



Fig. 1. Tonbridge Castle. The shell-keep from the inner bailey, looking west. The wing-wall with a parapet wall-walk on the right joins the 1260s Edwardian gatehouse. Today a Victorian zig-zag path leads to the motte top. Image by Clem Rutter, Rochester, Kent; multi-license with GFDL and Creative Commons CC-BY-SA-2.5 and older versions (2.0 and 1.0). Reproduced with thanks.

Tonbridge

14. Tonbridge

Tonbridge Castle was founded by Richard fitz Gilbert after the Norman Conquest. The family was known as de Clare, after their main Suffolk property, and were powerful earls from the 12th century. The castle remained with them until the early 14th century. It clearly had a very substantial structure on its motte-top (fig. 1). It is illustrated (in view) in an engraving by the Buck Brothers of 1735 (figs. 2, 3). Although the shell wall was by now ruinous, it still survived to a considerable height in places. The picture also shows a stair ascending the motte side, protected by a wing-wall rising from the bailey curtain as well as an entrance into the keep with incomplete arch. In a study of unusually early date for this type of archaeological monument, Edward King (1782) published a paper where Tonbridge was discussed and illustrated; he estimated the external diameters of “the (oval) keep” as 86ft and 76ft.

A plan of 1866 (fig. 4) shows a complete circuit of masonry and a wing-wall connecting it to the bailey gatehouse. Sadly, what remains today on top of the motte is very fragmentary, described (by Simmons 1996, 134) as “some badly-damaged and poorly-

repaired core-work a short length of the base of a wall of massive ashlar with an angled buttress and the stub of the north curtain wall” (figs. 6-10).

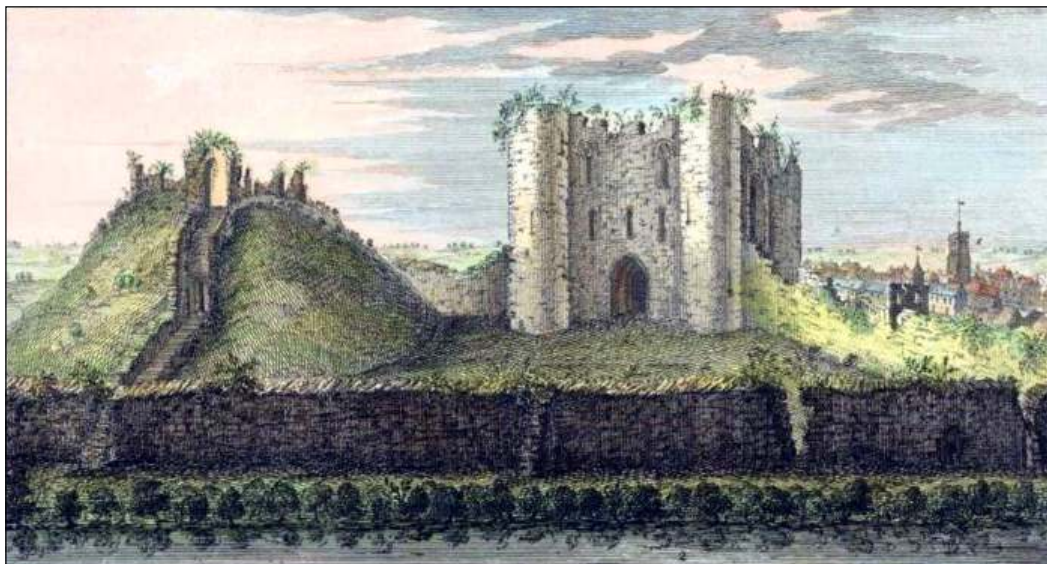
This structure is always referred to as a shell-keep (e.g. by Simmons, *ibid*: a “three-storeyed multi-angular shell-keep) but some published accounts (e.g. Simpson 1940, 71) mention some evidence which may be to the contrary. In about 1912, a limited excavation (now surviving as a large hollow) revealed parts of the foundation of a polygonal masonry structure in the centre of the motte. This raises the possibility the motte carried a *donjon* and ring-wall rather than a shell-keep. Given the disappearance of most of the superstructure and the lack of clarity about the nature of the excavated remains, the site remains somewhat enigmatic. It may have been a shell-keep, or it may not have been. Or it may have been to start with, but having a secondary *donjon* added within it.

Internal diameters: 86 ft x 76 ft (King)

Motte height: 65ft (20m)

