as a possible straight-sided vaulted opening for a postern.

BELOW: Fig. 6. Site display panel near the keep (detail). Bird's eye image (from the west) by Chris Smith for Cadw (Castle for a King as hard as Flint - a somewhat intrusive font size & typeface).





*ABOVE: Fig. 7. Flint, the Great Tower, from the SW. For affinities and possible origins see John Goodall, 'The English Castle', 2011, pp 213-4. Some suggest that the Tour de Constance at Aigues Mortes 'virtually complete by 1266' (Bothamley in Arch J. 73) might be a model. Note band of large square ashlar above the plinth.*

*BELOW, left: Fig. 8. The Great Tower - The chapel - one of the radiating rooms - at first floor level. Remains of the stone barrel vault above and it has fragments of a piscina in the right-hand wall.*

*BELOW, right: Fig. 9. The remains of the anti-clockwise spiral stairs in the SW Tower. One of three - one in each of the angle towers - that rotate in the same anti-clockwise direction.*





*ABOVE: Fig. 10. The Great Tower (centre) from the south, near the wharf area (fig. 6), with the enlarged loop (arrow-loop or postern) and missing wall section above.*

*BELOW: Fig. 11. The stone-vaulted gallery running around the basement of the Great Tower. It is narrowed at one point by the well, situated near the enlarged loop in the south (seen above). The vaulting pattern within the embrasure suggests, possibly, that this opening accommodated a postern.*

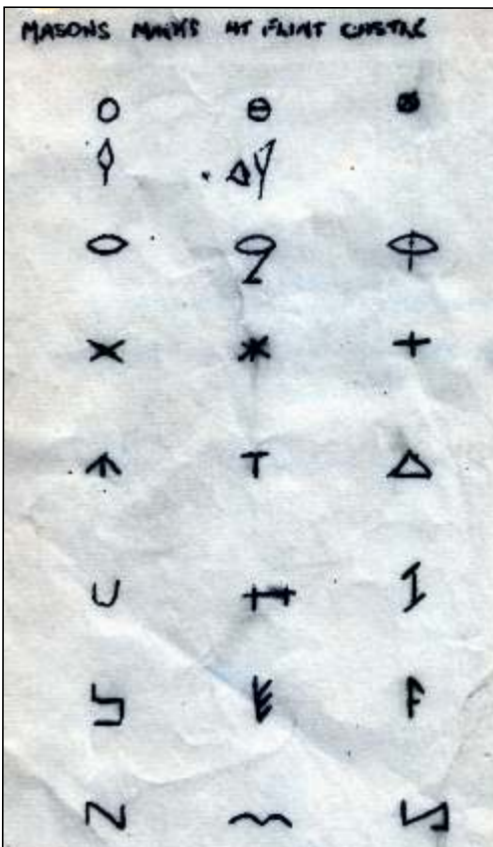




ABOVE: Fig. 12. Flint from the south - from the outer bailey. BELOW, right. Fig. 13. the NE Tower; the revetment wall is a modern C20 rebuild.

BELOW, left: Fig. 14. Mason's marks, Flint. CSG member Bill Woodburn comments that 'it is a copy that I was given in the late 1950s by the then custodian at Flint Castle. What I cannot remember is whether he had copied it from a published source, or whether it was his own observations. I had, fortunately, stapled it into the Ministry of Works guide that I had bought there for 3d. On this trip, on the wall of the main castle, in or near the moat facing the tower, I saw: + ; ++ ; T ; an Arrow ; and, possibly, a U . But they are very tricky to spot unless the light is just right'.

There is also a section on the mason's marks in Vicky Perfect's 'Flint Castle: the story of Edward I's first Welsh castle', 2012, Cilcain: Alyn Books.





ABOVE: Fig. 15. Flint castle from the north. Great Tower left, NE Tower, centre. From an engraving (detail) by Moses Griffith, c. 1775. with line engraving by James Roberts. Published in Thomas Pennant's 'A Tour in Wales', Vol. 1, opp. p. 44. Revetment walls on the east and north sides ruinous.

BELOW: Fig. 16. Office of Works 1924 plans to rebuild the retaining wall or revetment along the east wall. (See fig. 2). The inner bailey appears to sit on a sandstone platform and the masonry revets the walls between the towers by about 10-13ft (cf. Ruthin, Holt, Whittington).

