

Castle Cornet medieval tour notes

These are to accompany the PowerPoint presentation 'Medieval CC tour'. Each number corresponds to the slide number.

NB. CC = Castle Cornet

- 1.** Castle Cornet: the medieval tour.
- 2.** Where we are standing was once an isolated rock outside the harbour of St Peter Port. To understand why this medieval castle was built, we need to go back to the year 1204, a very important date in the history of the Channel Islands.
- 3.** This is King John. In 1204 he was the King of England and he also owned Normandy. In 1204 he lost Normandy to the King Philippe of France. The Channel Islands, which were originally part of Normandy, should have stayed with France but for reasons that are not fully understood, the islands were left out of the contract and remained under the English Crown. CC was started shortly after 1204.
- 4.** Why was CC built? King John wanted to protect Guernsey's harbour, which is a natural, deep harbour and a safe haven for ships making the journey from England to continental Europe. Some people have called CC 'the King's Castle' before, because it was King John who ordered that it was built. This is how the Castle would have looked in the 1300s. Notice how small it was. If you have visited CC before, are there any parts you recognise?
- 5.** This is a bit later on. Generally, CC has become larger over time, as different generations adapt it for their own needs. Notice the rocky path down to the beach. (Please note that these illustrations are artists' impressions, based on archaeological evidence. It wouldn't have looked exactly like this and there are many things we still don't know about the castle).
- 6.** When we talk about 'medieval', we are talking about approximately the years 500 to 1500. This is an artist's impression of a street in St Peter Port during those days. The harbour would have been a busy place – it was an important harbour where ships stopped between France and England. The ships were often carrying Gascon wine to England (Gascony is in western France but was ruled by England in the past). The people in Guernsey enjoyed the same customs, laws and traditions as those in Normandy. We were Norman. Ordinary farming folk were mostly poor and made extra money by knitting. Monks had set up a priory in the Vale, and later on Lihou Island. The ten parishes of Guernsey were established during this time. The people in Guernsey would have spoken Guernesiais (pronounced *JEHR-nehz-yay*), or Guernsey French.
- 7.** CC today. We are lucky that the medieval part can still be visited– we just need to head towards the centre, where the oldest part is.
- 8.** But first let's make our way over the concrete bridge. Did you know that CC was not connected to Guernsey until the 1860s? Before that, it was an island.
- 9.** This is an early photograph of the CC entrance without the bridge.
- 10.** The exterior wall of CC is from the reign of the Tudors. These walls are curved to deflect cannon fire. In medieval times, cannon had not been invented yet.
- 11.** This entrance is also Tudor and would not have been here in medieval times.
- 12.** You might notice that the entrance way is slightly curved. It was designed that way to make it difficult for invaders to attack using a battering ram.
- 13.** Look up to see the portcullis. This spiked wooden barrier also helped protect the doors from a battering ram. It was lowered by chains from above the gateway. The word portcullis comes from the Old French *porte-coleice*, meaning sliding door.
- 14.** We're inside the castle and looking up we can see battlements. As you can see so far, this castle is very well defended.
- 15.** This portcullis is a replica (a copy) and is not full sized.
- 16.** We are in the medieval part of the castle now. CC has been used as a prison in the past and this is where the name for this walkway comes from. The guards might have exercised the prisoners up and down here. Notice that the walls are not curved here, but tall and straight. There is no ceiling here and that design was intentional. Defenders could stand above and throw dangerous or unpleasant things onto unwelcome guests.

Eg. Bows & arrows, stones, mud, anything to frighten them. (Children often suggest boiling oil but more likely hot water would've been used. Oil is too useful).

