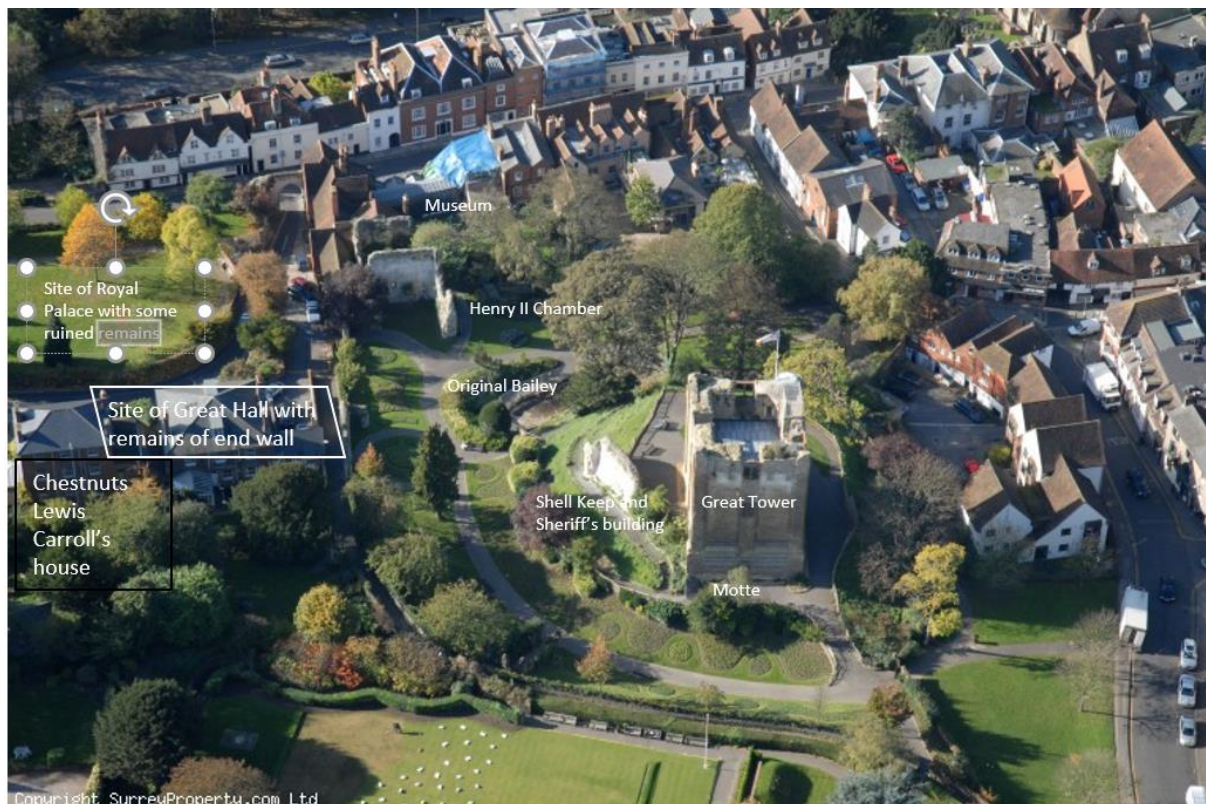




The interpretation of Guildford Castle

A discussion document

Version 0.3







Developing the interpretation of Guildford Castle

Author: Gavin Morgan

Date: April 2019

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Versioning

Version	Comment	Date
0.1	Written by Gavin Morgan	Apr-Jun 2018
	Reviewed by Mary Alexander	July 2018
0.2	Updated by Gavin Morgan. Sent for review to various	Aug 2018
0.3	Summary Added before the introduction	April 2019



Summary

Guildford Castle has a lot more to offer than most of us realise. Initially it might seem tame compared with the great Welsh castles of Harlech, Carnarvon and Conway. The Victorians did a marvellous job when they created the Castle Grounds, but they turned the Keep into an ornamental architectural ruin rather than a historic monument. Fortunately, that all changed in 2004 when a floor was inserted in the Keep and an exhibition with a detailed model was put on the ground floor. Now, as the Council plans for a new museum there is an opportunity to reassess how we interpret the castle.

What makes our castle special?

(see Section 1 Opportunities and Options)

As a town we are unique in having such a fine Norman Keep. It was a royal castle visited by monarchs from Stephen to Edward III and included a royal palace excavated in the 1990s. So, we can use Guildford Castle to explain how Norman castles and royal palaces worked. Anyone who visits English Heritage sites will know of the different interpretation methods they use from reconstructions, dressing up, re-enactments and models. Guildford was not central to any major historical events, but it was touched by three of the most important events in English history and there is an opportunity to use the castle to bring these alive.

So, let's take a tour of the castle

The castle in context

(See Section 3 Castle in Context)

The Council has plans to improve accessibility along Chapel Street and this will provide an easier route to the museum and Castle Grounds for the many people who prefer not to climb the High Street. However, for me, the best approach to the Castle is along Tunsgate. As you enter the Castle Grounds by the war memorial you get a great view of the Keep. You also get a sense of how the castle relates to the North Downs. Several places have created relief models to show how their castle fits into the surrounding area and this could work well here at the entrance to the Castle Grounds

Just before entering the Castle Ground, you can see how Pewley Hill rises to your left and you can see how the Keep would have dominated the town. This becomes even more apparent if you wonder round the bowling green. The park has been terraced but you can see how the Castle is half way down the hill leading from the North Downs to the river. And now we can appreciate the first thing we need to know about Guildford Castle. It was not built as a war machine but as a symbol of authority. In fact, it was not ideally situated for sieges. Attackers would have had the advantage of bombarding the castle from the hill rising above it. The planners of the castle had other ideas though. They situated it on the edge of the town to overawe the population. It would never have had many soldiers, but it was a strong place to base reinforcements should it be necessary.



The first castle

(See Section 2.2 Major events, p19)

The castle we see today was built in the mid to late 1100s but there would almost certainly have been a wooden castle before that, probably built on the orders of William the Conqueror. Following his invasion William circled London using the North Downs as his highway. He would have descended from Pewley Hill into Guildford. Guildford was already the largest town in Surrey, although to us it would seem like a small village with single story wooden houses, centred on the High Street and a few lanes leading off it. We do not know what the first castle looked like but an important excavation by the Surrey Archaeological Society in 1949 at Abinger transformed our understanding of these castles. Before that historians only had the crude images from the Bayeux Tapestry. The first castle would have been a motte and bailey. Excavations in the Castle published by the Surrey Archaeological Society have shown that there would have been a defended open area covering the lower part of the Castle Grounds between the Keep and the museum. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that locals would have been forced to build the mound and it must have been a painstaking task with just shovels and small barrows.

Bowling Green and the Castle Grounds

A stroll round the bowling green, itself dating back to the 1600s, takes one down through the Victorian Tunnel. The story of the Castle Grounds themselves are as interesting as the castle. They were landscape by a local architect, Henry Peak, and are arguably one of the finest and best-preserved examples of a Victorian park in the country. At the other end of Henry Peak's tunnel there is a dramatic view up at the Keep.

Construction of the Keep

(See Section 2.2 Major events, p19)

An information panel explaining the history of the keep could be positioned here and would be visible to people coming through the Castle Ground from several directions. A reconstruction of Peverel Castle in the Peak District from an almost identical angle allows us to appreciate what the castle might have looked like. Guildford Castle was faced in chalk and would have looked even more dramatic in gleaming white.

It is not known whether King Henry II or King Stephen built the Keep. Henry II was a great castle builder whereas Stephen's reign was dominated by civil war. He is not known to have built any castles. However, the low quality of the stonework is not comparable Henry's other castles suggesting it was built in a hurry. The south-east was under Stephen's control, so it is logical that he would have built a castle as Guildford on the commanding North Down's route that any attacking army would be likely to take. So, is our castle a unique example of one built in the reign of King Stephen?

Magna Carta

(See Section 2.2 Major events, p19)

Guildford Castle never saw action, but it did surrender to the French invaders in 1216 in a little known but highly important war that established Magna Carta as a symbol of English liberties. Although Magna Carta was agreed and sealed in 1215 it was merely a temporary treaty. The terms were impossible for King John who threw it on the scrap heap and returned to war. The Barons invited the French to seize the crown and the North Downs became a highway for armies



marching across the south-east. The French rapidly controlled over half the country but following John's death the royalists re-issued Magna Carta as a symbol of monarchy willing to accept the rule of law. Support for the French waned allowing the English to reclaim their country.

Royal Palace

(See Section 2.2 Major events, p19)

The new King was Henry III whose own reign was troubled by civil war that led to birth of Parliament. He was also a great builder and will forever be remembered for the construction of Westminster Abbey. However, he also lavished money on his palaces and Guildford palace was built at this time. The best place to appreciate the palace is from the top of the mound and in front of the Keep. You get a good view of Castle Cliffe Gardens and Lewis Carroll's house and this could be another good spot for an information panel. Henry III's reign also saw the birth of Parliament and the establishment of the House of Commons. Is this an opportunity for school groups to use the castle to bring alive themes of early democracy?

