

## Donnington Castle

Donnington Castle crowns a hill above the River Lambourne, a mile north of Newbury, Sir Richard Abberbury, the queen's chamberlain, obtained a license crenellate the place in 1386. In 1414 Thomas Chaucer, son of the poet, purchased the castle and through him it passed to the De la Pole dukes of Suffolk.

Donnington is notable for its role in the Civil War. After the first Battle of Newbury, Charles I entrusted the castle to Colonel (later Sir) John Boys. The Roundheads laid siege in July 1644 but were unable to take it in spite of a fierce artillery bombardment.

The King marched to the relief of the castle and the second Battle of Newbury was fought around it in October. Defense continued in appalling conditions for the next eighteen months. It was only when all hope of relief had finally vanished (in April 1646) that the garrison accepted honorable terms for surrender. They were permitted to march to Wallingford to join the Royalists still holding out there.

It must be said that the old walls could not have sustained a pounding on their own.. Donnington was a comparatively modest stronghold and certainly not designed to withstand powerful artillery. In preparation for the siege, Sir John Boys constructed a series of earthworks on the slopes around the castle. These, with their projecting bastions, are rare survivals of Civil War fortification.

The castle followed a quadrangular layout except that the rear bowed outwards in short, straight sections. There were round corner towers and two intermediate square towers on the longer sides. Owing to the siege or subsequent slighting only the footings of the curtain and its towers remain, but the handsome gatehouse has come down to us virtually intact, lacking only its roof and floors. The outer angles are clasped by boldly projecting, cylindrical towers which rise considerably higher than the main gatehouse.