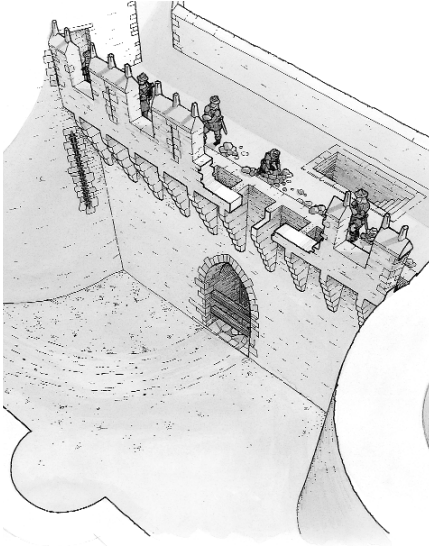


Conwy Castle



A reconstruction of the machicolations in the west barbican, showing the way they may have been used during an attack or siege upon the gateway leading to the outer ward.

Conwy Castle is one of the ring of castles built by Edward I to rule north Wales after he defeated the Welsh princes. A walled town for English settlers was established at the same time. The walls and castle are remarkably complete and, along with Caernarfon Castle and town wall, Harlech Castle and Beaumaris Castle, in 1987 they were added to the World Heritage List of sites of outstanding value.

History

Conwy Castle, built on a rocky outcrop, controls the crossing of the river Conwy, at the eastern edge of Gwynedd. Edward I personally oversaw the planning of the castle and town early in 1283, and the work was supervised by Master James of St George, one of the greatest military architects of his day. In summer 1285, 1,500 workmen were employed, and two years later the work was largely completed. In such an exposed position, the building soon began to decay. In 1332 it was said to be not fit for the king to stay in. In 1346 the buildings were re-roofed in lead. In the great hall range, stone arches strong enough to support a lead roof replaced the previous timber trusses. The castle was seized by followers of Owain Glyn Dŵr in 1401. Little maintenance seems to have been carried out until the castle was repaired by supporters of the king in the Civil War. After that, the roof was removed. The castle was attractive to artists in the eighteenth century and it was painted by J. M. W. Turner. When Thomas Telford's road bridge and later the railway brought visitors to Conwy, more interest was shown in the castle. It was given to the borough in 1865 and is now in the care of Cadw, on behalf of the National Assembly for Wales. A continuous programme of research and maintenance is carried out.

