

How big was Norwich Castle?

The Castle Keep, its bridge and the 'ditch' below are the only surviving features of a vast complex of ditches, gatehouses and baileys, which covered an area of some 9.3 hectares (23 acres).

Why was the Castle built?

The Castle was a strong fortress, but it was mainly designed as a symbol of power and dominance. Norwich had already become an important town before the Norman Conquest, with international trading links. It was an obvious regional base to conquer and control. Norfolk and Suffolk were the most densely populated part of England, and Norwich was becoming the most important settlement in the region, and a focus of ecclesiastical power.

Continental influences

The stone used to build Norwich Castle and Cathedral was quarried near Caen in Normandy and brought here by sea and river. The Keep is built in a style we call 'Romanesque', which developed in Normandy and flourished in England after the Norman Conquest. The layout of the Keep echoes developments in castle building established in Normandy, at sites including Mayenne, Doué and Loches.



This plaque was originally attached to one of the stakes marking out the Castle Fee, or outer boundary. The Castle Fee was the King's land: anyone living or staying within the Fee was exempt from city taxes and laws.



Two knights fighting. You can see this carving when you visit the chapel area on the modern balcony floor above you.



Falaise Castle in Normandy was built later in the 12th century, but is similar in construction to Norwich Castle.

Was the Castle Keep lived in?

The Castle Keep was not regularly lived in until later in the medieval period when it became a prison. It was originally built as a regional palace for the Norman kings, and received occasional visits from the King and his court. We know that King Henry I visited Norwich Castle on at least three separate occasions, in 1104, 1109 and for Christmas in 1121. Even then, most of the guests probably slept in tents and smaller temporary structures elsewhere on the mound and in the baileys. The Keep was used for feasts, special occasions and official business.



A feasting scene from the Bayeux Tapestry.