

SOUTHAMPTON CASTLE

The castle was constructed in the 11th century, after the Norman Conquest, with the main structure located under what is now the Castle House block of flats. It has a fine view over the River Test and the town. When first built, this motte and bailey structure was built from wood but was converted to stone by the end of the 12th century. It was an important factor in the wine trade for which Southampton was a major trader. The large vault beneath the castle can still be seen and is entered from the town walls where the original river front and quays would have been located. The King levied a tax on all imports and the goods received in this way by him were stored in this vault, perhaps being sent on to Winchester. Although the King would have visited on occasion, by the end of the 13th century the castle was in decline, although with the French raids in the 1370s, Richard II provided monies to undertake extensive rebuilding, resulting in a powerful castle, being one of the first in England to be equipped with cannon.



The only parts of the castle which can still be seen are the castle hall, the castle vault, some of the south bailey wall, the castle Watergate and some of its' north wall.



Castle Watergate Taken 1941



Remains of Castle East Gate



Henry V made his will in 1415 whilst in Southampton Castle prior to travelling with his soldiers to Agincourt. He also wrote a letter to the French king saying he was “in our castle of Hampton by the short of the sea”. His son, Henry VI met his 15 year old bride, Margaret of Anjou in 1445. Henry VIII also probably stayed at the castle, as did Elizabeth I in 1569.

By Elizabethan times, the castle was falling into disrepair and the inner bailey was being used as a rubbish dump, then in 1618, James I sold the castle. It remained in private ownership for many years and by 1770 the land was sold off in parcels and at one point a local merchant, George Gallop built a windmill on the site. A summer house was later built on the top of the hill with stone from the castle and this was used by visitors to the spa for contemplation of the views.

The Marquis of Lansdowne resided in the family home on Peartree Green but found that being away from the centre of the town, restricted his social life. He was comfortably off but not wealthy, so looking for a house suitable for his position in the centre of the town was difficult. The only site presenting itself was that of the old castle, but this was restricted by other dwellings, was generally untidy and had the remains of the castle keep on the top, which was crudely converted into accommodation with several crudely built extensions added. The only way to build a house big enough was to build upwards. Having travelled widely throughout Europe, the Marquis was used to seeing castle-like residences of the nobility and encouraged his architect to design something similar. The Marquis finally bought the site in 1804 and work commenced.

The Marquis of Lansdowne’s father died in May 1805 and he therefore owned not only the residence on Peartree Green, but a large town house in London (Lansdowne House) and a country estate with extensive parklands - Bowood in Devon. He decided to keep the house in London for his use, but as all the

properties were entailed, he rented the rest out to provide an income. However, Bowood House was shuttered and left empty, with much of its furnishings and art being moved to the new castle. He also to marry and the widow of an old friend, who had 5 young daughters. In 1805, after insisting his new house be completed quickly, resulting in shoddy workmanship, the Marquis and his family moved into Lansdowne Castle.

In 1809, John Henry Petty, Marquis of Lansdowne died at Lansdowne House in London. The only remaining evidence of his connection to Southampton is the statue of George III wearing imperial Roman dress, which he commissioned and which took the place of a wooden figure of Queen Anne on the Bargate. The Marquis's wife and her daughters remained at the castle until the girls came of age, then moved back to Richmond. The heir to the estate (the Marquis's half-brother) sold the property in 1816 and the castle was demolished in 1818 and the motte flattened.

Research Ken Burtenshaw HRA City of Culture Representative