



Fig. 1. Launceston Castle shell-keep. View from the south-west. Shell-keep 12th century; inner round tower mid 13th century. The motte is a part-natural scarped hillock.

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The castle was established before 1086 by Robert, count of Mortain and in the early 12th century it was in royal hands. In the 12th and 13th centuries it was held - though interrupted by periods of royal control - by the earls of Cornwall. In the 14th century it became part of the Duchy of Cornwall. The excavated evidence and surviving fabric suggest a 12th -century shell-keep (succeeding a timber phase of unknown form) that became the surrounding wall of a 13th-century two-storey *donjon*: they were stratigraphically separated and their relative sequence clear. The 12th-century phase cannot be dated, but may be associated with Reginald de Dunstanville, earl from 1141-1175. The 13th-century phase, which also included a chemise around the motte edge, was

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probably the work of Richard, earl from 1227-1272, but the dating evidence (pottery) is not precise enough to rule out Edmund, his son and successor.

The shell-keep was an irregular circle with a wall between 10ft and 12ft thick (3m - 3.7m). Hardly any internal features, however, survived the 13th-century re-building: this removed all internal structures as well as the wall-top and its defensive features; new and massive entrance arrangements replaced the simple door and whatever had approached it. So, impressive though the site now is - and the shell wall still stands to wall-walk height - it reveals very little of how the shell-keep was planned and used. It had a southern entrance (round-headed arch and draw-bar) some 8ft/2.4m wide. There were two stairs to the wall-walk

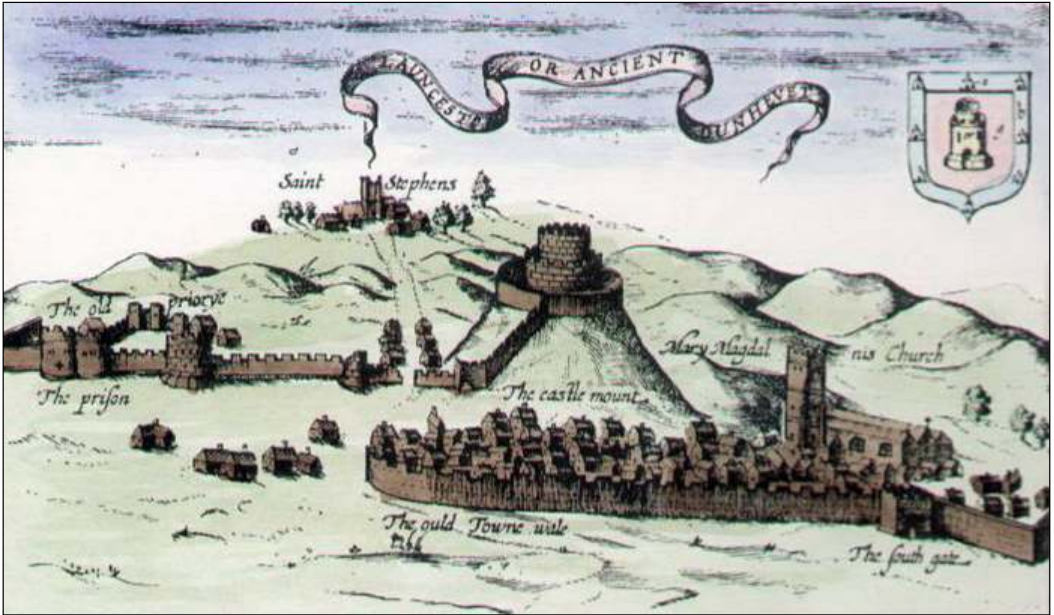


Fig. 2. John Norden's view of Launceston Castle. 1584. This 1611 copy is the one augmented and published by John Speed, titled: 'A map of Cornwall, "described by the travells of John Norden"'.

(one left of the entrance, the other on the opposite, northern, side). On the north side, a garderobe (flushed by rain down a drain from the wall-top) marks the location of a small mural chamber with a window (parts of jambs formerly surviving) where the shell wall is now broken through. Published accounts assume that timber structures once stood against the shell, but these are now beyond recovery. On its external face a continuous moulding runs some 2.0m above the motte-top, perhaps the lower limit of a rendered and painted finish?