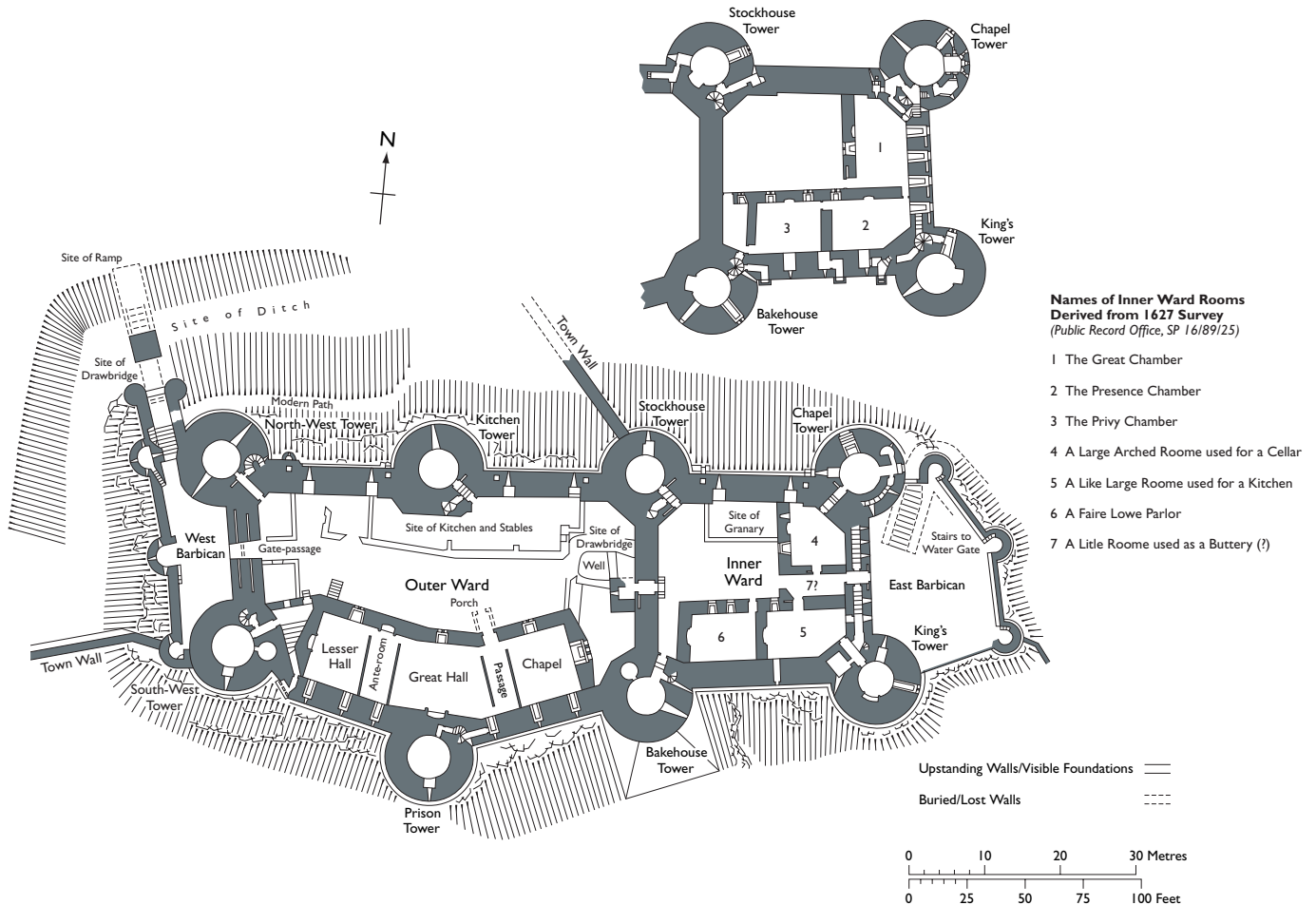
Looking at the buildings

The exterior

- Look at the siting of the castle and its relationship to the river and town walls.
- Is there evidence that the castle was built in a single phase?
- Look for patches of limewash, which show that the castle was painted white.
- Putlog holes: these round holes, visible in the tower walls, show where the scaffolding was.
- Square holes beneath the battlements are evidence for a hoard, or wooden platform.
- Arrowloops at alternating heights improve defence.
- Notice the turrets on the four eastern towers.



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The outer gate and west barbican

- The present entrance is modern. The original was via a ramp to the right.
- Notice the grooves for a portcullis and pivot holes for a drawbridge in the outer gate.
- There are drawbar holes for doors at the end of the gate-passage.
- Large arrowloops and machicolations protect the gateway to the outer ward.

The outer ward

- This is where the garrison lived, and in 1284 this comprised fifteen crossbowmen and fifteen other servants.
- Notice evidence for a portcullis and a drawbar in the gateway.
- The kitchen, stable and guardroom were built of timber against the north wall. Notice the foundations and stone corbels to support the roof in the wall.

The great hall range

- These were grand rooms: notice the fine windows and door frames.
- There are three fireplaces in this range.
- The stone arches were built to support the new lead roof in 1346.

The towers

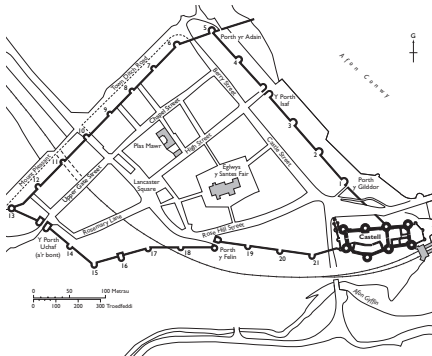
- The north-west and south-west towers were the home of the constable and his family.
- Notice the fireplaces and latrines.
- The basements were used for storage.
- The prison tower had a cell in the basement.

