

# *A Brief History of Dudley Castle*

## *The First Castle*

In the aftermath of the Norman Conquest in 1066 the lands of the West Midlands remained in the hands of Earl Edwin of Mercia. In 1070, however, he was involved in an unsuccessful rebellion against King William. As a consequence he lost his life and his estates were granted to followers of William.

Ansculf of Picquigny benefited from this division and amongst the various grants of land he received was the manor of Sedgley, containing the estates at Dudley. Here he built a fortification of earth and timber, called a motte and bailey castle. This is first mentioned in the great survey commissioned by King William in 1086, called the Domesday Book. By that time the castle was held by Ansculf's son William fitz Ansculf.

## *The Second Castle*

During the 12th century the de Paganel family became lords of Dudley. Details of the manner in which the family obtained the barony are uncertain.

In the turbulent years of the civil war between Queen Matilda and King Stephen Dudley was held by Ralph de Paganel who sided with the Queen. Documentary evidence suggests that, by this time, the castle had been re-fortified in stone for this reason when King Stephen and his army approached Dudley Castle in 1138 they decided not to besiege it but instead devastated the 'town' of Dudley and the surrounding lands and stole as much livestock as he could get his hands on. Fragments of the earliest stone walls can be seen within the surviving masonry.

In 1153 peace was made between Stephen and Matilda and the future King Henry II, the son of Matilda, stayed at Dudley Castle with Gervaise de Paganel, the son of Ralph. Gervaise did not always get on with the king and was involved in a revolt in 1173. The king ordered that Dudley Castle be slighted, that is, partially demolished to make it militarily useless.

## *The De Somery Family*

The De Somery family gained the Dudley estates through the marriage of Hawyse de Paganel to John de Somery. On the death of Gervaise de Paganel, her son swiftly arranged his inheritance of the estate through a trip to Germany where King Richard 1st was imprisoned.

In 1210 he was succeeded by his son William who in turn was eventually succeeded by Roger de Somery. Documentary references for the Somery family are scarce for this period but information becomes more readily available during the barons revolt against King Henry III in 1264. It was because of Roger's support for the king that he was allowed to re-fortify the castle.

## *The De Sutton Family*

With the death of John de Somery in 1322 the extensive estates of the barony of Dudley entered into a period of confusion and disputed ownership. Only in 1327 did John de Sutton, after imprisonment in the Tower of London and the extraction of a forced disclaimer to the property, eventually inherit the estates of his wife Margaret de Somery.

The castle had a relatively calm succession of de Sutton lords thereafter, all called John. Only in 1432 with the succession of John de Sutton VI did the barony come to prominence for he had a long and successful career in the royal court. Amongst his many appointments was the lieutenancy of Ireland. In the wars of the Roses he supported the Lancastrian faction under Henry VI and was imprisoned at Ludlow Castle.

In 1455 he was captured at the battle of St Albans and again imprisoned. Despite his previous loyalty to the Lancastrian cause he was soon employed on diplomatic missions for the Yorkists acting as ambassador in negotiations with Burgundy and Brittany. John de Sutton VI survived the slaughter of these wars and died in 1487 after a long and most distinguished career.



Dudley Castle from the Market Place, 1350

## *John Dudley*

John de Sutton VII succeeded to the estate in 1532. Unfortunately he soon ran into serious financial difficulties and was forced to sell his titles to a member of the junior line of the family, namely John Dudley, the son of Edmund Dudley (economic advisor to Henry VII. His taxation of the aristocracy was unpopular and early in the reign of Henry VIII the nobles persuaded the king to execute him). The execution of his father did not deter John Dudley from entering the service of Henry VIII and he rapidly rose to prominence, obtaining the titles of Viscount Lisle and Earl of Warwick.



John Dudley. Duke of Northumberland

Despite these honours he seems to have gained most pleasure in acquiring possession of the castle at Dudley. He swiftly embarked on a programme of rebuilding. He was advised in his work by Sir William Sharrington and the result of their labours is now known as the Sharrington Range

On the death of Henry VIII in 1547 he was succeeded by his young son Edward VI and John Dudley became one of the council of Regency. Ultimately Dudley became the chief protector of the king with the post of Lord President of the Council and the title Duke of Northumberland. His reign was short and in 1553 Edward's death left the throne open to the accession of Henry's eldest daughter, Mary. If Mary came to the throne her strong adherence to the Roman Catholic church would pose a threat to Henry's and later Edward's religious reformation, and the new found wealth of those who supported it.

