

Castles and Fortifications.

Fortifications after the Norman Conquest.

After completing these activities you should be able to:

- ✓ Describe the types of defensive structures used in England shortly after the Norman Invasion.
- ✓ Identify strengths and weaknesses in early Norman defensive structures.

Upon landing at Pevensey in 1066 one of the first things that William of Normandy did was order the construction of a Castle. The structure was a pre-fabricated wooden construction, brought on the boats from Normandy. The Bayeux tapestry shows his men working on this early Norman castle.

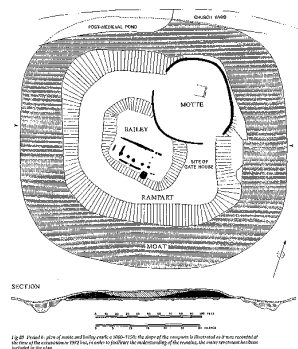
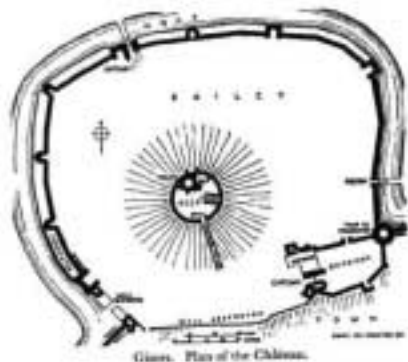


Source A. Normans building a Motte and Bailey Castle at Pevensey as illustrated in the Bayeux tapestry.

These early constructions (another was built at Hastings) are called Motte and bailey Castles. They were simple to make and relatively easy to defend.

The Castle consisted of two basic parts. The Motte, a mound of earth with, initially, a wooden tower on the top of it. And the bailey, a larger area surrounded by a fence. Around both the Motte and the bailey the Normans would have, in most cases, dug a defensive ditch.

Examples of Motte and bailey design



Motte and Bailey Castles: Key Points

- ✓ Easy to build. (They could be built in less than a week)
- ✓ Easy to defend. (And remember, the Normans were an invading army)
- ✓ Could easily be modified later (eg. A stone tower rather than wooden tower)
- ✓ Over 70 were built during William's reign as King of England.



The diagram above (taken from SchoolHistory.co.uk) shows the basic design of an early Motte and bailey Castle.

Main defensive features:

The Motte is hard to attack as its sides are quite steep. On average a Motte was no higher than 5 metres. There are some examples of Motte's that were much higher than this though, Clifford's Tower at York for example. The ditches around both the Motte and the bailey would prove a difficult obstacle to overcome for any attackers, with the fence and possibly a drawbridge to overcome immediately after the ditch the castle becomes a very strong fortress.

Major defensive frailties:

A Motte would be susceptible to collapse under the weight of a castle, whilst they were good in the short term the castle would require shoring up and possibly even rebuilding in the longer term. Wooden fortifications are also susceptible to simple methods of attack. They burn for example and given time would rot due to inclement weather. Later stone structures on these sites would of course overcome this problem (although the Motte itself would be placed under greater strain).

Activities

- (1) Describe the main defensive features of a Motte and bailey Castle.
- (2) Describe the main defensive frailties of a Motte and Bailey Castle.
- (3) Given the number of weaknesses of the Motte and bailey Castle, explain why the Normans built so many of these structures.