



*Fig. 1. Cardiff Castle. The motte and shell-keep from the south. Shell-keep c. 1140s. Forebuilding C13.*

### **Cardiff**

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Established by king William I in 1081, Cardiff was soon the *caput* of the lordship of Glamorgan: the first specific castle reference was in the tenure of Robert fitzHamon, lord of Glamorgan 1093-1107. The castle occupied the site of a late-Roman fort, which influenced its shape. It is assumed that the enormous late 11th-century motte - one of the largest in Wales - had primary structures of timber. Though there is no supporting documentary evidence, it is normally held that the polygonal masonry shell-keep was built about 1140 by Robert, earl of Gloucester and lord of Glamorgan: he faced a Welsh uprising in 1135, was soon the leading opponent of king Stephen and died in 1147. A gatehouse tower and forebuilding enclosing the stairway down the motte and across its ditch were added in the late 13th century during the long tenure of the de Clare earls (1217-1314). Wing-walls connected the keep with the the bailey curtain on one side and with the bailey's dividing cross-wall on the other. The motte top was still used in the 16th century: expenditure on a lodging and chamber in "the Kepe" occurred in 1590.

From the late 13th century, the motte-top was massively defended. The shell-keep had a wall-walk and crenellations. Its entrance was protected by a four-storey gatehouse. The latter connected to a massive forebuilding, covering a stairway with drawbridge up the motte side and incorporating a well-tower; another gatehouse at its lower end connected with the bailey cross-wall. The forebuilding was demolished in the late 18th century, but is known from engravings (figs. 2, 5, 6) and its foundations were exposed in excavation by G.T. Clark in the late 19th century. The keep and its gatehouse were subject to restoration in the early 20th century.

The shell-keep comprises a 12-sided polygon with a wall 1.6m thick. Most of the circuit dates from the primary 12th-century construction, but the fabric at the entrance and immediately to its east (comprising two of the 12 sides of the polygon) were rebuilt with the late 13th-century gatehouse addition. How the interior was planned in the 12th -13th centuries is unknown. There are corbels surviving at various levels which may show that at least some structures stood against the inside face of the shell wall, but their

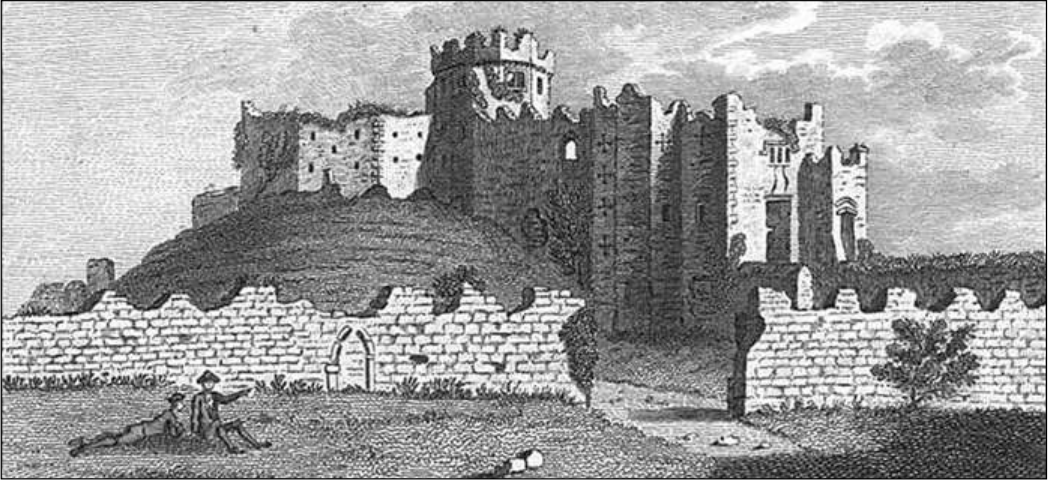


Fig. 2. Cardiff Castle shell-keep. From the south-west. Francis Grose's *Antiquities of England and Wales*, Vol. VII, opp. p. 46 (S. Sparrow, engraver). circa 1776. It well illustrates the nature of the complex linear forebuilding prior to its dismantling in the late 18<sup>th</sup> & early 19<sup>th</sup> century. cf. the 1825 Gastineau drawing in *Woolnoth*. (Ancient Castles of England and Wales, W. Woolnoth & E. W. Brayley Vol. II ), where the forebuilding has been completely removed (not illustrated).

pattern is not interpretable. There is also a stairway to the wall-walk, partly destroyed (and thus rendered irrelevant) by the addition of the gatehouse. The reliability of other features is open to question. A fireplace/chimney and two first-floor windows (blocked, though from the outside the blocking is not obviously distinguishable from the rest of the masonry) may represent medieval features but in their present form are products of the early 20th-century restoration. The small doorway (or window?) on the ground floor is certainly a modern creation since the painting of 1789 (shown in the on-site display panel) shows a large ragged hole in the wall at this point.