Life in a castle

(See Section 2.3 Life in a Norman Castle, p24)

Inside the keep there is scope for enhancing the visitor displays. The ground floor can be blacked out and could be used for an audio-visual display. Upstairs there is room for replica displays, models, dressing up. The space can also be used for functions so there is no room for permanent displays that fill up the space and for security reasons there can be no original objects. It is a difficult space for visitors to understand because it has been altered at different times. However, I believe that if you take on the role of "historical detective" it can be made interesting. The large windows show that this was one a nice room built for comfort. Indeed, the theory is that it was probably the sleeping quarters for the visiting monarch. Later, however, under Henry II, the King's chamber was built (which will be part of the new museum). So, what happened next? Castles were also administrative centres, so we can introduce visitors to the Constable. Perhaps a cleric from St Mary's Church or the Friary came to do the admin and used the chapel originally built for the King. He would have been expected to pray at regular intervals so access to a chapel would have been essential. There is documentary evidence of Guildford Castle being a prison from around 1200 and of the chapel being used as a gaol. It is convenient that the Victorian's added bars to the chapel to keep out tourists rather than prisoners in. However, there is graffiti in the chapel showing that it was used to hold prisoners awaiting trial. Prisoners were never held long term. Offences resulted in acquittal or hanging but there were more acquittals than we often think.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion there is plenty that can be done to bring the history of the castle alive. There are also some fun stories about castle. Most are about day to day business but there is one that stands out and I have copied the full story in one of the appendixes. In the reign of Henry III, in the aftermath of the civil war with the barons, Edward I engaged some rebels at Alton. He fought the leader, Adam Gurdon in Alton Woods and after a long duel, Gurdon was defeated. Edward, however, could not help but admire the bravery of his rival. He patched up his wounds and brought him to Guildford Castle where Henry was banqueting. In the great hall at Guildford he told the story of the epic struggle and the Queen decreed that Gurdon should be spared. Edward and Gurdon became friends and Gurdon subsequently served went on campaigns with Edward.





Introduction

The purpose of this document is to share ideas on how the interpretation of Guildford Castle might be developed. It collates information from various sources into one document. The sources consulted along with castles visited are listed at the end of this document.

NOTE: Whilst every effort has been taken to check dates in the document for accuracy, anyone wishing to use the information contained should check the original sources.

This document is divided into several sections.

- **Section 1** outlines the way the castle is presented today. It asks whether anything needs to change and then provides some examples of how other castles are presenting themselves.
- **Section 2** looks at the history of Guildford castle in different ways. A timeline lists key events. This is followed by a discussion of some of the key chapters in the castle's story. Where possible these are linked to national events to show how the castle's story can be brought alive and made relevant to people outside the town as much as within. Then there is a discussion about how the castle can be used to illustrate the evolution and workings of a Norman castle.
- **Section 3** pulls everything together and proposes a tour of the Castle Grounds and Great Tower to illustrate how the story of the castle might be told.

Finally, there is a conclusion which tries to assess what this study reveals and how the town might further develop the castle as a heritage attraction.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Mary Alexander for reading and commenting on the first draft. As a business analyst working in IT I am used to pulling together the work and views of experts into documents that can be used in projects. This exercise draws heavily on the work of Mary Alexander and the excavations led by Rob Poulton of the Surrey County Archaeological Unit. See **8 Sources** for details of other works consulted.



1 Opportunities and Options

1.1 Enhancing the interpretation of the castle

The current interpretation of Guildford Castle dates from 2004 when the Great Tower was restored. The first-floor level was re-instated, and an exhibition was put on the ground floor.

There are several arguments for enhancing the interpretation.

- **There has been a lot of research into the castle in recent years.** Mary Alexander, former Assistant Curator at Guildford Museum researched the early history of the castle for her PhD.¹ She also covered the later in history in “With Ramparts Crown’d” published in 2006². In the 1990s excavations led by Rob Poulton of the Surrey County Archaeological Unit revealed the palace buildings of Henry III. These excavations, along with reports on previous excavations and documentary evidence were published by the Surrey Archaeological Society in a major publication.³
- **Castle interpretation has developed.** In recent decades English Heritage has developed the way castles are interpreted and enjoyed, with better displays and regular events.
- **Living history groups** – Guildford’s Heritage Service has shown with its Christmas at the Castle events how costumed interpreters can attract an audience. There are two local groups which already work with Guildford Heritage Services. “Past Pleasures” (<http://pastpleasures.co.uk/>) is a professional group placing costumed interpreters into attractions like Hampton Court. “Historia Normannis” (<https://normannis.co.uk/wp/>) is a national group of living history enthusiasts focusing on the late Norman period. They have an active group in Guildford and are specialists not only in Norman warfare but in the social history of the period.
- **Opportunity to bring history alive** – Guildford Castle is the best example of a Norman castle in Surrey. In fact, you have to travel to Kent or Lewes in East Sussex or to Dorset to find a castle with a Great Tower as impressive as Guildford. As well as telling the story of Guildford Castle there is an opportunity to tell the history of the Norman period through the castle. It is also possible to use Guildford Castle as an interpretation tool to explain the development of castles.
- **Importance of tourism** – Guildford Castle is an important part of Guildford’s tourist industry. Visitor figures are 10,000 per year with about 200 on a Saturday in summer if the weather is good. (About 30 people if wet)⁴. It is one of the most obvious attractions. If a café could be put in the museum, then the castle could be used to draw more visitors to this part of the town.
- **A quick win?** – It is likely that the revamp of Guildford Museum will take several years. The research and collecting that needs to take place to create a modern museum will be complex, costly and time consuming. Although costings are not part of this exercise it is possible that enhancing the interpretation of the castle could be done relatively quickly.





1.2 Guildford Castle today

The modern setting of Guildford Castle was established by the Victorians. The castle was purchased by Guildford Borough Council in 1885 and became the centrepiece of a municipal park which opened in 1888. The castle ruins were treated as ornamental features in a formal park setting. A viewing gallery was put on top of the Great Tower and was reached by a stair case that ran up around two sides of the hollow interior of the building.



The park is beautiful and the ornamental bedding plants have won many awards. However, the park setting reduces the impact of the castle as an historic monument with stories to tell.

This was redressed to a large extent in 2003-4. At the first-floor level a floor was inserted into the shell of the Great Tower to create two areas. The ground floor is now an exhibition area with display panels and a model of the castle and royal palace. The first floor is empty but allows visitors to appreciate it as a room. There are then Victorian stairs leading to the viewing gallery.

1.3 Does anything need to change?

One option is to keep the castle as it is. It already has some strong selling points:

- Beautiful setting in a Victorian municipal park.
- Great tower with views of the town.
- Model of the medieval castle and palace.
- Exhibition display panels.
- Events in the Castle Grounds including music at the bandstand.

There are, however, some obvious changes that could be made to the experience of visiting Guildford Castle.

- Trail around the park explaining the different features of the castle.
- Information panels (similar to those used at English Heritage sites).
- More information about the first floor explaining its use as a domestic space for the king with a chapel, garderobe and chamber
- Guided tours.
- Interactive exhibits, items for visitors to wear or pick up.
- Events with Norman re-enactment groups.

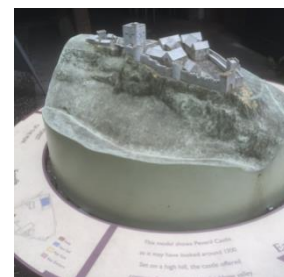


1.4 Examples of displays at other castle sites



Model Reconstructions

- At Peveril Castle in the Peak District a resin model has been placed outside. It allows visitors to orientate themselves and see how the site originally looked.



Model of Peveril Castle

- Lincoln Castle uses the same technique



Model of Lincoln Castle



Artist reconstructions

- Artist reconstructions are another way of orientating visitors. Whereas models allow them to get a feel for the layout of the site, artist reconstructions allow them to imagine the view in front of them. This illustration is from Totnes Castle and shows the building of the shell keep. A similar reconstruction could be used to inform visitors about the purpose of the motte at Guildford Castle. English Heritage sites have information panels around their sites. This might not seem appropriate in a public park like the castle grounds but there are other ways of using reconstructions.
- This illustration shows the thirteenth century hall at Peveril Castle built by Henry III. It is the same date (approximately) as the hall at Guildford Castle. At both castles there are now hardly any remains, and it is hard for visitors to appreciate what they see.
- Guildford Castle allows visitors to view the town from the top of the Great Tower. At Totnes artists reconstructions are on display at various view-points. They allow visitors to imagine how the town looked in the middle ages. Although space is limited, something similar would be very useful at Guildford.



Totnes Castle and the building of the Shell Keep



Thirteenth Century Hall at Peveril Castle



Arial view of Medieval Totnes (Totnes Castle)

Audio Visual presentations

- The ground floor of the Great Tower at Guildford Castle is a totally enclosed space and can be darkened. It would be very suitable for an audio-visual presentation. An easy solution could be a light show with sound that lights up different parts of the existing model and explains the evolution of the castle. A more ambitious A/V production could be created which could add to the tourist attraction. Lincoln Castle has a very imaginative A/V which is a model onto which are projected images of the site at different periods. At Farnham Castle a computerised model is animated to show the different phases of the castle



Animated model at Lincoln Castle



Computerised reconstruction of Farnham Castle



Displays for first floor of Great Tower

The first floor at Guildford Castle could house some exhibits but for conservation and security reasons it would probably not be possible to display historic artefacts. However, hands-on exhibits, models and display panels would work well. Here are some ideas.

