

= St Briavels Castle =

St Briavels Castle is a moated Norman castle at St Briavels in the English county of Gloucestershire . The castle is noted for its huge Edwardian gatehouse that guards the entrance .

St Briavels Castle was originally built between 1075 and 1129 as a royal administrative centre for the Forest of Dean . During the 13th century the castle became first a favourite hunting lodge of King John , and then the primary centre in England for the manufacture of quarrels , large numbers of which were required for crossbows in medieval warfare . The castle was transferred many times between royal favourites in the 14th and 15th centuries and slowly declined in appearance and importance . St Briavels Castle became used primarily as a court and as a notorious debtors ' prison , conditions being documented by the prison reformer John Howard in 1775 . Following local riots and a parliamentary investigation in the 1830s , reforms in the 19th century brought an end to the castle 's use as a prison .

Extensive renovation at the turn of the 20th century allowed St Briavels Castle to be taken over as a Youth Hostel in 1948 . It remains in this role today , owned by English Heritage and open to the public . The castle is classed as a Grade I listed building and as a Scheduled Monument .

= = Architecture = =

St Briavels Castle is located on a spur dominating a position above the River Wye , on the western edge of the Forest of Dean . The castle is predominantly built of local old red sandstone and limestone . The castle site is surrounded by an in @-@ filled moat ; now a garden , the moat was originally wet and fed by a spring underneath the moat itself .

The castle keep , which collapsed and was demolished in the 18th century , was originally a square Norman design , 15 @.@ 6 m by 13 @.@ 9 m ( 51 ft by 45 ft ) in size , built on a motte of clay and stone . Intact , it would have been approximately 20 m ( 66 ft ) tall , and would have resembled the keeps at Goodrich Castle and White Castle , both of a similar period and design in the region .

The keep was protected by the stone curtain wall that still survives today , forming the castle bailey . Its irregular polygonal plan suggests that it was built on the site of an earlier earthwork . It originally had a small round tower protecting the south @-@ east corner and probably a gateway in the south wall alongside the keep . Other demolished buildings included a forge and assorted buildings along the north @-@ east of the bailey . A set of medieval domestic buildings still stand along the north @-@ west side of the bailey , however , including a hall , solar and chapel , originally providing accommodation for the castle constable and the King . These buildings were restored in the 19th century to their current condition . Some features , including the hall range , fireplace and capitals appear to date from the 13th century . The hall and solar form a two @-@ storey building 23 m by 10 m ( 75 ft by 33 ft ) wide , alongside the 14th century chapel , which still incorporates later 17th century adjustments and windows . At one end of the domestic range is the famous " Forester 's Horn " chimney , crested with the forest warden 's horn , a symbol of Forest Law and the castle 's authority . The buildings include a sunken pit prison ; graffiti dated 1671 show that it was still in use for that purpose at that time .

The gatehouse of St Briavels Castle is described in Pevsner 's Buildings of England as " magnificent ... a very fine example of the royal masons ' work of the period . " It is a massive structure of two large D @-@ shaped towers flanking a wide gate passage 14 @.@ 8 m ( 48 ft ) long , and linked above by a large room . This sort of gatehouse is sometimes termed a keep @-@ gatehouse or gatehouse @-@ keep because of the massive size and defences on both the inner and outer sides of the building . The first gatehouse of this sort was built at Caerphilly Castle ; other examples exist in North Wales and at Tonbridge Castle . Uniquely , St Briavels ' gatehouse is protected with three sets of portcullises ? although some gatehouses , such as Harlech and Beaumaris Castle were built for slots for three , they were only installed with two . A notable feature is the existence of smaller portcullises to defend the doorways from the passage to the porters ' lodges . The gatehouse was originally taller than it is today and the entrance would also have included a drawbridge , removed during the 20th century .

The base of the gatehouse is defended from undermining by large " spurs " . This design feature is characteristic of castles in the Welsh Marches , including Goodrich and Tonbridge Castle , but unlike these castles depends on a solid octagonal , rather than square , based interacting with the form of the circular towers . The gatehouse is well defended , except for the upper windows at the rear ; the upper floors were designed for high status guests and these windows would have provided adequate light for the chambers . The south @-@ east of the gatehouse is relatively modern , however , having been rebuilt after a past collapse .

