

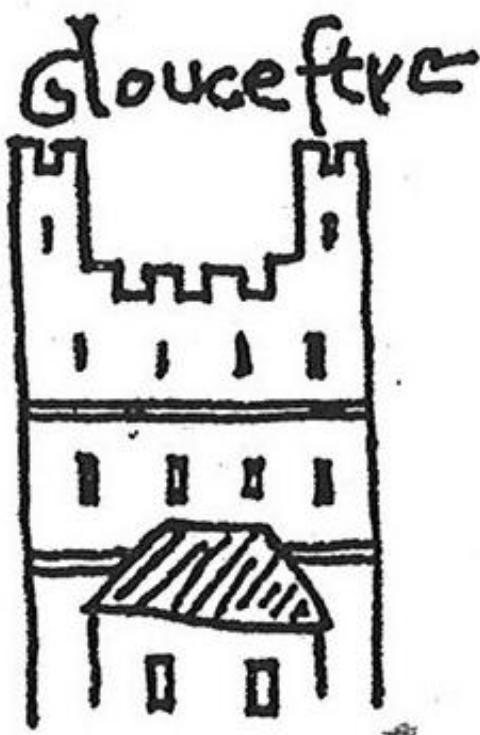


Take One Castle

Gloucester Castle

A castle was built at Gloucester soon after the Norman Conquest. The man responsible was William FitzOsbern who ordered that 16 houses were to be demolished to make way for it. This first castle - probably a ringwork with timber palisade - was seemingly located inside the walls in the south-west corner of the town. It was placed in the custody of the sheriff of the county, Roger of Gloucester and by the late 1000s, was strengthened and enlarged by William II who demolished 8 more houses, adding a motte (probably with tower and wall) that was seemingly built over the old Roman wall.

Sometime before 1112, Walter of Gloucester had started work on a new castle to the west of the first, overlooking the Severn. This castle seems to have been built of stone from the start and was probably completed by 1143, when the original castle was referred to as 'the old castle'. The new castle reached its greatest extent by the mid-1200s by which time it covered over 3 hectares (8 acres) and had excellent defences. Outside of the curtain walls, the castle was defended on the west by the Severn and on the other sides by moats, mostly a double line of ditches. The curtain wall itself included towers and turrets with a tall tower over the inner gatehouse on the north-east.



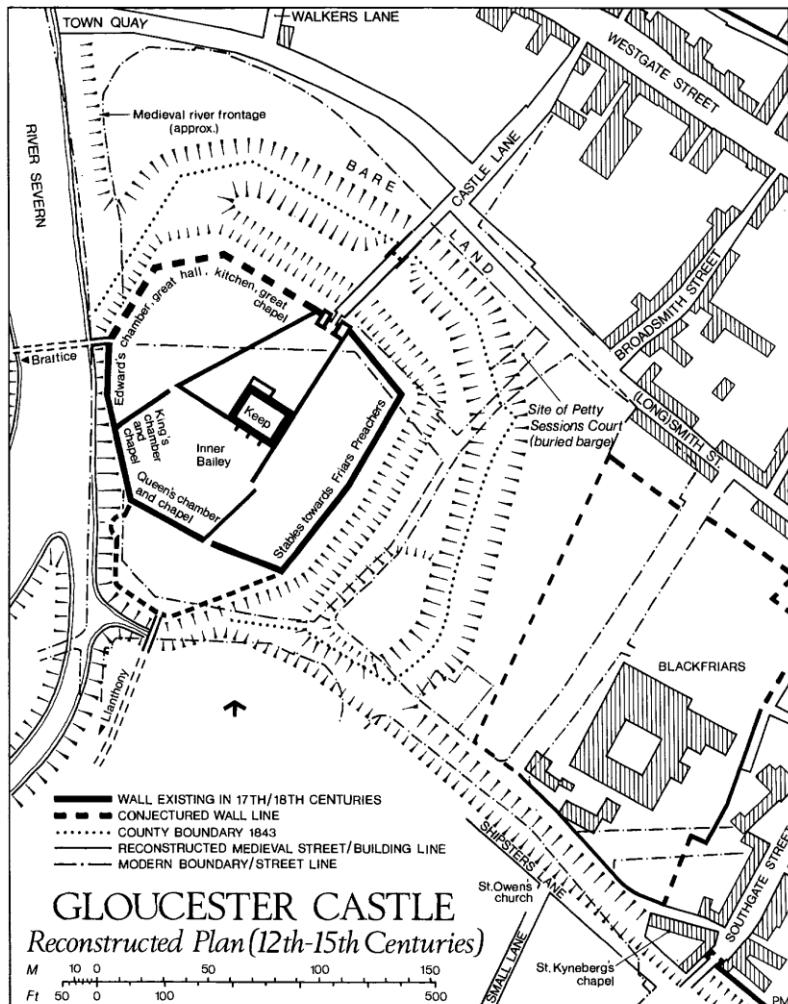
The only known drawing of Gloucester Castle; a sketch of the Keep made in the 1300s (Courtesy British Museum MS. Royal 13A. iii, f.82)

Within the curtain wall were four baileys, a vineyard and herb garden. The castle's central feature was a massive square keep, evidently built by Walter of Gloucester in the early 1100s although it was increased in height in the 1230s. A chapel adjoined the keep while other buildings (mostly built for Henry III and his family), included the king's and the queen's chambers (possibly in separate blocks), each with chapels, a great hall, and a kitchen.



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Because nothing of the castle now survives above ground and no systematic archaeological investigations have ever been able to be undertaken, the exact locations of these structures are not known although all were apparently built around the curtain wall.



Location & conjectural plan of Gloucester Castle by P. Moss.

Courtesy *Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*

The castle had three entrances; the main entrance which faced north-east and had inner and outer gatehouses with drawbridges over the moats. On the west was a gateway on a bridge across the Severn, defended at its western end by a brattice fortification. The final gate was on the southern side, with drawbridge that led onto a road heading south towards Llanthony Priory.

Few additions were made to the castle after the 1260s but the defences were kept in full repair until well into the mid-1400s. It was in Richard III's reign that the castle ceased to be maintained as a military fort, its use continuing only as the county gaol. Some of the buildings inside the castle were demolished in 1489 and the stone used for road repairs. Piecemeal demolition continued and in 1529 the city corporation was taking stone, although they had to leave enough for repairs to the gaol.



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By the mid 17th century all the buildings around the curtain wall had been demolished, leaving only the keep (used as the gaol) and the main gatehouse standing. Most of the curtain wall was removed in the 1630s and 1640s, the stone being sold for road works or burnt in a limekiln built at the site. By 1787, the keep was considered unsuitable for use as a goal and so the once



John Speed's Map of Gloucester, c1610. The castle is shown as 'P'.

Gloucestershire Archives SR85/1610Speed(10)GS

mighty tower began to be demolished and work on building a new prison commenced. This was finished in 1791 by which time nothing of the castle could be seen.



Gloucester Borough seal, 1398; with image of Gloucester Castle.

The text on the rim reads: *Sigillum
Burgensium de Gilda Mercatorium
Gloucestrie* which loosely translates as
'Seal of the Burgesses Guild of Merchants
Gloucester'