- Dressing up is a very good way of getting children interacting with the past. At Carisbrooke Castle people can try the weight of chain mail, put on helmets and touch weapons fixed to an information panel.



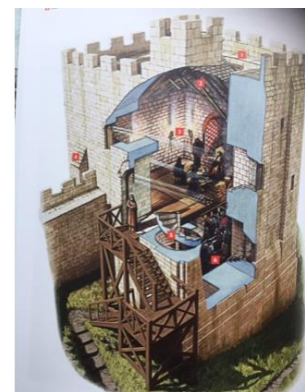
Dressing up at Carisbrooke Castle

- At Salisbury Cathedral it is possible to pick up and feel the weight of a sword which is fixed so it can only be lifted a small distance.



Sword display at Salisbury Cathedral

- A reconstruction of how the first floor at Guildford Castle might have been used would help visitors. It is a confusing space with features from many different periods of history. It might have served as living quarters but also had an administrative role and in the sixteenth century changes were made to turn it into a residence or more likely a summer house within ornamental gardens. It was possibly around this time that the bowling green appeared⁵.



Reconstruction of Peveril Castle Keep

- The paintings of Guildford Castle by Alison Merry (<http://www.meryillumination.co.uk>) could also enhance the experience and enjoyment of visitors. One shows Adam Gurdon bowing to Edward I and Eleanor of Castile at Guildford Castle. These are great paintings that could also be displayed in the First floor



Modern illustration by Alison Merry show obeisance of Adam Gurdon in 1266



Guildford Heritage Forum

- Another Alison Merry painting shows Edward III celebrating Christmas at Guildford in 1347.



Edward III celebrating Christmas at Guildford in 1347

Interpreters and Events

- Events are always a great way to bring a site alive and attract audiences. **Past Pleasures** (<http://pastpleasures.co.uk/>) and **Historia Normannis** (<https://normannis.co.uk/wp/>) are both close to Guildford.



Story telling – Christmas at Guildford Castle 2016

Exhibitions Design

- Farnham Castle is a good example of small English Heritage exhibitions display. It is about the same size as the ground floor of Guildford Castle but much more recent and more detailed





2 The Castle Story

2.1 The Castle Time Line

Guildford existing Pre-Conquest⁶

5 th /6 th c	Pagan Saxon cemetery discovered on Guilddown in 1920s ⁷
C880-5	Guildford mentioned in the will of King Alfred the Great
975-8	Mint recorded at Guildford
C930-970	Guildford made into a town ⁸
10thc	St Mary's Church tower dates from late Saxon period
1086	Guildford mentioned in Domesday as existing prior to 1066
1086	Population of around 1000 making it was the largest settlement in Surrey and the only town in the county

Castle founded after conquest

1066	It is presumed that the castle was built during reign of William I. This assessment is based on fact that similar towns acquired castles at this time. (NOTE: Guildford castle was not mentioned in Domesday, but that is possibly due to fact that the construction of the castle did not reduce value of town (the usual reason for mentioning castles). Also, as a royal castle the King would not have needed to know about it for tax purposes (the reason behind Domesday) because he was not going to tax himself
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Construction of Great Tower

Exact date not known (see below for key arguments). There were several royal connections with Guildford in the 12th century which might suggest presence of a castle. Current thinking is that the Great Tower was constructed during the reign of King Stephen (1135-1154)

1121	Grant of Henry I witnessed at Guildford
1136-43	King Stephen (1135-1154) issued charters at Guildford ¹⁰
1141	Henry of Blois (Bishop of Winchester and brother of King Stephen) met, Stephen's wife Matilda at Guildford for negotiations during the civil war where Henry was persuaded to re-join the royal cause. Although Guildford Castle was not mentioned specifically there was no religious house or large nobleman's mansion known that could have been used ¹¹
1167	Henry II enclosed parkland suggesting he wanted to use Guildford regularly
1165-7	Kings Chamber built – presumed to be the large ruin backing onto the museum. Construction of this did not mention the



castle but unlikely such a chamber would have been built before the castle or Great Tower. Mary Alexander also explains that since the reference was in the Sherrif's accounts there was no need to mention the castle so the absence of any reference does not mean the castle was not there

1173-4 Castle specifically mentioned in documents for first time

Castle becomes royal palace

NOTE: The use of the word royal palace can create confusion. Guildford was a royal residence with a number of buildings and not a palace in the grand modern sense of the word. The Great Tower was probably used as lodgings for King Stephen/Henry II but very early on it seems it ceased to be used for accommodation and was replaced by buildings in the bailey. Monarchs from Henry II (1186)¹² to Edward III (1347) regularly spent New Year in Guildford. Henry III visited Guildford over 60 times, mostly for a day or two. He was here for a week in 1251 and 1256 and two weeks in 1227 and 1257.¹³ He spent £1800 on the palace and castle (mainly the former). £770 of this was spent between 1253 and 1256.¹⁴ The amount spent on Guildford was the largest spent on any royal palace after Westminster, Clarendon, Woodstock and Havering.¹⁵

- 1165-7 Kings Chamber built (as mentioned above)¹⁶
- 1186-7 Money spent preparing Kings lodgings for Christmas (not clear where these were but this could be interpreted as a reference to building backing onto museum)¹⁷
- 1200 Great tower had become county gaol¹⁸
- 1227 Henry III (1216-72) visits Guildford for 2 weeks¹⁹
- 1247 Accommodation for Sheriff built on motte²⁰
- 1251 Henry III (1216-72) visits Guildford for 1 week²¹
- 1256 Castle Arch built on Henry III's orders (presumed that this reference refers to existing castle arch)²²
- 1253-6 £770 spent on palace and castle
- 1256 Henry III (1216-72) visits Guildford for 1 week²³
- 1257 Henry III (1216-72) visits Guildford for 2 weeks²⁴
- 1272 Death of Henry III
- 1273 Eleanor of Province, Henry III's widow inherited the palace and moved there²⁵
- 1274 Edward I son Henry died in Guildford²⁶. Henry III's widow, Eleanor of Province founded Guildford friary in 1274-5 in honour of her grandson²⁷
- 1286 Eleanor's association with Guildford ended when she entered the convent at Amesbury in July 1286²⁸
- 1347 King Edward III spent Christmas at Guildford Castle²⁹



Decline of castle

- 1332 Survey lists dilapidations building by building. (Castles regularly needed repairs) - £500 spent on maintaining castle over next 30 years³⁰
- 1359 Doors and windows of chapel strengthened to better maintain prisoners³¹
- 1371 A building in palace was dismantled and moved to lodge in park. Royal parties now stayed there or at Friary³²
- 1378 Lead taken for new round tower at Southampton Castle³³
- 1379 Only building not fallen or about to fall was the Great Chamber (presumed to be the building backing onto the museum³⁴

Later history

- 1391 Castle remained County Gaol for Surrey and Sussex under the sheriff after the palace ceased to be used. In 1391 14 prisoners escaped "for want of repairs".³⁵
- 16th c Early in the sixteenth century the county gaol moved to Southwark³⁶
- 1533? Dendrochronology on Castle Arch shows that a house was built here in 1533 but it may have been an earlier dwelling incorporated in Castle Arch house³⁷
- 1544 John Daborne, a local man, became keeper of the castle and his family were tenants for the remainder of the century.³⁸ The Tudor fireplace, brickwork and windows in the Great Tower were added under this tenancy.³⁹
- 1611 Crown sold castle to Francis Carter. He was under-keeper of the hunting park and living in the house on the site of the medieval friary⁴⁰
- 1630 Carter (or his son) built (or enlarged) Castle Arch house (This is the presumed date based on circumstantial evidence but see also Mary Alexander's comment about an early 1533 house above)⁴¹
- 1644 Date needs to be checked. Visitor mentions the bowling green. There may be an earlier date of c1624⁴²
- 1813 Castle remained in Carter family until 1813 when sold to Duke of Norfolk
- 1822 Duke of Norfolk sold castle to Lord Grantley
- 1885 Lord Grantley sold Castle Grounds to Guildford Borough Council



Guildford Heritage Forum

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 1888 | Castle Grounds opened |
| 1898 | Guildford Museum opened |
| 1920 | 1920 War Memorial erected (Unable to check date but see Guildford Institute scrapbook for 1920/21) |
| 1971 | Public baths outside Castle Grounds demolished and Castle Green created |
| 1990-4 | Excavations in Castle Cliff Gardens |
| 2003-4 | Great Tower restored, re-roofed and first floor inserted |



2.2 Major Events

This section looks at the main chapters in the castle's story. Its aim is to draw out big stories. Where possible it links the castle's story to national events to make the story more relevant to visitors. There are several major stories from English history that have touched Guildford and could be used to tell its story. From an historical point of view, Guildford castle was not a major player in any of them. However, from an interpretation point of view, they are stories that could capture the imaginations of the public and introduce the stages in the development of the castle.

