



My Drift

Title: Castles

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Have you ever visited and been inside a real castle? I saw a few castles when I was stationed in Spain for two years while in the Navy, but I never set foot in one. In this article we are going to learn a few things about castles and look at pictures of some of the more spectacular ones in Europe.

First of all, let's get the true definition of a castle. Here in the United States, we have palaces, mansions, fortresses, and big places that look like castles but none of these are real castles. Here is the definition of a castle:

A castle is a type of fortified structure built during the Middle Ages (a period between the 5th and 15th centuries) predominantly by the nobility or royalty. A castle was usually the private fortified residence of a lord or noble. This is distinct from a palace or mansion, which are not fortified; from a fortress, which was not always a residence for royalty or nobility. Over the 900 years that castles were built, they took on a great many forms with many different features, although some, such as curtain walls, arrow slits, moats, and portcullises (heavy vertically closing gates) were common.



**Neuschwanstein Castle
Germany**

When castles were being built, there was no United States of America. Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492 and we became a country on September 9, 1776. The real castles were built before this.

Most all castles are in Europe. There are more than 20,000 medieval castles and their remains in Europe today. In fact, 25,000 castles were built in Germany alone. Today, Germany is home to approximately 12,000 castles (either still standing or in ruins). Castles popped up all over Europe to keep out both the Vikings and Romans. Many castles still stand today in France, Spain, Great Britain, and several other European countries. In fact, the small UK country of Wales has 600 castles, the highest number of castles per square mile in the world. Still, no other country built as many castles as Germany.



Caerphilly Castle in in South Wales

Caerphilly Castle is one of the great medieval castles of western Europe. Several factors give it this pre-eminence – it is the largest castle in Britain after Windsor, its large-scale use of water for defense and the fact that it is the first truly concentric castle in Britain. At the time of its building in the late 13th century, it was a revolutionary masterpiece of military planning.

One of Henry III's most powerful and ambitious barons, Gilbert de Clare, lord of Glamorgan, built this castle. His purpose was to secure the area and prevent lowland south Wales from falling into the hands of the Welsh leader Llywelyn the Last, who controlled most of mid and north Wales. De Clare built other castles on the northern fringes of his territory for the same purpose. Apart from the remodeling of the great hall, no more alterations were carried out, making it a very pure example of late 13th-century military architecture.



Windsor Castle England

Windsor Castle was built in the 11th century after the Norman invasion of England by William the Conqueror. Originally designed to protect Norman dominance around the outskirts of London and oversee a strategically important part of the River Thames, Windsor Castle was built as a motte-and-bailey, with three wards surrounding a central mound. Gradually replaced with stone fortifications, the castle withstood a prolonged siege during the First Barons' War at the start of the 13th century. Windsor Castle was used as a refuge by the royal family during the Luftwaffe bombing campaigns of the Second World War and survived a fire in 1992.

It is the oldest and largest inhabited castle in the world and has been the family home of British kings and queens for almost 1,000 years. It is an official residence of “Her Majesty the Queen” and is still very much a working royal palace today, home to around 150 people.

The castle's lavish early 19th-century State Apartments were described by early 20th century art historian Hugh Roberts as "a superb and unrivalled sequence of rooms widely regarded as the finest and most complete expression of later Georgian taste". Henry III built a luxurious royal palace within the castle during the middle of the century, and Edward III went further, rebuilding the palace to make an even grander set of buildings in what would become the most expensive secular building project of the entire Middle Ages in England. Edward's core design lasted through the Tudor period, during which Henry VIII and Elizabeth I made increasing use of the castle as a royal court and center for diplomatic entertainment.



Corvin Castle Romania

The Corvin Castle was one of the recent pictures that come on my computer's Windows screen when I turned it on. I did a little research on this castle, and it gave me the idea to write about castles.

The Corvin Castle was laid out in 1446, when construction began by order of Voivode of Transylvania John Hunyadi. The castle was originally given to John Hunyadi's father, Voyk (Vajk), by Sigismund of Luxembourg, king of Hungary and Croatia, as severance in 1409. It was also in 1446 that John Hunyadi was elected as the regent-governor by the Diet.

