

Hedingham Castle

The village of Castle Hedingham is dominated by one of the finest keeps. Faced with ashlar masonry brought all the way from Barnack, it is almost perfectly preserved, lacking only its battlements. The sloping plinth and pilaster buttresses are typical Norman motifs but the turrets rising at two opposite corners are a distinctive feature. From outside, the keep is seen to have five stages.

This translates to four stories within because the hall - as usual in the larger Norman keeps - is twice the height of the other rooms and its upper windows are at gallery level. The top floor, or solar, is just below the parapet, so there is no blank space to protect a steeply pitched roof as in many Norman keeps. It is interesting to see how the windows graduate from narrow slits at ground level to larger and more elaborate openings above, though being Norman, they are relatively small. Note the even rows of putlog holes used in the construction.

A fore building preceded by a flight of steps guarded the way in. This has been allowed to decay into a ruinous stump, but the first floor entrance, with chevron ornament and portcullis groove, is still in use. The room within is bisected by a wide archway, which prepares us for the loftier, molded arch at hall level. These cross arches are a unique feature. They helped support the wooden floors without dividing the keep into smaller rooms as a cross wall would have done.

A mural gallery runs all the way around the keep at the upper level of the hall. Frequent window recesses pierce it so the hall benefits from light at two levels. The present floors and roof are modern, the older ones having been consumed by a fire in 1918. .