

Pevensey Castle



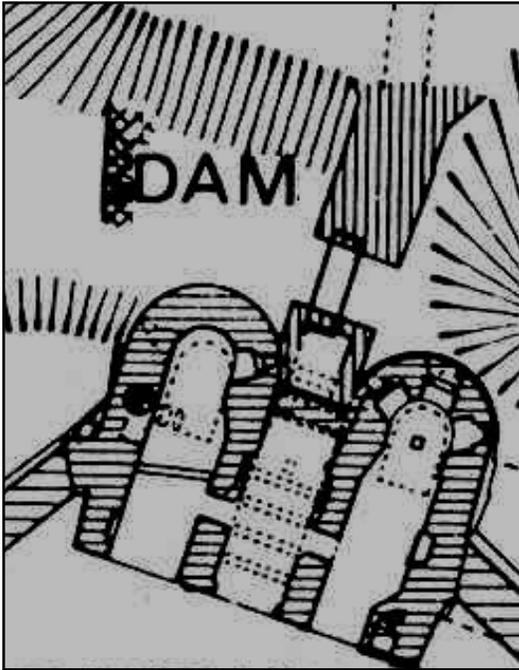


Pevensey Castle - from the west. Opinions differ about the keep. Possible dates are: (1) keep *circa* 1130's, bastions added *circa* 1190-1220's, gatehouse *circa* 1190-1220's; or, (2) Keep and bastions completed in one building campaign *circa* 1190 (current handbook). Curtain wall and towers in stone *circa* 1240's. The late Norman castle lies within the Roman fort of Anderida of *circa* 290 AD. Reproduced by kind permission of the National Monuments Record, Swindon. ©Crown Copyright NMR.

Pevensey.

Outline History:

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| <p>c 290 Roman fort Anderida constructed at Pevensey, one of the Saxon Shore-forts.</p> <p>491 Fort was attacked and its population slaughtered by a Saxon raiding force.</p> <p>1066 William makes his first landing at Pevensey and erects a temporary fortification.</p> <p>1088 1st siege. Castle was held by supporters of Duke Robert of Normandy against William Rufus. After six weeks the rebels sought a truce due to a lack of food. Robert of Mortain retained Pevensey but his son forfeited it when opposing Henry I. Rape passed to Gilbert Laigle (or d'Aquila; the honour came to be known as 'of the Eagle'). At some stage The Laigle family lost control of Pevensey but regained it later.</p> <p>1147. 2nd siege. Castle was in possession of Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Pembroke when it was besieged by Stephen; starvation forced submission and castle passed into the hands of the Crown.</p> | <p>1190s Richard I made improvements to defences. Might have constructed the keep and gatehouse.</p> <p>1246 After having passed through the hands of a couple of royal favourites Pevensey is granted to Peter of Savoy, uncle of Henry III's queen. The stone inner bailey is built.</p> <p>1264 3rd siege. Pevensey was held by royalist supporters after the battle of Lewes. Besiegers cut off land supplies but garrison replenished by sea Siege not lifted until 1265.</p> <p>1372 Castle passes to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster.</p> <p>1399 4th siege. Castle besieged by troops of Richard II, when Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbroke claimed throne. Constable of Pevensey Sir John Pelham was with Henry. His wife Lady Joan Pelham was in charge of the castle until, after Henry overthrew Richard II, the siege was lifted.</p> <p>1573 Survey records buildings in ruin.</p> <p>1588 Gun emplacement constructed in the outer bailey during the Armada.</p> <p>1925 Castle presented to the State by the Duke of Devonshire.</p> <p>1940 Castle garrisoned & fortifications built into it.</p> |
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Pevensey Castle. Looking south. The much altered and fragmentary D shaped gatehouse towers; the gatehouse included a portcullis and lifting bridge. They probably had wooden backs.