Built in a Renaissance-Gothic style and constructed over the site of an older fortification on a rock above the smaller Zlaști River, the castle is a large and imposing structure with tall towers, bastions, an inner courtyard, diversely colored roofs, and myriad windows and balconies adorned with stone carvings. The castle also features a double wall for enhanced fortification and is flanked by both rectangular and circular towers, an architectural innovation for the period's Transylvanian architecture. Some of the towers were used as prisons. The Buzdugan Tower was solely built for defensive purposes. The rectangular shaped towers have large openings to accommodate larger weapons.

The castle has three large areas: the Knight's Hall, the Diet Hall, and the circular stairway. The halls are rectangular in shape and are decorated with marble. The Diet Hall was used for ceremonies or formal receptions while the Knight's Hall was used for feasts. This castle is recognized as being one of the biggest and most impressive buildings in Eastern Europe.

Here are a few more Spectacular Castles



Edinburgh Castle in Scotland



Hohensalzburg Castle in Austria



Alcázar of Segovia Castle in Spain



Bodiam Castle in England

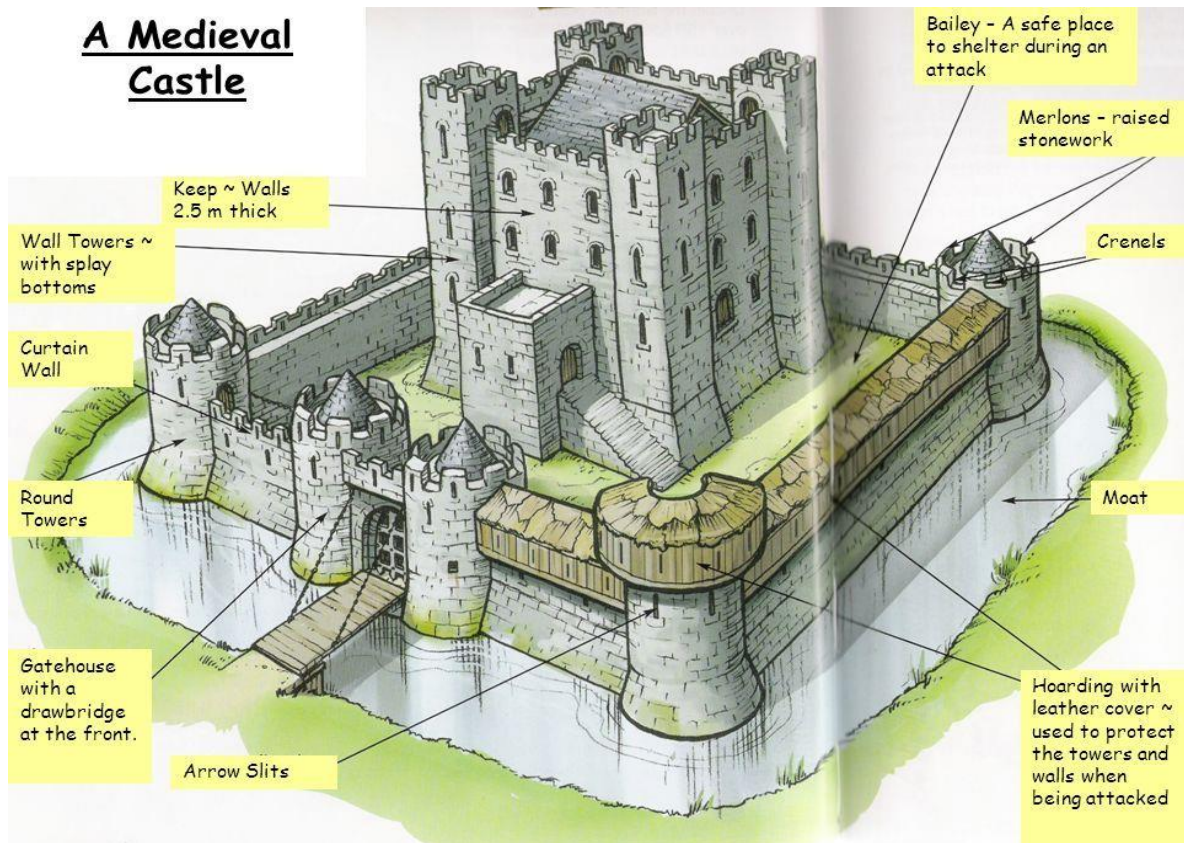


Vianden Castle in Luxembourg



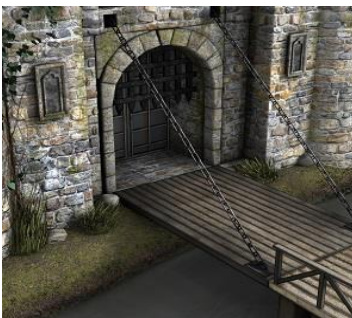
Predjama Castle in Slovenia

A Medieval Castle



Moat and Drawbridge

A moat was a defensive ditch (5 to 40 feet deep) built around the castle, and it could be either dry or filled with water. They were usually crossed by a drawbridge which was lifted using a simple crank from the gatehouse when attackers were nearby.



Drawbridge



Portcullis



Arrow Slits

The Gatehouse was the main (and only) entrance to the castle and therefore needed to be heavily guarded. It was defended by at least one portcullis which was a heavy gridded door that dropped vertically down to protect the main entrance. The Castle Gatehouse would have arrow slits in the side walls and might also contain murder holes.

Murder Holes were openings in the ceiling just in front of the entrance gate or in the passage beyond. Castle defenders could fire, throw, or pour harmful substances or objects such as rocks, arrows, scalding water, hot sand, quicklime, tar, or boiling oil, down on attackers.



Murder Holes

Round Towers and Curtain Walls

