

Cockermouth Castle

Cockermouth Castle crowns a promontory between the rivers Derwent and Cocker. The notorious William de Fortibus acquired the manor in 1215 and built a castle here, possibly on an older site, but Henry III ordered its destruction upon his downfall six years later. It seems to have survived this episode but most of the present complex is the work of Gilbert, last of the Umfraville barons, and Henry Percy, who acquired Cockermouth on Gilbert's death in 1381.

As Earl of Northumberland, the latter played a major part in the Border struggles of the period. And the Black Douglas sacked the unfinished castle. Henry is better known for his revolts against Henry IV, familiar from Shakespeare. The castle remained in Percy hands but drifted into decay. In spite of enduring a Royalist siege during the uprising of 1648, the castle was slighted by Parliament as a potentially dangerous stronghold. Around 1800, Percy Wyndham, Earl of Egremont, built a mansion inside the outer bailey.

The castle has a triangular plan very similar to Carlisle, its apex overlooking the junction of the rivers. There is no keep. Gilbert de Umfraville largely rebuilt the inner bailey though the curtain incorporates portions of William de Fortibus' work. The well-preserved outer curtain is entirely Henry Percy's. Its east front is flanked to the left by the square Flag Tower, now gabled, and to the right by a mighty gatehouse. This massive, oblong structure has the sidewalls of a barbican in front.

A row of shields over the gateway bears the arms of Henry Percy and his allies. The vaulted gate passage was defended by a portcullis and three sets of doors. Within the outer bailey is the Wyndham mansion, built against the curtain. The inner bailey is much ruined and has been distorted to some extent.