

Fig. 1. Plan of Berkeley Castle prepared for G. T Clark, published in Vol. 1 of *Mediaeval Military Architecture*, 1884, opposite. p. 229.

Berkeley

2. Berkeley

Published interpretations of the shell-keep have assumed the following sequence: (a) the motte was part of the castle of William fitzOsbern, documented in the late 11th century, bearing a structure of which no trace now remains; (b) with the assent and direction of Henry II in 1154, the new owner, Robert fitzHarding (a rich Bristol merchant, from an English family, who supported the Angevin cause and died in 1170) truncated the motte-top, encased the motte in a shell-keep with battered plinth, a series of pilaster buttresses, (probably) four semi-circular "bastions" and (soon afterwards) a forebuilding with defended stair rising from ground level to a doorway on the motte-top, the latter being leveled up with the spoil created by truncating the motte; (c) this shell-keep rose above the motte, with domestic buildings against its inside face - all now gone except for the apse of a chapel in the north-east "bastion"; (d) these domestic structures were replaced during a major 14th-century rebuilding of the whole castle by Thomas III Berkeley (died 1361); (d) to this rebuilding relate (i) the Thorpe Tow-

er (knocking out an earlier "bastion") comprising two, joined rectangular towers which may be an early example of an artillery emplacement and (ii) additions and alterations to the forebuilding and (iii) encasement of the south "bastion" by the new gatehouse to the inner bailey (e) the siege of 1645 and the slighting of 1646 inflicted damage to the motte and its masonry structures which were patched up around 1700 (f) various 18th- to 20th-century alterations and additions further masked and/or destroyed the structures, both in the domestic ranges (the east range of which is wholly 1920s, as is the rebuilding of the chapel) and in Thorpe's Tower.

The castle is unusual in having charter evidence relating to its revival under new ownership in the 1150s, although the authenticity of these charters as contemporary record has been questioned. Also crucial is the family history of the Berkeleys written in the 17th century by their steward, John Smyth (died 1641) who quoted from records which no longer survive. The castle has a remarkable continuity of family occupation from the medieval to modern peri-

A date for the shell-keep following 1154 may be supported by Romanesque details in the forebuilding and chapel apse, if these are now in the primary position (see below). On the other hand, semi-circular “bastions” are unknown at this date, and since they do not appear to be secondary additions a later date for the shell-keep could be postulated. Although the published literature refers to these structures as “bastions”, this usage is problematic since the word evokes artillery-related features of a later era and of solid construction. At Berkeley, it is more helpful to call them semi-circular towers since it was not only

Another issue is the reliability of the 12th-century details *in their present position and condition*. It is well known that the site not only underwent reconstruction in the 14th century but also alterations from the 17th century onwards, culminating in a major