The curtain walls are a set of walls that surrounded and protect the interior of the castle. Walls are often connected by a series of round towers to add strength and provide for better defense of the ground outside the castle. It was harder for attackers to make round towers collapse. Unlike square towers, they had no corners which collapsed if holes were dug underneath the foundations. The curtain walls were made up of multiple layers of vastly thick stones. The walls range in thickness from 7 to 20 feet and were typically thirty to forty feet in height.

The Bailey is a fortified courtyard enclosed by the castle curtain wall. Castles can have more than one bailey. Their layout depends both on the local topography and the level of fortification technology employed, ranging from simple enclosures to elaborate military architecture defenses.

The Keep was the center of castle life, often serving as the King's or Lord's residence. The number of floors within the keep depend on its size and the wealth of its owner. Most Keeps contained a large room known as the Great Hall. The keep is the strongest portion of the fortification of a castle, the place of last resort in case of a siege or attack. With its extra thick walls and protected entrance, the keep was the safest place in a castle. As a lasting testimony to their integral strength, many tower keeps still survive today across Europe, where most often the rest of the castle buildings and walls have long since disappeared.



The Keep

Medieval Period Weapons



A Mace was a pole fitted with a heavy spiked head made of stone, iron, or bronze (Picture below is a Mace attached to the pole with a chain)



Remember, back in the Medieval Period or Middle Ages, there were no guns, or missiles, or bombs. Still, these weapons could do a lot of damage to a human or animal. How would you like to get hit on the head with the above mace?

The main methods of attacking a Medieval Castle were:

- Fire
- Ladders
- Mining or Tunneling
- Battering Rams
- Catapults
- Siege

Fire - Fire was the best way to attack the early castles (built between the 5th and 10th century) since they were made entirely of wood. Archers would shoot fire-arrows into the castle. As the fire spread, those living inside would be forced to leave allowing the attackers to take them prisoner or kill them. These wooden castles were replaced by stone castles since fire had little effect on a stone castle.