Dudley, using a political manoeuvre, attempted to place his daughter-in-law, Lady Jane Grey on to the throne, but her claim was weak and he lacked support. Dudley's fellow conspirators swiftly deserted him and he was forced to surrender himself to the mercy of Mary. Such mercy was not forthcoming and he was executed in 1553. His son Guildford and Lady Jane later followed him to the block.

As a result the estates reverted to the main line of the Sutton family in the person of Edward, the eldest son of John de Sutton VII.

In 1575, on one of her frequent progressions around the realm, Queen Elizabeth 1st visited Dudley Castle but despite the magnificence of the occasion the castle was already in decline. The family preferred to live in the more comfortable surroundings of Himley Hall a few miles from Dudley. In 1585, a survey of the castle was undertaken to establish if it was suitable for use as a prison for Mary Queen of Scots.

The survey recorded that the castle was in a poor state and unsuitable as a prison. The reports could have been biased however, as there were many catholic gentlemen living, in the area and the authorities might have been worried about giving them a focus for rebellion.

The fortunes of the family declined still further with the accession of Edward, son of Edward in 1586. In order to help the failing fortunes of the family Edward arranged the marriage of his granddaughter, Frances, to the rich London jeweller Humble Ward, who was created Baron Birmingham by Charles 1st.

### *The Civil War*

It was not surprising therefore that when the English Civil War broke out Dudley Castle was garrisoned by royalist troops. The castle was twice besieged. The first time was by the Earl of Denbigh in 1644.

Popular legend maintains that the castle was bombarded from Kates Hill, which would have been possible with contemporary cannon. The siege was relieved by a relief column commanded by Prince Rupert marching from Worcester. As a result a skirmish was fought at nearby Tipton Green. Although details of this battle are vague the desired outcome was achieved and the castle was saved for the Royalist cause.



Sir William Brereton, Parliamentarian Commander

In 1646 a renewed attempt on the castle was made under Sir William Brereton, a formidable Parliamentarian general. The royalist garrison was commanded by Colonel Leveson. The second siege saw considerable skirmishing including an attack by the garrison against the nearby priory. Initially the sortie was successful against the somewhat lax defenders but, fortunately for them, help was on hand and the attacking company of troops was forced back to the safety of the castle.

It seems highly unlikely that the castle could have been taken by direct assault. However by this time the battle of Naseby had been lost and the king was now a prisoner. It seemed that the Royalist cause had lost all hope.

After some negotiation Colonel Leveson surrendered the castle on the 13th May 1646. He rode out of the castle accompanied by 340 men at one o'clock. For Dudley the civil war was over.

Despite Sir William Brereton's request that the castle should be preserved as a parliamentarian stronghold, Dudley Castle suffered the fate of so many of England's noble fortresses. In 1647, by order of Parliament, the keep, gatehouse and various portions of the curtain wall were slighted. It later turned out that Sir William Brereton was planning to marry two of his children into the Ward family of Dudley; perhaps his wish to keep the castle intact was not motivated by purely military considerations. Whatever the case, Dudley Castle would never again play a part in the military history of England.

## *Eighteenth - Twentieth Century*

Although the castles defences were dismantled, the domestic range was left intact and the Ward family continued to use these buildings on an occasional basis. Even then it would seem that the castle was falling from favour and when, on the 24th of July 1750 a great fire tore through the Sharrington Range little effort was made to extinguish the flames. The fire raged for three days and no attempt was made to rebuild the castle afterwards. A popular belief of the time was that the fire was started on purpose by a gang of forgers intent on hiding their activities from discovery. The local population did not put out the blaze as it was rumoured that the local militia stored their gunpowder in the castle and everyone was afraid of the possibility of an explosion.

Dudley Castle was allowed to settle into the role of a romantic ruin. The Ward family who had, by then, been created Earls of Dudley showed sporadic interest in the ruin and occasional work was undertaken to improve its appearance. For example the battlements of the keep were rebuilt in the early years of the 19th century. Throughout that century and into the 20th the castle fulfilled a new role as a centre for festivals and fetes for the people of Dudley and beyond.

In more recent years the castle became a drain on the resources of the Earl of Dudley. In 1937 he opened the zoological gardens which preserved the castle as its focal point. In the early 1980s major restoration work and an archaeological dig were carried out on the site. This work has ensured that this history of the castle is now better known but as a new century commences in the life of the castle there are still many questions left to be answered about its history.

