

Motte and Bailey castles

Motte and Bailey castles were originally used by the Normans when they invaded England in 1066 to protect themselves from the native people who they weren't very popular with. It was like a community which had a lord and lady that were in charge. The motte and bailey design became less popular in the mid-medieval era and from the end of the 12th century a new scientific approach had emerged. The stone castle era. Another reason was because timber burns so easily flaming arrows were a favourite for intruders. The castles originally made from earth and timber alone. It was thought that the motte and bailey castle was a true European innovation. They were often rebuilt as stone structures when Norman lords felt more established. Most of the castles in Wales were for when the Normans wanted defence and when Edward 1st the invaded Wales. Castles were usually made to intimidate others, show off or for protection.



Figure 1 A plan of a motte and bailey castle

The motte

The motte is an earth mound forming a defensive raised platform on which stands a tower known as a keep. The earth for the mound was taken from around its own base forming a deep ditch which was sometimes filled with water. It would be strengthened with wooden supports or clay. The motte was flattened on the top for the keep. The steep embankment on the side of the motte was known as the scarp. Large mottes could be as high as 30 meters and as wide as 90 meters but were rarely that high because it took a lot of effort to pile up huge volumes of earth.

The bailey

The bailey was the centre of domestic life within the castle and could contain a variety of buildings such as halls, kitchens, stores, stables, a chapel, barracks and workshops. The bailey was the section of land in front of the keep and was where normal people (e.g. not barons) lived. The yard was surrounded by a wooden fence, called a palisade, and the a ditch. Baileys that were built by the Normans tended to be made out of wood. The yard, where people lived, was formed by flattening an area alongside the motte. Around the Bailey there was often a moat that was sometimes filled with water. This was achieved by damming streams or letting the ditch fill up with rain water.

The keep

The keep was the place the Lord of the castle and his wife lived. It was surrounded by a protective wall. The keep was on top of the motte and was the castles' primary form of defence as it was on higher ground. The bailey was linked to the keep either by a flying bridge or, more commonly in England, by steps that were cut into the motte.

Cardiff castle

Cardiff castle was commissioned by either William the Conqueror or Robert Fitz Hamon* and formed the Medieval town of Cardiff. It was attacked several times in the 12th century and stormed in 1404 during the revolt of Owain Glyndwr. The original Motte and Bailey castle was built in the late 11th century by Norman invaders on top of a 3rd century Roman fort. The castle was rebuilt in stone in the 12th century, probably by Robert of Gloucester with a shell keep and substantial defensive walls being erected. Further work was done by the 6th Earl of Gloucester in the 2nd half of the 13th century.



Cardiff castle now

*ROBERT FITZHAMON WAS THE 1ST FEUDAL BARON OF GLOUCESTER AND THE NORMAN CONQUEROR OF GLAMORGAN AND BECAME THE LORD OF GLAMORGAN IN 1075.