

Hereford Castle

Hereford means "army ford", a reference to the turbulent days of its foundation when the Kingdom of Mercia was pushing westwards into Welsh territory. Excavations have uncovered the Saxon town rampart. For centuries the English settlers and the Welsh beyond the River Wye were uneasy neighbors, and in 1055 the town went up in flames. Harold Godwinson, later King Harold, drove back the invaders and rebuilt the shattered defenses.

In Norman times, the enclosed area doubled in size and a walled circuit replaced the earthwork defenses from 1224 onward. Hereford rebuffed a Scottish army in 1645 but fell to Parliament at the end of the year. Damaged during these sieges, the city wall suffered the common fate of demolition and concealment thereafter. However, clearance in the 1960s for the Victoria Street bypass has led to the re-appearance of much of the western part of the circuit, extending from the river almost to West Street. The wall is mutilated but it preserves two semi-circular bastions. All the gatehouses have perished, including the one which guarded the medieval Wye Bridge. There was no wall on the riverside, but remains of a ditch show that the medieval city had a suburb on the opposite bank.

According to John Leland, Hereford Castle was one of the "largest, fairest and strongest" in England, so its virtual disappearance is a great pity. Castle suffered from too close a proximity to the cathedral. In 1140 the Empress Matilda's supporters fired stones and arrows into the bailey from the central tower, a forerunner of the present one. Henry III found himself a prisoner here after of Battle of Lewes, but his son Edward escaped and rallied the royal forces to victory over Simon de Montfort at Evesham. The defenses of this royal stronghold were torn down at the Restoration.