The only guidance for reconstruction of internal lay-out are the positions of the entrance and of the northern garderobe/chamber. But this garderobe was later altered to serve the 13th-century *donjon* (whose upper storey, reached by a mural stair which proceeded to the wall-walk, had none, despite having a fireplace and grand window), so that in its present form (even its exact position?) the garderobe illuminates the later period more than the earlier. The eventual double structure - massive and secure though it was, its well was situated near the foot of the motte and its lower storey had no facilities at all - had limited defensive or even residential purpose: it was for display and viewing (from its west-facing window) the nearby park. A new platform (the timber roof - whose joist holes survive in the *donjon* face - linking

the old shell to the added *donjon*, and accessed by an eastern door from the mural stair and upper chamber of the *donjon*) provided further viewing facility as well as a place for ceremonial appearances.

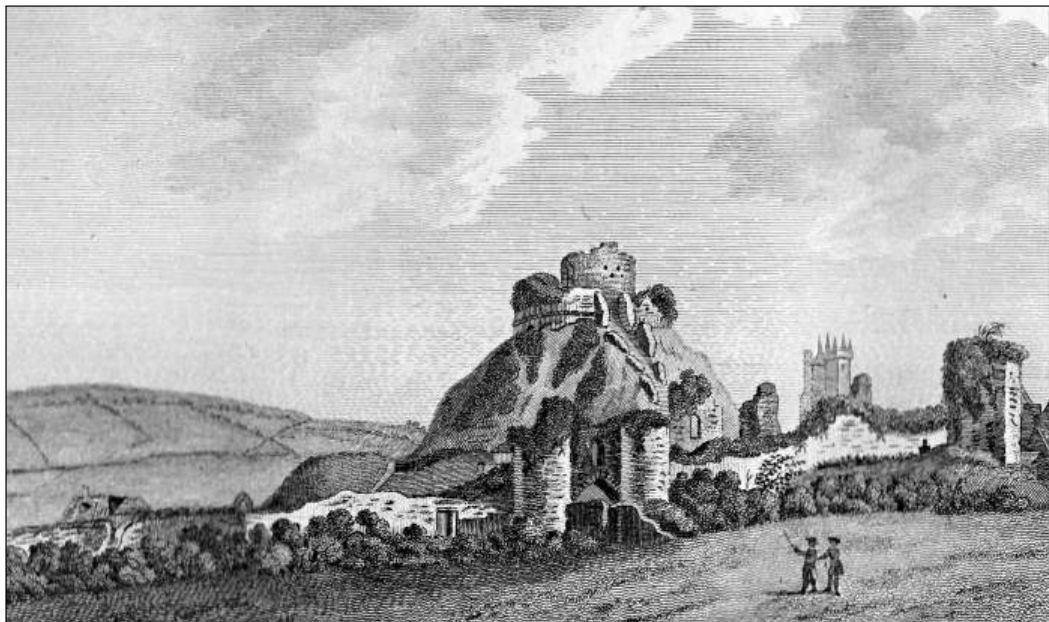
How far these 13th-century design emphases can be extrapolated back to the 12th century shell-keep is unknown. Part of a foundation trench (for timber?) was excavated, running just inside the inner face of the shell-keep: if this is evidence of an earlier phase (a palisade?) it provides a rare glimpse of a possible timber-to-stone transformation (as at Windsor, see below) which is generally an elusive aspect of the whole subject of shell-keeps. If so, it may indicate that here, unlike at some other places, the motte was not truncated, but was rather consolidated, for the erection of the shell-keep. On the other hand, there is no way of knowing whether the foundation trench was a primary feature of the site: it could belong to a timber structure which post-dated a lowering and broadening of the original motte.

Internal Diameter: 50ft x 55ft (15.2m x 16.7m).

Shell wall height: 23ft (7m).