A History of Dudley Castle compiled by Adrian Durkin

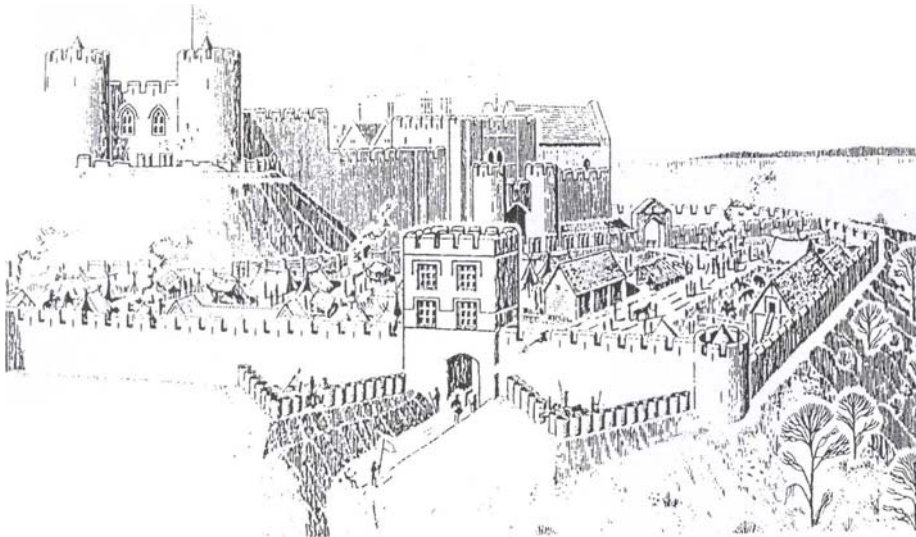
## *A Tour of Dudley Castle*

### *1 The Outer Bailey*

Most of the surviving parts of Dudley Castle are gathered around an enclosure called the Bailey. However there is some evidence to suggest that there was an outer ring of defences around the top of Castle Hill. This enclosure would have formed an outer bailey. The top of the hill was extensively remodelled during limestone mining operations in the 18th and 19th centuries and now the only part of the outer defences to survive is a gate house tower above a flight of steps.

Nineteenth century paintings (In the care of Dudley Museum and art Gallery) show mining in this area also. The original approach would not have been so steep and access by horse or carriage would have been possible. The gate house tower had two stories of living rooms above the gate and can be dated to the Tudor period from architectural details.

It is not known if there was an earlier gate. The outer bailey would also have contained a moat. This has long been filled in, in front of the castle mound but its size can still be appreciated in other areas of the circuit. The moat would have been water filled.



The Outer Bailey as it might have appeared in 1646

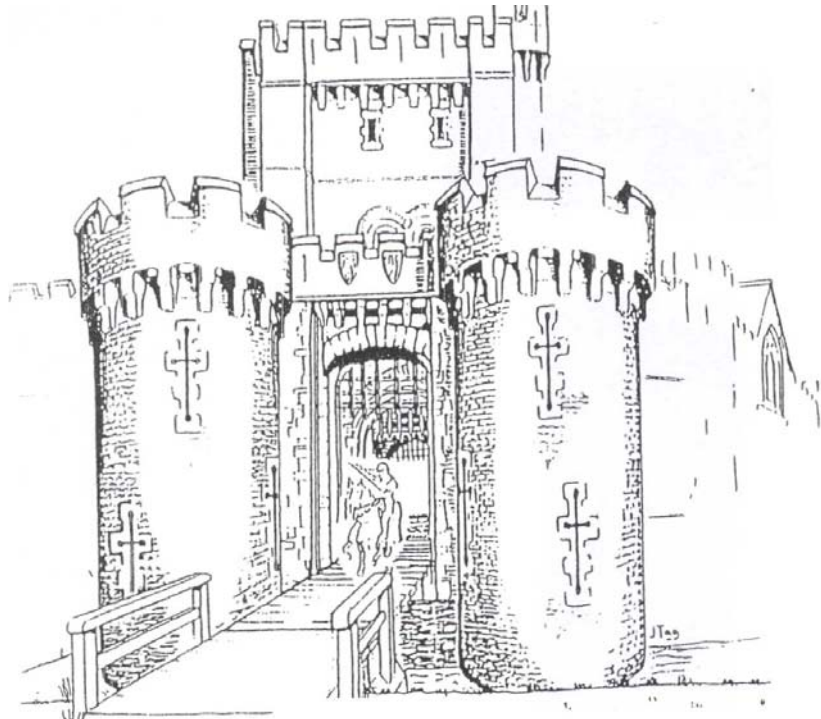
*(The Castle during the siege)*

### *2 The Triple Gate*

Within the main gate there are remains of most of the phases of castle construction. However, the most obvious work is that of the de Someries (1264 to 1321) which includes the main arches of the gate with their portcullis slots and positions for hinged gates.

