

= Bedford Castle =

Bedford Castle was a large medieval castle in Bedford , England . Built after 1100 by Henry I , the castle played a prominent part in both the civil war of the Anarchy and the First Barons ' War . The castle was significantly extended in stone , although the final plan of the castle remains uncertain . Henry III of England besieged the castle in 1224 following a disagreement with Falkes de Breauté ; the siege lasted eight weeks and involved an army of as many as 2 @, @ 700 soldiers with equipment drawn from across England . After the surrender of the castle , the king ordered its destruction . Although partially refortified in the 17th century during the English Civil War , the castle remained a ruin until the urban expansion in Bedford during the 19th century , when houses were built across much of the property . Today only part of the motte still stands , forming part of an archaeological park built on the site between 2007 and 2009 .

= = History = =

= = = Early history ( 1100 ? 1153 ) = = =

Bedford Castle was probably built after 1100 by Henry I in the town of Bedford , overlooking the River Great Ouse . The castle was constructed inside the town itself , and many of the older Anglo @-@ Saxon streets had to be destroyed and diverted to make room for it , leaving a permanent mark in the formal grid system . The castle was built in a motte and bailey design and was probably much smaller than the later castle , just consisting of the motte and the inner bailey .

By the early 12th century the castle was controlled by the royal castellan , Simon de Beauchamp , the son of Hugh de Beauchamp who had helped conquer England in 1066 . Contemporaries described the castle around this time as " completely ramparted around with an immense earthen bank and ditch , girt about with a wall strong and high , strengthened with a strong and unshakeable keep " . Simon died in 1137 , and King Stephen agreed that Simon 's daughter should marry Hugh the Pauper and that the castle would be given to Hugh , in exchange for Stephen giving Miles compensatory honours and gifts . Miles and Payn de Beauchamp , the children of Simon 's brother , Robert de Beauchamp , declared that the castle was rightfully Miles ' and refused to hand it over to Hugh .

Meanwhile , civil war had broke out in England between King Stephen and the Empress Matilda , resulting in a period of chaos known as the Anarchy . Matilda 's uncle , David I of Scotland , invaded England during 1137 in support of her claim . Although Miles de Beauchamp declared himself in support of Stephen , the king decided to retake Bedford Castle before marching north . Stephen formed an army to besiege Bedford Castle but Miles gained advance warning of the attack and took in considerable supplies , preparing for a long siege . Stephen was unable to storm the castle and left a force under the command of Hugh to starve it into submission whilst he marched north to tackle the Scots invasion .

Henry of Blois , the Bishop of Winchester , intervened in an attempt to produce a negotiated solution . Henry reached an agreement whereby after five weeks , the castle finally surrendered ; the garrison were allowed to leave peacefully but the castle was handed over to the king . The deal struck by Miles and Henry appears to have left the surrounding estates in the hands of the Beauchamps , however , and in 1141 Miles returned and retook the castle itself , although no details are available as to how he achieved this .

Miles subsequently supported the Empress , and in 1146 , Ranulf , the Earl of Chester and temporarily on the side of the king , attacked and took the town of Bedford , but was unable to take the castle , which continued to be controlled by Miles until his death several years later . Towards the end of the war , Bedford Castle may have been attacked again ; Henry II , during the final year of the conflict in 1153 , marched through Bedford and documentary evidence shows damage to the town at this time . Historians are divided as to whether the castle was besieged at the same time .

= = = Mid @-@ medieval period ( 1153 ? 1224 ) = = =

Early in 1215 tensions grew between King John and a rebel faction of his barons , which would lead to the First Barons ' War . The rebel barons attempted to besiege Northampton Castle ; unsuccessful , they turned to Bedford Castle but the castle withstood the attack and they moved south to London . Bedford was held at the time by William de Beauchamp but his loyalty came into question and he rebelled against John . Falkes de Breauté , a key Anglo @-@ Norman leader loyal to John , resisted and seized Bedford Castle back for John in 1216 . In return John gave Falkes the Honour of Bedford , and in practical terms the castle as well , although it is unclear whether he gave Falkes the role of castellan or ownership of the castle itself . As the war continued , Falkes took control of Plympton , Christchurch and Carisbrooke castles , whilst continuing to hold onto Bedford . After the death of King John in 1216 the war turned against the rebel barons and the royalist faction , including Falkes , was able to restore his son , the young Henry III to power in England .