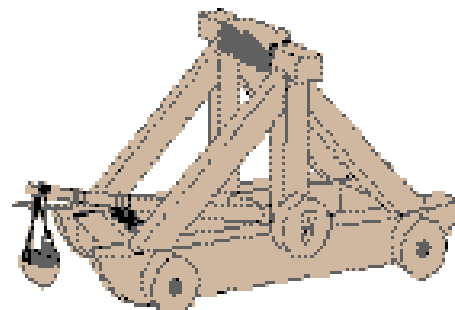
Battering Ram - The thick stone walls of the stone castles were difficult to knock down. Although pickaxes were used against the castle walls, it would take a very long time to knock a hole through it. The battering ram was particularly useful since the weight of several men would be put behind it. This would make it a considerable force that could seriously weaken and possibly destroy castle doors and walls.



Ladders - Ladders were used by those attacking a castle to climb over the walls and fight the castle inhabitants within the castle walls. However, ladders had the disadvantage of leaving the man climbing the ladder subject to attack by arrow, boiling water, or oil, or by being thrown to the ground if the ladder was pushed away from the wall.



Catapult - A variety of catapults were developed during the Middle Ages to fire stones, fireballs, or other objects such as dead sheep, cattle, or plague victims, at the castle walls or into the castle itself. This type of catapult works by twisting rope as tightly as possible so that it acts like elastic when the arm is released.





Mining or Tunneling - A good way of attacking a stone castle was through mining. Attackers would dig a tunnel underground up to the castle walls, under the gatehouse or a wall. The advantage of mining was that the attack could not be seen by those living in the castle. However, if those inside the castle were aware that attackers were mining underground, they would often mine from the castle to meet the attackers underground and there would be a sword battle.



Castle Under Siege

Siege - Another good way of attacking a stone castle was by placing it under siege. Attackers would surround a castle with both men and catapults so that no one could enter or leave the castle. Sieges could last for months, usually until the inhabitants of the castle ran out of food and were starving. One of the castle owner's mainline of defense against siege was to send all women, children, old, weak, and sick people out of the castle. This meant that only those strong enough to fight off attackers remained in the castle and that the food supply would last much longer.

Bottomline: Castles were built to fight off and survive enemy attacks.

Life Inside a Medieval Castle

Once upon a time, castles were full of life, bustle and noise and crowded with lords, knights, servants, soldiers and even entertainers. In times of war and siege they were exciting and dangerous places, but they were homes as well as fortresses.

THE LORD AND LADY OF THE CASTLE

The most important person in a castle was the owner—the king, lord, knight, and/or lady. But they didn't live there all the time. Kings owned dozens of castles and could never have visited them all. Castle owners always had private rooms, or at least a bedroom with an in-suite loo (toilet) and a chamber where they welcomed visitors. These were usually in the safest part of the castle, and only trusted servants or honored guests were allowed in.



THE SOLDIERS

Castles were no use without soldiers to defend them. In peacetime, a small castle might have a garrison of only a dozen soldiers. This was just enough to open the gate, operate the portcullis and drawbridge and patrol the walls against stray robbers who tried to break in. They'd be commanded by the constable who had his own room. The soldiers slept in a dormitory. But when attack threatened, they'd pack as many soldiers as you could into the castle. For example, at the great siege of Dover Castle in 1216, 140 knights and about 1,000 soldiers defended the castle against the French.



THE SERVANTS

Because all housework was done by hand, castles were full of servants—especially when the owner was at home. Some Kings had over 100 servants, so things got a little crowded at times. Ordinary servants ranged from the important steward, butler (in charge of drink) and head groom down to the hot and greasy boy who turned the spit for roasting meat over the fire. Lowlier servants slept anywhere within the castle they could find. They had few days off and little pay but were given uniforms (called liveries) in their lord's colors and regular meals all year round. Even the lord's leftovers were much tastier than peasant food. So being a castle servant was a sought-after job.



Castle Servants

THE COOKS

Cooks were among the busiest castle servants. At an average castle, they had to feed up to 200 people two meals a day. They cooked many meats we don't eat today including swans, peacocks, larks, and herons, as well as beef, pork, mutton, rabbits, and deer. In winter, with no refrigeration, there was little fresh food. The Baker was busy everyday baking bread, from fine white wheat rolls for the lady's table to rough loaves made from barley, oats or even peas and beans for servants (and horses). Medieval kitchens were hot, noisy places, with massive fireplaces for spit-roasting meat and many ovens, and cauldrons for boiling various other items.