= = History = =

= = = 11th and 12th centuries = = =

St Briavels Castle appears to date from Norman times , although the village itself predates the Norman period . The area was acquired by William FitzOsbern , the first Earl of Hereford in 1067 , who built a number of castles across the region , including Chepstow , Monmouth , Clifford and Wigmore . It does not appear that FitzOsbern built a castle on the St Briavels site , however , and the revolt of FitzOsbern 's son , Roger de Breteuil resulted in the village being taken into the possession of the royal bailiffs of the Forest of Dean .

St Briavels Castle was constructed sometime between 1075 and 1129 by royal mandate , although the precise date is uncertain . Walter de Gloucester , the Sheriff of Gloucester and his son Miles de Gloucester made St Briavels Castle the administrative centre of the Forest of Dean . The location of the castle placed it well behind the English border , in an area with little Welsh presence before the invasion , and it therefore appears to have been established for the purposes of royal governance , rather than to protect the Welsh Marches to its west . Equivalents elsewhere in the south @-@ west include Restormel Castle and Lydford Castle in Devon and Cornwall , both regional royal administrative centres . One alternative view , however , sees St Briavels as intended to protect the Severn estuary to the south , along with the royal castles of Bristol and Gloucester . This early castle was of motte and bailey design , the keep probably of wood .

Miles and his partner Pain fitzJohn strengthened their hold on the Welsh border during the last years of Henry I , but after the king 's death in 1135 England descended into the civil war of the Anarchy , as factions loyal to King Stephen and the Empress Matilda fought for control of the country . Fitz John was killed early in the fighting , but Miles declared in favour of Matilda and took control of the castle in his own right . In 1141 the Empress confirmed Miles as the Earl of Hereford and formally granted him St Briavels Castle . Under Miles , the castle escaped the worst of the fighting of the Anarchy . Miles ' son , Roger Fitzmiles continued to hold the castle into the reign of Henry II , the empress ' son , but a confrontation with the king resulted in it being removed from the earldom and taken back into royal ownership , once again as part of the Forest of Dean . Henry II rebuilt the castle keep in the 1160s , replacing the older wooden structure with stone .

Royal forests in the early medieval period were subject to special royal jurisdiction ; forest law was " harsh and arbitrary , a matter purely for the King 's will " . Forests were expected to supply the king with hunting grounds , raw materials , goods and money . The Forest of Dean could be used for hunting , but was more important to the king as a major metalworking centre , thanks to the plentiful supply of trees for making charcoal and the iron deposits in the limestone stone of the region . The iron goods constructed locally were stored at the castle before being shipped to other royal locations . The quantities being produced were substantial ? in 1172 , for example , Henry II received 100 axes , 1 @,@ 000 picks , 2 @,@ 000 shovels and 60 @,@ 000 nails from St Briavel Castle . Richard I took 50 @,@ 000 horseshoes on crusade with him from St Briavel . The constable of St Briavel Castle had wide ranging responsibilities within the Forest , including managing the rights and privileges of the iron @-@ workers , exercised through the Miners ' and the Hundreds Court of the castle .

= = = 13th century = = =

King John enjoyed regular hunting in the Forest each November , and used St Briavels Castle as his base for such trips . The king entertained the Welsh lord Gruffydd ap Cadwallon at the castle in 1207 . This royal interest resulted in further building works and substantial expenditure , with £ 291 being spent in the next four years . A stone curtain wall replaced an earlier wooden one between 1209 ? 11 , complete with a tower and gateway . Inside the bailey a number of buildings suitable for use by the king as a lodge were constructed . A wooden chapel was built within the castle in 1236 ? 7 . The castle expansion may have been funded by the increased taxes from iron @-@ working across the areas , and by the end of John 's reign , the castle was almost in its mature form .

In 1217 the Charter of the Forest was passed , in part to mitigate the worst excesses of royal jurisdiction . The forest laws , however , did allow for a very wide range of fines to be imposed on local peasants who broke the numerous edicts in place to protect both wildlife and the trees in the forest . The courts held at St Briavels Castle imposed a relatively large number of fines , or amercements , for both illegal wood @-@ cutting and the poaching of venison during the period . The castle also began to be used a prison shortly afterwards , partially for forest trespassers and for those who could not pay the required fines .

After King John 's death , however , St Briavels Castle became the primary centre for English quarrel manufacture . The crossbow was an important military advance on the older short bow and was the favoured weapon by the time of Richard I ? many crossbows and even more quarrels were needed to supply royal forces . Crossbows were primarily built at the Tower of London , but St Briavels Castle , with the local forest to provide raw materials , became the national centre for quarrel manufacture .