The Gatehouse:

The dating of the gatehouse has come under close scrutiny over the last twenty years. Twin towered D-shaped gatehouses have customarily been dated to the early part of the thirteenth century, (Beeston, Bolingbroke etc). However, the English Heritage Pevensey Handbook of 1985, still using the text of the late Sir Charles Peers, stated:

'The present gatehouse of the inner bailey with its twin bastions was the first step in replacing the earlier earthwork defences. Its detail is still rather in the Norman fashion, but military architecture can be old-fashioned in this point. In any case it is not later than the 1220's and **may be as early as the 1190's**. It was much altered in succeeding years, and in the fifteenth century [1405] the wooden bridge was replaced by a stone causeway across the moat'.

This text appears to have updated Peers' original words, for in an earlier handbook Peers said the gatehouse was 'begun about 1220'. However, the plan, from which the above image is taken, gives a key that still stated: mid 13th century A (narrow lines), mid 13th century B, (broader lines). There is no explanation what the A and B indicate, but it is evident from inspection that the



Pevensey Castle. The gatehouse from the south. Photograph taken on Saturday, April 2nd, 2005 during the CSG visit.

walls abutting the gatehouse are of a different build, therefore probably of a different time. Derek Renn's 'popular guide' of 1970 said: '...in 1216 Pevensey was dismantled, but soon after the gatehouse was rebuilt in stone'. The latest 1999 edition of the English Heritage handbook, written by John Goodall reassesses the dating of the gatehouse and states:

'The gatehouse was probably built **around 1200** along the line of the Norman timber palisade to the inner bailey.....There is an untidy join between the masonry of the walls and gatehouse visible on both sides'.

The gatehouse had two great 'D' or drum-shaped towers flanking the vaulted entrance passage, and is indeed one of the earliest surviving examples of this popular medieval twin-towered design. Perhaps an earlier example, not known when the current Pevensey guide was written [1999] is that of Chepstow. The main twin-towered gatehouse at Chepstow had previously been dated to the early thirteenth century, but recent dendochronology work done on the original wooden gatehouse doors suggests that the doors were made no later than the 1190's, contemporary with the building of William Marshall twin-towered main gate.



Pevensey Castle - From the west, with gatehouse centre. Engraved by Miss Hawkesworth after a picture by Prout, published in *Relics of Antiquity* 1811. Copper engraved print.

These may have been built in 1189 almost immediately after his marriage to Isabella of Clare. They consist of two round towers of slightly different diameters built close together and well equipped with arrow loops. Between the towers the gate-passage was protected - from front to back - by murder holes, a portcullis with counterweights passing down through neatly constructed circular shafts, a pair of wooden, yet heavily-nailed doors, and a second portcullis. Outside there was a small barbican.¹ It demonstrates that by the 1190's such technology was known and available in England and Wales. Sir Charles Peers (or whoever the writer of the amended 1985 version of Peers's text was) assigning an 1190's date on the Pevensey gatehouse is quite compatible with what we now know was the then state of the art gatehouse design.

John Goodall does not see changing sequential experimental technology as the catalyst for this series of different designs. His comparison for Pevensey is Dover North Gate, not Chepstow, and he would refer to St John Hope who found or commented on a twelfth century gatehouse with drum towers at Old Sarum.² His view is that technology has nothing to do with design change in this instance.

The problem at Pevensey is with assigning the gatehouse to a particular builder, event, or to building accounts, and both English Heritage guides skirt this issue. The castle was in royal possession from 1157, when Henry II confiscated it from William, Earl Warenne, and it remained a royal castle until early in the thirteenth century. Between 1161 and 1197 small sums of money

¹ Rick Turner, *Chepstow Castle*, Cadw, 2002.

² The 1965 *Illustrated Guide* to Old Sarum has a fold out plan that appears to show solid drum towers extending from the castle gatehouse of late 12th century date. The new 1994 edition of the *Guide* has a colour coded plan on page 7 that shows a square ended gatehouse re-dated to early 12th century.