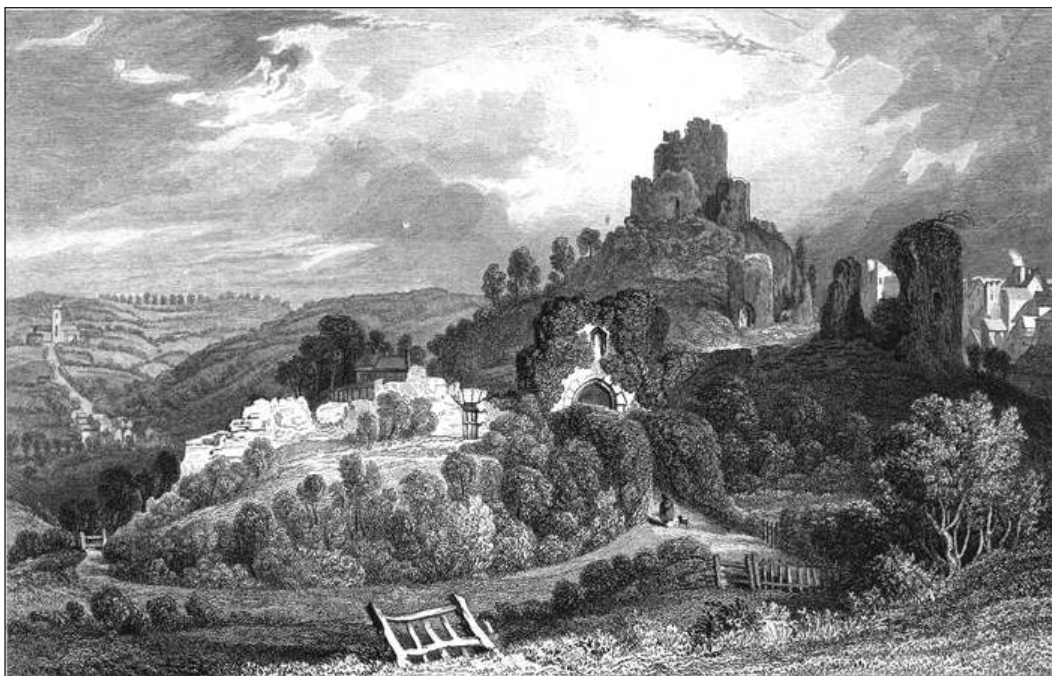
Motte height: c. 65ft (20m).

Published refs: Borlase 1769, 358-366; Toy 1933; Brown *et alii* 1963, II, 693- 694; Renn 1968, 220-222; King 1983, I, 74; Saunders 1990; Saunders 2006, 62-64, 229-232; Higham 2009-2010.



ABOVE: Fig. 3. Launceston Castle, from Francis Grose's *Antiquities of England and Wales*. Vol. VIII, opp. page 26. 1784. View from the south, with the drum-towered outer gatehouse clearer than the more romanticised view (fig. 4) below.

BELOW: Fig. 4. Launceston Castle, engraved by W. Miller sculpt; drawn by T. Allom del. From 'Cornwall Illustrated, in a Series of Views of Castles, Seats of the Nobility, Mines, Picturesque Scenery, Towns, Public Buildings, Churches, Antiquities etc.', with Historical & Descriptive accounts by Britton & Brayley, 1831.



