

Ogmore Castle

MID GLAMORGAN

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HISTORY

THE siting of Ogmore Castle is of peculiar interest. As the administrative centre of a large lordship the castle must have been most inconveniently situated, because it stands at the extreme western end of the area and six miles distant from the eastern boundary. Attendance at the manorial courts must have been a heavy burden upon the tenants. It is quite isolated and apart from the centres of population. Tactically also its situation is none too strong. Lying beneath the bluff of Ogmore Down it might be attacked suddenly by a force assembled and concealed behind the hill, but as that would be within the lordship the danger was probably considered to be negligible.

The fact is that the site was chosen for considerations of strategy. A strategic scheme can be read upon the map, and it is evident that the early castles in the Vale of Glamorgan were so placed as to guard against attack from without, and not in the least to meet any danger of a rising within, which the Normans did not fear and which in fact never took place. The main object was to guard the lines of approach and especially the river crossings. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the mid-Glamorgan region. It is possible that the tide of conquest halted for a time on the line of the Ormore, but in any case it was guarded with extreme care. The northern fords and the ancient ridgeways leading from the Welsh highland were controlled by the castle of Coity; the best ford on the river, upon which all the old trackways converge, was guarded by the bridge-head (or more accurately "ford-head") of Newcastle, erected on the summit of a cliff beyond the stream; and Ogmore watched the lower fords.

The castle overlooks an important ford on the Ewenny river, also traversed by the famous stepping stones, and the way leads to

a ford over the Ogmore at Merthyr Mawr a short distance beyond. Going upstream from this ford the Ewenny is bordered by marshes for many miles, and the only other possible crossing place is at Ewenny Bridge, used by the east and west traffic from Roman times onward.

The three castles form the Ogmore triangle, and about the year 1200 the scheme was completed and formed into a quadrilateral by the conversion of the priory of Ewenny into a heavily fortified base, a curious and unexplained anomaly. In the rear of this fortified concentration the Vale of Glamorgan is bare of early castles until the line of the little river Thaw is reached. There is much in all this to suggest a strategic scheme imposed by a master mind.

In this period Ogmore was held by the family of de Londres. William, the first recorded member, was settled here as early as 1116 and it was probably he who built the first castle on the site, a structure with earth banks and ditches, of which the plan still survives. Ten years later Maurice de Londres had succeeded his father. Before the end of Henry I's reign his possessions had been increased by a grant of the Commote of Kidwelly, where a castle had already been erected by the previous holder, Roger, Bishop of Salisbury. These lands descended to Thomas de Londres, the last male representative of the family, whose daughter and heiress, Hawise, brought them to her husband, Walter de Braose, on their marriage in July, 1223. He died some ten years later, and his widow, in 1244, married Patrick de Chaworth. The latter was killed in battle with the Welsh in 1258. About 1270 his son, Payn de Chaworth, began to rebuild the castle of Kidwelly. On his death in 1278 he was succeeded by his brother Patrick, who died four years later, leaving his possessions to an infant daughter, Matilda. In 1292 the marriage of the ten-year-old heiress was granted to Edmund, Earl of Lancaster, whose second son Henry, married her in 1297. The forfeiture and execution of Thomas of Lancaster in 1322 eventually brought the junior branch of the family to the Earldom, and Ogmore became a part of the Honour of Lancaster. The defeat of the Welsh rendered many of the castles of Glamorgan unnecessary, and, although the service of castle-guard was still being exacted, there is no trace of any rebuilding during the later years of the Middle Ages, when the importance of Ogmore seems to have been restricted to its function as the site of the court and prison of the lordship. The connection between Ogmore and the Duchy of Lancaster has continued till the present time; in 1928 the ruins were placed under the guardianship of the Commissioners of Works (now Department of the Environment), who have carried out their conservation. The Duchy has also placed the adjacent stepping stones in the Department's protection.

PERIODS OF CONSTRUCTION

A close examination of the masonry shows that the castle is of several dates. The oldest structure is the Keep, which is built of large irregular boulders set in a poor, brown mortar. The quoins at the base of the angles are roughly dressed, but ashlar is used for the upper part and for the windows, doors and fireplace of the first floor. The heavy cubical capitals which support the chimney breast at this level indicate a date near the beginning of the twelfth century, though it is doubtful whether the fine jointing of the internal ashlar can be as early as the first castle of William de Londres.