1066 and the Norman Invasion

Following the Battle of Hastings, the Normans marched on London. They were repulsed at Southwark so marched round London across the North Downs. Guildford had about 1000 inhabitants in 1066. Being the only town in Surrey, and a royal site, it was an obvious place for a castle to control the population. We can imagine him pausing on the hill for a glimpse of the town. Of course, it would seem like a hamlet to us with wooden, thatched cottages lining the High Street and running down to the river. The tower of St Mary's Church would have been the most striking feature in the view. Holy Trinity Church also existed at this time⁴³

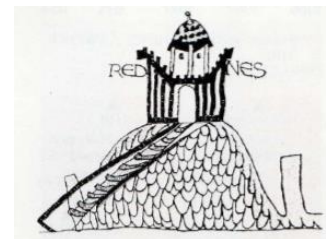
Motte and Bailey

William I built castles across his new kingdom to subdue the Anglo-Saxons.

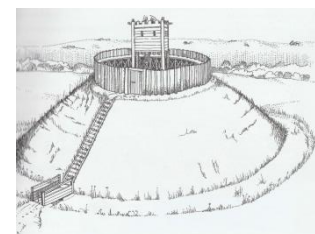
- There is no direct evidence that Guildford Castle was built at this time, but it is assumed that a wooden keep was erected in the years following the Norman Conquest. Most county towns, with castles, acquired them about this time.
- Guildford is a classic motte and bailey castle of the Norman period.
- The first castle was probably a wooden structure on a smaller mound.⁴⁴ Although there are illustrations of such castles in the Bayeux tapestry little detail was known about them until 1949 when the Surrey Archaeological Society based in Guildford Museum excavated a Norman castle at Abinger.⁴⁵

How was the motte built and by whom?

- It might have been constructed by engineers from the Norman army, but it is more likely that it was built by locals under Norman direction. Local people were often pressed into service. The Anglo-Saxon chronicle tells of people being "cruelly oppressed...by castle works."⁴⁶ Labourers were equipped with wooden shovels, tipped with iron. (Examples have been found in London and there may be some in the SyAS collection). Picks are mentioned in later accounts. Labourers could not throw soil more than 12 feet so wooden barrows were almost certainly used to transport the soil. Some mottes were built in weeks and only needed unskilled labour.⁴⁷



Bayeux Tapestry



Abinger Castle
(reconstruction)



Military position

- It is half-way down a hill where the North Downs drop into Guildford. This was not a good defensive position against armies attacking from the North Downs.⁴⁸
- However, the military position was not relevant to the 11th/12th political situation. The Castle was not built to defend Guildford against invading armies. It was there to impose Norman rule on the people of Guildford and its position illustrates this.
- Even today it stands out as a landmark and visitors are be able to climb to the viewing gallery on the Great Tower. In Norman times when the residents lived in largely single-story dwellings the sight of this Norman castle would have been daunting.

Stephen and Matilda – Civil War and Construction of Great Tower

William the Conqueror (1066-1087) was succeeded by his two sons, William Rufus (1087-1100) and then Henry I (1100-1135). Henry left a daughter, Matilda, to succeed. However, her cousin Stephen seized the throne and civil war broke out. It is presumed that the stone tower at Guildford castle was built at this time. The south-east remained loyal to Stephen, so it was one of the few areas in which he could have built a castle. He might have wanted to strengthen his position particularly as his brother Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester was on the opposing side and built a castle at Farnham in 1138. The illustration on the right shows a reconstruction of Farnham Castle. It was not on the scale of Guildford – perhaps Stephen wanted to make a statement. **NOTE:** The reconstruction of the bailey shows what the bailey of Guildford might have looked like



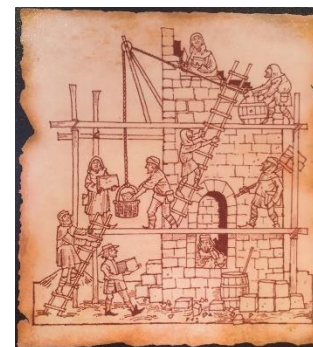
During the crisis Stephen was captured but his wife met Henry of Blois at Guildford in 1141 to persuade him to join his brother's cause.⁴⁹ Eventually a truce was agreed in which Stephen ruled until his death. Leaving no heirs, he was succeeded by Matilda's son Henry II



Farnham Castle (1138) reconstruction

Construction of the Great Tower

The earliest reference to the castle is 1173-4 when some repairs were carried out.⁵⁰ The dating of the architecture suggests that it was built in the 12th century and most probably in the reign of Henry II (1154-89) or Stephen (1135-54). Henry II was a great castle builder, but Guildford is of simple construction when compared with his other castles. Stephen is not known to have built any castles so might be ruled out but the simplicity of the construction and fact that he needed a castle here for strategic purposes in a time of civil war makes him the current favourite.





1215 - King John and Magna Carta

There is an opportunity to tie Guildford Castle in with the story of Magna Carta. The Great Tower was still relatively new when King John visited in the months before Magna Carta was agreed in June 1215. John rejected the charter almost as soon as it was agreed, and civil war broke out. In a panic the barons invited the French Dauphin, Louis, to invade. His armies landed in Kent and marched across the North Downs in 1216⁵¹. (see Appendix 1 for detailed account) Guildford Castle surrendered and during the war that followed there were several occasions when armies marched across the North Downs via Guildford. Eventually the royalists under William the Marshall defeated the barons and their French allies and put the 9-year-old Henry III on the throne. The significance of the war to Guildford was that it resulted in Henry III securing the crown and he was to have a big impact on the development of Guildford Castle through the construction of a palace here.

1265 Henry III and Birth of Parliament

Henry III's palace at Guildford sheds some light on this extravagant and out of touch monarch. The reign was also significant for the "birth of Parliament" and this is a hook that could be used when telling the story of Guildford Castle. Henry III was an extravagant builder and unpopular monarch who gave high positions and privileges away to foreign favourites. He had building projects going on all over the country, but Guildford was one of the most costly. The amount spent on Guildford was the largest spent on any royal palace after Westminster, Clarendon, Woodstock and Havering.⁵² In 1264 Simon de Montfort took the dramatic step of organising a rebellion⁵³. He defeated and captured Henry at the Battle of Lewes on 14th May 1264. In simplistic terms, England became republic three centuries before Oliver Cromwell. The House of Commons regards its birth as the year 1265 when Simon De Montfort welcomed knights and burgesses to Parliament as a political expedient to cement his influence. However, cracks emerged in his support and the rebellion was short-lived. Simon de Montfort was defeated and killed at the Battle of Evesham in August 1265 by the future Edward I. Nevertheless, significant foundations were laid for Parliament which continued to grow in importance. Henry III is linked to Guildford in other ways. In 1274 his grandson died here, and the Friary was founded in the boy's honour (1274-5).

Life in the Royal Palace

The excavations of the royal palace between 1990 and 1994 produced interesting detail about life in the royal palace.⁵⁴ Henry III spent £1800⁵⁵ on the castle and palace. (Over £10,000 was spent on making improvements to Windsor⁵⁶). In 1256 the cloister was laid out with marble columns. In the same year the ceiling of the Kings chamber was painted green spangled with gold and silver.⁵⁷ High quality masonry was



used throughout.⁵⁸ Biographies of Edward I also reveal how he was brought up in a lavish way⁵⁹. Edward was raised with the best of everything; stone chambers, fireplaces, tiled floors, beautifully painted walls and hygienic privy chambers- having enough hygienic toilet facilities, as well as their maintenance and condition, was important to Henry III.⁶⁰ Edward ate from a silver plate and wore clothes of the finest fabrics.⁶¹

Adam Gurdon

There is also a colourful story connected with the end of the Simon de Montfort rebellion that is linked to Guildford. Edward fought a rebel army at Alton led by a knight known as Adam Gurdon. During the battle the two men met and fought a long struggle with sword and shield in Alton Woods until Gurdon finally submitted. But Edward recognised a worthy opponent, patched up Gurdon's wounds and led him to Guildford Castle. The Queen decided that Gurdon deserved a pardon and he was taken into service at Windsor Castle. (See Appendix 2 for a detailed account of this story)

Eleanor of Provence, Lord Henry and the Royal Palace⁶²

Eleanor of Provence, wife of Henry III was widowed in November 1272 and entered a new phase of her life as queen dowager. Just before he died Henry III placed Windsor Castle in Eleanor's custody, and it was to here that she moved.⁶³ Just like her children, the households of some of Eleanor's grandchildren were established at Windsor- Edward I's son Henry and daughter Eleanor were both there. When she was awarded her dower lands by her son the following summer, Eleanor established herself a household at her palace at Guildford, her grandchildren with her.

It is with her grandson Lord Henry, named after her husband, that Eleanor seems to have had the closest relationship. He was a sick child, and as she had cared for his father in 1246 she cared for his son. Physicians that were held in high esteem by the dowager queen were appointed to care for young Lord Henry⁶⁴ and on one occasion he was bathed in a gallon of wine, at a cost of 4d, as the process was thought to be strengthening.⁶⁵ Lord Henry died aged just six years old in October 1274, shortly after his parents had returned from crusade and had been crowned king and queen. He died at his grandmother's palace at Guildford⁶⁶ presumably, she had been with him as he died too, just as she was likely with his grandfather.

