

= Clare Castle =

Clare Castle is a medieval castle in the small town of Clare in Suffolk , England . Built shortly after the Norman conquest of England by Richard Fitz Gilbert , the motte and bailey castle was later improved in stone . In the 14th century the castle was the home of Elizabeth de Clare , one of the richest women in England , who maintained a substantial household there . The castle passed into the hands of the Crown , and by the 16th century was in ruins . Damaged by the construction of the Great Eastern Railway through the castle in 1867 , the remains of the castle are now part of a local park and a scheduled monument and a grade 2 * listed building .

= = History = =

= = = 11th - 13th centuries = = =

Soon after the Norman conquest of England , Richard Fitz Gilbert was granted a barony by William the Conqueror , with two blocks of land , first in Kent and later across Suffolk and Essex . Richard built two castles to defend his new lands , Tonbridge in Kent , followed by Clare Castle in Suffolk . The exact date of the construction is unknown , but the first documentary records of the castle appear by 1090 . In the 11th century , Suffolk was one of the most prosperous parts of the country .

Clare Castle was built between the River Stour and the Chilton Stream and took the form of a motte and bailey design , with two baileys rather than the more common one . The motte is 850 feet (259 m) wide at the base and 100 feet (30 m) tall , with its flat summit 63 feet (19 m) across . The two baileys , stretching alongside from the motte along the north and east , were protected by deep ditches and steep palisades , with either a causeway or a drawbridge linking the inner to the outer bailey ; the inner bailey was also sheltered by the curve of the Chilton .

The castle was built on the site of a former Anglo @-@ Saxon manor house , probably reflective of the wider Norman effort to demonstrate that their authority had replaced those of the previous lords . Castles such as this were termed a caput , and as historian Robert Liddiard describes , as well as having a defensive value it also " represented and reflected the rank and dignity of the lord " . The castle was surrounded by three parks , including the Great Park at Hundon , established by 1090 . Like many other major castles , Clare was twinned with a local religious house when Richard de Clare founded Clare Priory in 1249 , close to the castle , and grew to contain 29 friars .

A new keep was built , probably in the 13th century . This took the form of a polygonal shell keep , with fourteen triangular buttresses supporting six foot (1 @.@ 8 m) thick walls . The inner bailey was strengthened with new stone walls , 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 m) tall on top of the earlier earth banks , the walls and keep being built of flint and rubble . The castle was manned during this period by a castle @-@ guard system , in which lands were given out to local lords in return for their providing knights and soldiers to serve at the castle .

= = = 14th century = = =

By the early 14th century , before the outbreak of the Black Death , the town of Clare had a population of around 600 . The de Clares continued to own estates across England , but in Suffolk their possessions were concentrated in estates clustered around Clare Castle . The castle was passed through the de Clare line until Gilbert de Clare died at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314 , when the estate passed onto his sisters . Elizabeth de Clare , whose husband John de Burgh had died the previous year , acquired the castle ; the combined estates made Elizabeth one of the wealthiest women in England . Elizabeth used the castle as her main residence between 1322 and 1360 .

The castle was well developed by this time , and was reached through three gates positioned across the wider estate , called Nethergate , Redgate and Dernegate . The castle itself had four stone towers protecting the entrance to the inner bailey and the keep , called Auditorstower ,

Maidenstower , Constabletower and Oxfordtower . Elizabeth built a chamber for her own use at the castle between 1346 @-@ 7 . A substantial water @-@ garden , forming part of the moat to the east , existed at the castle during this period ; it may have included a fountain and probably had a geometric form , possibly similar to the garden at nearby St Benet 's Abbey in Norfolk . Vineyards and orchards surrounded the property . The castle 's three parks continued in active use , and , as part of the local rearing programme , the local deer were moved between them as the animals grew older .

The castle and estates supported a luxurious , wealthy lifestyle by their owners - Elizabeth had an income of approximately £ 3 @,@ 500 a year , most of which was spent on supporting her household , centred on Clare . Over £ 1 @,@ 750 was spent on food and drink , including luxuries such as swans , salmon and German wines . Some goods could be bought locally , but others , such as furs , spices , cloth and wine , were imported for the castle through the international fairs held at Bury St Edmunds , Colchester , Ipswich , London , King 's Lynn and Stourbridge . The staff at Clare Castle included falconers , tailors , chaplains and goldsmiths , supported as necessary by 30 knights and squires . The castle 's bakers could produce up to 2 @,@ 360 loaves of bread a day , and on average around 900 gallons (4 , 091 litres) of ale were brewed every five days .

= = = 15th - 21st centuries = = =

After Elizabeth de Clare 's death , Clare Castle passed by marriage into the Mortimers of Wigmore . When Sir Edmund Mortimer acquired the castle in 1405 , contemporaries reported it " in good repair and stocked " . The subsequent years saw the Mortimers heavily involved in the Wars of the Roses ; after Edmund 's death in 1425 , the castle passed to Richard of York and in turn , via his son Edward IV , to the Crown .

The castle deteriorated during this period . The masonry of the castle had probably been stripped for use as local building materials , as this part of England was traditionally very short of suitable stone . Edward VI gave the castle to Sir John Checke , until it reverted to Mary I. After Mary , the castle was acquired by Sir Gervase Elwes , whose family retained it until the 19th century . At some point after 1720 , the surviving east and south sides of the inner bailey walls were destroyed .

In 1867 the Cambridge and Colchester branch line of the Great Eastern Railway was built through the castle , cutting across and largely destroying the inner bailey in order to make room for a new station . The railway line was later closed in 1967 as part of the Beeching Axe .

The castle now consists of a motte , on which a part of the keep still stands and the outer bailey earthworks ; fragments of the inner bailey stone wall can also still be seen . The disused station , goods yard and the castle grounds have been developed into a landscaped country park , interlaced with water in the old moats , called Clare Castle Country Park , which is crossed by the Stour Valley Path . The park was opened in June 1972 , after 15 acres (6 @.@ 1 ha) were donated by Anthony de Fontblanque and 4 @.@ 5 acres (1 @.@ 8 ha) of railway land bought for £ 10 @,@ 000 . In 2014 the keep and curtain wall were extensively consolidated with the assistance of English Heritage (now Historic England) . On the keep two of the surviving merlons have been refaced and capped ; a walkway has been reintroduced - all to protect the surviving original masonry . A flagpole was fixed to the outer wall . In March 2015 , the stewardship of the park transferred from Suffolk County Council to Clare Town Council . A trust manages Clare Castle Country Park on behalf of the town council , with the support of local volunteers . The castle is a scheduled monument and a grade 2 * listed building . The castle is a scheduled monument and a grade 2 * listed building .