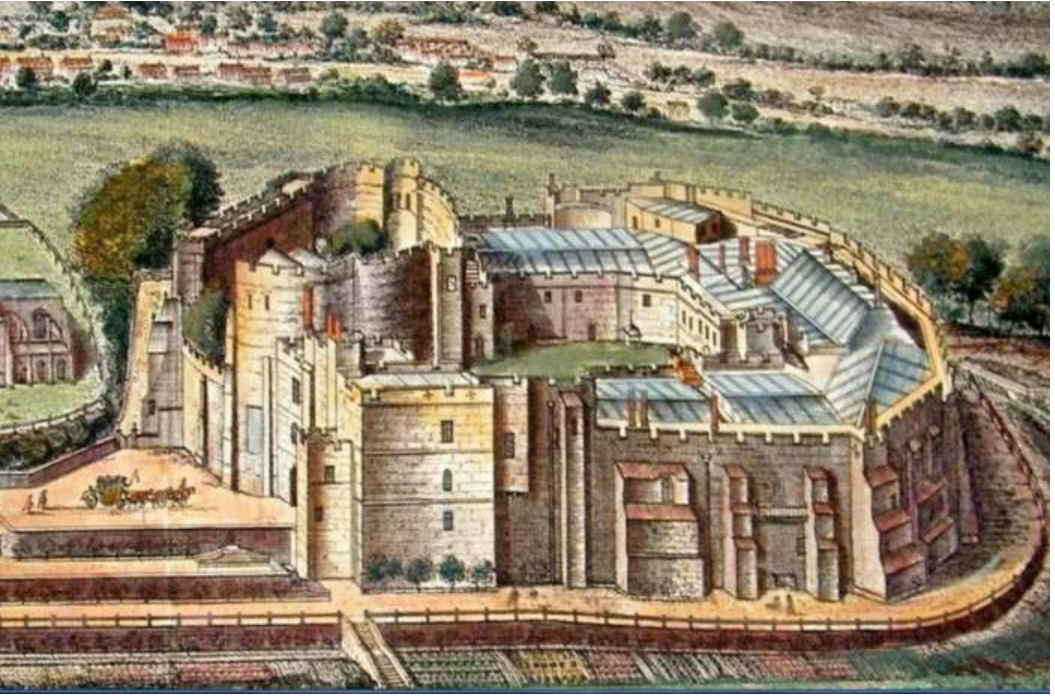


Fig. 3. Bird's eye view of Berkeley Castle from the south (detail). Published in 1712 for the antiquary Robert Atkyns in *'The Ancient and Present State of Glostershire'*.

renovation in the 1920s-1930s. This last episode was a fascinating process in its own right, involving - simultaneously - restoration *in situ*, movement of fabric from some parts of the site to others and the importation of fabric from other sites elsewhere. The 12th-century chapel in the north-east "bastion" was also rebuilt at this time.

The "phasing" of the castle, in terms of observable architectural features, must be approached with extreme caution. The passageway - itself probably knocked through in the 18th century - opening from the Thorpe Tower onto the shell-keep interior has been heightened in modern times and has had 12th-century details added which probably came from elsewhere. The lower entrance into the shell-keep forebuilding also appears to result from a part-reconstruction, even allowing for the 14th-century rebuilding of this structure (involving the addition of its upper storey, the narrowing of the entrance and the new alignment of steps to replace - to judge from the fabric - a stairway running concentric to the curving shell wall). This, in turn, raises another problem: the relationship between the forebuilding and the adjacent "bastion". In its final form, the forebuilding wraps around part of the latter; whether it did so

originally is an interesting and important issue (another "bastion" was later wrapped around by the south-western entrance to the inner bailey).

At the top of the forebuilding, an impressive Romanesque doorway has a round-headed arch of three orders with double chevron and zig-zag design, and a (surviving, right) column with a design based on interlace foliage supporting a foliate capital. Even this impressive structure, however, is not easy to interpret. Some of its fabric disappeared in the 14th century when it was part in-filled to take a narrower door: its left column and tympanum were casualties. But the surviving column is remarkably short in relation to the height of the doorway: even allowing that the present level at the top of the steps is lower than the original thresholds. While it is impossible to be certain, it could easily be a column re-used from some other building: if so, how old was it when placed here? The change in threshold level is evident not only from the main doorway but also from the intermediate one, near the top of the stairs, whose bases are high and whose jambs - with flat faces on the downside, bevelled edges on the upside and no sign of door hangings - suggest it may at some point have been related to a tilting draw-bridge.



Fig. 4. Berkeley. The shell-keep from the inner bailey, from the south. The lobed or half-round tower adjacent to the forebuilding is integral to the wall of the shell.

Excavations carried out in the 1930s revealed what appeared to be the tops of a row of piers buried within the motte, representing a structure with a base some 3' 6" wide. This has been regarded either as a relic relating to the original 11th-century motte, or as a cross-wall relating to the domestic planning of the shell-keep in its late 12th- or 14th-century phase. Neil Guy has, however, now pointed out that the alignment of these foundations connects to features of the 14th-century fabric: first, a blocked doorway at the west end of the domestic range which has survived subsequent re-buildings; second, a doorway into the north-east "bastion" which, in turn, gave access to the adjacent chapel. Perhaps, then, the excavated masonry was the foundation of a (presumably covered) walkway which gave direct access to the chapel, across the courtyard, from the far end of the domestic range. Such a walkway would, in effect, have created a cross-wall through the courtyard, so this idea is not incompatible with earlier interpreta-

tions. Recent structural survey by John Thorp revealed survival of much 14th-century fabric within this south range, but the range has been so heavily remodelled between the 16th and 20th centuries that detailed reconstruction of the 14th-century arrangements is as impossible as it is for their presumed 12th-century predecessors. It seems very likely, however, that in the 14th century - and quite possibly in the 12th century - ranges of two-storey buildings occupied much of the internal face of the shell-keep on this (south) side. One socket for a large timber may survive in the face of the shell wall just outside the western end of the domestic range.

