

Paying homage to the King

Important guests approached the upper floor of the Keep through the ceremonial entrance in what we now call the Bigod tower. Only a privileged few would have been allowed beyond the Great Hall into the King's Chamber beyond.

This royal Castle was richly painted. When the king visited, he brought lavish furnishings and rich wall hangings. The contrast with ordinary houses of the time would have been immense.

Who was Henry I?

Norwich Castle was completed on the orders of King Henry I (1100-35), the youngest son of William the Conqueror. His reign is known for advances in government and law. But if crossed he could be harsh and vengeful.

Henry's later life was blighted in 1120 when 'the White Ship' bearing his son and heir sank in the English Channel. It was shortly after this incident that Henry visited Norwich for Christmas in 1121. He was accompanied by Queen Adeliza, his second wife.

Who else attended the great Christmas feast here in 1121?

The official records from the Crown-wearing ceremony list the leading 'witnesses' who attended, among them the most powerful landowners in the East of England. William de Warenne, Earl of Surrey was one of the richest men in the land and had a castle, priory and estate at Castle Acre in North Norfolk. The Bigod family dominated the East Anglian political scene in the 11th and 12th centuries. Roger Bigod had been one of William the Conqueror's knights and built castles at Framlingham and Bungay. At the time of this feast, his son Hugh Bigod was the King's Steward.

What was everyday life like in Norwich Castle in Norman times?

Most of the time, Norwich Castle was run by the King's Constable and Sheriff, his representatives in Norfolk. The Constable maintained a garrison of soldiers here, while the Sheriff dispensed justice and collected taxes. These powerful posts were usually held by members of leading local families like the Bigods.

So the Castle complex was home to both soldiers and officials, and had to serve their needs. Animals were grazed in the north-east bailey, and there were also stables, kitchens, storehouses, a bakehouse and a brewhouse on site.



These elaborate carvings from the Bigod archway were once richly painted. You can see this ceremonial entrance to the Norman Keep on what is now the balcony floor.



King Henry I, from Matthew Paris Historia Anglorum, 1250-9.



William the Conqueror surrounded by his leading knights at a feast.

A feast being prepared and cooked, from the Bayeux Tapestry.



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