Southampton Castle

Southampton Castle was located in the town of Southampton in Hampshire , England . Constructed after the Norman conquest of England , it was located in the north @-@ west corner of the town overlooking the River Test , initially as a wooden motte and bailey design . By the late 12th century the royal castle had been largely converted to stone , playing an important part in the wine trade conducted through the Southampton docks . By the end of the 13th century the castle was in decline , but the threat of French raids in the 1370s led Richard II to undertake extensive rebuilding . The result was a powerfully defended castle , one of the first in England to be equipped with cannon . The castle declined again in the 16th century and was sold off to property speculators in 1618 . After being used for various purposes , including the construction of a Gothic mansion in the early 19th century , the site was flattened and largely redeveloped . Only a few elements of the castle still remain visible in Southampton .

History

11th ? 13th centuries

Southampton Castle was first constructed in the late 11th century , at some point after the Norman conquest of England . Southampton at this time was a relatively large town , but not as significant as in the later medieval period . The royal castle was erected within the existing town on the site of a probable large English hall , and considerable damage was caused to the surrounding local buildings as space was opened up for the new fortification . The town of Southampton was protected by water on most sides , surrounded by protective ditches and banks , and the castle was built on rising ground in the north @-@ west corner of the town , overlooking the mouth of the River Test , an important medieval waterway . The initial castle was a timber motte and bailey design , with a motte 45 feet (14 metres) across ; at least some of the bailey walls were rebuilt in stone during the first half of the 12th century . The wealthiest parts of Southampton were in the west of the town , just to the south of the castle , with some of the poorest districts just beyond the castle to the north @-@ east . The castle was positioned so as to adjoin the town 's quays .

During the years of the Anarchy , in which the Empress Matilda and Stephen fought for control of England , the castle was held by William le Gros , the bishop of Winchester and supporter of Stephen . When Henry II came to the throne in 1153 , he took back the castle and took steps to improve the condition of Southampton castle , as part of his attempt to improve the general standard of security in the south . At this time , Southampton was considered a key fortification , classed alongside other important castles such as the Tower of London , Windsor , Oxford , Lincoln and Winchester .

By the second half of the 12th century , Southampton Castle was valued more for its role in coastal defence and as a coastal base for operations on the continent than for its value in ensuring internal security . Following the threat of French invasion in the 1170s , Henry II invested modest additional resources in the castle , and in 1187 the wooden keep was converted into a stone shell @-@ keep . John increased spending on the castle during his reign . Royal visits to Southampton were quite common , and additional royal accommodation , called the King 's House , was built outside the castle .

Southampton was an important trading port in the 12th century , with trade routes to Normandy , the Levant and Gascony . The castle played an important role in this trade , in part forming a warehouse for the king 's imports , this process being managed by a Crown Bailiff . Royal purchases of wine were particularly important for the castle , being stored and distributed to royal properties across the south of England . The former castle hall was turned into a subterranean vault in the 13th century , probably for storing wine .

14th ? 15th centuries

By 1300 , Southampton was a major port and a large provincial town , with a population of around 5 @,@ 000 . In 1338 there was a successful French attack on Southampton , burning various buildings down and damaging the castle . Edward III responded by improving the quality of the town defences , including building walls along the old ditch and bank defences , and particularly focusing on improving the west side of the town , but little work appears to have been done to improve the castle itself . By the middle of the 14th century , Southampton Castle sat alongside one and a quarter miles (2 km) of town walls , although the castle and the walls were kept administratively separate .

In 1370 the French made a successful attack on Portsmouth , commencing a new sequence of raids along the English coast . In due course first Edward , then Richard , responded with a new building programme of castles , including work at Southampton , where the castle was in a poor condition , owing in part to the theft of building materials , including stone and lead , by the citizens of the town . Henry Yevele and architect William Wynford rebuilt the keep from 1378 to 1382 , whilst additional defences were added between 1383 and 1388 , including a barbican and a protective mantlet wall . Thomas Tredynton was appointed to the castle as the chaplain , being paid an unusually high wage of £ 10 a year , reflecting his other skills as a military engineer . Southampton Castle was equipped with its first cannon in 1382 , making it one of the first castles in the country to be so equipped . At this time cannon were still unreliable , only capable of reaching relatively short ranges and required the construction of specialist gunports ; once again , the decision was driven by the fears of French attack . An " expert in guns and the management of artillery " was retained during the 15th century to manage the new weaponry .

After the scare of 1457 , when French troops successfully attacked the town of Sandwich on the south coast , Southampton Castle was once again put on alert , and one of Henry VI 's more " dependable captains " , Nicholas Carew , was given control of the castle for life . Despite investment in the castle declining , the antiquarian John Leland could describe the new keep in the early 16th century as being " the glory of the castle , both large and fair and very strong , both by works and by the site of it " .

= = = 16th ? 19th centuries = = =

The castle began a second period of decline in the 16th century . After 1518 , no more money was spent repairing the castle . The inner bailey became used first as a rubbish tip , then for small @-@ scale agriculture . By 1585 , the castle was " very ruynaise and in greete decaye " . In contrast to many royal castles , Southampton Castle was never converted into a gaol , with Southampton 's two prisons instead being built in the town at the Bargate and on Fish Street . In 1618 James I sold the castle to property speculators ; it was then sold on to George Gollop , a local merchant , and a windmill was subsequently built on the motte . The castle played no role in the subsequent English Civil War , although some of the masonry was used to strengthen the town walls in 1650 . Two of the entrances to the castle , Southgate and Castle Eastgate , were demolished in the late 18th century ; and the remaining castle buildings fell into significant disrepair .

Several short @-@ lived buildings were later constructed on top of the motte . The first of these around the turn of the 19th century was a banqueting house constructed by Lord Stafford . In 1808 Marquess of Landsdowne built a mansion in a Gothic style on top of the motte using some of the stone remains of the old keep ; it became known as Landsdowne Castle , providing famous views across the town . Landsdowne Castle was pulled down in either 1815 or 1818 , and most of the motte was subsequently flattened .

From the late 19th century onwards the castle site was subject to considerable development . A new road ? Upper Bugle Street ? was built through the old bailey site , and various local council buildings constructed . Development continued after the Second World War , in which large parts of the city around the castle were significantly damaged by bombing .

= = Today = =

Only fragments of the medieval castle survive today , with most of the original site covered by modern buildings and dominated by the block of flats built in 1962 over the remaining part of the castle motte . The castle hall and the castle vaults can still be seen , along with surviving parts of the south bailey wall , the Castle Watergate and fragments of the north wall . A sequence of archaeological investigations between 1973 and 1983 excavated around 10 % of the total castle area , and more limited work has occurred since , including a " watching brief " excavation carried out in Forest View road in 2001 .