Leicester Castle

Leicester originated as the Roman Ratae, was occupied by the Danes as one of their Five Boroughs, then fortified against them following English re-conquest of the Danelaw. Hugh de Grantmesnil became Sheriff of Leicester after the Norman Conquest and he probably founded the castle on the King's behalf.

Nothing is left of Leicester's Roman and medieval town wall. Furthermore, the castle has only survived as a number of isolated fragments. It stood beside the River Soar. Castle Yard marks the site of the inner bailey and the truncated Norman motte can still be seen there. The defenses of the bailey have perished but there are two interesting domestic survivals.

The seventeenth century façade of the Court House conceals a remarkable Norman hall. It was originally divided into aisles by two lines of wooden posts, but only on carved capital remains in place and the building has suffered from later partitioning.

The adjacent church of St. Mary de Castro originated as an unusually sumptuous castle chapel, founded as a collegiate establishment about 1107, by the first Robert de Beaumont. Portions of elaborate Norman work have survived a heavy Victorian restoration. The church stood within its own precinct, entered through the surviving timber-framed gatehouse.

Henry, the blind Earl of Lancaster, enlarged the castle in the 1330s. He added a large outer court known as the Newarke, enclosing a religious complex comparable to the lower ward of the Windsor Castle. The center of this complex was a second and larger collegiate church. This no longer survives but Trinity Hospital is still in use as an almshouse, preserving its chapel and infirmary arcades. Two gatehouses nearby are the only remnants of the defenses, both the legacy of a rebuilding program under the Lancastrian kings. Turret Gate, a simple ruin, led from the Newarke into the inner bailey.