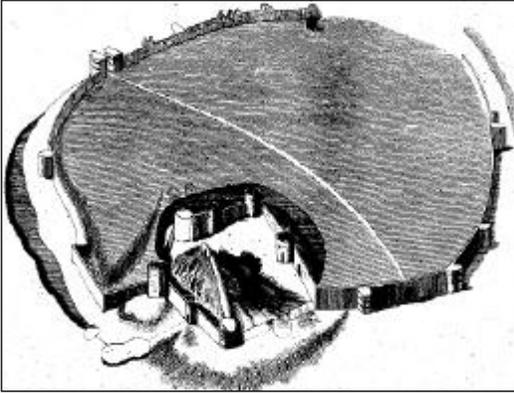
were expended on repairs to the Norman tower keep, the palisade, the ditch and the buildings in the castle, 'but no important works were undertaken by the Angevin kings, and when Prince Louis landed in Kent in 1216, John did not attempt to hold the castle, but, apparently, dismantled it in the course of his retreat through Sussex'. (HKW Vol II, *The Middle Ages*).

Richard I, king from 1189-1199 may have issued instructions, but there is no record. As Richard spent most of those ten years abroad, England was effectively ruled by a Justiciar, Hubert Walter, who became Archbishop of Canterbury. William Marshall (of Chepstow) was also a loyal supporter of Richard and enjoyed high office. It is conceivable that these two were the initiators of the Pevensey gatehouse in the late 12th century. And if John later dismantled Pevensey (1216) did he destroy the just completed gatehouse? If so, is what we see a complete rebuild of the period 1220's? Whenever it was actually built, it would satisfy a date range between 1190 and 1220, with the earlier period the preferred option.

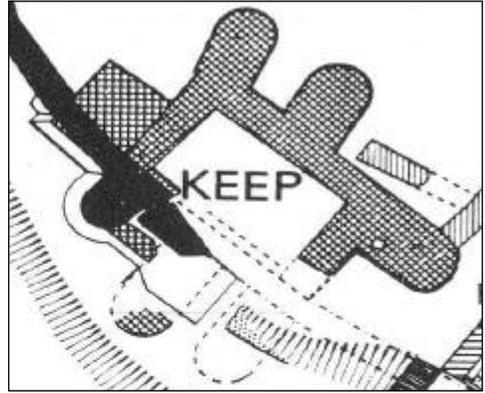
The Keep.

Dominating the eastern side of the inner bailey is the ruin of the tower-keep. Grose's *Antiquities* (1786) shows a bird's eye view engraving of the ruin, (the original painting is from S H Grimm), and being so ruinous, the text indicates the antiquaries of the time thought it had been some kind of motte, on top of which someone had built a picturesque arch. Early in the twentieth century the mound of earth and rubble was excavated and cleared by Duncan Montgomerie and Harold Sands (1908-10). What became exposed are the ruins that are seen today.

The rear of the rectangular keep was a vertical extension of the Roman wall, using one of the bastions (solid black on the plan), and adding two more round-fronted bastions facing west - that is, facing the inner bailey entrance, - one north (containing a square well-shaft, shown on the plan) and possibly two east, shown by dash lines on the plan. Finally there was a square bastion added to the south. What do we make of these eccentric bastions? The present handbook, written by John Goodall, states that they: '*pose an architectural puzzle which still remains to be solved.....this design is unique among medieval keeps and it is difficult to imagine what this building originally looked like*'.



Pevensey Castle - Bird's eye view from Grose's *Antiquities*, 1786, with the ruins of the keep, thought to be a motte.



Pevensey Castle - Plan of the keep. Detail from the 1985 English Heritage handbook. Smaller hatching indicates late 12th century, larger hatching slightly later.

