

Caernarfon

Caernarfon castle and town are among the grandest of the Edwardian castles. The site lies on the Menai strait between the mouths of the Seiont and Cadnant rivers. The castle itself with its multiangular towers and banded walls resembles the defenses of Constantinople. This may have been deliberate as the area is linked to Imperial aspirations in the legend of Maccsen Wledig (Magnus Maximus). An earlier Norman castle may have existed here from the late eleventh century, but control of the area was wrested back by Welsh lords who certainly resided there. With the collapse of local control in 1283 to Edward I, construction of the current castle and town walls began under the supervision of James of St. George. Initial construction was rapid, and



it was here in 1284 that the first English “Prince of Wales” was born. Considerable progress had been made when heavy damage was made by a Welsh attack in 1294. Most of this had been repaired by 1301. Progress became more intermittent as resources were required elsewhere, particularly during Edward’s expeditions in Scotland, and subsequent to his death in 1307. Substantial construction came to an end in 1330, although some sections were incomplete (particularly the rear of the Queens gate, and the foundations of a wall to enclose the upper ward).

The castle continued in its role of controlling the local population until the fifteenth century when the Welsh Tudors assumed the throne. The castle was then neglected and by the sixteenth century only those buildings in use as prisons were in good order, with material having been removed for other building projects. During the seventeenth century civil war the castle was garrisoned by the Royalists and held through three sieges. Parliament later ordered the demolition of the castle, but this does not seem to have resulted in any major destruction. Economic expansion in the early nineteenth century brought new industry to the area. In the later part of the century much restoration work was carried by the deputy-constable Sir Llewelyn Turner. The castle achieved new prominence when it was used for the investiture of the Prince of Wales in 1911. This was last repeated in 1969. The castle and its associated town walls were listed as a world heritage site in 1987. Today the castle, which is still crown owned, is administered by Cadw on behalf of the Secretary of State for Wales.

Colchester

Colchester was the first stone castle to commence construction after the Norman invasion, and work was under way by 1076. The foundations of the Roman Temple of Claudius built in the 1st century were utilised for the castle. Built as a tower keep, at 46.2 x 33.5m, the castle is the largest built by the Normans. The ground plan is shared with the White Tower (the Tower of London) and both castles are believed to have been built by Gundolph, Bishop of Rochester. As well as the foundations, recycled Roman materials (particularly red brick) were used with imported Caen stone for the building. Construction was interrupted by threat of Danish invasion, but the castle was completed around 1125. The only military action occurred when the castle was captured after a three month siege by King John from rebellious nobles supported by French soldiers sent by King Philip of France.



By the mid-fourteenth century the castle was reduced to use as a prison. In the early 17th century the castle was falling into ruin, and was sold by the crown in 1629. In 1683 it was purchased by John Wheeley who partially demolished the castle to sell the stone. His use of gunpowder to assist the demolition revealed the Roman vaults below the castle. Wheeley fortunately went broke and the surviving elements of the castle were acquired in 1726 by Charles Gray who carried out restoration work and modified some parts for his own use. The castle passed into public ownership in 1920 and is now a museum.

Corfe

Corfe is located on a hill in a gap in the chalk ridge which runs through the area known as the ‘Isle of Pur-

beck' in Dorset. As such it dominates local transport routes. The hill was reputedly inhabited in Saxon times. A Norman castle was commenced in the time of William I, and Robert Duke of Normandy was imprisoned there in 1106. The castle was scene of military operations during the civil war in the middle of the twelfth century. It seems to have then been a quiet place until King John redeveloped the castle as a prison, treasury and royal palace at the beginning of the thirteenth century. His successors continued the expansion work throughout the century. Considerable funds were invested and the castle was recorded as being of high quality. The castle become dilapidated in the first half of the fourteenth century, but was then restored with further extensions. The final structure consisted of an inner ward containing the keep and the 'gloriette' or King's palace, surrounded by a west and outer bailey which included ditch and gatehouse defences.