The excavations of the royal palace possibly discovered the room in which Lord Henry died. It seems probable that he would have used the building described as Lord Edward's Chamber in documents. This was built for his father in 1246. It was "50 feet long from the wall towards the street along the wall towards the field to the corner of the wall towards the kitchen...and 26 feet wide from the walk towards the field to the



Reconstruction of kitchens
(from Farnham Castle)



Modern illustration by
Alison Merry show
obeisance of Adam Gurdon
in 1266



almonry". This precise description allowed archaeologists to identify the room in the excavations.⁶⁷

It was at the dowager queen's insistence that a gift of £10 a year for Henry's nurse was made permanent, and it was she that founded a Dominican priory at Guildford in his memory.⁶⁸ (NOTE: The history of the friary is a little more complicated in that there was an existing friary found in 1260 and Eleanor refounded it – see history of friary for more information⁶⁹). The Friary was founded in late 1274 or early 1275.⁷⁰ These are the actions of a woman who is clearly grieving for someone beloved. The following year both of Queen Eleanor's daughters died, too; the chronicler Thomas Wykes commented that the grief of losing her daughters was only comforted by the joy Eleanor found in their children.

After Eleanor left Windsor for Guildford, she was frequently visited by her grandchildren, and more were still to come. In April 1284 Edward of Caernarfon was born, who quickly became heir apparent when another of the dowager queen's grandchildren, ten-year-old Alfonso, died later that year. By this time Eleanor was making preparations to enter the convent at Amesbury for the rest of her days, though she still took an active interest in the well-being of her grandchildren. Eleanor entered Amesbury in July 1286

The excavation of the Royal Palace

There is potentially a good story to be told about the way the Royal Palace was rediscovered in the 1990-4 excavations. The excavations were run as a training excavation using the Surrey County Archaeological Unit for professional archaeologists supported by members of the Surrey Archaeological Society. Guildford Museum and Guildford Borough Council supported the project as an opportunity to raise awareness of archaeology. In 1990 150 took part helping to excavate. 23 school parties and 600 school children came to learn about archaeology.⁷¹

The practice of archaeology and the way information is gathered can be a story in itself. One interesting aspect of the Royal Palace is that it combined historical research with archaeology to create a detailed picture of the Royal Palace. The results are illustrated in the model now in the ground floor of the Great Tower. There are many historical references to repairs at the palace which mention the buildings there, how they were used, what bits of them looked like and even where they were in relation to each other. However, it really was a jigsaw with lots of pieces and no way of knowing how to put them together. By contrast the archaeology presented a dot the dot image of the ground plan of the palace. There were some impressive sections but also lots of bits of wall that were very hard to interpret on their own. The historical record on its own could not be used to recreate the palace and neither could the archaeology. However, when put together lots of things made sense. When people first see the model in the castle they assume most of it is



conjecture but nearly all the details from the building materials to the types of windows come from the history and archaeology.

1379 onwards - Decay of the castle

The castle had already fallen into ruins by 1397 when the King's Chamber was described as the only building standing other than the Great Tower. Already the castle had taken on the shape we are now familiar with and it remained a private garden on the outskirts of town until the 19th century



1888 - Castle Grounds and Lewis Carroll

The castle was still a ruin when Lewis Carroll bought a house next door in 1868, three years after the publication of Alice in Wonderland. Carroll was a frequent visitor to Guildford where his sisters now lived and would have seen changes that transformed the castle from ruin in wasteland to a proud municipal park which opened in 1888.

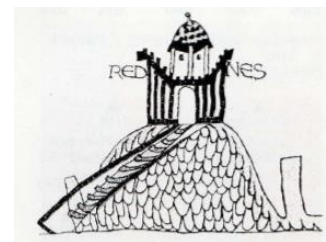
2.3 Life in a Norman Castle

The Great Tower at Guildford is one of the finest examples of a Norman castle in Surrey and you must travel a long way out of Surrey to find a comparable example. To the east there are remains of Norman castles at Rochester and Dover. To the West you have to travel to Corfe Castle in Dorset. One of the strengths of Guildford Castle is the opportunity to install displays within it ever since the floor was inserted in 2003-4 at the first level. There is an opportunity to use the Great Tower and the castle ruins to tell the story of life in a Norman castle. This section provides some information to illustrate the types of topics that could be covered.

Building the castle

Guildford is a classic motte and bailey castle of the Norman period.

The first castle was probably a wooden structure on a smaller mound. Although there are illustrations of such castles in the Bayeux tapestry little detail was known about them until 1949 when the Surrey Archaeological Society based in Guildford Museum excavated a Norman castle at Abinger.



Bayeux Tapestry

Building the Great Tower

Stone keeps needed skilled labour and were expensive. They tended to be built by the monarch. Even the cheapest keep would exceed the value of lands held by the richest landowner.⁷² They took years to build – even the smallest took more than a year, and most were nearer 10 years. Most were built in the late 12th century and no new mottes were built after



that. The bailey became more important in the 13th century and in Guildford we see the construction of the Kings Chamber.⁷³

Castle Administration

Castles were built to overawe the population but were also places of public administration.⁷⁴ They were evenly distributed across the country providing a network of civil administration.⁷⁵

The Constable

A castle was run by the constable who was appointed by royal writ. Some constables had inherited positions, but most were appointed for a few years. The constable ran the castle, maintained it, guarded prisoners, entertained guests and managed the fields, mills and other assets belonging to the castle.⁷⁶ Later in the medieval period constables might take on the responsibility for two castles e.g. Hastings was linked to Guildford. Other staff at the castle might be the gatekeeper/watchman and a chaplain. Windsor had a crossbow maker, gardener, builders, craftsmen and chaplains. It is unlikely that there would be this number at Guildford⁷⁷ so we must imagine a castle run on a small staff. It is also likely that there would have been a granary at the castle for staff had to be fed. In fact there would have been lots of buildings. As a fortified building it was also important for the castle to be able to hold out in the event of a siege.⁷⁸

The Sherriff

Whilst the constable might run the castle there was also the Sheriff, responsible for carrying out the king's business in the wider area. Sheriffs existed at the conquest, but William developed their role. There were about 27. In 25 counties there was an obvious urban centre where the conqueror built a castle. So, most sheriffs had a castle. Often a sheriff looked after two counties e.g. Surrey and Sussex were combined with Hastings and Guildford castles being the base of the Sherrif. Duties included collecting revenue for the king, managing estates, representing the king as judge, arrest and imprisonment, presiding over courts, responding to royal writs, collecting taxes, receiving rents, responding to complaints e.g. a bridge needing repairs.⁷⁹

Crime and Punishment

In 1247 accommodation for the sheriff was constructed outside the Great Tower but it was still used as a prison. The Assize of Clarendon of 1166 required the sheriff to have his own gaol in his castle which without exception became the county gaol. There were usually several gaols but the one in the castle was the strongest.⁸⁰ Medieval gaols were not places where people served sentences. They were incarcerated whilst waiting trial and there was just one punishment – hanging. However, “the severity of the sentence was tempered by the fact that not guilty



sentences were frequently given”.⁸¹

Great tower as a fortress

Everyone likes to think of a castle as a war machine. As we have seen, Guildford was more of a palace and administration centre but there is an opportunity to talk about the castle in war.

The castle was an innovation in England that enabled William to secure his grip on the country. The castle had originally evolved as a defensible home for the local lord under the late Carolingians in the 9th century and the Anglo-Saxons had fortified enclosures for the populace.⁸²

However, the Norman form of castle was new to the English. Ordericus Vitalis says “The King (William) rode into all the remote parts of his kingdom and fortified strategic sites against enemy attack. For the fortifications, called castles by the Normans, were scarcely known in the English provinces and so the English, in spite of their courage and love of fighting could put up only a weak resistance to their enemies.”⁸³

The use of horses in battle was also an important Norman innovation. It allowed them to control a much wider area. The Saxons rode to battle on horses but fought on foot. The Normans, however, used their horses in battle to overwhelm the enemy.⁸⁴

A castle was therefore a fortified base from which to control the surrounding area. William of Malmsbury wrote “There were many castles all over England, each defending its own district or rather plundering it”.

⁸⁵

Although the primary role of a castle was military the big sieges that capture the imagination were rare. There might be skirmishes or ambushes but pitched battles were avoided. A battle could often be a knock-out blow and whilst that might seem attractive, the risk of losing a war in one day made commanders wary of battles. The forces in medieval warfare were small and warfare was more about destroying your enemy’s resources. Castles had a strategic purpose in weakening an enemy by creating defensible pockets of resistance that would take up resources.⁸⁶



3 A Guildford Castle Tour

This section tells the story of the castle in the form of a tour and illustrates ideas for enhancing the castle's interpretation. The information provided in the text could be made available to visitors in a number of formats including display panels, a published guide and audio guide.

3.1 Approaching the Castle from High Street

The grandest approach to the castle is via Tunsgate. Assuming a visitor will be starting their visit in the High Street then it makes sense to follow this route. The tourist office in Guildford House is very close to Tunsgate and the Town Hall is opposite. Walking through the Tuscan arch and up the newly paved road with the refurbished Tunsgate shopping centre on the right the visitor soon sees the imposing spectacle of the Great Tower.

Here too is the main entrance to the Castle Grounds and more use could perhaps be made of it. It has the war memorial, a flower border and concrete area.