Contemporary with the later gatehouse was an adjacent hall which projected into the interior. The length of this building is unknown: a regrettable gap in knowledge since its size must have affected how much of the internal face of the shell-keep was available for other structures. Only the gable end of the hall, which replaced one section of the polygonal shell wall, survives. It had a two-loop window to the exterior (replaced in the 16th century). The beam sockets which indicate its first-floor level are not shown on the painting of 1789 (above): either the sockets are purely a product of later restoration, or reliable traces of them were discovered despite their non-appearance on the painting. The gatehouse tower was both defensive and residential: doorways with draw-bars; three arrow-loops at second-floor level (the centre one altered); its top-storey connected to the wall-walk. It had three

chambers (with latrines) stacked vertically above the entrance passage. The projecting turret is a creation of the 1930s, when the internal timber floors and the crenellations were replaced.

Despite the disappearance of its forebuilding and the loss of so much internal detail, Cardiff's shell-keep retains a complete circuit and still projects an impressive image of the classic type. The evidence suggests that its domestic and defensive functions were maintained over a long period from the 12th to 14th centuries and that it was still (at least partly) occupied in the post-medieval period. The gardens north of the castle are modern. Whether this area was originally a medieval park is not known. Extensive views in all directions were available from the top of the shell-keep and its gatehouse. These views would have afforded not only an aspect of the site's security, but also of its amenity: a large tract of the lordship of Glamorgan's "Englishry" would have been visible from here, as well as a view of the river Taff and its estuary. The possibility of former parkland views to the north is therefore an interesting addition to this aspect of the site's values.

*Internal Diameter:* 77ft (23.4m).

*Shell wall height:* 27ft (8.2m).

*Motte height:* 40ft (12.0m)

*Published refs:* Clark 1884, I, 336-350; Renn 1968, 130-131; King 1983, I, 162; RCAHM(W) 1991, 162 – 211 (esp. 191-199).