THE GONG-FARMER

There were no flushing toilets in medieval times. Instead, you sat on a stone or wooden board with a hole in it, and the poop (or gong as it was called) dropped through. The bathroom or place with toilet were called a loo or privy or garderobe. In castles, toilets were often made to overhang an outside wall, and the poop fell either into the moat (if there was one), into a pit outside the wall or just on the ground. Men had a place on the top of the wall to pee on the outside of the castle.

The poop from the private loo (see pictures below) would fall into some sort of cesspit. Though medieval people didn't know about germs, they believed bad smells caused illness. The stink from the cesspit would come up into the owner's (Lord and Lady) rooms. Well, they didn't want that to happen, so the

unfortunate servant called the 'gong-farmer' had to clean out the cesspit on a regular basis. He would shovel the poop into baskets and wheelbarrows, and take it off to bury, or spread on the fields as fertilizer. Gong-farmers were quite well paid, but people didn't get too close to them.



**Here is a 3 Stall Public Toilet
Used by everybody except the castle
owners (Lord and Lady)**



Private Loo for the Lord and Lady

THE JESTER

In castles, all entertainment was live and at great feasts, lordly hosts were expected to have minstrels, jugglers, and acrobats. Jesters, or fools, were something special, employed full-time by a king or lord. They usually wore a brightly colored fool's outfit, for instance, a hood with donkey's ears. But in reality they had to be wise and quick-witted since they were often so favored by their masters that they could get away with mocking barons or even monarchs, telling the truth in jokey form. However, Triboulet, the King of France's Fool, went too far; he was sentenced to execution but was allowed to choose how he would die. 'Of old age', he replied, and was pardoned.



Some Burning Questions

Were the castles effective? Yes. Castles were great defenses against the enemy during the medieval period. However, when gunpowder and cannons were invented, the castles stopped being an effective form of defense. By the end of the 1400s, cannons were widely in use. The medieval castles with their high vertical walls were no longer the invincible fortification they had once been.

How long did it take to build a castle? About 10 years.



The first castle in England was built by the Normans

What were castle dungeons like? A medieval castle dungeon was the part of a medieval castle which was used to hold prisoners. It was customary to build a medieval castle dungeon in the form of an underground cell to increase the solitary nature of the confinement. It was also common to torture prisoners in the dungeons due to various political and religious reasons. Various methods of torture included branding irons, collars, torture rack, whippings, and starvation.



Castle Dungeon

How did the people stay warm in the winter? Castles weren't always cold and dark places to live. The great hall of castle had a large open-hearth fire to provide heat and light. The hall would also have tapestries which insulated the room against too much cold. Tapestries were pictures designed by artists painted on pliable fiber. They could be rolled up and thus far more easily transportable than framed paintings. Larger tapestries were hung in castles for decoration and to line drafty halls and rooms in an era before central heating.



Castle Open-Hearth Fire



Tapestries Wall Paintings

Where did people in medieval castles get their drinking water? The water supply was a problem for medieval castles, especially when they were under siege. Some castles were built alongside or near streams and rivers. Castles had a system of pipes that carried rainwater from the roof into cisterns. However, the most common way they got water was from multiple wells using a bucket on a chain – then filling cisterns.



**Mont Saint Michel Castle in France
(They had plenty of water at this castle)**



**Wells were the main source of
water for most medieval castles**

Did people in the Middle Ages wash and take baths? Yes. Medieval people, even regular old peasants were pretty clean types of people. In fact, they were so clean that for them bathing constituted a leisure activity. So, the average person would likely wash daily, but once a week or so they would treat themselves to a bath at the communal bath house.



Castle Owners (Lords and Ladies) had Private Baths with Servants to Help



Everybody else would bath at the Communal Bath House

Okay, did you learn anything about Medieval Castles? I found these castles to be fascinating! One thing I learned for sure is I would not want to have lived my life during the Middle Ages. We have things pretty good living here in the United States in the mid-to-late 20th and early 21st centuries. Just think – In a few hundred years, people will be learning the history of those poor unfortunate souls who had lived during our small period of time here on earth.

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