The later part of the twelfth century saw the erection of the detached building which occupies the eastern side of the inner ward. The more regular character of the masonry, which is roughly coursed, and the absence of the boulders so frequent at the base of the Keep, distinguish this from the earlier work. The curtain and the Hall in the north-east angle of the inner ward were built at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The more carefully coursed masonry and the use of a harder white mortar are characteristic of this work, and their occurrence in the detached offices on the south side of the courtyard suggests that they may also be contemporary. The ashlar of these buildings is more finely dressed than that of the earlier periods and the rounded angles and stops at the base of the jambs of the Hall door are characteristic of thirteenth-century work. But the absence of towers flanking the curtain and the continued use of diagonal tooling indicate a date soon after 1200.

After the completion of this refortification the buildings at Ogmores underwent only slight alterations and additions. The two smaller chambers flanking the entrance to the cellar, the upper floor of that building, and the conversion of the eastern postern into a fireplace, together with the contemporary wall forming the western side of this room, all appear to be medieval. The rectangular building on the north side of the outer ward is of fourteenth-century date, and is traditionally held to have been a Court House.

DESCRIPTION

The castle consists of an inner and outer ward, each surrounded by a moat except on the north, where the river formed a sufficient defence.

OUTER WARD

The outer ward lies on the west. It was defended by an earthen bank 5 feet high. This is an original feature, which was never

replaced by a stone curtain. Excavation has shown that the surface of the bank was lightly revetted with flat stones. The entrance is on the south-west, where two irregular areas of cobbles forming the foundations of the wooden outer gate were found. In spite of modern alterations the ditch protecting the south and west sides of this ward is still 8 feet deep.

On the north side of the inner court lies the later medieval Court House, a rectangular building of one storey. The main door is near the centre of the south wall. The position of the windows is still visible, but little original detail remains. The Court House is probably of fourteenth-century date. The western end of the site had been previously occupied, first by another building, the foundations of which have been uncovered, and later by a circular limekiln. Part of the kiln was destroyed when the Court House was built. The remainder, which was then filled in, has now been brought to light again. The structure probably dates from the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century.

INNER WARD

The inner ward covers about one-third of an acre and is enclosed on three sides by a moat about 50 feet wide and 20 feet deep. The sides are cut through a soft subsoil, but near the bottom outcrops of natural rock begin to appear. The moat is normally dry except at spring tides, when it is filled to a depth of 2 or 3 feet.

The main entrance is through the outer ward, crossing the moat by a wooden bridge. The two abutments are of different construction. That on the west is badly built and seems to be relatively modern, but the eastern structure, with its splayed base and the steps leading down to the hollow interior, suggests a drawbridge pit and is probably contemporary with the thirteenth-century gateway.

The inner ward was originally protected by an earthen rampart, the base of which can be traced along the southern half of the enclosure. It can best be seen on the south-west and south-east sides, where it is still about 3 feet high. Originally it must have been considerably higher, and the accumulation of soil covering the lower part of the courtyard was probably the result of a partial levelling when the stone curtain was built.