Entrance to Castle Grounds

3.2 The Castle in Context

The entrance to the Castle Grounds could be used to put the castle in context. From this spot the visitor clearly sees the castle and its relation to the town. A model of the town and castle in medieval times along the lines of those at Peveril and Lincoln could be used to good effect.



Lincoln Castle Model in bronze

3.3 Guildford's military and royal connections

From the area in front of the war memorial the visitor can see evidence of warfare and royal connections stretching back eight hundred years.



Model of Peveril Castle

- In front of us is evidence of the sacrifice made by Guildfordians in two world wars. The Queen's Royal Regiment was based at Stoughton Barracks until 1959.
- The Castle Keep was in use from mid-12th century to late 14th century.



3.4 Royal Connections

Whilst putting the castle in context there is also an opportunity to point out that the town has royal connections stretching back centuries as well. Guildford Castle was a royal castle. It was probably founded by William the Conqueror. It was visited by Kings and Queens including Stephen and Matilda, Henry II, John, Henry III, Edward I and Queen Eleanor and Edward III. The Friary was founded by the widow of Henry III and visited by Henry VIII. More recently the current Queen was based in the town when she served in the WRAC during World War II.

3.5 View from Bandstand

Before visiting the castle, visitors could be taken on a tour of the Castle Grounds to help them understand the castle's setting. The tour could start at the bandstand where there is a view across the bowling green. This is a good spot from which to put the castle in context as a military stronghold overawing the people of Guildford.

- The Castle Grounds have been terraced and we can see how the ground slopes down towards the town in front of us.
- It is worth commenting on the military function of the castle.
- Bowling green might have existed in the 16th century when the ornamental garden created and was mentioned c1620



View of Castle from bandstand

3.6 View Point 2 – looking up at the Great Tower

From the bandstand the visitor could now be taken round the bowling green and through the tunnel created by the Borough Surveyor Henry Peak when he laid out the Castle Grounds which opened in 1888. Emerging from the tunnel there is a dramatic view of the Great Tower above us.

An information panel illustrating what the castle looked like in its heyday would be useful. The reconstruction here is of Peveril Castle in the Peak District which is a similar age to Guildford.

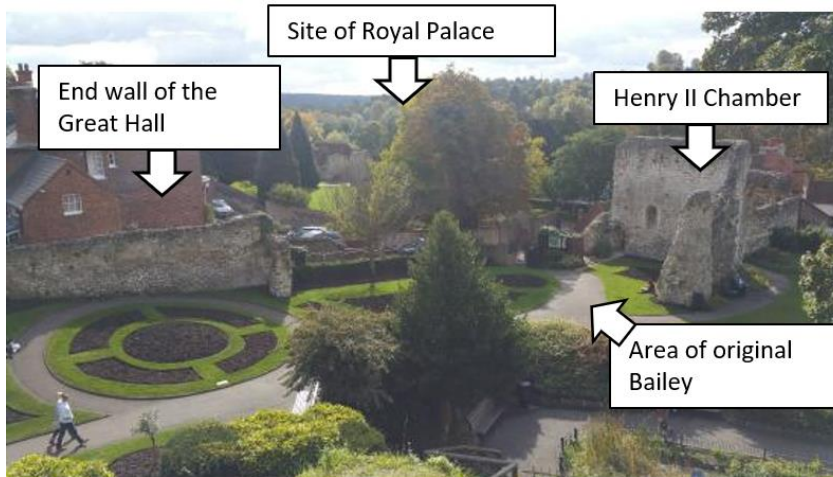


View of Guildford Castle reconstruction of great tower at Peveril



3.7 Visit to the Great Tower

Now is a good time to visit the Great Tower. Walk right up the slope and take the left even steeper slope to the top of the motte. Before entering the Great Tower walk over to enjoy the view towards St Catherine's Chapel.



Here is an opportunity to get an idea of the extent of the original castle. We are standing on the castle motte and the original bailey would have been the area below within the castle grounds stretching to the gate and the museum.

Beyond this is Castle Cliff Gardens. The castle was extended in the mid-1200s into this area and a palace was built. The front of the great hall can be seen just below where we are standing and occupied the area covered by the houses behind. It was excavated in the 1990s

3.8 Ground Floor Exhibits

The ground floor is a dark room with only one small window. It therefore offers the opportunity for some sort of audio visual presentation explaining the history of the castle.

The room currently consists of a model of Guildford Castle with exhibition panels and a small shop/kiosk. Here might be a good place to tell explain the history of the castle through the stories identified above.





3.9 First Floor Exhibits

The first floor of Guildford Castle is not easy for the visitor to appreciate. It is an open space with a few rooms leading off. The room has had walls opened and an arch looking like a fireplace added by Victorian restoration. This makes it hard to appreciate the room's original appearance.

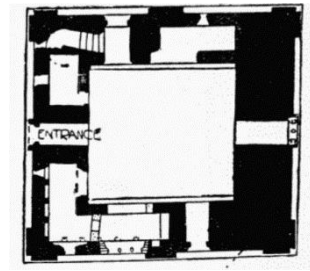
There is an opportunity to use this floor to display exhibits. Due to conservation and security issues the exhibits would have to be secure replicas rather than original artefacts but there are plenty of opportunities to enhance this part of the castle.

However, if one encourages the visitor to be an architectural detective then I believe we can use the different features of the room to reveal its story bit by bit,

- **Thick walls** – The visitor enters via the original entrance and passes through a long entrance with two rooms either side, the thickness of the walls suggest a building that was built for security
- **Main room** – the room we enter is not enormous but there is a chapel, chamber, gardrobe and two windows with steps showing that this room was built for comfort. This floor was probably too small for ceremonial occasions and was possibly built as the private quarters for the monarch when visiting. It is presumed there would have been more buildings and possibly a great hall in the bailey. The keep was probably a secure place for the king to sleep and live in private. It is quite likely that this room did not serve as private quarters for very long. By 1200 it was described as the County Gaol and in 1186-7 Henry II built a chamber next to the current museum.
- **Great Tower as an administration centre** – If the Great Tower ceased to be a residence what happened next? A castle like this would have been an administration centre and as visitors are curious to understand the life of a castle, this is a good place to do it. There is no direct evidence for the use of this room as an office for administration, but it has the correct features. As a secure room it would have been a suitable place with perhaps the ground floor being used as a lock up for prisoners.

So perhaps we should imagine this room with a simple table and perhaps some secure chests for documents. Often clergy were brought in to carry out administrative duties which means the chapel would have been a place of prayer used by the person working here.

- **Great Tower as a prison** - If we allow ourselves some liberties we can imagine Guildford Castle serving as a court with





Guildford Heritage Forum

prisoners kept in the basement awaiting trial on this floor. In Guildford we know of some offences. Most were for murder, but some people were accused of unspecified felonies and two women were accused of counterfeiting coins.

In the ante-chapel there is graffiti of a crucifixion, St Christopher, a bishop and a castle. They are medieval and not part of a piece of artwork⁸⁷. It is most likely that they are the work of prisoners.⁸⁸ However, the fact that they are behind bars added by the Victorian's creates the impression that prisoners were held here whilst awaiting trial. (The bars are simple there to protect the graffiti and not really part of the castle). It is not impossible that one of the rooms off this hall did serve such a purpose as a temporary cell and it certainly helps feed the imagination of younger visitors. Furthermore, there is a reference from 1359 of doors and windows of the chapel being strengthened to better maintain prisoners.⁸⁹ (This reference probably refers to this chapel in the Great Tower⁹⁰). The Castle remained County Gaol for Surrey and Sussex under the sheriff after the palace ceased to be used. In 1391 14 prisoners escaped "for want of repairs".⁹¹

3.10 Return to the castle grounds

Having visited the Great Tower, the visitor can now explore the rest of the Castle Grounds. We should retrace our steps down the slope and back to the Victorian tunnel where we were earlier. Ahead of us is the Henry II chamber and to our left the wall of the great hall built by Henry III. The buildings represent the development of the castle. It seems that the Great Tower originally served as accommodation with perhaps some timber buildings in the bailey providing accommodation for other functions of the castle. However, in 1165-7 Henry II built a chamber in the bailey and we must assume this would have been private quarters. Later, Henry III built a palace.

It is hard to appreciate these buildings and so some reconstructions would be useful. One idea is to use reconstructions from other sites to save costs. There is a good illustration of the interior of the hall at Peveril (also built by Henry III).



More information on the Henry II chamber would also be helpful. There are plans to incorporate this into the museum





From the Kings Chamber one gets a good view back at the great tower. This is a good point from which to appreciate the layout of the original castle before the palace was added in the early/mid 1200s.



A reconstruction illustrating how the original castle might have looked would be helpful to visitors. There are many simple reconstructions. The one on the right is of a generic Suffolk motte and bailey castle



3.11 Castle Cliffe Gardens

The palace that was built by Henry III was excavated in 1990-4. Most of it stood in Castle Cliffe Gardens. There are some remains in Castle Cliffe Gardens, but it does not have the character of the Castle Grounds. To get to it one must leave the Castle Grounds and cross the road.

