

= Oxford Castle =

Oxford Castle is a large , partly ruined Norman medieval castle on the western side of central Oxford in Oxfordshire , England . Most of the original moated , wooden motte and bailey castle was replaced in stone in the 11th century and played an important role in the conflict of the Anarchy . In the 14th century the military value of the castle diminished and the site became used primarily for county administration and as a prison .

Most of the castle was destroyed in the English Civil War and by the 18th century the remaining buildings had become Oxford 's local prison . A new prison complex was built on the site from 1785 onwards and expanded in 1876 ; this became HM Prison Oxford .

The prison closed in 1996 and was redeveloped as a hotel . The medieval remains of the castle , including the motte and St George 's Tower and crypt , are Grade I listed buildings and a Scheduled Monument .

= = History = =

= = = Construction = = =

According to the Abingdon Chronicle , Oxford Castle was built by the Norman baron Robert D 'Oyly the elder from 1071 ? 73 . D 'Oyly had arrived in England with William I in the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 and William the Conqueror granted him extensive lands in Oxfordshire . Oxford had been stormed in the invasion with considerable damage , and William directed D 'Oyly to build a castle to dominate the town . In due course D 'Oyly became the foremost landowner in Oxfordshire and was confirmed with a hereditary royal constablership for Oxford Castle . Oxford Castle is not among the 48 recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 , but not every castle in existence at the time was recorded in the survey .

D 'Oyly positioned his castle to the west side of the town , using the natural protection of a stream of the River Thames on the far side of the castle , now called Castle Mill Stream , and diverting the stream to produce a moat . There has been debate as to whether there was an earlier English fortification on the site , but whilst there is archaeological evidence of earlier Anglo @-@ Saxon habitation there is no conclusive evidence of fortification . Oxford Castle was clearly an " urban castle " but it remains uncertain whether local buildings had to be demolished to make room for it . The Domesday Book does not record any demolition , so the land may have already been empty due to the damage caused by the Norman seizure of the town . Alternatively the castle may have been imposed over an existing street front which would have required the demolition of at least several houses .

The initial castle was probably a large motte and bailey , copying the plan of the castle that D 'Oyly had already built 12 miles (19 km) away at Wallingford . The motte was originally about 60 feet (18 m) high and 40 feet (12 m) wide , constructed like the bailey from layers of gravel and strengthened with clay facing . There has been debate over the sequencing of the motte and the bailey : it has been suggested that the bailey may have built first , which would make the initial castle design a ringwork rather than a motte and bailey .

By the mid @-@ 12th century Oxford Castle had been significantly extended in stone . The first such work was St George 's Tower , built of coral rag stone in 1074 , 30 by 30 feet (9 m × 9 m) at the base and tapering significantly toward the top for stability . This was the tallest of the castle 's towers , possibly because it covered the approach to the old west gate of the city .

Inside the walls the tower included a crypt chapel , which may be the site of a previous church . The crypt chapel originally had a nave , chancel and an apsidal sanctuary . It is a typical early Norman design with solid pillars and arches . In 1074 D 'Oyly and his close friend , Roger d 'Ivry endowed a chapel with a college of priests . At an early stage it acquired a dedication to Saint George .

Early in the 13th century the wooden keep on top of the motte was replaced with a ten @-@ sided stone shell keep , 58 feet (18 m) , closely resembling those of Tonbridge and Arundel Castles . The

keep enclosed a number of buildings , leaving an inner courtyard only 22 feet (7 m) across . Within the keep , stairs led 20 feet (6 m) down to an underground 12 feet (3 @. @ 7 m) wide stone chamber , with an Early English hexagonal vault and a 54 feet (16 m) deep well providing water in the event of siege .

= = = Role in the Anarchy and Barons War = = =

Robert D 'Oyly the younger , Robert D 'Oyly the elder 's nephew , had inherited the castle by the time of the civil war of the Anarchy in the 1140s . After initially supporting King Stephen , Robert declared his support for Empress Matilda , Stephen 's cousin and rival for the throne , and in 1141 the Empress marched to Oxford to base her campaign at the castle . Stephen responded by marching unexpectedly from Bristol in December , attacking and seizing the town of Oxford and besieging Matilda in the castle . Stephen set up two siege mounds beside the castle , called Jew 's Mount and Mount Pelham , on which he placed siege engines , largely for show , and proceeded to wait for Matilda 's supplies to run low over the next three months . Stephen would have had difficulty in supplying his men through the winter period , and this decision shows the apparent strength of Oxford Castle at the time .

Matilda responded by escaping from the castle ; the popular version of this has the Empress waiting until the Castle Mill Stream was frozen over and then dressed in white as camouflage in the snow , being lowered down the walls with three or four knights , before escaping through Stephen 's lines in the night as the king 's sentries tried to raise the alarm . The chronicler William of Malmesbury , however , suggests Matilda did not descend the walls , but instead escaped from one of the gates . Matilda safely reached Abingdon @-@ on @-@ Thames and Oxford Castle surrendered to Stephen the next day . Robert had died in the final weeks of the siege and the castle was granted to William de Chesney for the remainder of the war . At the end of the war the constablership of Oxford Castle was granted to Roger de Bussy before being reclaimed by Henry D 'Oyly , Robert D 'Oyly the younger 's son , in 1154 .