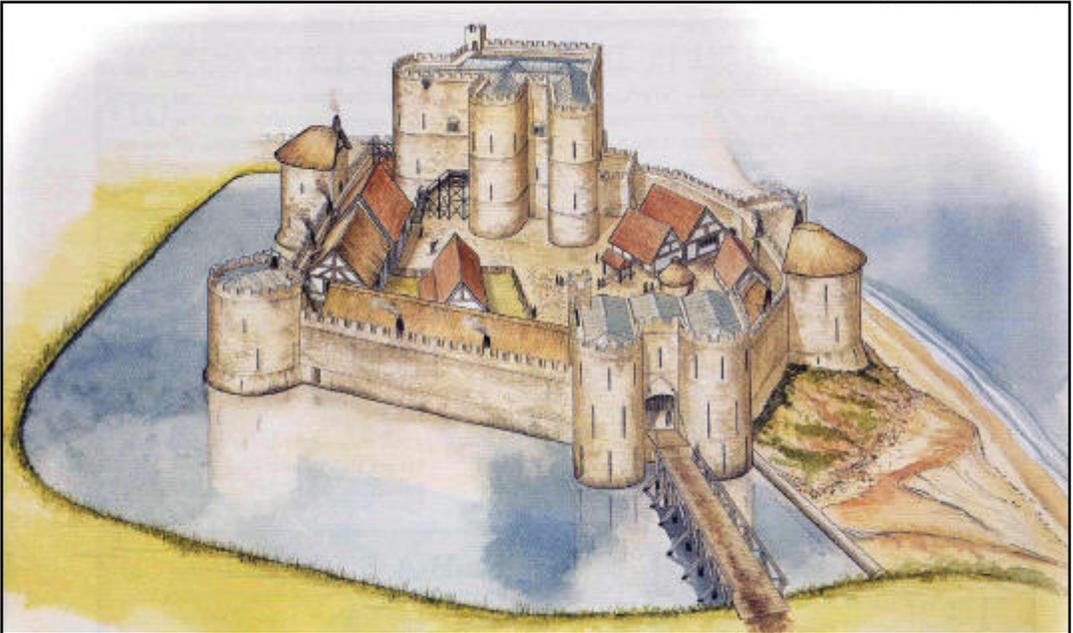


Pevensey Castle - The shattered ruins of the keep with the two D shaped Norman bastions, solid at ground level. The reconstruction on page 53 puts the keep entrance to the left of the left bastion adjacent to the west face of the keep.

The dating of the keep and its bastions is problematic. Some authorities have dated the keep to 1130, with the bastions added at a later time; others have suggested a complete build sequence *circa* 1190-1200, at the same time as the gatehouse with its D-shaped towers. The problem is that the keep is so fragmentary that it is impossible to reconstruct the internal layout. Derek Renn suggested many years ago that the keep was probably built four-square in the 1130's with the seaward side resting on or supported by the Roman wall. This would have been a much more conventional early Norman tower-keep, with a projection (the Roman bastion) in the same position as the chapel apses of the keeps of London and Colchester. (See *Postscript* at the end of this article)¹.

The Norman bastions, or towers in the west, facing the gatehouse, to the north and elsewhere, no doubt inspired by the Roman bastions, may well have been *added* in the 1190-1200 period, although the current handbook sees no evidence that these have a separate, later build sequence. They are of masonry that fits in accordance with late Norman work. The entrance, on the first floor, if it had been between the new bastions, [and there is no evidence for this] would have given to the front of the keep the appearance of a raised gatehouse entrance, matched by the new tall inner gatehouse of the same or similar date. The other, almost square low block, at the southeast angle 'appears to have been added about the same time. Its purpose is uncertain and may have been a platform for an engine of war' (1985 *Handbook*).

¹D F Renn., *The Turris de Penuesel: A Reappraisal and a theory* - Sussex Archaeological Collections, Vol CIX