After the war , Falkes made Bedford Castle his headquarters and he expanded it considerably , resulting in what David Baker has described as a " major refortification " . Falkes destroyed the neighbouring churches of St Paul 's and St Cuthbert 's to make space for a new bailey , reusing the stone for the castle . The exact form of the castle after this expansion remains uncertain . The castle appears to have been quadrangular , with the western edge running along the rear of the modern High Street and the northern edge running along the modern roads of Ram Yard and Castle Lane . The castle had a new barbican ; an outer and an inner bailey , with the inner bailey in the south @-@ east corner , protected by an internal ditch and a stone @-@ lined palisade ; further stone lined ditches lay around the castle ; and a new keep was built on the motte . Brown suspects that the new keep was probably a shell keep with a tower , similar to those built at Launceston or Bungay . The stone @-@ lined palisades and ditches built at Bedford were very unusual in England - their closest equivalent are those found at Skenfrith Castle . The castle had a postern watergate facing towards the river , and a great hall within the inner bailey in the middle , at least 13 m ( 43 feet ) wide and 40 m ( 131 feet ) long . There was possibly a large stone gatehouse positioned on the outer bailey wall . A mound in the north @-@ east corner of the castle probably supported a large tower .

= = = = Siege of 1224 = = = =

Henry III decided that Bedford Castle should be returned to its original owner , William de Beauchamp , and became increasingly frustrated with Falkes ' refusal to do so ; matters came to a head when Falkes ' castellans imprisoned Henry of Braybrooke , a royal judge who was hearing law cases against Falkes . When Falkes refused to release the judge , Henry mobilised an army , supported by the Church in the form of Stephen Langton , the Archbishop of Canterbury , and advanced to Bedford . Falkes had left the castle , along with around eighty men , in charge of his brother , William de Breauté , who refused to surrender it to the king . Falkes was probably hoping that if the castle held on long enough , his efforts to convince Pope Honorius III to intervene against Henry would succeed . The Archbishop excommunicated William and the siege began .

The siege of Bedford Castle required huge resources . Siege engines were brought from Lincoln , Northampton and Oxfordshire , while carpenters built others on site using timber from Northamptonshire ; ropes from London , Cambridge and Southampton ; hides from Northampton and tallow from London . Labourers from across Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire were gathered by the relevant sheriffs , and miners from Hereford and the Forest of Dean . Crossbow bolts were ordered from a depot at Corfe Castle and from the provinces ; 43 @, 300 crossbow bolts are known to have been ordered by the king . Local trees were cut down , and stone quarrying begun to provide ammunition for siege engines . Tents and pavilions for the king were sent from London , along with supplies of luxury foods and wine for the king . In total , Henry 's wage bill for the siege came to £ 1 @, 311 ; it is uncertain exactly how large Henry 's army was , but potentially there were between 1 @, 600 and 2 @, 700 men present at any one time . To support the siege , Langton instructed his bishops to mobilise one man from every 24 hectares ( 60 acres ) of land they

owned and levied a special tax on the churches' estates .

With these resources , Henry erected a number of siege engines around the castle ; one probable trebuchet and two mangonels were set up to the east of the castle ; two mangonels were placed on the west side , to attack the keep , and one mangonel on both the north and south sides . Two siege @-@ castles were established to observe the occupants of the castle . William was confident , however , that either his brother would return and relieve the siege , or that the pope would intervene , and held on despite the artillery attacks . The losses in the royal army began to mount ; chronicler Ralph of Coggeshall suggests that seven knights , and over 200 soldiers and labourers were killed as the siege dragged on .

