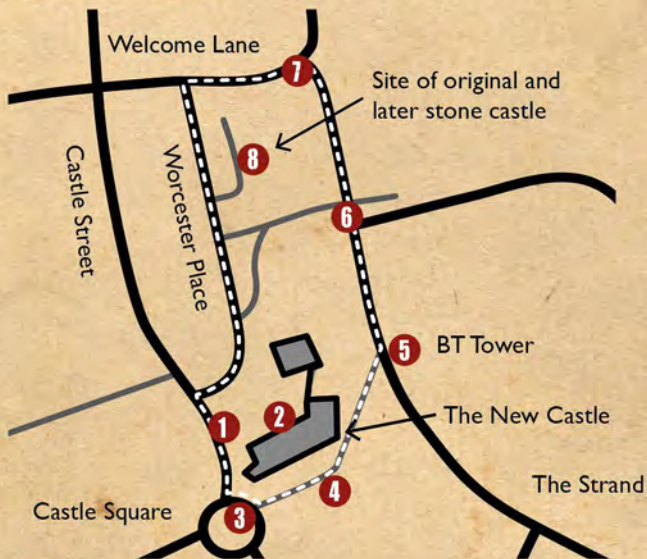


Swansea Castle Family Trail

Llwybr Castell Abertawe i'r Feulu



Play history detective on this short trail around Swansea Castle and find out who built it and why.



Start in the paved area in front of the castle.

Who wants to attack the castle?

You might feel safe here inside the courtyard, protected by the castle's thick walls, but this was a Norman castle and the Welsh princes of Deheubarth (who ruled west Wales) wanted to attack it. When William the Conqueror seized the English throne in 1066, he didn't have the right to rule Wales. The Welsh princes fought a 200-year rebellion against the invading Normans, attacking this and other castles built on the border of their territory.

You can see this jousting knight on a medieval floor tile at Swansea Museum. (City & County of Swansea: Swansea Museum Collection)



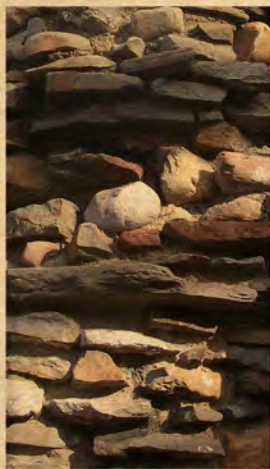
A castle for show-offs

After the first timber castle was burnt down by the Welsh a second castle was built in stone. These walls are part of the third or new castle, built in the late-13th century by two powerful and prosperous Norman Lords. Although William de Breos II and his son William de Breos III still needed to defend themselves against Welsh attack, they also wanted to show off their wealth and influence as Lords of Gower.



Wander around the courtyard and see how many of these things you can spot:

Stones from foreign lands



Can you find any smooth round stones to match these?

Most of the castle is built from flat or rectangular stones. These round pebbles were probably ships' ballast brought to Swansea by trading vessels. Some have come from as far away as Brittany and Scandinavia. Dumped on the river bank below the castle, they have been worn smooth by water, providing an ample supply of stones for building the castle.

Go to gaol!

Find the square tower where people were imprisoned. Why were they locked up here?

Well, well!

Find a circle shape in the paving. What do you think is underneath?

The castle didn't have taps or running water. It had to be carried inside from the castle well, which was under this stone.

The other stone shapes in the paving mark where staircases led up from the courtyard to doorways on the first floor. Stairs on the right led to the grand hall where the Lord of Gower entertained his guests. The stairway on the left led up to the family's private room, called the solar, where they could relax. They probably slept here too and enjoyed the comforts of an indoor loo!



Walk around the tower closest to the road and before turning left down Castle Lane, stand and look back at the castle.

We are watching you!

Can you spot two small round openings near the top of the tower?

Is someone pointing a gun at you? Gunners in the tower could take aim and fire down on you through these holes called gunports. You couldn't fire back at them though, could you? They were added to the castle during the Wars of the Roses, between 1440 and 1485.





Walk down Castle Lane.

We're still watching you!

Can you spot some narrow slits, called arrowloops, in the castle wall?

As well as letting light into the castle, they let archers aim their arrows at people like you, down here. Longbow archers could shoot 12 arrows a minute, travelling at 100 miles an hour and hitting targets 200m away. When the Welsh leader Owain Glyndŵr threatened to attack in 1402, 18 archers and 3 men-at-arms were stationed inside the castle to defend it.

Crowning glory

Look at the arches at the top of the castle. Once you could promenade along here, enjoying views across the bay.

This arcaded parapet was added in the 1330s by John, Lord Mowbray, some 50 years after the new castle was built. After defeat of the Welsh princes, this Lord of Gower was now less worried about attacks and more about copying the latest elegant fashions from Europe.



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Cross the road and stand with your back to the BT Tower, facing the castle.

Where has the river gone?

You would have needed wellies to walk along here 200 years ago. The drawing below shows how the river Tawe used to flow just below the castle. You are standing where ships and boats moored along the river bank. Today this street is called 'The Strand', an old word meaning 'shore'. Those smooth water-washed stones, used to build parts of the castle, would have been collected here. The river was diverted along the New Cut, an easier route to the sea, in 1845 and the old route of the river became a floating dock in 1852.



Detail from Bucks' print of 1745. (Private Collection)



Walk to the right under the footbridge.

The grassy slope to your left is where the original castle was built. In the picture it's the mound with trees on top of it. You can see how hard it would be to run up the slope, attacking the castle, whilst archers shot arrows at you!



At the junction turn left. Walk uphill a very short distance before turning left back towards the castle courtyard, passing a car park on the left.



Siege!

Cars now park where the first castle was built in 1106. The first Norman Lord of Gower, Henry de Beaumont, built a timber castle here to defend the Norman frontier from attack by the Welsh princes.

A ten-week siege in 1192 by the Prince of Deheubarth (The Lord Rhys) starved people inside the castle, although the castle was eventually saved. Even fiercer than his dad, Rhys Gryg destroyed the castle in 1217 and threw the Normans out of Gower. Destroyed by fire many times, the castle was eventually rebuilt in stone.



View of Swansea, based on Bucks' print of 1745. (City & County of Swansea: Glynn Vivian Art Gallery)

Download a short film about the castle's history at:
<http://www.swansea.gov.uk/swanseacastle>

Follow the story of medieval Swansea at:
<http://www.medievalswansea.ac.uk/>

With thanks to Swansea Museum, West Glamorgan Archives, City Witness project, the Swansea branch of the Historical Association, Swansea Your Story and Pastoral Audiobooks.
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