

Pontefract Castle



Pontefract Castle has had a long and colourful history since its beginnings following the Norman Conquest. It was frequently at the centre of national events, acting as fortress, temporary home for lords or kings, centre of local administration, prison for important prisoners and an armoury, up to its demolition in 1649. The first earth and timber motte and bailey castle at Pontefract was built by Ilbert de Lacy in the late 1080s.

The Gatehouse (rebuilt 1390-1400) was the main entrance to the inner bailey. The towers date from the 1190s, they were strengthened and given polygonal buttresses in the 14th century.

Constable Tower (built 1405-1412) is one of the earliest towers on site. This was also known as the Blanche Tower named after John of Gaunt's wife. It was a large, square tower with thick walls projecting 6 metres beyond the curtain wall.

Elizabethan Chapel (built 1564-1581) would have joined onto the southern corner of the King's Tower. It was used as a burial place during the Civil Wars; the more important figures were reburied elsewhere after the war. Evidence of countermine shafts has been found here.

Norman Chapel (built 1086) was the first of 3 chapels in the castle and was called St Clements. It was left to decay and replaced by a newer chapel in 1499.

Royal Apartments (Great Hall King's and Queen's Towers built 1390-1400) were built during a period of rebuilding and refurbishment in the 1300s. The towers are known to have been 12 metres square and over 18 metres tall; similar in design to the Constable Tower and had 5 storeys.

Swillington Tower (built 1399-1405) was the only tower built entirely outside of the castle, this eliminated a defensive spot which made the site impenetrable. A drawbridge linked it to the main curtain wall. It was originally a 13 metre square tower with 2 storeys and

battlements above but it was cut in half in 1810 in order to widen the road next to it.

Kitchens (built 1415-1420) had 4 large open fireplaces. The areas where the stonework is pink from burning shows where the fires and ovens were located. The large size of the kitchens reflects the size and importance of the castle.

Gascoigne Tower (built 1405-1412) was an early medieval building that was rebuilt, strengthened and extended in the 15th century. It protected the sally port.

The Keep was completed in wood by 1086, by 1284 it was completed in stone. The original motte is still visible. Only 3 towers of the Keep survive from the original 4 (quatrefoil design) similar to Clifford's Tower in York which was built at a similar time.

The Magazine, once the cellar to the 11th century hall. Still visible are the names of Civil War prisoners who carved them into the solid rock of the walls. In the 1720s the castle was hired by Dunhills to cultivate and harvest liquorice, which was stored in the Magazine.

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The Tour

To follow this tour, walk anti-clockwise around the site.

Please take care as historic sites can be hazardous! In particular, watch out for uneven steep slopes, slippery and uneven surfaces, steep drops, steps and steep uneven steps. Please take all necessary precautions to prevent fires and do not climb on the monument. You are responsible for the control of children in your care; please ensure they are carefully supervised.



KEY

-  Standing Remains
-  Main Paths
-  Buildings
-  Car Park

Details of the key features of the site are on the reverse

-  1 Gatehouse
-  2 Constable Tower
-  3 Elizabethan Chapel
-  4 Norman Chapel
-  5 Royal Apartments
-  6 Swillington Tower
-  7 Kitchens
-  8 Bakehouse and Brewhouse
-  9 Gascoigne Tower
-  10 Sally Port
-  11 Keep
-  12 Magazine
-  13 Shop and Visitor Centre
-  14 Toilets