

= Halton Castle =

Not to be confused with Alton Castle .

Halton Castle is in the former village of Halton which is now part of the town of Runcorn , Cheshire , England . The castle is situated on the top of Halton Hill , a sandstone prominence overlooking the village . It is recorded in the National Heritage List for England as a designated Grade I listed building , and a scheduled ancient monument .

It was the seat of the Barons of Halton from the 11th century until the 14th century and it then passed to the Duchy of Lancaster . It was besieged twice in the Civil War after which its structure deteriorated . In the 18th century a new courthouse was built on the site of the previous gatehouse . The castle lies in ruins apart from the courthouse which has been converted into a public house .

= = History = =

= = = Building and administration = = =

Although there is no surviving evidence , it is likely that Halton Hill was a settlement in prehistoric times . Following the Norman conquest , the Barony of Halton was established by Hugh Lupus , Earl of Chester . The first baron to be appointed was Nigel of Cotentin and it is almost certain that he would have built a motte and bailey castle on the site , constructing it from wood , although the excavations in 1986 ? 87 showed no evidence of a motte and bailey structure or of a timber tower or palisade . It is most probable that during the 12th century the wooden structure was replaced by a castle built from the local sandstone although no documentary evidence of this remains . Details of the building works are obscure but it has been suggested that John of Gaunt , the 14th baron , made alterations to the castle but this again has not been confirmed by documentary evidence . When the 15th baron , Henry Bolingbroke , ascended the throne as King Henry IV , the castle became the property of the Duchy of Lancaster .

The earliest documentary evidence of building work at Halton Castle shows that during the 15th century and into the 16th century it was regularly maintained . Between 1450 and 1457 a new gate tower was built . There is no evidence that the castle featured in the Wars of the Roses ; this would have been unlikely because of its relatively obscure position . However a survey of the Royal Palaces in 1609 suggests that by then the castle had fallen into disrepair . During the Tudor period it was used less as a fortress and more as a prison , an administrative centre , and a court of law . In 1580 ? 81 the castle was designated as a prison for Catholic recusants , but there is no evidence that it was ever used for that purpose .

= = = Royal visits = = =

There is little evidence of any visits by eminent people to the castle , although there is a belief that in 1207 King John visited and donated £ 5 towards the upkeep of its chapel . Edward II certainly visited the castle and was there for three days in November 1323 , during which time he also visited Norton Priory .

= = = Civil War = = =

At the outbreak of the Civil War the castle was garrisoned by the Royalists under the command of Captain Walter Primrose who had been appointed by Earl Rivers . It was besieged by Parliamentary forces under Sir William Brereton in 1643 , and the Royalists eventually surrendered after several weeks . On hearing of the approach of superior Royalist forces led by Prince Rupert , the Parliamentarians abandoned the castle and it was held again for the Royalists under Colonel Fenwick . There was a second siege in 1644 but , as the fortunes of the Royalists declined elsewhere , they withdrew from Halton and the Parliamentarians under Sir William Brereton re @-@

occupied the castle . In 1646 a " Council of War " was held in Warrington where it was decided that the defences of the castles at Halton and Beeston were to be dismantled . In time this was achieved and Halton castle was to have no further military function . By 1650 the castle was said to be " very ruinous " .

= = = More recent history = = =

The condition of the building continued to deteriorate although the gatehouse remained in use as a court . In 1728 George Cholmondeley , 2nd Earl of Cholmondeley leased the site from the Crown . In 1737 a courthouse was built on the site of the medieval gatehouse . Henry Sephton , a Liverpool architect and builder and John Orme , a joiner from Prescott , were appointed to carry out the work . The first floor was the courtroom and prisoners were held in the basement . By 1792 the courthouse had fallen into disrepair and money was found to repair it , although the source of that money is unclear . The court continued to function there until 1908 .

Around 1800 three folly walls had been added to the existing ruined walls on the east side of the castle to make it look more impressive from Norton Priory , the home of Sir Richard Brooke . One of these walls was demolished around 1906 . During the Victorian era a sunken garden and two bowling greens were constructed within the castle enclosure . In 1977 the castle was leased to Halton Borough Council . In 1986 ? 87 the site of the castle was excavated .

= = Present state = =

The castle continues to be owned by the Duchy of Lancaster and the site is managed by the Norton Priory Museum Trust . The interior of the castle is occasionally opened to the public and there are plans to make it more accessible in the future . The castle is a Grade I listed building . Its walls are in a ruinous state but the circumference is intact and it is possible to walk completely around the exterior . From its prominent position there are extensive views in all directions , including Lancashire , Cheshire , the Pennines , the hills of the Peak District and the mountains of North Wales . The courthouse is now a public house , the Castle Hotel . Its first floor is used as a function room and the basement contains the cellars of the public house . It is designated as a Grade II * listed building .