In the Barons ' War of 1215 ? 17 the castle was attacked again , prompting further improvements in its defences . In 1220 Falkes de Breauté , who controlled many royal castles in the middle of England , demolished the Church of St Budoc to the south @-@ east of the castle and built a moated barbican to further defend the main gate . The remaining wooden buildings were replaced in stone , including the new Round Tower which was built in 1235 . King Henry III turned part of the castle into a prison , specifically for holding troublesome University clerks , and also improved the castle chapel , replacing the older barred windows with stained glass in 1243 and 1246 . Due to the presence of Beaumont Palace to the north of Oxford , however , the castle never became a royal residence .

= = = 14th ? 17th centuries = = =

By 1327 the fortification , particularly the castle gates and the barbican , was in poor condition and £ 800 was estimated to be required for repairs . From the 1350s onwards the castle had little military use and was increasingly allowed to fall into disrepair . The castle became the centre for the administration of the county of Oxford , a jail , and a criminal court . Assizes were held there until 1577 , when plague broke out in what became known as the " Black Assize " : the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire , two knights , eighty gentlemen and the entire grand jury for the session all died , including Sir Robert D 'Oyley , a relative of the founder of the castle . Thereafter assizes ceased to be held at the castle .

By the 16th century the barbican had been demolished to make way for houses and the moat had begun to be occupied with housing . By 1600 the moat was almost entirely silted up and houses had been built all around the edge of the bailey wall . In 1611 King James I sold Oxford Castle to Francis James and Robert Younglove , who in turn sold it to Christ Church College in 1613 . The college then leased it to a number of local families over the coming years . By this time Oxford Castle was in a weakened state , with a large crack running down the side of the keep .

In 1642 the English Civil War broke out and the Royalists made Oxford their capital . Parliamentary forces successfully besieged Oxford in 1646 and the city was occupied by Colonel Ingoldsby . Ingoldsby improved the fortification of the castle rather than the surrounding town , and in 1649 demolished most of the medieval stonework , replacing it with more modern earth bulwarks and reinforcing the keep with earth works to form a probable gun @-@ platform . In 1652 , in the third English Civil War , the Parliamentary garrison responded to the proximity of Charles II 's forces by pulling down these defences as well and retreating to New College instead , causing great damage to the college in the process . In the event , Oxford saw no fresh fighting ; early in the 18th century , however , the keep was demolished and the top of the motte landscaped to its current form .

= = = Role as prison = = =

After the Civil War , Oxford Castle served primarily as the local prison . As with other prisons at the time , the owners , in this case Christ Church College , leased the castle to wardens who would profit by charging prisoners for their board and lodging . The prison also had a gallows to execute prisoners , such as Mary Blandy in 1752 . For most of the 18th century , the castle prison was run by the local Etty and Wisdom families and was in increasing disrepair . In the 1770s the prison reformer John Howard visited the castle several times , and criticised its size and quality , including the extent to which vermin infested the prison . Partly as a result of this criticism , it was decided by the County authorities to rebuild the Oxford Prison .

In 1785 the castle was bought by the Oxford County Justices and rebuilding began under the London architect William Blackburn . The wider castle site had already begun to change by the late 18th century , with New Road being built through the bailey and the last parts of the castle moat being filled in to allow the building of the new Oxford Canal terminus . Building the new prison included demolishing the old college attached to St George 's chapel and repositioning part of the crypt in 1794 . The work was completed under Daniel Harris in 1805 . Harris gained a reasonable salary as the new governor and used convict labour from the prison to conduct early archaeological excavations at the castle with the help of the antiquarian Edward King .

In the 19th century the site continued to be developed , with various new buildings built including the new County Hall in 1840 ? 41 and the Oxfordshire Militia Armoury in 1854 . The prison itself was extended in 1876 , growing to occupy most of the remaining space . In 1888 national prison reforms led to the renaming of the county prison as HM Prison Oxford .

= = = Today = = =

Since 1954 the two oldest parts of the castle have been Grade I listed buildings : the 11th @-@ century motte with its 13th @-@ century well @-@ chamber , and the 11th @-@ century St George 's tower with its crypt chapel and the 18th @-@ century D @-@ wing and Debtors ' Tower . The site is protected as a Scheduled Monument .

The prison was closed in 1996 and the site reverted to Oxfordshire County Council . The Oxford Prison buildings have since been redeveloped as a restaurant and heritage complex , with guided tours of the historic buildings and open courtyards for markets and theatrical performances . The complex includes a hotel in the Malmaison chain , Malmaison Oxford , occupying a large part of the former prison blocks , with cells converted as guest rooms . However , those parts of the prison associated with corporal or capital punishment have been converted to offices rather than being used for guests . The mixed @-@ use heritage project , officially opened on 5 May 2006 , won the RICS Project of the Year Award 2007 .