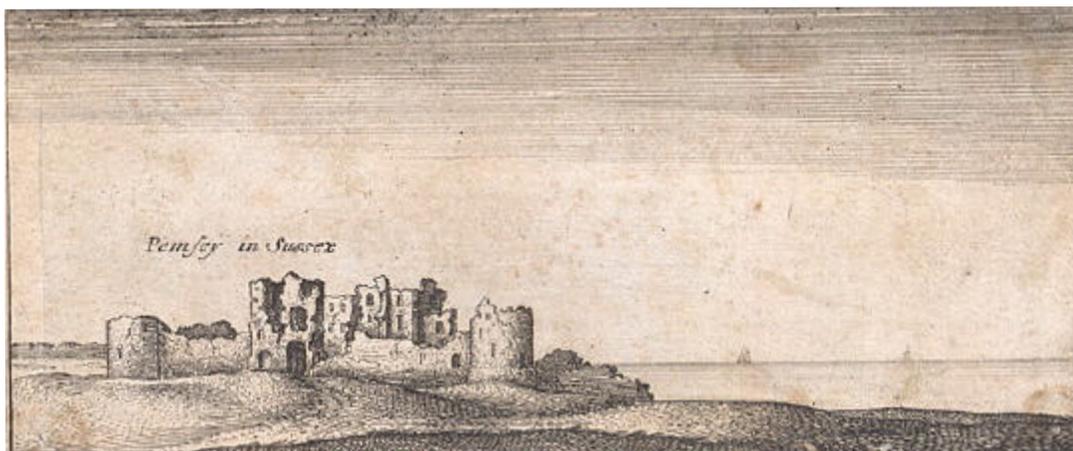
Pevensey Castle. A conjectural reconstruction drawing by Philip Winton of the inner bailey of Pevensey Castle in about 1325. Note how the three story gatehouse echoes the towers of the keep. Reproduced by courtesy of English Heritage. © English Heritage.

The 1190's was a period of change and experimentation in the fabric and design of castles, and another slightly earlier castle, at Conisbrough, also incorporated solid round towers around the inner bailey. The castle is attributed to Hamelin Plantagenet who held the castle from 1163 to 1202. Here, the curtain was built after the keep and the oval bailey is notable for its solid, half- round projecting bastions. In the late twelfth century flanking towers of any kind were an innovation, and up until then had been square fronted. Conisbrough was probably the earliest English example of a curtain flanked at regular intervals by round towers. Unfortunately the gate tower has been reduced to its foundations.

Pevensey seems to be the next stage in this development. The stone curtain and the D-shaped towers built in 1246 by Peter of Savoy, probably included a major overhaul of the gatehouse. The basement chamber in each tower remains complete, thereby allowing for three levels of arrow slits, with fine ashlar walls and a rubble barrel-vault on which the marks of the wooden shuttering can be seen. That the southern chamber acted as a 'dungeon' for the custody of prisoners is indicated by the fact that its door was closed by a draw bar on the outside; the other, with its trap in the roof was known as an 'oubliette', or prison cell.



Pevensey. The Gatehouse. The chase or grooves for the portcullis, left on the south side and right, on the north. That on the south is more clearly defined with the lower course of masonry showing the stop point. The portcullis is shown in the reconstruction, above.



Pevensey Keep - Postscript.

Following some additional desk-based research on the form of the Pevensey keep for the conference report, the above print came to light. It is from the King George III Topographical Collection in the British Library, described as a "View of Pevensey Castle" Engraver: Hollar, c. 1780: British Library Reference : Ktop XLII, 58 a." It is reproduced here by permission of the British Library. The image below is an enlarged detail. It may be an eighteenth century engraving of a seventeenth century Hollar original which is now lost. Other evidence suggests a 1635 date. What it does show is the keep, rear centre right, in a ruinous state, but still standing to three storeys and retaining a series of enlarged windows. If we are reading it correctly, what we see, from right to left is as follows:

1. A low square/rectangular room with a large light - in the south-east angle, the square

'bastion' base of which still exists. Was this just a platform, or was it the base for rooms above?

2. The rectangular keep with two lights, the largest below.

3. The fragmentary side of one of the tall towers or bastions, curving round to the left. The lights may be doors into the bastion.

4. The Keep with a further four lights, which is then hidden behind the gatehouse.

This suggests that the bastion(s) were solid to the base only, and rose up to the full height of the keep, as illustrated in the Philip Winton drawing. The enlarged lights may be evidence of modifications to suit later living requirements or they may be due to stone robbing around the dressed stone areas of the building, but their rectangularity suggests the former.