The inner ward

- This was 'a castle within a castle', containing the apartments of the king and queen.
- From the castle it was reached over a drawbridge.
- It could be entered from the east barbican without passing through the outer ward.
- The towers have turrets.
- There are some fine windows.
- Some original plaster survives on the walls.
- The chapel is the best preserved in the Edwardian castles.

The town walls

- Edward I divided the Welsh territory into English-style counties and Conwy was designed to be a county town.
- The whole circuit of the town walls survives, although new openings have been made for roads and the railway.
- The walls are 1,400 yards (1.3km) long, with twenty-one towers roughly 80 yards (46m) apart.
- There are three defended gates and a row of twelve latrines.
- There is a good view of the walls and the castle from Tower 13.

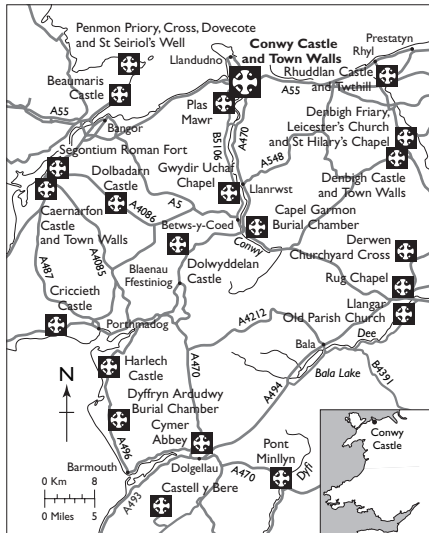


Some ideas for site activities

The castle as a stronghold

- From the outside, what is most impressive about the castle? Does everyone agree?
- What obstacles face attackers trying to reach the inner ward? What are the most dangerous places on their route?
- Where would you position the fifteen crossbowmen in the garrison to best defend the castle?
- In 1401 the followers of Owain Glyn Dŵr seized the castle by 'treachery'. How might they have sneaked in? Plan a possible route to the king's chamber.

The new-style **Conwy Castle** guidebook contains information about the history of Conwy and reconstruction drawings of the buildings. It is available at 25% discount for educational use from Cadw Sales.
Tel 01443 336 092/094
Email cadw.sales@wales.gsi.gov.uk



The domestic arrangements

- Describe or sketch the chapel. How is it different from the other rooms?
- Would the castle have been a healthy place to live? Would it have been the same for the king, the constable, the soldiers and the servants?
- Parts of the decorative windows survive. Can you sketch one as it would have been when complete?

Leisure and tourism

- Since 1966 the chapel has had a new roof and a new floor. Should more work be done to the castle?
- Design a guide for a visitor who can only spend an hour in Conwy. Decide what are the most important things to see.

Your visit

Conwy Castle and walled town are reached via the A55 coast road.

Facilities

Parking, toilets, guidebook available, site exhibition, gift shop, tourist information centre on site.

Access

Good access to the shop, paying desk and exhibition area. There is a sloping path and steps from there to the castle entrance and the ground has various stairs and levels. There is an exhibition inside one of the towers and there are information panels on the site. Benches are provided.

The pay-and-display car park next to the castle is free to disabled badge holders. There are five spaces with the wheelchair logo (two wide and three of normal size).

The public toilets next to the shop include one radar key toilet.

Disabled visitors and their assisting companion are admitted free of charge to all monuments. Please note that, for health reasons, dogs are not allowed on Cadw sites, but guide dogs and hearing dogs for the deaf are welcome.

Further information, help and advice on visiting the site is available from the custodian at the monument, who can also arrange a free planning visit for group leaders.

The Custodian, Conwy Castle, Conwy, LL32 8AY
Tel 01492 592358 Email conwy.castle@cadw.co.uk

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