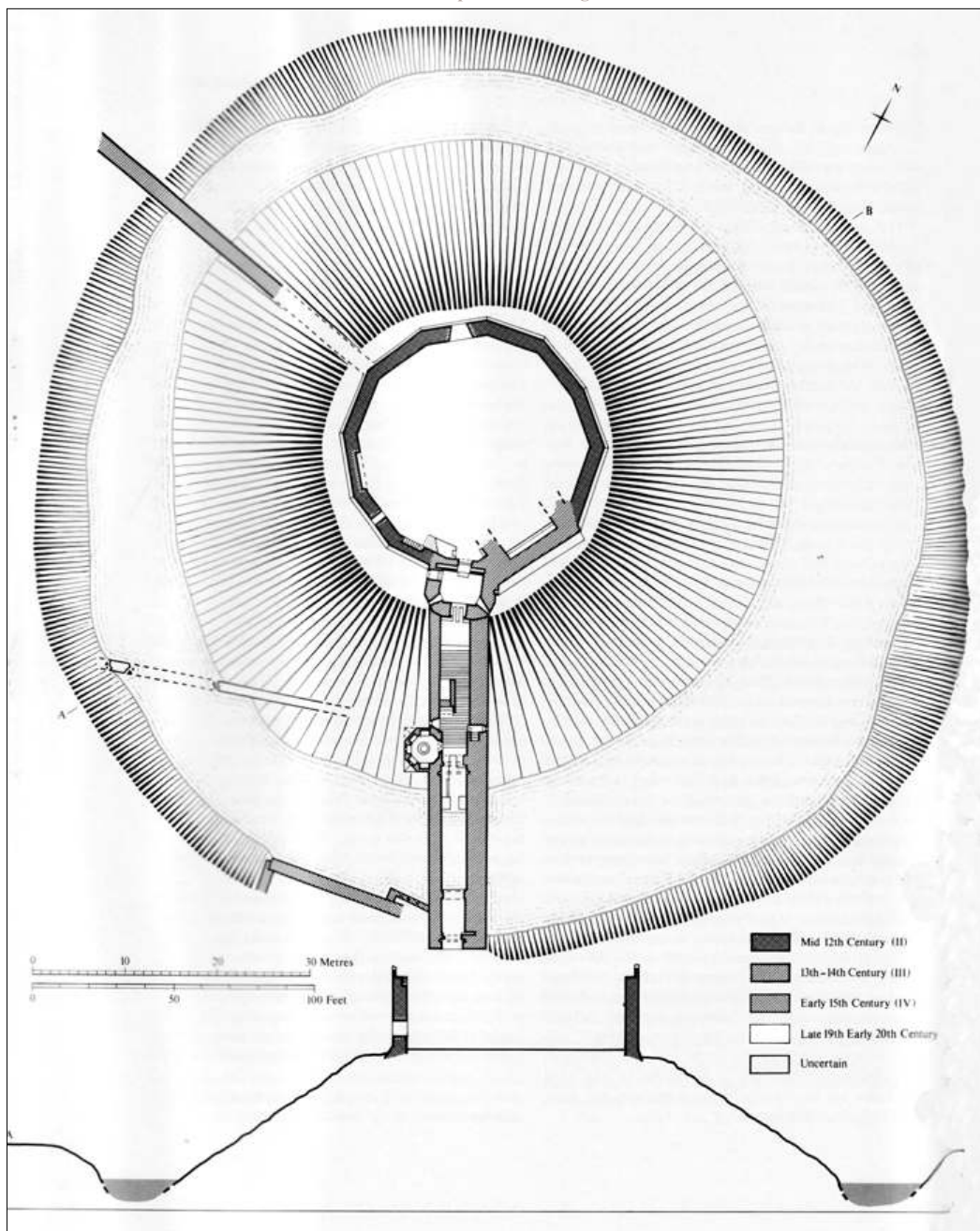
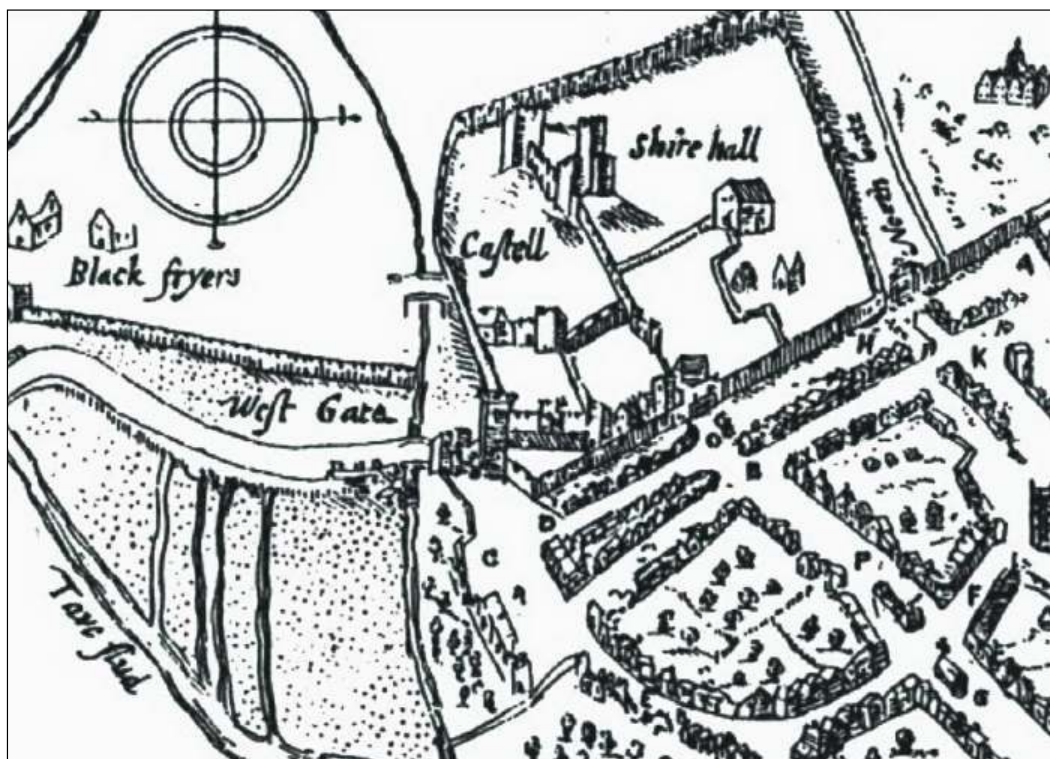


Fig. 3. The multi-faceted shell-keep ground plan and profile of Cardiff castle, showing the phased sequence of development to its fullest extent from the mid-12<sup>th</sup> to the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Plan © RCAHM Wales. *Inventory of Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan. Vol. III, Part 1a. The Early Castles: From the Norman Conquest to 1217.* (1991). Reproduced with thanks. For a full description see Vol. III, Part 1a, pp. 162-211, esp. 174-180.