Primarily held by the crown up to the sixteenth century, the castle was sold in 1572 to Sir Christopher Hatton and passed to his heirs. The castle was again sold to Sir John Banks in 1635. At the outbreak of the Civil War the castle was besieged, but held for the Royalists by Lady Banks. The castle was again besieged in 1644 after the death of Sir John. The siege was ended by treachery after 48 days when parliamentary troops entered the castle disguised as reinforcements. Parliament ordered the demolition of the castle in 1646 and it was slighted with explosives to an extent not seen elsewhere. The castle has been a ruin since then. The castle remained the property of the Banks family until it was bequeathed to the National Trust in 1981.

Kidwelly

Kidwelly (Cydweli) was started early in the twelfth century by Bishop Roger of Salisbury as a ringwork of earth and timber on a ridge above the River Gwendraeth. The site commanded a strategic position on a trade route, and allowed easy views to the tidal estuary to the south. The Norman castle was lost to the Welsh several times during the following century and required rebuilding. Ownership also changed several times. Construction in stone began in the middle of the thirteenth century under returned crusader Pain de Chaworth. The first phase was the central four towers connected by curtain walls. Apartments and support structures



were then built in the ward. In the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century, concentric defenses were created as a second wall with four towers was erected approximately on the line of the original wooden walls. The height of the inner stone towers was increased to allow them to overlook the outer wall. The gatehouse which was damaged in a Welsh siege in 1403 was not completed until 1422. In the late fifteenth century a new building phase resulted in a number of buildings (including a new hall) being built in the outer ward.

After Rhys Ap Gruffudd was tried for treason in 1531, the castle passed to the crown. By the early seventeenth century the site was still used for court sittings, but the castle was in decay. It was sold in 1630 to the Vaughn family. It took no part in the civil war in the following decade. Some repairs were carried out at the end of the eighteenth century. The castle later passed to the Earls of Cawdor and in 1927 came into public ownership. The castle is now in the care of Cadw.

Restormel

Restormel Castle is located in Cornwall, about a mile north of Lostwithiel, where it commands a ridge to the west above the River Fowey. The first castle on the site is believed to have been built around the beginning of the twelfth century and would have been a timber structure inside a ditch cut into the rock of the ridge rather than on a motte. A bailey extended to the west. The stone castle appears to have been built in the late thirteenth century, probably by Edmund, Earl of Cornwall. The castle is a shell keep - an outer wall with a series of apartments and service buildings inside the walls and surrounding a central courtyard with a well. The castle is about 38m in diameter and built of local shillet with pentewan stone for architectural features. The 2.4m thick and 8m high walls plastered and whitewashed. It appears to have been a building of some status, indicated by the materials used and features such as the large rooms and the windows in the solar.



No Earls of Cornwall were resident after the beginning of the fourteenth century and the castle passed to the Crown. The Black Prince is known to have visited in 1354 and 1365, but after this the castle appears to have been in decline. It was empty and in ruin by the time it was garrisoned by a Parliamentary army during the English civil war. The castle was captured for the Royalists by Sir Richard Grenville's forces in August 1644. The gatehouse was later slighted so the castle could not again be defended. It returned to ruin. Although still owned

by the Duchy of Cornwall, the castle is now in the care of English Heritage.

Tintagel

The remains of the Castle at Tintagel only add to the mystery of the place. The small peninsula connected to the mainland by a narrow isthmus provides a spectacular scene. Little is known about the site, although remains dating back to the Roman period have been found including considerable quantities of imported ceramics. The nature of subsequent occupation is still open to debate, although evidence points to religious occupation, and possibly military/administrative use. The site is most famously connected to the Arthurian legend as his birthplace. The medieval castle is believed to be the work of Earl Richard of Cornwall, younger brother of Henry III and dates to the thirteenth century. The reason for the castle site is unclear as it is away from trade routes. Possibly it was a matter of prestige to occupy a site with earlier associations. The castle had an upper and lower ward on the landward side of the isthmus (which is much lower and narrow than it was 750 years ago) and an inner ward on the 'island'. The landward side has a valley to one side and a crumbling cliff on the other, with a ditch to protect the access. The seaward inner ward was accessible only by the narrow isthmus protected by the landward portion of the castle. How long the isolated castle was occupied is not clear and it appears to have been in decay by the fifteenth century. Some work to stabilise the stonework was begun in the nineteenth centuries as Victorian romanticism was on the rise. Today the area is under the care of English Heritage.