Whilst it is of historic interest there is little there to inspire the visitor and it is unlikely that it would attract people in great numbers in its current form. It is more likely that having visited the Great Tower people would go to the museum, particularly if an entrance directly from the Castle Grounds can be opened up. It might therefore be better to have a display about the royal palace inside the museum rather than in Castle Cliff Gardens. Another idea might be to have a model of the palace as a sculpture in the gardens or a series of reconstructions. Good signage should be added as well

4 Conclusion

Guildford Castle may not be one of the great castles of England but it has much more to offer than most people realise. As an example of a Norman great tower, it is unique for miles around and the insertion of a floor in 2003-4 has made it more usable. Its history can be linked to national events, it has stories of its own and it can be used to illustrate the role and workings of early medieval castles. As the Council is considering the development of the museum and its links to the castle I feel this is a good time to assess the development of the visitor experience to the castle. The costs of improving displays and their impact on visitor flow was never in the scope of this work but comparison with other castles suggests our castle could be more of an attraction without harming the charm that makes the Castle Grounds so special.



5 Appendix 1 - Guildford and the forgotten invasion of 1216

This is an account of a little-known invasion of England by the French in 1216. In his book “Blood Cries Afar”, Sean McGlynn has told this story properly for the first time and it features several references to Guildford. I retell the story below and believe it would be a great promotional tool for the museum and castle

In 1940 Guildford children sat on Pewley Downs watching German bombers flying over on their way to London. These children would have been aware that they were part of an epic struggle that would shape the future of their country. Perhaps they thought of similar struggles they had read about at school – the Spanish Armada or Alfred defeating the Vikings. There is one struggle, however, they would have probably not thought about.

In 1216 children playing on Pewley Downs (or the hills overlooking Guildford Castle) would have seen another invader. This time it came on horseback. Heavy horses carry French knights and lighter horses pulling baggage trains would have passed across the Downs and descended into Guildford. As in 1940 these children would be spared the worst of the war that was about to unfold but were nevertheless at the centre of an epic struggle that would shape the future of their homeland.

This is the story of the forgotten invasion of 1216.

800 years ago, dastardly King John, the villain of the Robin Hood stories, was on the throne of England. This was the man, who according to a local Guildford legend, chased a young woman into Silent Pool where she drowned. These tales may be fictional but the image of John they portrayed was deserved. He took away lands and castles from barons, removed their inheritance and left people to die in dungeons. By 1215 the barons were in revolt and forced him to meet with them in London in January that year. It was the prelude to civil war and following the meeting John came to Guildford for a couple nights on his way to Winchester. By June he had been forced to accept the terms of a peace treaty – Magna Carta.

Few expected John to obey the terms of Magna Carta and true to form John restarted the war. This time he had the upper hand and in a panic the barons invited Louis, the son of the French monarch to invade.

It was 150 years since William the Conqueror had invaded but this time there was to be no battle of Hastings. John was near the coast when Louis invaded in late May and he went into full retreat. The



south east of England in medieval times was even more densely wooded than it is today and there were limited routes for an army to use. The North Downs was therefore an ideal highway. A few days after the invasion people of Guildford would have been aware that something was up as John passed through the town with his retinue of knights. Louis headed for London which was controlled by the barons. There he received a rapturous welcome. Twelve of the country's twenty bishops welcomed him as defender of the church. There was a procession to St Paul's where the Mayor of London greeted him. Louis swore an oath on the gospels and promised to be protector of the laws and rights of his new vassals. He behaved very much like the rightful king.

Louis did not stop long and on 6th June he led his army south whilst another went into Essex. He arrived in Reigate the following day where he found the castle abandoned. Then he moved to Guildford on 8th June which surrendered immediately. Farnham initially closed its gates but then it too surrendered as the French started to lay siege. It was not until Louis reached Winchester on 14th June that he met with any resistance. It fell after a ten-day siege.

NOTE: The Chronicler of Waverley Abbey wrote: "Louis, the eldest son of the King of the French, came in summer to England and took the castle of Reigate, on... the 8th June and the morrow (Thursday) the castle of Guildford and the castle of Farnham the day after".⁹²

Across the summer Louis strengthened his position and by July about a third of the country was under his control. He wrote to Alexander of Scotland who assisted by invading from the north whilst Louis's armies pursued John into the midlands. England was crumbling into Louis's hands and in October he probably could not believe his luck when John was suddenly taken ill and died.

For the second time in 150 years an army from France had successfully invaded England. Everything was going Louis's way and by now two thirds of the barons were on his side. His new enemy, John's successor, was a nine-year-old boy whose only protection was a very old knight, long passed retirement age. This knight had spent a lifetime manoeuvring his way to the top of the political establishment. There was very little incentive for him to risk his estates and the lives of his family on a hopeless cause.

But this knight was William the Marshall, the greatest knight of his age. He had fought alongside Henry II and ridden with Richard the Lionheart on crusade. He had a reputation for utmost loyalty. Having served three kings, he chose to risk everything serving one more. The fight for England was on.

Louis returned to France to raise more money. Meanwhile Henry was crowned at Gloucester Cathedral. In a highly significant move Magna Carta was then reissued. It was a bold idea that transformed the



young Henry from the son of an oppressor to the champion of baron's rights. It was this, and subsequent reissues of Magna Carta, that would turn it from a failed legal document into a symbol of English liberties. It worked, and some barons started to drift back. But there was still a French invader to defeat.

On 26th April 1217 the people of Guildford would have witnessed two armies on their doorstep. Louis returned from France and marched across the North Downs. At Guildford he paused and was joined by a second army from London. They then marched west. Many battles and sieges lay ahead but the tide started to turn. There are castles all over England which can tell the story of their involvement in the war of 1216/17. The first decisive defeat for Louis was at the battle of Lincoln. It was not a knockout blow. Louis still held London and organised a French fleet to bring reinforcements up the English coast.

On 16th August 1217 the people of Guildford once again woke to the news that an army was coming. This army had William the Marshall at its head and it was on its way to the coast. At the battle of Sandwich, the French were decisively defeated in a gruesome sea battle. Louis was isolated, paid off and sent back to France. The boy, William the Marshall had protected was crowned Henry III in Westminster Abbey.

William the Marshall did not live long to enjoy his retirement. He died two years later and at his funeral in the Temple Church, London the Archbishop of Canterbury described him as the "greatest knight there ever was". His effigy remains in the church having survived a World War II bomb which gutted the church.

The significance of this story has possibly been overlooked by historians. Some suggest the barons would never have accepted Louis as king and regard this as a footnote in history. But Henry III's reign was to be an important one for English democracy. Had William the Marshall abandoned him, had Louis murdered the boy then the story of English democracy might have been very different. As for Guildford, it may well have played only a bit part in an epic story, but it too would have been affected if Henry had not lived. He was a great builder and spent a lot of money on Guildford Castle, turning it into a small palace. He stayed here many times and it was here that his grandson, Prince Henry died. His wife founded the Friary in Guildford in memory of her grandchild. Today Guildford Castle stands as a proud ruin but as we remember the French invasion of 1216 perhaps we will imagine it and appreciate it in new ways.

6 Appendix 2 – The Story of Adam Gurdon

This account of the story of Adam Gurdon was written by the Canadian journalist and novelist, Thomas B. Costain. It is the most detailed account I can find of the Gurdon story. It is very fanciful but entertaining. It was published in 1952 as part of his non-fiction



history of England in the middle ages. Drawing on medieval stories from ballads and chronicles he filled his books with all the classic stories from this period. I have included this because it is a story about Guildford Castle told with great enthusiasm even if Costain does take historical liberties and make mistakes. Alton is suddenly in Berkshire. Guildford Castle was not given to Eleanor until after Henry III's death. Henry does not appear in the story even though he would still have been alive, and I don't think there is any evidence that the palace was improved for Eleanor, Edward's Princess, even though the improvements quoted are probably true.

From: The Pageant of England 1216-72 - The Magnificent Century by Thomas B. Costain (Doubleday, 1951), p328-9 (in 1973 edition)

In the meantime, Edward was taking energetic measures to restore order in the country. He sent Henry of Almaine to subdue what disaffection was left in the North and gave command in the Marches to Mortimer. He himself took the southern shires in hand. At Whitsuntide he defeated Adam Gurdon's army in Alton Wood and in doing so provided the annals of English chivalry with one of the most pleasing and colourful stories. In the course of the battle he encountered the leader of the band, and the two tall men decided to fight it out single-handed. As in the case of Fitz-James and Roderick Dhu in Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, the mighty champions clashed with broadsword in one hand, shield on arm, the woods ringing with the sound of clashing steel. They seem to have been evenly matched, but in the end the youth of Edward told, and the result was the same as in the other contest; the commoner went down to defeat.

Edward treated Adam Gurdon with great generosity. He saw to it that his opponent's wounds were bound up and then rode by his side from the shade of the Berkshire woods into the higher country of the chalk Downs. Here, standing high above the market town of the same name, was the castle of Guildford which had been given to Princess Eleanor as her official residence. It was Guildford Castle which Henry had order to be prepared for the beautiful Spanish bride, specifying that her chamber was to have "glazed windows, a raised hearth, a chimney, a wardrobe, and an adjoining oratory". When the prince and his company came within sight of the place it was apparent that something was afoot. Flags in profusion flew above the battlements, and the sound of trumpets greeted them as they rode in under the portcullis. Inside it was found that the stables were filled with horses and that smoke was pouring from all the kitchen chimneys, as evidence that much food was being prepared. Edward realised from the buff-and-blue costumes of the armed men in the outer bailey that his mother had honoured him with a visit, for these were the colours of Queen Eleanor's Brabanters.