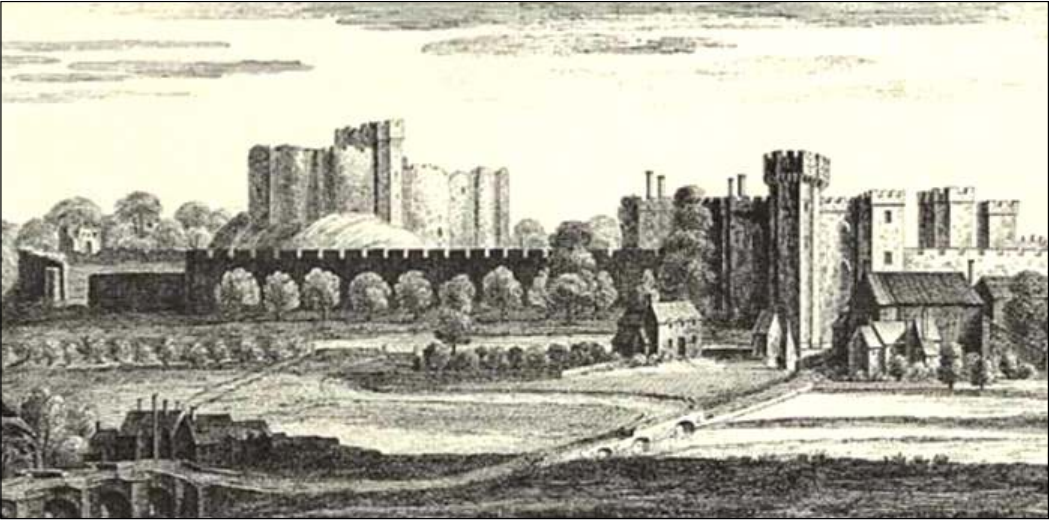




ABOVE: Fig. 4. John Speed's plan of Cardiff and the castle, c. 1611 (detail).

BELOW: Fig. 5. Cardiff Castle. Francis Place, 1678 (detail). The shell keep from the north-west (see Buck, fig. 6). The National Museum Wales (Amgueddfa Cymru) has in its collection fifteen views of Wales drawn by Francis Place (1647-1728). Of these, ten are from a single sketchbook. These ten sketches, dated 1678, are the earliest images that the Museum holds of Wales that were drawn on-the-spot. In addition to revealing sketches hidden for 200 years, recent conservation work by the Museum has enabled sketches to be digitally stitched together - creating complete panoramic views that have never been viewed before. See: [https://www.museumwales.ac.uk/rhagor/article/francis\\_place\\_sketchbooks/](https://www.museumwales.ac.uk/rhagor/article/francis_place_sketchbooks/)





ABOVE: Fig. 6. Cardiff Castle. Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, c. 1741. The shell-keep from the north-west, a similar viewpoint as the Francis Place drawing (fig. 5).

BELOW: Fig. 7. Cardiff - shell-keep, from the south-west. The 12-sided polygonal keep, c. 1140. The keep gatehouse and interior integral hall; keep forebuilding with stone bridge and lower gatehouses c. 1217-1314. The latter were demolished c. 1800.







ABOVE: Fig. 8. Shell-keep interior looking south toward the SE gable of the hall and the four storey-gatehouse.

BELOW: Fig. 9. Two interior facets of the shell keep, facing south, to the west of the gatehouse. To the left a steep and narrow stair to the wall-walk. To the right may be the remains of a chimney but this is problematic. (See RCAHM Wales. *Inventory of Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan. Vol III, Part 1a* p. 191. *The Early Castles: From the Norman Conquest to 1217*). (1991).







ABOVE: Fig. 10 and BELOW: Fig. 11. Cardiff, shell-keep, from the gate-tower looking north. Some of the various lights in the shell wall appear to be insertions - a large 4-centred segmental-headed window-like opening in the sixth facet makes good a breach in the wall; and at first-floor level in the seventh facet two blocked windows (to the exterior), less their mouldings suggest traces (of indeterminately dated) buildings formally ranged around the interior. There is also a blocked door in facet two, under the stairs to the wall-walk, currently about 1m above the present ground level (fig. 9) which appears now to be superfluous.