On the northern side of this covered way or cross-wall, and aligned parallel to it, lies another enigmatic structure: the Thorpe Tower, named after a family who held land for castle guard and identified by John Smyth, from a (now) non-surviving part of the building accounts which started in 1338: "this lord (Thomas III) of new built (then ruined) the great



Fig. 5 (& Inset). Detail of the south-east face of the shell-keep showing two of the round 'bastions' or turrets; that on the right containing the chapel. It is possible that the forebuilding and stairs have been re-aligned or straightened and that the steps were narrower at the base, once curving up concentrically to the entrance.

high tower on the north part of the keep". This was in 1342-1343 and cost £108-3-1. In traditional interpretation, this is seen as replacing a "bastion" and adding a straight building to a shell wall which had been curvilinear here. But a literal reading of the extract suggests there was already a "great high tower" here, in ruined condition, which was built anew in 1342. The present shape of Thorpe Tower arises from a Gothic-style infilling of its north side in the 1760s (a laundry). Prior to that it comprised two rectangular towers joined by a wall carrying a wall-walk with parapet on each side. The towers had no interior rooms and have been seen as early artillery platforms:

presumably for stone-throwing engines since 1342 is too early for gunpowder cannon to require such platforms? The fact that they face the church and borough raises, however, a query about whether particular defensibility was required on this side of the castle, though some have noted that this is the side of the castle where the natural defences are weakest. Also (so far) unexplained is the blocked doorway at the uppermost level of the connecting wall. The whole structure was, when first built, a whole storey higher than it now survives. Its original height is shown on paintings of 1676 by Jacob Knyff. The uppermost storey was demolished around 1700, during consoli-



Fig. 7. Lower forebuilding entrance from the bailey. With original hood moulding above the (now) off-centre entrance.

dation of the fabric (including an adjacent stretch of shell-keep wall) damaged in the siege of 1645 and the slighting which followed in 1646.

Neil Guy has tentatively proposed a new interpretation of this structure, in which it was not wholly created in the 14th century but is a part-relic - arising from the 14th-century rebuilding - of the 12th- and 13th-century castle: namely, two corners and one side of a square *donjon* which abutted the side of the motte, and for which the shell-keep encasing the motte was an inner (and elevated) bailey. This could explain why the two (remaining) structures of the Thorpe Tower contained no rooms, but only stairs: that would be usual in the corners of a *donjon*. A case can be made, on stylistic grounds that the surviving vaulted vice-stair (at the east end) is of 12th-century date rather than 14th-century (but with modern alterations). This idea could also explain why the masonry in the lower part of the Thorpe Tower, viewed from the shell-keep courtyard, runs continuously into the curving shell-wall. The Thorpe Tower, at this point, does not look like an intrusive structure: there is no major straight joint to separate an earlier shell-wall from a later insertion. So, at this point, the shell-wall may already have been straight, either



Fig. 8. Top of the forebuilding stairs with keep entrance to the left. To L & R are narrow jambs that supported the drawbridge when closed.

because it incorporated a lean-to domestic range (many other shell-keeps have a relatively straight stretch for such a purpose) or because there was already a substantial structure here - such as the postulated *donjon* - which gave it this shape.

There remain, however, problems. One is a detail of the surviving fabric: if it is an early feature (and not a 14th-century feature giving access to a timber wall-gallery facing north) how did the (blocked) doorway (figs. 17, 18) in the upper level of the Thorpe Tower wall relate to the interior of this putative *donjon*? Another is that we are still left with the issue of what resulted from the documented 14th-century works. Was an earlier structure, larger but ruinous, rebuilt in its entirety, only to be reduced in size later (in the 1640s?). Or was the earlier structure reduced by half its bulk and rebuilt in 1342 more or less as it was until its front side was in-filled in the 1760s? In either event, what was it used for in the 14th and later centuries? Is it what John Leland called the "square dongeon tower". It had lost its northern half before 1676 when it was shown on Knyff's paintings (fig. 15), one of which (but not the other) shows ragged masonry stubs presumably arising from demolition or collapse of fabric.



