



Discover Portencross Castle

Medieval Castle Timeline

Pre-Medieval Times

Castles as we now know and recognise them were not around before Norman times, although various fortifications were to be found across the world. People made look-out towers from wood and built these towers at good vantage points at the tops of hills. Other forms of defence in these times included sturdy walls. People built these walls round cities to stop invasions. The practice of building walls as methods of defence started in Syria and Egypt. The Romans used forts as a main form of defence.

1066 and beyond

Following the Battle of Hastings in 1066, William the Conqueror built around 40 castles in England. Successive monarchs continued doing the same and very soon hundreds of castles appeared all across the country. People built castles in Norman times from timber and although this was a good defence against attacks, it could not compete against fire. Invaders quickly realised that fire made timber construction useless. Later, people built moats around castles and stopped building timber castles around the middle of the 1100s.

1140 onwards

People built stronger and more effective castles from this time on out of stone. Stone made castles very cold to live in, but very effective against an attack. Castles had many sides to provide vantage points to see the enemy. Orford Castle in England is the only known 5-sided castle. At this time also, archers defended the castle and with more sides there were fewer blind spots. Circular towers also had no blind spots. Also around this time, people made the castles with higher walls and normally on a hill or near a river. Many castles had to have outer walls and moats if there was no hill close by.

From 1270

Many castles from the earlier medieval period were useless under a prolonged siege. A well-planned attack could mean that the inhabitants were virtually prisoners without the necessary provisions to last any great length of time. Some of the older castles also did not have a water supply. This was one of the main reasons people built concentric castles. Concentric castles sometimes had more than four lines of defence which dramatically improved their chance of survival.

Castles were often extended like a modern house and developed over time. Look at the three phases of Portencross Castle and see how it has changed. It has lost its 'barmkin' - the defensive wall in phase 1, and gained an extra storey.

