

Dover Castle

Dover Castle rises high above the town and harbor, crowning a hill, which ends at the White Cliffs. This site was first fortified in the Iron Age and the medieval castle fills the area defined by the ancient hill fort - thirty-five acres. The castle, therefore, is of extraordinary size and exceptional strength.

The keep is one of the greatest of square Norman keeps. It is a mighty cube, nearly a hundred feet long in each direction, with square corner turrets and the most elaborate of fore buildings. This fore building is an L-shaped structure appended to the main body of the keep with three projecting turrets of its own. The fore building was originally roofless, so the assailants would be exposed to projectiles hurled from the parapet. Where the accent changes direction is an ornate little Romanesque chapel occupying one of the fore building turrets.

The staircase leads to a grand entrance portal at second-floor level - one floor higher than usual and another parallel with Newcastle. No doubt, this arrangement provided an extra degree of security, but it also means the fore building took the form of a grand staircase, communicating directly with the principal apartments, as this floor contained the royal hall and solar.

As in other major Norman keeps, this level actually forms a double story with a mural gallery running most of the way around the upper stage. A number of private chambers are contrived within the great thickness of the walls off the hall and solar. One of them contains a well, the shaft of which sinks 350 feet into the underlying chalk. A passage leads to another chapel, even more delicate than the one immediately below it, and showing signs of the transition to Gothic architecture. The floor beneath is similar in layout, including the mural chambers.