The outermost gate arch with its two towers, which form the barbican, was added around the end of the 14th century by the de Sutton family. There would have been a drawbridge in this area to cross the moat. There is no evidence of any drawbridge associated with the earlier gatehouse. The low arch over the outer gate seems to have been a Tudor replacement for an earlier arch and surviving illustrations suggest it was surmounted by family heraldry.

The entire complex was partially demolished after the English Civil War but it is likely that the roof level was crenulated and may indeed have had machicolations, stone balconies with holes in the floor for dropping things on the enemy.

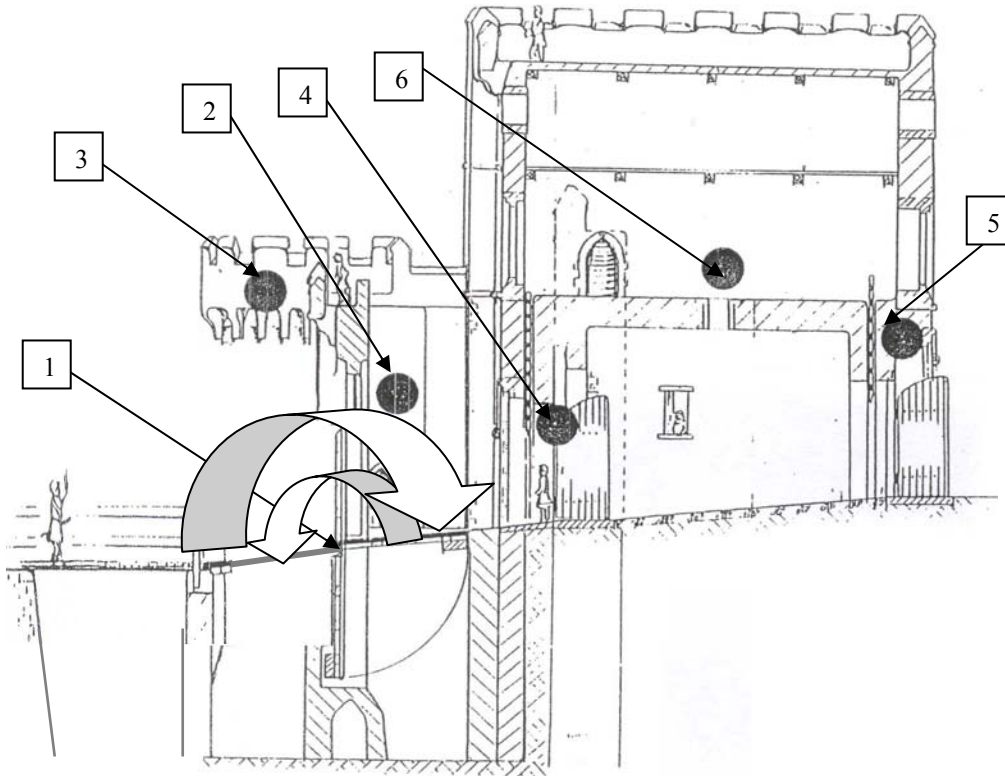


The Triple Gate, about 1400

Within the gate the side walls are earlier than the rest of the building and may date to the first stone castle of 1138. A blocked door from this period can be seen high in one wall. The roof arch shows the remains of a blocked opening. This was a 'murder hole' from which objects could be dropped on any adversary who had managed to penetrate the defences this far.