KEEP

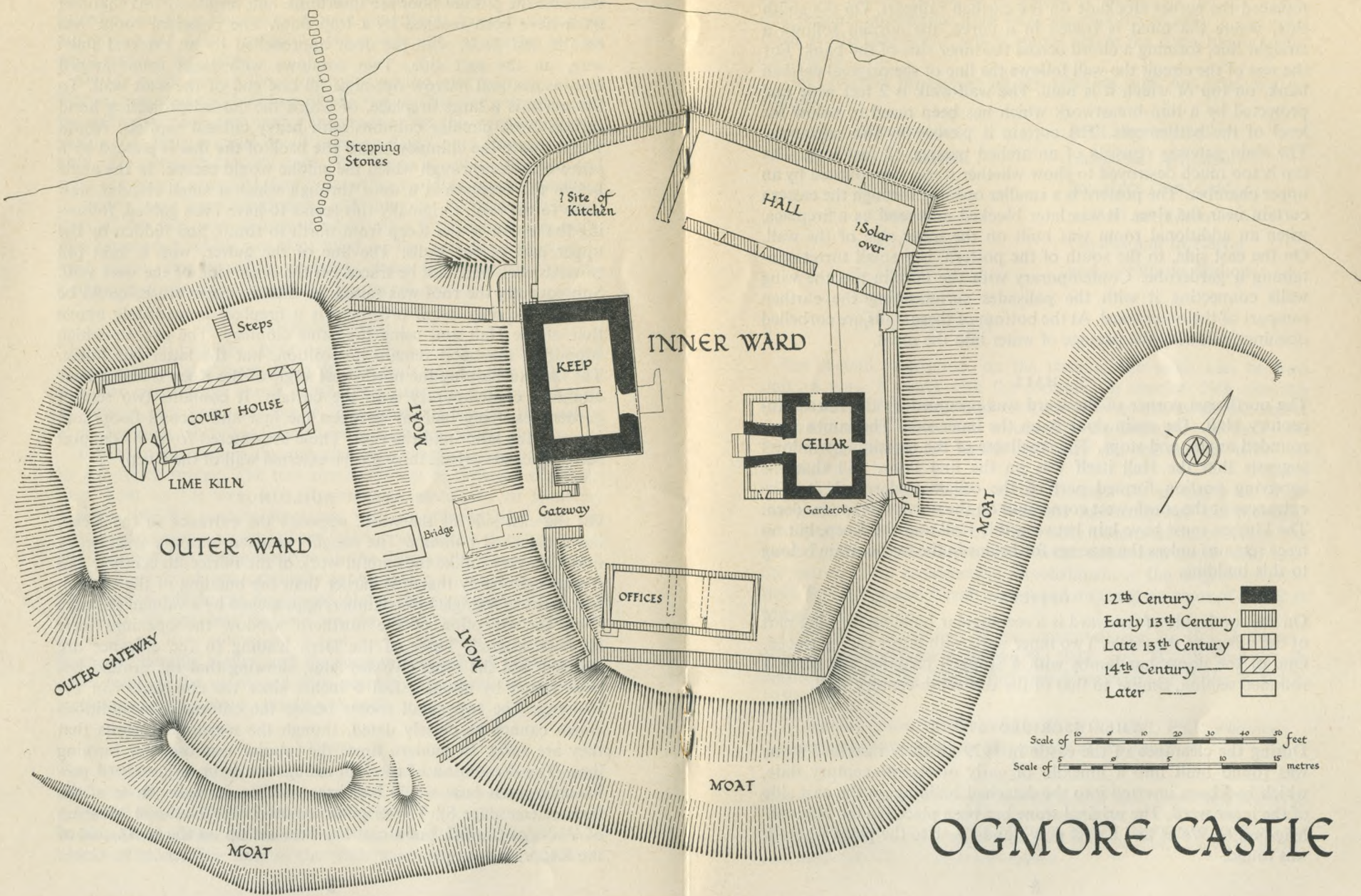
The Keep is a rectangular building of three storeys, occupying the centre of the west side of the courtyard. The west wall stands to a height of about 40 feet, but the others have fallen. The masonry is composed of large undressed boulders mixed with roughly-hewn blocks of stone. The base of the walls has a slight external batter,

above which they are 6 feet thick. The ground floor was occupied by three unlighted cellars. The present entrance to and the partition walls on the ground floor are insertions, and originally this chamber must have been reached by a trap door. The principal room was on the first floor, with the door approached by an external stairway, on the east side. Two windows with large round-arched embrasures and narrow openings fill one end of the west wall. To the north is a large fireplace, of which the curved projecting hood springs from circular columns with heavy cubical capitals. About 1 foot above the chimney breast the back of the flue is pierced by a series of holes through which the smoke would escape. In the angle beside the fireplace is a door through which a small circular stair leads to the roof. Originally this seems to have been gabled, following the length of the Keep from north to south, and hidden by the upper part of the walls. The line of the gutter, with a light fall towards each end, can be traced on the inner side of the west wall. Subsequently the roof was raised, so that an upper storey could be added. The only detail preserved is a fireplace immediately above that of the Hall and using the same chimney. The corbels which supported the hood remain in position, but the latter has fallen. The annexe clasping the north-west angle of the Keep is also a later addition, contemporary with the curtain. It contains two sets of garderobes, lying halfway between the first and second floors and between the latter and the roof. These are entered from the circular stairs by doors driven through the external wall of the Keep.