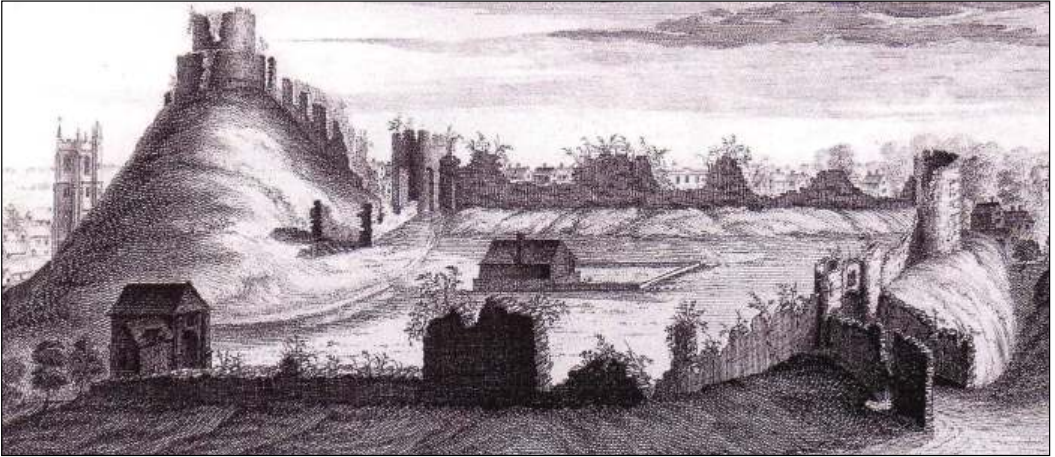


Fig. 5. Launceston Castle (detail). Samuel and Nathaniel Buck. From the west, 1734.

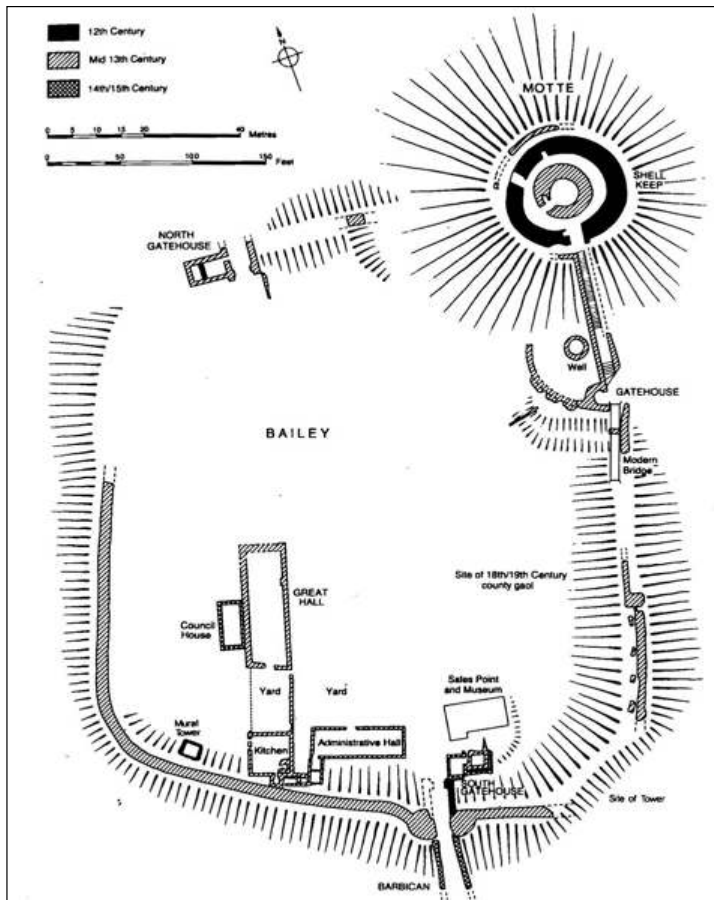
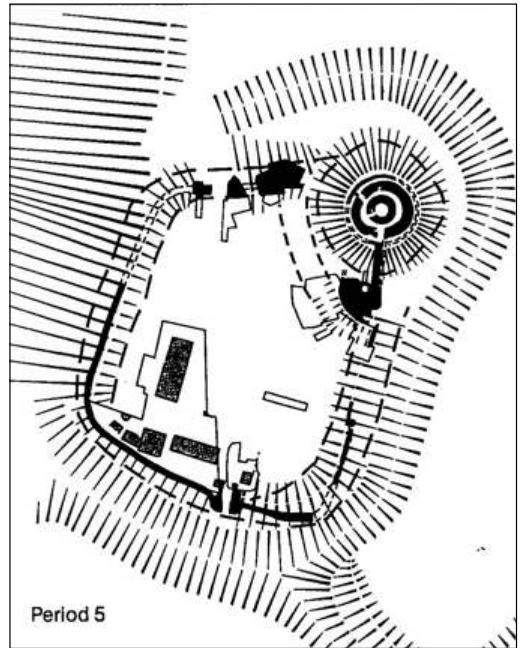
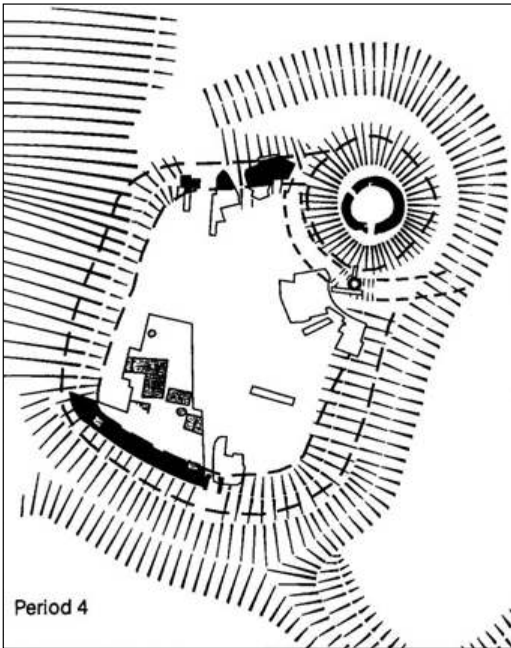