Bedford Castle finally fell through a sequence of four attacks . Royal forces first captured the barbican and then stormed the outer bailey , seizing most of the castle 's supplies but taking considerable losses . Miners , operating under the protection of a " cat " , then gained access to the inner bailey by collapsing part of the wall . Finally , on 14 August , the miners attacked the keep itself , lighting a fire under the walls , cracking the stone and filling the building with smoke . The female members of the household , including Falkes ' wife , and Henry de Braybrooke were released , the royal standard was raised over the tower , and the next day William and the garrison surrendered .

A discussion ensued about the fate of the garrison ; near contemporary accounts suggest that the prisoners asked the Archbishop for assistance , but that this was declined . Henry then had all the male members of the garrison hanged , except for three knights who agreed to join the military order of the Knights Templar . Three days after the fall of Bedford Castle , the Pope wrote a letter demanding that Henry cease his campaign against Falkes , but this intervention had occurred far too late to be of use . Alexander de Stavenby , the Bishop of Coventry , convinced Falkes to surrender after the fall of the castle ; he handed over his remaining castles at Plympton and Storgursey and was absolved by Langton , going into exile shortly afterwards . Historian R. Brown has noted that the 1224 siege of Bedford Castle was remarkable in that the castle 's garrison was able to hold out against " the concentrated military resources of the whole kingdom " for an impressive eight weeks . David Carpenter argues that the fall of Bedford castle " concluded the triumph of central government " over the previously uncontrollable forces of the local barons .

= = = Later history ( 13 ? 19th centuries ) = = =

After the siege Henry III ordered the castle to be dismantled and labourers filled in the ditches and halved the height of the stone walls . William de Beauchamp was forbidden to rebuild the castle , and instead built an unfortified house in the inner bailey . St Paul 's and St Cuthbert 's churches were rebuilt in 1224 using stone from the castle . The sudden availability of cheap stone led to the repaving of many of the town streets in Bedford in 1224 . Local tradition suggests that the first stone bridge at Bedford , the Great Bridge , was built using stone from the castle . By 1361 the castle site was described as " a void plot of old enclosed by walls " and seems to have been derelict for most of the medieval period . The antiquarian John Leland visited the site in the 16th century , and noted that the castle was " now clean down " . The early 17th century mapmaker John Speed produced a map of Bedford in 1611 , showing the motte and a fragment of bailey wall still standing on an otherwise vacant site .

At the outbreak of the English Civil War , Bedford sided with Parliament ; the town was temporarily captured by Prince Rupert of the Rhine in 1643 and the castle was refortified for the duration of the war . A probable wooden fort and prison were built on the remains of the motte and defended by a hundred @-@ man garrison . After the war the motte became used as a bowling green until the 19th century . In 1804 the north @-@ east tower of the castle was turned into a hexagonal building for the local militia unit . Bedford began to spread eastwards in the late 19th century and the castle baileys became desirable property for housing ; in 1851 the last parts of the barbican were destroyed to make way for the construction of cottages .

= = = Modern period ( 20 ? 21st centuries ) = = =

Today only the base of the motte survives at Bedford Castle , 7 @. @ 5 m ( 25 feet ) high and 49 m ( 161 feet ) wide at the top , and is a scheduled monument . Archaeological work has been conducted to develop a better understanding of the history of the castle , although excavations are difficult because of the urban nature of the site . Excavations between 1969 and 1972 established the broad form of the castle ; this was supplemented by further work in 1995 ? 6 and another phase of excavations in 2007 . Following the 2007 investigations , an archaeological park was built on part of the castle site between 2007 and 2009 , forming the centre of a mixed @-@ use development of restaurants and apartments . The park incorporated one of the castle 's lime kilns , first rediscovered in 1973 , and the foundations of a hall discovered at the castle .