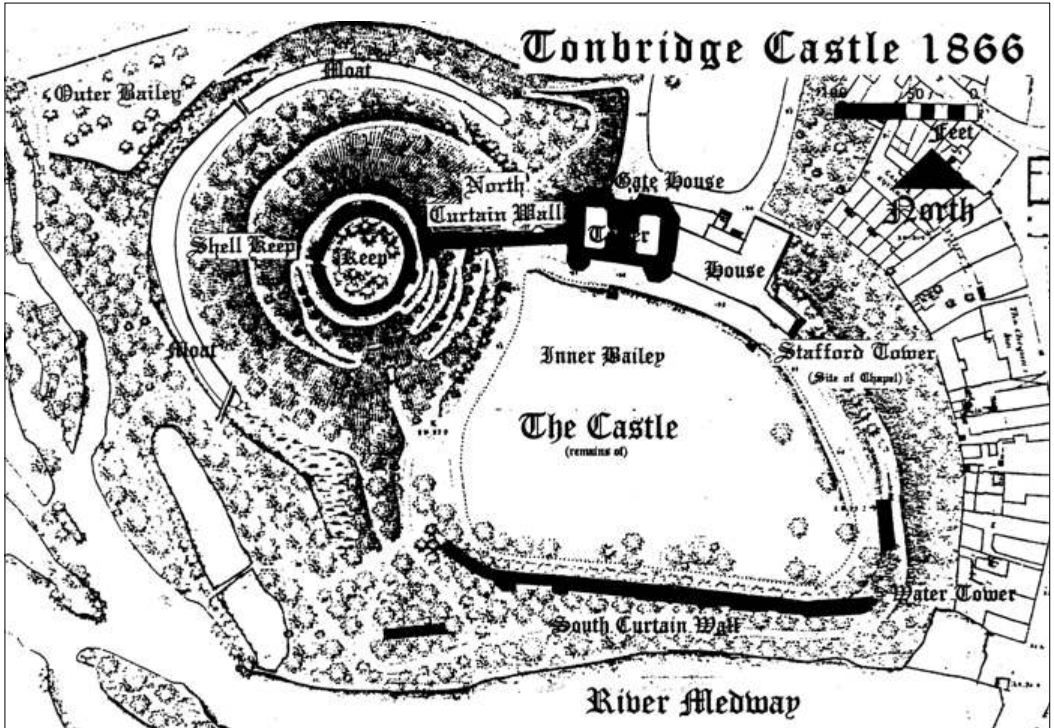
Published refs: King 1782, 270-290; Simpson 1940; Renn 1968, 324; King 1983, I, 235; Oliphant, 1997, 2007; Simmons 1996.

THE SOUTH VIEW OF TUNBRIDG-CASTLE, IN THE COUNTY OF KENT.



Figs. 2 (ABOVE), & 3 (BELOW). Engraving by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, of 1735. From the south (with detail of the shell keep below). The engraving shows a stair ascending the motte on the south side (left), and protected by a wing-wall rising from the bailey curtain that joins up with the 13th century gatehouse. The motte top entrance is shown with an incomplete arch. There is a hint of an intermediate entrance half-way up the stairs. The second wing-wall joins the 13th century gatehouse. This also had protected stairs to the motte-top.





ABOVE: Fig. 4. Tonbridge Castle, plan, 1866. Published in Sydney Simmons article, 1996.

BELOW: Fig. 5. Tonbridge Castle plan, as published in the current Tonbridge Castle guidebook authored by Jane Oliphant, 2007, and assisted by the Tonbridge Historical Society. (© Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tonbridge). See tonbridge.castle@tmhc.gov.org Reproduced with thanks.

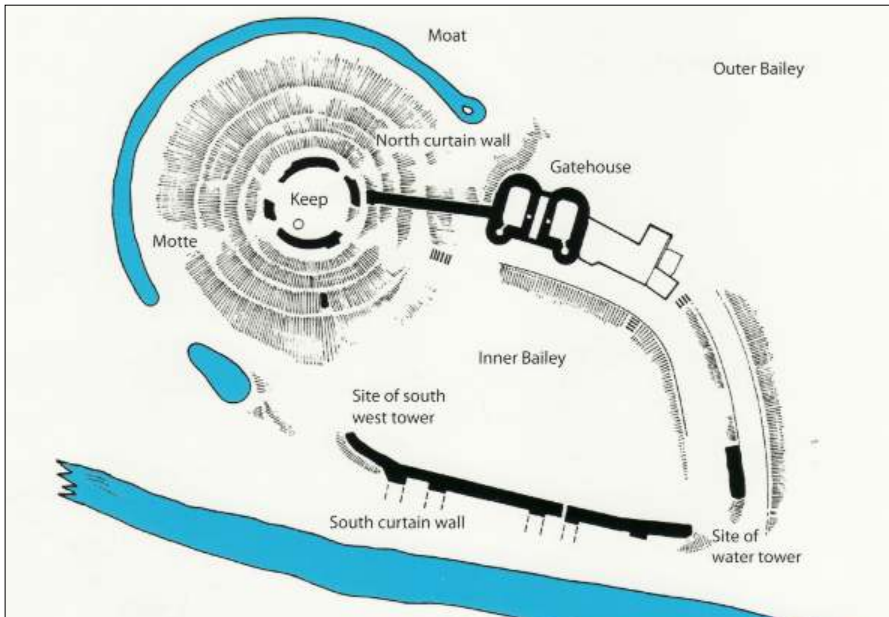




Fig. 6. ABOVE: Tonbridge Castle shell-keep. Part of the outer battered base of the shell with what appear to be two large buttresses (on the east) that extend beyond the line of the wall, at the position near to where the original stairs reached the motte top.

Fig. 7. BELOW: Base of the curving shell-keep exterior to the south-west without the plinth mouldings seen above and in figs. 8, 9. Much of this walling is no more than 1 metre in thickness and is much rebuilt.





Fig. 8. Tonbridge Castle shell-keep. Modern steps into the interior of the shell, on the east side.



Fig. 9. Detail of the plinth mouldings and batter on the east.



Fig. 10. Motte-top interior of the shell with caged well. Looking north-east.