In 1228 John Malemort , William the Smith and William the Fletcher arrived at the castle and began production operations at a forge built within the bailey . A production level of 120 @,@ 000 quarrels in a 120 @-@ day period was achieved by 1233 , with men like Malemort being able to produce up to 100 quarrels a day . Quarrels were then put into barrels and shipped across the kingdom in large quantities . Other iron from the castle was sent to build siege engines in Hereford . The manufacturing capability of St Briavels Castle gave the king a distinct advantage over potential baronial enemies , with the supply of arms from the castle to Marcher Lords threatened by the Welsh being one of the levers of royal power during the period .

Now a centre for arms manufacture , the castle was made more secure , with a new defensive ditch , freshly repaired walls and a new chapel . The castle was garrisoned with royal troops during the uprising of Richard Marshal against Henry III in 1233 ? 4 , suggesting it had considerable military value at this time . Another indicator of the military importance of the castle and the surrounding forest was the £ 20 fee each year being paid to the constable of the castle by 1287 , on a par with the much larger castles of Rhuddlan or Nottingham .

Under Edward I , the massive gatehouse was built to protect the castle entrance , including special protection against undermining . There has been speculation that the royal architect James of Saint George may have been responsible for the building work , which occurred between 1292 ? 3 at a cost of £ 477 . The reason for the king extending the castle at this time is unclear , as the castle was relatively far from the Welsh border and in no particular risk of attack . One popular explanation is that given the quantities of weapons and money being stored at the property by this time , the gatehouse was designed to improve the internal security of the castle ; the presence of the additional portcullises would also support this explanation . In 1300 , the old wooden chapel was rebuilt in stone and in 1310 , an extension to the castle wall was constructed at a cost of £ 40 ; called ' the Peel ' , this followed the line of the old motte and gave additional protection to the keep .

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

St Briavels Castle remained an important location in the reign of Edward II , as the Welsh Marches were a key region in the wars between the king , his favourites and various noble factions during the period . Roger d 'Amory was the constable of the castle during the early years of Edward 's reign . D 'Amory was a royal favourite and Edward II visited the Castle several times , with an extensive

renovation of the rooms and quarters occurring during this time . Around £ 500 was spent on the work , a substantial sum .

D 'Amory was supplanted in the king 's favour by Hugh Despenser the Younger , and d 'Amory fought against the king in the Despenser War of 1321 @-@ 22 . After the war , Edward placed the Marches under the control of the Despensers , with Hugh Despenser the Elder taking particular responsibility for St Briavels . The Despensers appointed Robert Sapy as the keeper of St Briavels and the other confiscated castles across the Marches . Violence began to break out across the region in response to the Despenser 's harsh rule , and Sapy 's deputy was attacked in July 1325 on his way back from St Briavels Castle to London ; his eyes were torn out , his arms and legs broken and all his records and money stolen . Edward and the Despensers were deposed shortly afterwards by Edward 's wife , Isabella of France . Isabella set about expanding her own lands after her victory , and took St Briavels Castle and various other royal castles into her own possession . When Isabella herself was overthrown by her son , Edward III , in 1330 the castle then reverted to the crown .

Towards the end of the 14th century , England saw increasing conflict between the rival Yorkist and Lancastrian factions . St Briavels Castle passed back and forth between the senior nobility on either side , but without playing a major part in the conflict itself . The castle was initially given to King Edward 's son Thomas , Duke of Gloucester ; with the fall of Thomas from favour after his uprising against Richard II , Thomas le Despenser received a life grant of the castle in 1397 , as part of his reward for serving Richard . With Thomas ' own fall from power under Henry IV , the castle was then given to Henry 's son , the Duke of Bedford . Henry Beauchamp , the Duke of Warwick and a close friend of Henry IV , then acquired St Briavels Castle and the Forest of Dean around 1445 . William Herbert was rewarded with the castle in 1467 for his support for Edward IV and the Yorkist faction during the Wars of the Roses ; he was then executed by the Lancastrian Richard Neville , Earl of Warwick , who took the castle for his own . Warwick died himself at the Battle of Barnet in 1471 , but after being briefly held by Robert Hyet , Henry VII restored St Briavels Castle to Neville 's widow , Anne Neville , 16th Countess of Warwick . With Anne 's death in 1492 , the castle passed into the control of Thomas Baynham .

By this time , however , St Briavels Castle had been in a slow period of decline for many years , similar to that of several other royal castles in the region , including Bristol and Gloucester . Minor improvements were made , including various light windows added to the internal buildings in the 15th century , and extensive restyling of the chapel in the 17th century , but not to the extent of those castles successfully converted to more luxurious dwellings .