- 17.** We believe this is the site of a drawbridge & pit. According to records, the pit could have been up to 6ft deep. This is yet another castle feature to keep away invaders. This very crude illustration gives you an idea of how it might have looked. The pit could be filled with unpleasant things such as mud, hair, a broken finger – anything unpleasant, worthless or smelly.
- 18.** This doorway was once the main entrance into the castle.
- 19.** I'm putting my hand into the gap made for a portcullis.
- 20.** This is the 'Sally Port'. A 'sally port' is effectively a narrow passageway that only the defenders of the castle know about. This is seen in many castles and is a very useful feature to have. It's very handy to have a secret way to nip in and out of the castle, especially during times of attack.
- 21.** We are in the older part of CC and look how worn these steps are. People have been using them for about 800 years.
- 22.** Inside the Sally Port.
- 23.** Look up to see a hole in the ceiling. This feature is called a 'murder hole'. This murder hole has been restored with bricks but it could be very old. The murder hole is for dropping unpleasant/heavy things through, to frighten or injure someone.
- 24.** There's no need to panic! Thankfully, we have no use for it today and the hole is blocked up.
- 25.** All around the castle we can see the natural rock that the first castle was built on. It reminds us that until relatively recently, CC was an island.
- 26.** Talking of islands. Let's have a look at the view. Can you name any of these islands?
- 27.** Out of view are Alderney (to our left) and Jersey (to our right).
- 28.** It is believed that the oldest part of CC is a square tower or 'Tour Carrée'. You can see part of it today.
- 29.** The red line marks what *could* be part of the square tower.
- 30.** Many medieval castles have moats and this one is quite spectacular! It's better than a normal moat because this one can be rough and difficult to cross sometimes.
- 31.** People often ask if we have dungeons and our answer is 'we don't have any evidence for any'.
- 32.** This is not a dungeon, but rather the basement of a tower. People might have been imprisoned or left here in the past but we have no evidence for this.
- 33.** Moving around the castle, let's look at up at these machicolations. These are arches or boxes on the side of castles with holes in. The idea is that defenders can throw unpleasant or dangerous things down through the holes.
- 34.** Just around the corner is a machicolation with a difference. This hole has a large ball stuck in it. We don't know how it got there but we suspect someone might have used it during an attack and didn't realise it was too big. This tower was once called 'Mangonel Tower' so it is possible that this ball is a mangonel ball.
- 35.** What's a mangonel? It is a type of medieval catapult. A missile is placed in the large spoon-shaped arm and then fired through the air. This model can be seen in the Story of CC Museum.
- 36.** Continuing with our tour, here are some high walls and towers.
- 37.** Climbing to the top of this tower, we can have a good view on a clear day. An embrasure is the name for the gap in battlements. Can you see a Guernsey landmark from here?
- 38.** The Bathing Pools.
- 39.** An example of an arrow loop. Medieval defenders of the castle would have used longbows and crossbows.
- 40.** Gardens are very important in a castle, as they can help provide food for the people who live here. The Sutler was the person in charge of supplies. This is where we grow vegetables for cooking with.
- 41.** The Plaisance Garden is intended to be beautiful and sweet-smelling. In the past, castles could be full of stinky odours, so pleasant smells were always welcome.
- 42.** We are making our way to the top of the castle and there are many steps. Castles are traditionally built high up on hills (or rocks like CC). There are several reasons for this:
 - You have a good view from your castle
 - You can keep a lookout for anyone trying to invade
 - Any attackers have to fight uphill, which is tiring and demoralising
- 43.** The Inner Ward would have been filled with buildings in the late medieval period, including a chapel, a Great Hall and a large tower or keep.

- 44.** This gives you an idea of where we are on the late medieval map.
- 45.** This crude illustration gives you an idea where the keep was. It is not there anymore because of a tragic night in 1672. It was a dark & stormy night just after Xmas. Lightning struck the tower. Unfortunately, they were keeping gunpowder in the room below. The lightning ignited the explosive and there was an enormous explosion! The Governor, who was living here at the time, reported in his diary that he was blown out of bed and landed on one of the Castle curtain walls. Another person claimed that they were thrown out of bed and landed unhurt on the beach. Tragically, 7 people died. No governor has lived in CC since.
- 46.** Here is a drawing of the keep, which could be seen from Guernsey.
- 47.** This is where the Great Hall, Chapel and other medieval buildings stood before the explosion.
- 48.** Archaeologists have found objects in this area. Can you tell what any of these might be?
1. Blue and red wall plaster from the Great Hall
 2. Glass window pane
 3. Daub from the earliest part of the Great Hall
 4. Glazed green floor tile, from south western France
 5. Slate from the Great Hall
 6. Nails of varying length
 7. Lead, which would have held a window pane in place
- 49.** From here we can see a few buildings that survived the explosion. This is the prison.
- 50.** This is the back of Sutler's House, which is the building that has been continually lived-in for most of the castle's history.
- 51.** We are at the very top of the Castle. The earth here has been raised and, in medieval times, there would have been a garden here.
- 52.** The union flag flies at the top of CC to remind us that this was built as an English castle and not a Guernsey one. It was given to Guernsey in 1947 by the King of England.
- 53.** We hope you enjoyed the tour. We welcome questions – please feel free to contact us at museums@gov.gg

For more information we recommend these sources:

The History of Castle Cornet by Guernsey Museums & Galleries

Guernsey's Medieval Castles by Gregory Stevens Cox