Fig. 6. Launceston Castle. Plan, from Saunders, 1984, 1990. © English Heritage.



ABOVE: Figs. 7 & 8. Left & Right. Launceston Castle. Phasing of the development of the shell-keep and bailey, during Phases 4 & 5. Saunders, 2006, p. 257. © Society for Medieval Archaeology, Reproduced with thanks.

BELOW: Fig. 9. Launceston Castle. Plans of the ground floor and at the level of the rampart walk. From Sidney Toy, 1933. ©. Reproduced courtesy of the Sidney Toy Estate.

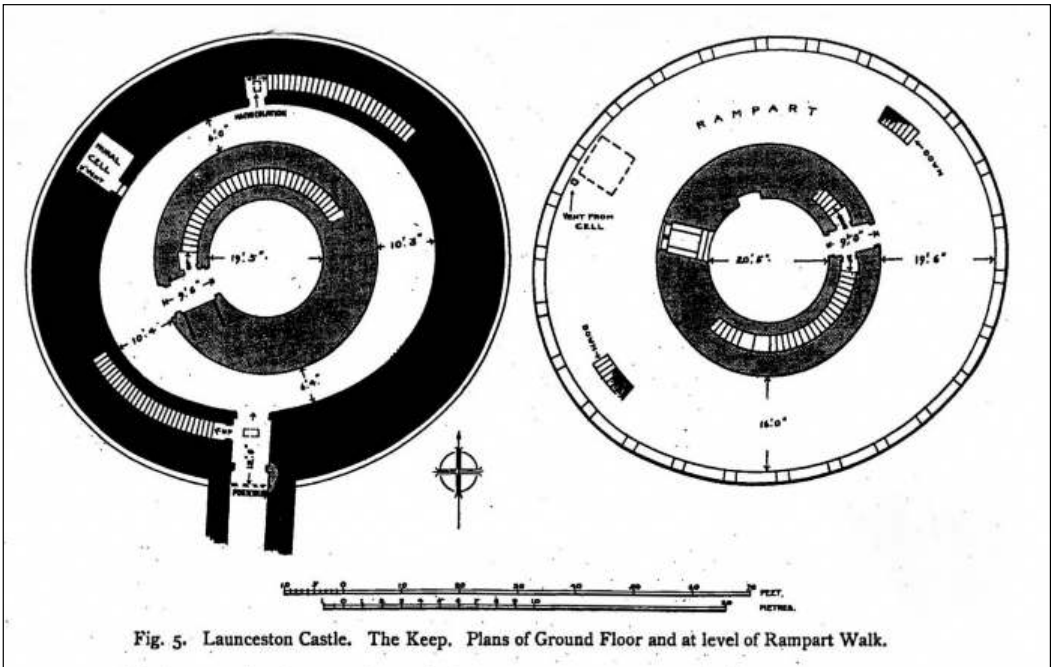




Fig. 10. Launceston. The ascent to the shell keep (from the south). The motte, a natural scarped mound is c. 65 ft high, and the shell wall 23ft high to the level of the rampart. The inner round tower adds another 30ft.