Under James I and Charles the castle was traditionally granted to the Earls of Pembroke . By the time of the English Civil War , St Briavels Castle was held by Philip Herbert , the 4th earl and a friend of the king 's . Philip Herbert sided with Parliament , however , and St Briavels ' played little part in the conflict . With the Restoration and the return of Charles II to power in 1660 , the castle was removed from the Earls of Pembroke and given instead to Henry , Lord Herbert of Raglan for life . After Henry 's death , Duke of Beaufort was granted the property ; after the disgrace of the Duke of Beaufort a few years later , the castle changed hands again , with the subsequent owners being more modest figures in English public life than had been the case in previous years .

= = = 18th and 19th centuries = = =

In the 18th century many of the buildings inside the bailey were knocked down and the more valuable materials , including the lead from the roof , recycled . The keep partially collapsed in 1752 , with the remainder falling down in 1777 . Victorian writers blamed both the progress of time and the theft of stones by local peasants for the collapse . The famous " forester 's horn " chimney was moved from its original location to the west side of the building between 1783 and 1824 . Whilst not achieving the picturesque status of other ruined castles in the area , Georgian visitors noted the " beautiful and romantic scenery that surrounds these ruins " .

The castle was now principally a prison and a court , still operating under the authority of the constable and the Forest Law originally established in 1217 . The remaining buildings inside the

bailey were converted into a courtroom and jury room , with the west side of the gatehouse being used as a jail for detaining prisoners . St Briavels Castle was primarily a debtors ' prison ? in England up until the Debtors ' Act of 1869 , individuals unable to pay their debts or fines could be detained in prison indefinitely to encourage payment . The conditions in the castle prison became increasingly notorious after a visit from the prison reformer John Howard in 1775 as part of his research for the first edition of his book *The State of the Prisons* , published two years later . Howard found the prison " greatly out of repair " , with the two inmates locked in a single room without exercise for the best of a year , with no fresh water , financial support or firewood . Graffiti on the stone walls of the castle jail includes the mournful inscription by a prisoner of the period " For I have been here a great space ; And I am weary of the place . "

In 1831 there were extensive riots in the Forest of Dean , led by Warren James . After the intervention of the military , the rioters were dispersed and order restored , but a range of complaints were levied about the enforcement of the local laws on miners and metal @-@ workers . There had been attacks against St Briavels Castle by discontented locals before during the 1780s , but the degree of violence in this case was much greater . An act of Parliament followed , establishing a number of commissioners who investigated local practices and recent events at the Castle .

The debtors ' prison at the castle came in for particular scrutiny . It emerged that out of the 402 cases brought before the court at St Briavels ' Castle , 397 of them were for extremely small sums of debt of £ 5 or less ( £ 373 in 2009 prices ) , increasingly unacceptable in Victorian eyes . A penalty of up to £ 7 ( £ 522 in 2009 prices ) was also being charged for each case , making the process extremely onerous for the local poor being prosecuted in this way . The investigation found that the keeper of the debtors ' prison , which could hold up to six inmates at a time , was appointed by the constable , and made part of his income by charging each prisoner one shilling a week for the use of the beds in the prison ; with no other public funding , prisoners depended on friends or relatives for food and other essentials , or from donations from their original parishes .

The castle prison was found to still be in a very bad condition . The commissioners noted how the prison had " only one window , which is one foot wide and in a recess . It does not open .... There is a door at the outer end of the passage , and in it a hole which is considered necessary for air ... The privy is a dark winding recess ... It leads to a hole going down to the bottom of the building , which is always inaccessible for cleaning , but which until six years ago had a drain from it to the moat ; the air draws up from it into the passage and the room . There is no water within for the prisoners ' liberty , and they are obliged to get some person to fetch it . "

Prison reforms followed , including improving the conditions of the castle facilities , although visitors continued to note how the castle was " patched and cobbled like a worn @-@ out shoe " . In 1838 the role of constable was transformed into the Chief Commissioner of Woods and Forests . The court and jury rooms were turned into a local school , although occasional Courts of Attachment were held in the chapel and the castle retained its function as a prison until 1842 , when the remaining inmates were transferred to the prison at Littledean .

= = Today = =

The gatehouse and the buildings inside the bailey were made habitable again in 1906 and became a Youth Hostel in 1948 . In 1961 the moat was partly infilled and turned into a garden . The castle is classed as a Grade I listed building and as a Scheduled Monument . The site as a whole remains open to the public , managed by English Heritage .