

Beeston Castle

Ranulf de Blundeville, the most powerful of the palatine earls of Chester, began Beeston Castle in 1225. Prompted by the King's growing growing mistrust, he built several strong castles to protect his territories. It is possible that Beeston was intended as an impressive new seat of administration away from the mercantile bustle of Chester. As an experienced soldier and crusader Ranulf clearly appreciated castles built in the new idiom - with round flanking towers and no keep - and the great rock of Beeston provided a wonderful situation for one.

An Iron Age fort occupied this site, two miles south of Tarporley, but Beeston is a product of the time when castle building was approaching its zenith. It occupies a huge sandstone hill rising dramatically out of the Cheshire plain. The castle does not have a keep as such but its compact inner bailey occupies the highest corner of the rock, so the Norman motte and bailey concept had not been entirely forsaken.

The outer bailey follows the contours of the hill and is large enough to have accommodated a vast retinue. A nineteenth century gatehouse forms the entrance to the site, and some ascent is necessary before the real outer gatehouse is reached. More than half of the outer curtain has disappeared but the long section on the east side of the hill has seven towers, spaced closely together to provide effective flanking fire. These towers are the semi-circular, open-backed variety often found on town walls of this period.

A long ascent through the outer bailey takes us to the summit. A rock-cut ditch of exceptional width and depth, now spanned by a modern bridge, cuts off the inner bailey. A squat gatehouse, perhaps the earliest in England to be equipped with round-fronted flanking towers, guards the entrance. The site commands magnificent views.