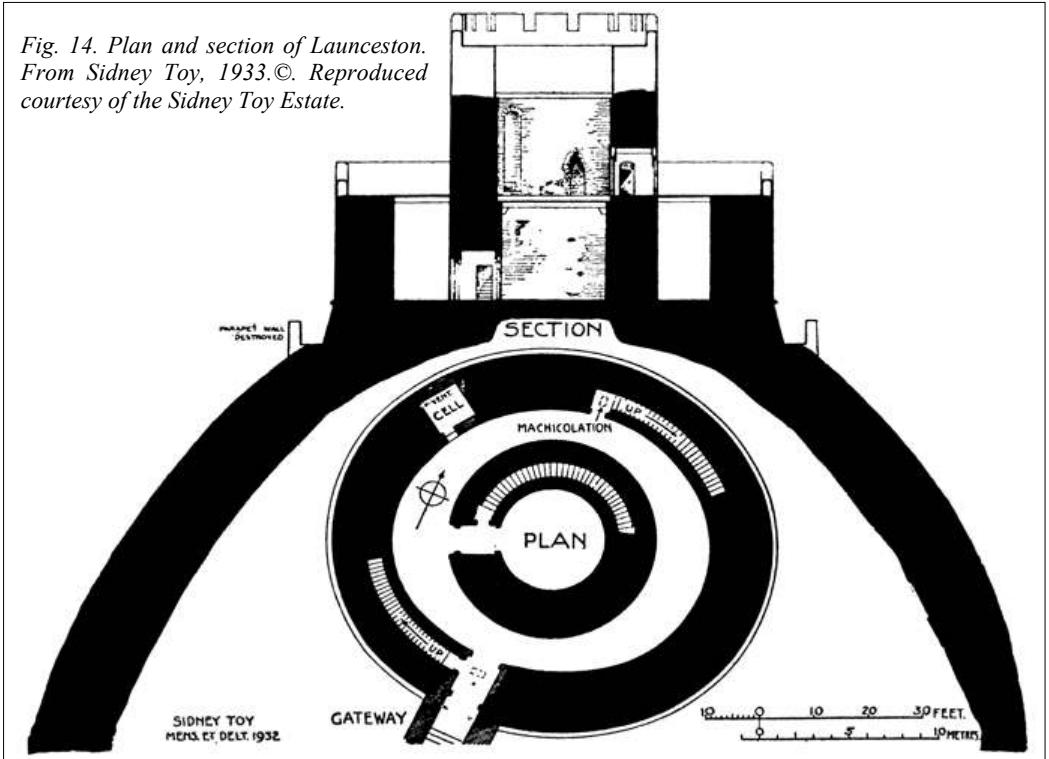


ABOVE: Left: Fig. 11. Main entrance from the south with concentric mural stair to wall-walk within the wall thickness. Right: Fig. 12. Main entrance from the south, looking north, with entrance to mural stair on the left.

BELOW: Fig. 13. Entrance and concentric stair into the inner mid-13th century round tower.



Fig. 14. Plan and section of Launceston.
From Sidney Toy, 1933. ©. Reproduced
courtesy of the Sidney Toy Estate.



BELOW: Left: Fig. 15. Left: Entrance to concentric mural stair in the shell wall on the north side (see above).
Right: Fig. 16. Second broken through 'entrance' through the shell wall on the north-west, (marked 'Cell + Vent') by Toy, above).