EASTERN BUILDINGS

On the east side of the ward, opposite the entrance to the Keep, lies a detached building. The roughly coursed masonry with heavy quoins is very unlike the careful work of the thirteenth century, and it seems probably that it is earlier than the building of the curtain. It consists of a single low chamber, approached by a vaulted passage. With the exception of the northern window the openings have all been altered. Three of the steps leading to the entrance are original, but the other five are later, showing that the ground has been raised by about 2 feet 6 inches since the completion of the building. The two small rooms beside the entrance are additions which cannot be closely dated, though the masonry suggests that they are early. In modern times the interior was used for burning lime. The demolition of the kiln brought to light an inscribed pre-Norman cross base which had been used to form the floor of the furnace (*see* page 8). The original is now in the National Museum of Wales at Cardiff, but a cast has been set up on the north side of the Keep.

RIVER EWENNY



- 12th Century — [Solid black box]
- Early 13th Century [Vertical lines box]
- Late 13th Century [Horizontal lines box]
- 14th Century [Diagonal lines box]
- Later [White box]

Scale of 0 10 20 30 40 50 feet
Scale of 0 5 10 15 metres

OGMORE CASTLE

CURTAIN WALL

The whole of the inner ward is enclosed with a stone curtain, which replaced the earlier stockade on the earthen rampart. On the south side, where the moat is traced in a curve, the curtain follows a straight line, forming a chord across the inner side of the bank. For the rest of the circuit the wall follows the line of the original earthen bank, on top of which it is built. The wall-walk is 2 feet wide and protected by a thin breastwork which has been razed to below the level of the battlements. The curtain is pierced by two entrances. The main gateway consists of an arched passage 12 feet long. The top is too much destroyed to show whether it was surmounted by an upper chamber. The postern is a smaller opening through the eastern curtain near the river. It was later blocked and used as a fireplace, when an additional room was built on the inner side of the wall. On the east side, to the south of the postern, is a small turret containing a garderobe. Contemporary with the curtain are the wing walls connecting it with the palisades surmounting the earthen rampart of the outer ward. At the bottom of these walls are corbelled openings, allowing the passage of water into the moat.

HALL

The north-east corner of the ward was occupied by the thirteenth-century Hall. The main door is on the inner side. The jambs have rounded angles and stops. The smallness of the remaining windows suggests that the Hall itself was on the first floor, and that the surviving portion formed part of the cellars underneath it. The entrances at the south-west corner and on the north side are modern. The kitchen must have lain between this Hall and the Keep, but no trace remains unless the recesses for beams in the west curtain belong to this building.

OFFICES

On the south side of the ward is a rectangular building forming part of the offices of the castle. Two inner walls with doors can be traced. One of the doors has jambs with a stopped chamfer, the other a rounded section, similar to that of the thirteenth-century Hall.

THE INSCRIBED STONE

During the clearance of the castle in 1929 an early inscribed stone was found built into a limekiln of early nineteenth-century date, which had been inserted into the detached building on the east side of the inner ward. The original stone has been placed in the National Museum of Wales and a cast now stands near to the place where it was found.

The stone formed part of the shaft of a decorated cross of the eleventh century. There are Latin inscriptions on both faces of the shaft and narrow panels of interlaced ornament on the two edges. The original appearance must have been similar to that of the great cross at Merthyr Mawr, which stands across the river, barely half a mile away.

The principal inscription on the Ogmore shaft has been read as follows:

(SCIENDUM)	Be it known to all
EST (OMNIBUS)	(men) that Arthmail
QUOD DED(IT)	has given (this) field
ARTHMAIL	to God and (Saint)
AGRUM D(e)O	Glywys and to Nertat
(ET GLIGUIS	and to Ffili the Bishop
(ET NERTAT	
(ET FILI EP(iscop) I	

The second inscription, on the back of the shaft, can be read only in part. It starts with the formula: In nomine d(e)i sum(m)i (in the name of the most high God). Following this we should expect the name of the donor and a record of the setting up of the cross. Only a few letters are legible and they do not conflict with this suggestion.

The cross was doubtless set up to mark the property to which the grant referred. Sir Ifor Williams has compared the principal inscription with the text of other early donations recorded in the *Book of Llandaf*. St Glywys is a local saint, who must have been the patron of an ecclesiastical establishment in the neighbourhood. Both St Glywys and Nertat are named on the great cross of Merthyr Mawr.

For a fuller discussion of the inscription see Sir Ifor Williams's note in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 1932, pp. 232-38, and V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950), No. 255.

Acknowledgment is due to Mr H. J. Randall, FSA, who has contributed the first four paragraphs of the guide.

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