

VALE CASTLE

Guernsey



Key Facts & Plans

Why are so many Castles built on hills?

A good question! There are two main reasons:

- 1) It's easier to walk down than climb up. Have you ever tried running to the top of a hill? The defenders of a hill fort or castle have an advantage because their attackers will get tired climbing uphill.
- 2) You get a better view. It's much easier to defend a castle if you can see what's coming your way.

Vale Castle was built on a hill which overlooks St Sampson's harbour. The Castle we recognise today was probably built about 600 years ago (c. 1370-1400) but there was also a hill fort there in Iron Age times over 2,000 years ago (500-600 BC). The Castle was in a good position to defend the northern part of Guernsey. In fact, before 1806, Vale and Guernsey were not connected but separated by a channel known as the Braye du Valle. The northern part of Guernsey was called the Clos du Valle.

In 1616 the gateway and walls had to be repaired and more repairs were recommended in 1680 after the Civil War. Nearly 100 years later, Vale Castle fell into disrepair.

The American War of Independence began in 1778 and Guernsey people were concerned they might get invaded. The Castle was completely repaired and barracks (for the soldiers to live in) were built.

Russian troops were stationed in Guernsey in 1799. Hundreds of these soldiers fell ill from disease and the bodies were buried close to the castle.

By the end of the 19th century the barracks were once more abandoned and in a neglected state. During World War I, the



local militia had a small garrison in the castle and from around 1920-1940 the barracks were used by the States of Guernsey as housing.

German forces occupied Guernsey for five years from 1940. They demolished the barracks and built their own fortifications in and around the castle. If you visit the Castle today, it is clear to see these concrete additions.

The Castle is now owned by the States and is free to visit. From the Iron Agers to the German forces, the Vale Castle has been used for military purposes for over 2,000 years.

