Tintagel Castle

The legend of King Arthur has made Tintagel a hallowed place. Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing about the time when the castle was in fact founded, chose it as the setting for Arthur's conception. That is his only link with Tintagel, but it has lasted in the popular imagination. The beauty of the site is no doubt the reason why. This rocky, sea-battered headland is an unusual setting for a medieval castle but a very likely one in which to find an ancient hill fort. It comes as a surprise to discover that no evidence has been found of any fortification before the Norman period. Instead. The headland first became the retreat of Dark Age monks who were drawn to such inaccessible spots. The foundations of several groups of monastic buildings are scattered across the summit of the headland and its eastern slope.

The Tintagel headland is nearly an island, but is connected to the mainland by a narrow neck of rock. The castle occupies the junction of the two and has a bailey on either side of the isthmus. Originally a bridge connected the narrow chasm between them, but over the centuries the causeway has eroded and the castle is now divided into two distinct halves, connected by precipitous stairways. Today the castle is very ruinous. Simple curtains protect both baileys, at least on those sides where the natural defense is merely a steep fall as opposed to a sheer drop.

There is no keep. The shattered gate tower leading into the outer bailey is preceded by a narrow passage. This is overlooked by an elongated walled enclosure on an outcrop of rock so that attackers could have been showered with arrows from above. In the inner bailey on the headland are the ruins of a fourteenth-century hall within the footings of a Norman predecessor.