The young chatelaine was frightened when she found that her blond giant of a husband had returned in a badly battered condition, Edward



reassured her and led the way to the Great Hall give orders for Adam Gurdon to follow. There he told the story of the Homeric conflict, blow by blow, and at the finish the two Eleanors agreed that so gallant an opponent should be given his pardon.

Adam Gurdon was not only pardoned but was taken into the service of the prince, being given a post in Windsor. He is mentioned as fighting under Edward in the Welsh wars in succeeding years. The two tall men remained the best of friends thereafter.

7 Appendix 3 – Castle Model

Description of the Castle Model by Matthew Alexander

(Published in Friends of Museum Newsletter around 2004 – please check original as some words changed in scanning process)

When the decision was taken to mount a display on the castle's history in the keep, I suggested that its centrepiece should -be a model representing the castle at the end of the 13th century. Some records survive which, taken together with accounts of archaeological digs and chance discoveries, provide enough evidence on which to base a reasonable conjecture as to how it might have looked.

It was clear that Guildford castle had an unusual layout. It stands on a steeply- sloping site and was very vulnerable to attack from Pewley Hill. This prompt me to represent the castle Field as an outer bailey with a rampart and ditch. A section of such a ditch was noted at South Hill, but no masonry or foundations are known- consequently, I showed these outer defences as timber - an early type which may have lasted into the 13th century. They formed a triangle, its point thrusting directly uphill, forming an effective defence. The inner bailey would have been enclosed with stone walls - I based their crenulations or battlements on those of the first phase of the keep.

Nearly every castle in the land is entered first by a gate into the outer bailey, then by another to the inner bailey. This was hard to picture at Guildford, but an outer gate opposite Tunsgate with an inner just a few yards beyond it was just possible. The keep and the other buildings on the motte were relatively straightforward, but the access to them and the line of the route was not. The alignments chosen at least made sense as workable defences and some 18th century illustrations tend to confirm them.

The appearance of the buildings inside the inner bailey was based on the reconstructions of Clarendon in Wiltshire, roughly contemporary with the palace at Guildford. The positions of the palace -buildings relative to each other was reasonably certain. If the Great Hall stood



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on the site of the Chestnuts and its neighbouring house, and if the ruins behind the Museum were those of the King's Great chamber, then I could be fairly confident of the general position of the rest. The excavations of the 1990s have provided detailed plans of some structures and had identified the Lord Edward's chamber.

Representing the 13th century extension to the castle posed problems of gradient and access - and must have done at the time what emerged was a pattern of courtyards and gardens between groups of buildings, less cramped and with more open space than I had imagined. It seemed like a small village within the outer walls, with chapels and buildings with windows in the Early English style. At the very least I hope people will now cease to describe the keep (or The Great Tower as we now call it) as "the castle" and realise that Guildford castle was once one of the grandest royal residences in the kingdom.

Matthew Alexander





8 Sites Visited

- Farnham Castle, Surrey
- Totnes Castle, Devon
- Lincoln Castle, Lincolnshire
- Peveril Castle, Peak District
- Salisbury Cathedral

9 Sources

Abbrev:	Source
Pounds:	The Medieval Castle in England and Wales – A Social and Political History by N.J.G Pounds (CUP, 1990)
Official Guide:	Guildford Castle: Official Guide
Royal Complex:	A Medieval Royal Complex at Guildford – Excavations at the Castle and Palace by Rob Poulton (SyAS, 2005)
Poulton	The Royal Castle and Palace by Rob Poulton (Surrey County Council A4 pamphlet)
Early History:	“With ramparts crown’d” - The early history of Guildford Castle by Mary Alexander (Guildford Museum, 2006)
EdIIblogspot	Website devoted to Edward II. Provides useful information and references published sources http://edwardthesecond.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/eleanor-of-provence-and-her-children.html
Howell	Eleanor of Provence: Queenship in Thirteenth Century England by Margaret Howell, (Blackwell Publishing, 2001)
Wade-Labarge	Margaret Wade-Labarge, <i>Mistress, Maids and Men: Baronial Life in the Thirteenth Century</i> , Phoenix Books, 2003 (Originally published in 1965)
Morris	Marc Morris, <i>A Great and Terrible King: Edward I and the Forging of Britain</i> , Hutchinson/Random House, 2008
Costain	The Pageant of England 1216-72 - The Magnificent Century by Thomas B. Costain (Doubleday, 1951), p328-9 (in 1973 edition)



10 Notes and References

- ¹ Early History, pix
- ² “With ramparts crown’d” - The early history of Guildford Castle by Mary Alexander (Guildford Museum, 2006)
- ³ Royal Complex, preface
- ⁴ Visitor figures were provided anecdotally by Jill Draper, former Heritage Officer
- ⁵ Based on discussion with Mary Alexander. No evidence at bowling green not mentioned until 17th century but seems very likely
- ⁶ Early History
- ⁷ SyAS Bulletin 464 (<https://www.surreyarchaeology.org.uk/sites/default/files/SAS464.pdf>)
- ⁸ Date kindly provide by Mary Alexander
- ⁹ Information kindly provide by Mary Alexander
- ¹⁰ Royal Complex, p135
- ¹¹ Early History, p15 – see comment at top of page. Not religious house in area before c1275
- ¹² Royal Complex, p8 – Pipe roll 1186-7 lists payments “spent in preparing the king’s lodging at Guildford for Christmas”
- ¹³ Royal Complex, p10
- ¹⁴ Royal Complex, p10
- ¹⁵ Royal Complex, p141
- ¹⁶ Royal Complex, p5
- ¹⁷ Royal Complex, p8
- ¹⁸ Early History, p32
- ¹⁹ Royal Complex, p10 for all references to Henry III visits
- ²⁰ Royal Complex, p136
- ²¹ Royal Complex, p10
- ²² Royal Complex, p12
- ²³ Royal Complex, p10
- ²⁴ Royal Complex, p10
- ²⁵ Howell, p288
- ²⁶ Royal Complex, p12
- ²⁷ Howell, p289
- ²⁸ EdIIBlogSpot, Howell, p300
- ²⁹ Guildford Castle Official Guide, p19
- ³⁰ Royal Complex, p148
- ³¹ Royal Complex, p12
- ³² Royal Complex, p12
- ³³ Royal Complex, p12
- ³⁴ Royal Complex, p148
- ³⁵ Royal Complex, p149
- ³⁶ Early History, p32
- ³⁷ Information kindly provided by Mary Alexander
- ³⁸ Early History, p32
- ³⁹ Early History, p32-3
- ⁴⁰ Early History, p33
- ⁴¹ Early History, p33
- ⁴² Mary Alexander advises that there is an earlier date of about 1624. See Mary for details
- ⁴³ Information about Holy Trinity provided by Mary Alexander. I need to provide precise reference
- ⁴⁴ Early History
- ⁴⁵ Pounds, p12
- ⁴⁶ Pounds, p17
- ⁴⁷ Pounds, p20
- ⁴⁸ Early History. Mary pointed out that the military position was not relevant in the 11th/12th c in conversation



- ⁴⁹ Early History
⁵⁰ Early History, p33
⁵¹ See Appendix for article on 1216 invasion.
⁵² Royal Complex, p141
⁵³ There are many accounts of this period. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30849472>
⁵⁴ Royal Complex, pxi
⁵⁵ Royal Complex, p10
⁵⁶ Wade-Labarge, p.25
⁵⁷ Royal Palace, p145
⁵⁸ Royal Palace, p145
⁵⁹ The remaining information in this section comes from EdlIblogspot. Published works referenced in the website and quoted.
⁶⁰ Wade-Labarge, p.25
⁶¹ Morris, p6
⁶² This information is from EdlIblogspot. . Published works referenced in the website and quoted.
⁶³ Howell, p288
⁶⁴ Howell, p.289
⁶⁵ Wade-Labarge, p.26
⁶⁶ Howell, p.289
⁶⁷ Poulton, p10
⁶⁸ Howell, p.289
⁶⁹ I have no current reference – see Surrey Archaeological Society library
⁷⁰ Display at Guildford Museum
⁷¹ Royal Complex, pxiii; Poulton, preface opposite p1
⁷² Pounds, p20
⁷³ Pounds, p21-22
⁷⁴ Pounds, p58
⁷⁵ Pounds, p58
⁷⁶ Pounds, p87
⁷⁷ Pounds, p122
⁷⁸ Pounds, p124
⁷⁹ Pounds, p92
⁸⁰ Pounds, p99
⁸¹ Pounds, p99
⁸² Pounds, p6
⁸³ Pounds, p7, see footnote ref 27
⁸⁴ Pounds, p8
⁸⁵ Pounds, (page to be added)
⁸⁶ Pounds, p44
⁸⁷ Official Guide, p14
⁸⁸ Information kindly provided by Mary Alexander
⁸⁹ Royal Complex, p12
⁹⁰ Mary Alexander thinks that the reference probably does refer to this chapel
⁹¹ Royal Complex, p149
⁹² Source: Lawrence – a Descriptive View of Guildford (1845) and quoted in E.R Chamberlin: Guildford – a Biography