Fig. 9 (& Inset). Detail of the (probably impossible to date) pot-helm graffito. Pot helms were used after the 1180s. The inset image locates the graffito on the newel of the spiral stairs in the east tower of the Thorpe Tower, approx 14 cms height x 10 cms max width.

Berkeley Castle is a fascinating and enigmatic place in a great many ways, not least in the problems involved in the interpretation of its shell-keep. With the exception of the defensive character of the late 12th-century fore-building, all surviving defensive details - parapet and wall-walk, crenellations, cruciform arrow-loops - seem to date from the 14th-century rebuilding phase: clear witness to the ongoing importance of the shell-keep. The guardroom above the forebuilding stair was rebuilt as late as the 16th century. Despite major late medieval develop-

ments in the baileys of this castle, the shell-keep seems not to have been relegated to secondary status, but to have remained throughout a major element in its planning, both domestically occupied and defensible for many centuries.

Internal Diameter: 100ft (30.48m).

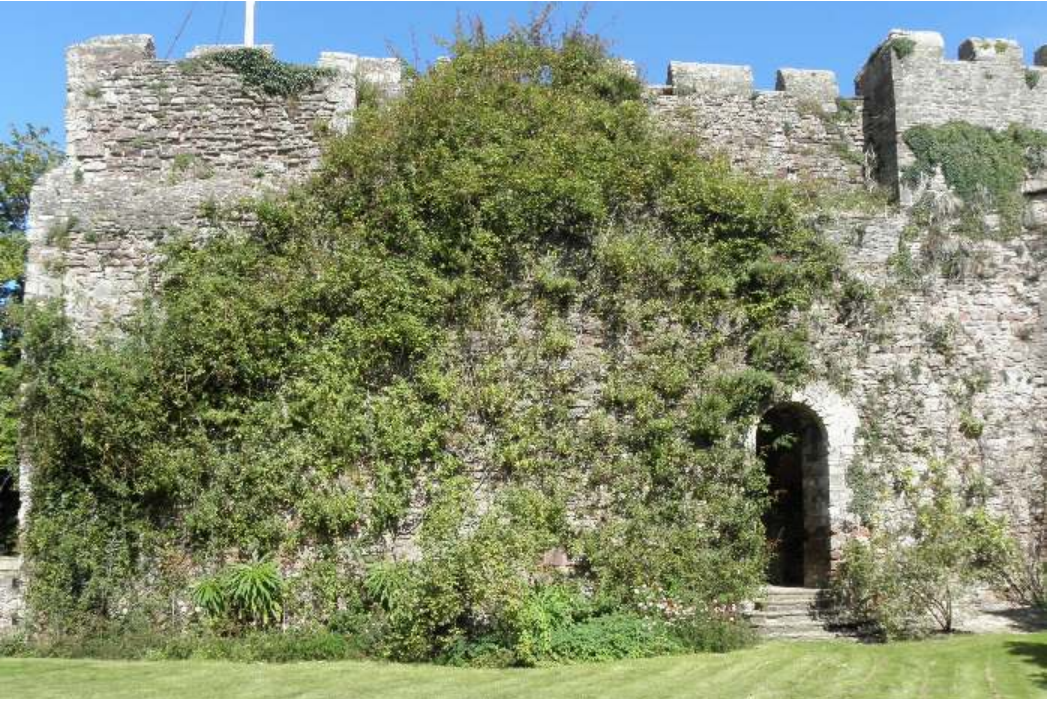
Total height: approx. 60ft (18.3m);

Shell wall above motte: approx. 40ft (12.2m)

Published refs: Clark 1884, I, 228-239; Baddeley 1926; Berkeley 1938-39; Faulkner 1965; Renn 1968, 107-109; King 1983, I, 180; Townsend (ed.) 2009.



