

# Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn [C1]

Un progetto durato cinque lunghi anni ha ridato vita al castello di Norwich, fondato per volere di Guglielmo il Conquistatore. Ecco in cosa hanno consistito i lavori e perché vale la pena visitarlo.

---

Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn is an ambitious €32-million renovation project to restore the city's historic Norman palace to its 12th-century glory. Original rooms, walls, floors and roofs have been restored to reconstruct the building, which was begun by William the Conqueror and completed by his son, King Henry I of England, who visited here in 1121. To make way for the structure, almost one hundred Anglo-Saxon houses, entire streets and churches existing at the time, were demolished. To find out more, Speak Up spoke with two of the experts involved from start to finish. Dr. Tim Pestell is senior curator of archaeology at Norfolk Museums Service and interpretation lead for the project. Dr. Pestell [explained](#) why the castle, one of the largest Norman [keeps](#) in England, was built in this particular location. **Dr. Tim Pestell (English accent):** Norwich Castle is one of a series of defensive structures that was put up by William the Conqueror after the conquest. And that's [fairly](#) clearly a defensive position because he knew that the country was still very unstable. Norwich is an incredibly important part of the country in 1066, because it is one of the wealthiest places. Norwich itself was [undergoing](#) a meteoric rise in importance, and that's a reflection of its [trade links](#) with, in particular, Scandinavia, but the continent more widely. Thetford had traditionally been the centre of importance in East Anglia, but Norwich was presumably coming up because of its [riverine](#) connections with the North Sea. So as the [River] Ouse was becoming more [silted](#), Norwich was an easier place to get to. Norwich and Norfolk more generally are Anglo-Scandinavian population centres. And so at the time of the conquest, the northern world was still incredibly important politically to the state of England. And therefore Norwich was one of those key centres that had to be held because you didn't want hordes of hairy [Northmen](#) coming down and trying to take the kingdom back. So that's why you put a castle down there.

## EXPLORATION

However, the design features of the castle reveal that it was built to be more than just a defensive structure. **Dr. Tim Pestell:** It's designed as a royal palace. And you can see that in the way that it's a really ornate stone building. You do not need to make a defensive structure, have all those twirls and arches and arcades and all those sorts of things. If you're looking just for a defensive structure, it just needed to be plain, and [have] lots of arrow slits to shoot people from. But actually the fore building is a really weak part of the defensive structure and it seems to have been stormed at some point in the history, because you've effectively got a staircase over an arch, but you've got no way of getting underneath if you're inside the castle. So if people can rush the castle and get underneath the stone stairs, they can build a big bonfire and break through the wall, which is what they did at some point in its history.

## CHALLENGES

Today, 950 years after the castle was first built, visitors can see the Norman palace as its designers intended. However, during the five years of the project, the builders faced many challenges caused by hidden structural surprises discovered during the works. Hannah Jackson is the project manager for Royal Palace Reborn and responsible for the building work, funding and renovation. She explained that the work revealed some interesting findings. **Hannah Jackson (English accent):** You never know what you're going to find, and sometimes you then have to change your designs as you go along to make sure that everything's correct, so, just thinking of our entrance area in particular, where we knew we needed to pile through the mounds, we put in concrete walls through the mound to give the foundational support that you need. These piles are sort of over twenty metres in length and pretty much everywhere we wanted to put one of those piles there was a wall, there was a well...

## EXCAVATIONS

In addition to these structural findings, Dr. Pestell adds, there were also others of a different nature that provide a picture of everyday life at the castle throughout its history. **Dr. Tim Pestell:** We also had to undertake excavations on the mound and we found some human [remains](#) on the top of the mound. So that's a real reminder of the lives that were there. They were almost certainly prisoners that had been incarcerated within the keep and had died, either executed, or had died through natural causes and [were] then [buried](#) in the mound. It does really make you remember the people that were there. There have been some wonderful things like the animal bones that were [buried](#) inside the keep. It was a lot easier for them just to take stuff down into the basement and [tip it out](#) on the floor rather than take it out onto the mound. You can imagine servants doing [a quick shifty down](#) into the basement where no one's looking. And there are things like [porpoise](#) or dolphin bone as [well](#) as [deer](#) and [rabbit](#). So you can see the high status food that's been eaten on the site. And that, again, is a wonderful [insight](#) into past lives.

## LIVING HISTORY

From the castle's new entrance to its café, shop and galleries, Royal Palace Reborn offers highlights on every floor. A new roof platform allows views of the landscape in all directions, while inside the restored medieval kitchen, [king's chamber](#), [chapel](#) and [great hall](#), there are hi-tech projections, virtual reality scenes, recreated early 12th-century [furniture](#), and [tapestries](#) and [needlework](#) involving thirty thousand hours from volunteers. The castle makes a major contribution to the living history of Norwich. **Hannah Jackson:** If there was one criticism of Norwich Castle previously, and the keep, [it] was that it didn't really feel like a castle. It felt like a Victorian museum within some very old walls. Whereas to be able to put the Norman stories and the medieval history [front and centre](#) and to be able to give people that experience... So it's not just about looking at these places, it's about [dressing up](#). So our wonderful volunteers have also created some [costumes](#) for our visitors to try on, so they can [feel the part](#) of medieval characters. And they can go and sit on the throne as a medieval

king or queen and immerse themselves in the sights, the smells, the sounds of the castle. And then to contextualise that with time in the Gallery of Medieval Life that explores that broader period of history, all the change and development that was happening over that time. And then find out more about the building of Norwich Castle through the [VR headsets](#), or through documentary films that will be on show. And also the opportunity to just look over the city landscape from the [rooftops](#).

---

# Glossary

- **staircase** = scalinata
- **a quick shifty down** = dare un'occhiata veloce
- **insight** = sguardo
- **tapestries** = arazzi
- **rooftops** = terrazze
- **undergoing** = attraversare, sperimentare
- **funding** = finanziamento
- **as you go along** = man mano che si procede
- **porpoise** = focena
- **king's chamber** = camera reale
- **VR headsets** = visori di realtà virtuale
- **plain** = semplice, senza ornamenti
- **remains** = resti
- **dressing up** = travestirsi
- **great hall** = sala grande
- **twirls** = ghirigori
- **arrow slits** = feritoie, saettiere
- **fore building** = edificio anteriore
- **weak** = debole
- **rush** = lanciarsi contro
- **deer** = cervo
- **riverine** = fluviali
- **Northmen** = vichinghi
- **bonfire** = falò
- **tip it out** = buttare, versare
- **chapel** = cappella
- **costumes** = vestiti, costumi
- **silted** = diventare paludoso, insabbiarsi
- **stormed** = assaltare
- **pile through** = perforare con pilastri
- **concrete** = cemento
- **well** = pozzo
- **buried** = seppellire

- **mounds** = colline, rilievi
- **rabbit** = coniglio
- **furniture** = arredamento
- **needlework** = ricamo
- **front and centre** = mettere in primo piano
- **keeps** = fortezze
- **fairly** = abbastanza
- **trade links** = legami commerciali
- **feel the part** = calarsi nei panni di