Fig. 10. The Romanesque doorway with round-headed arch of three orders, bold chevron design, and a (surviving, right) column with design based on interlace foliage supporting a foliate capital. The column is remarkably short in relation to the height of the doorway: even allowing that the present level at the top of the steps is lower than the original thresholds. While it is impossible to be certain, it could be a column re-used from some other building.



ABOVE: Fig. 11. The Thorpe Tower from the interior of the shell-keep, looking north. The round-arched entrance from the shell-keep courtyard may post-date the medieval period. The east tower (right) contains the vaulted spiral stair that contains the putative medieval graffito (fig. 9).

BELOW: Fig. 12. The altered west end of a range of domestic buildings on the south side of the shell-keep courtyard. The buildings have traces of 12th-century work. The early 14th century low pointed-arch window (near the lawn roller) may have been a door, which is on axis with the chapel (see plan - fig 2) and follows the line of the transverse arcade wall.





ABOVE: Fig. 13. Detail of the round-arched entrance to the Thorpe Tower from the shell keep courtyard. The arch includes fragments of Norman chevron decorated voussoirs, which may have come from elsewhere.

BELOW: Fig. 14. The shell-keep from the west with the gap in the shell wall caused by Civil War artillery. North is the truncated west tower of the Thorpe Tower and behind which is the added 1760s Gothic Revival 'laundry'.





Fig. 15. Detail of the 1670s Knyff painting, from the east, showing the Thorpe Tower's ragged east 'buttress' that may have originally been a truncated wall heading north. It also shows the original heights of the two towers (since reduced).

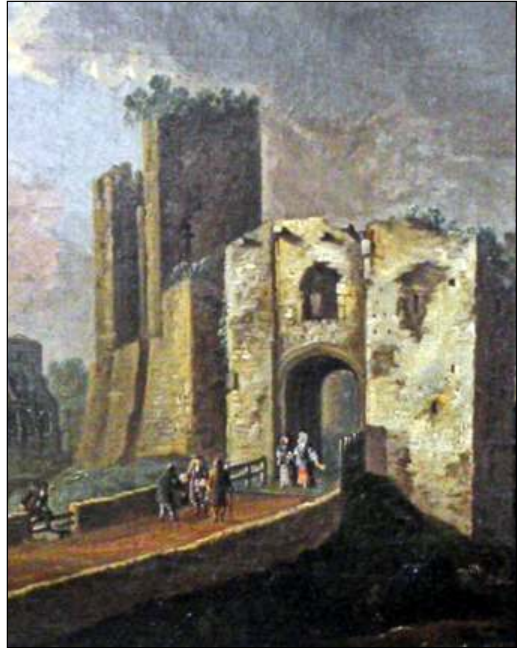


Fig. 16. Detail of a second 1670s Knyff painting of the Thorpe Tower from the south. The gatehouse to the right has since been demolished. It shows the north side of the Thorpe Tower prior to the Gothic-style extension that now butts up against the wall.



Fig. 17. The suspected blocked doorway in the upper level of the Thorpe Tower, facing north. The other side of this door is viewable from the mural passage that leads from the east to the west tower.

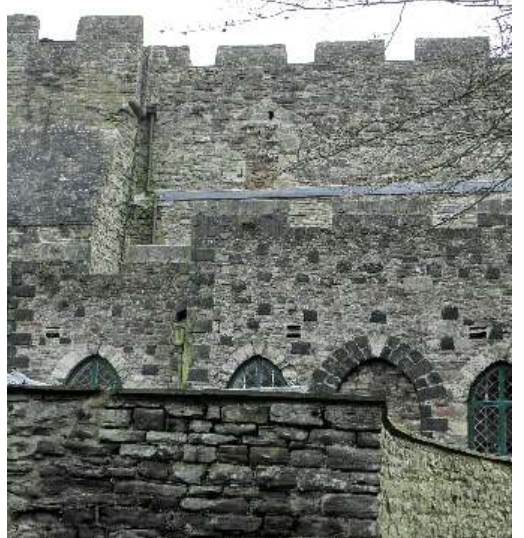


Fig. 18. Context for the suspected (once 'interior?') blocked doorway in the upper level of the Thorpe Tower. Long range view from the north. Merlons are a later addition.