Plan and cross-section of the Gate house (after 1350) showing

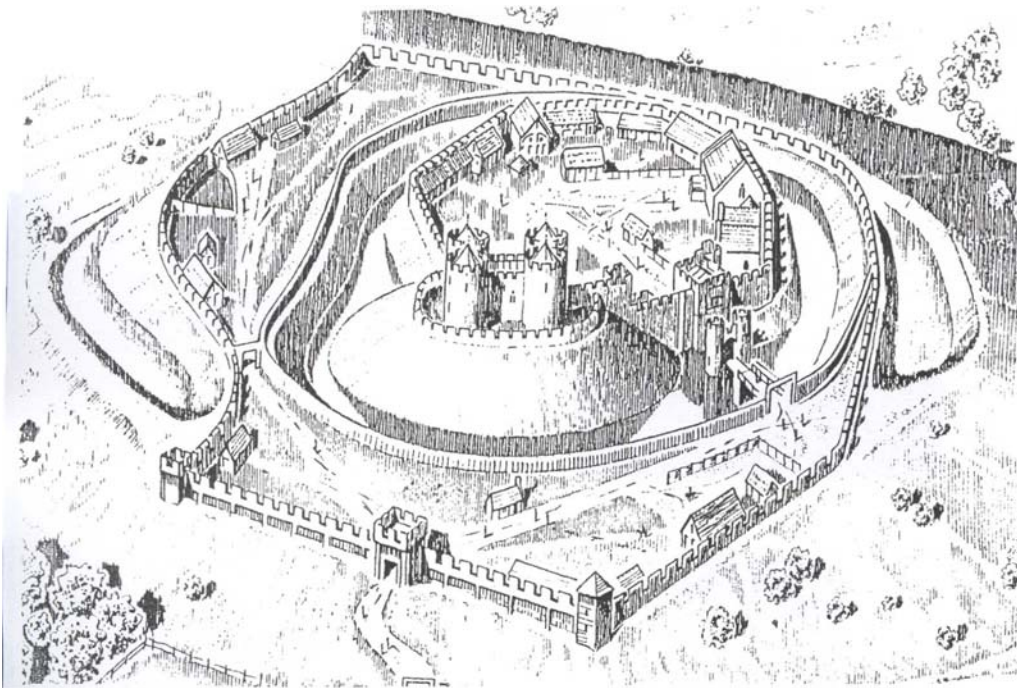
- 1 The Drawbridge
- 2 The Barbican
- 3 The Machicolations
- 4 The First Door and Portcullis
- 5 The Second Door and Portcullis
- 6 The Murder Hole



### **3 The Bailey**

Dudley Castle takes the form of a typical Motte and Bailey castle. On entering the castle through the great gate the visitor immediately sees the large enclosure which makes up the Bailey. When the first castle was built this enclosure would have been filled with a large number of structures making up the domestic buildings, service rooms, barns, stables and store houses of the castle. Before leaving the great gate visitors should look at its inner face. As well as the main gate arch a doorway set high up in the wall can be seen. This would have been accessible from wooden stairs. In the event that an enemy had gained access to the castle the defenders could have pulled up the stairs and continued to hold the keep and gate houses as separate defences. This idea was copied from contemporary keep gatehouses being built in Wales at this time.





The Inner and Outer Bailies in 1400

#### *4 The Stables*



To the right of the *Great Gate* are the stables buildings which were constructed in the late 17th century. The elaborate mouldings on both door and window openings suggest that the naming of this building is incorrect. However excavation has revealed the floor surface which consisted of brick in the southern half and stone slabs in the north.

This arrangement is common within stables: the brick providing comfortable standing for the stabled horses and the stone slabs an easily cleaned grooming area. The alternative name for the building is 'the lodgings'. This title probably refers to the first floor which may have been used for housing visitors or their servants. The first floor was accessible via a partly blocked doorway in the western wall.

The western wall is of considerable interest as within the masonry a blocked archway is visible. Close by is a wall scar which reveals the position which once ran from east to west but is now demolished.

These clues, along with archaeological excavations reveal that the stables were built upon the ruins of a building which once provided access to the top of the castle motte, across the moat. This entrance arrangement was possibly first built along with the first stone castle in the 1130s and modified after 1270 as part of the construction of the current great tower by the de Somery family. It was partially demolished in 1647 along with the tower and gateway in the aftermath of the Civil War. The Ward family constructed the stables to plug the gap in the castle walls towards the end of the 17th century.

## 5 The Keep



The great tower which formed the centre of the castles fortifications is called the keep. It stands on a man made mound called the motte which originally would have been surrounded by a moat on the inside as well as the main castle moat on the outside. The mediaeval approach to the keep was by a bridge arrangement over the inner moat in the vicinity of the current stables building. The cobbled steps which now lead to the keep are of modern construction.

The mound upon which the keep stands is not part of the natural hill but was produced during the excavation of the castle moats during the 11th century. Clay and limestone spoil, reinforced with dry stone walls, was piled here to create a high mound known as a motte.

The construction of the first castle occurred around 1070. At this period the motte, which was higher than that which we see today, would have been surmounted by a timber tower and palisade. This formed the stronghold of the castle.

At the top of the cobbled steps are the foundations of a square building. This was constructed in the late mediaeval period and served as a kitchen for the great tower. A bread oven survives built into the western curtain wall. The stone walls of the kitchen are laced with timbers, possibly intended as reinforcement to prevent any slippage down the motte side.

Steps lead from the kitchen area towards the great doorway of the keep. The visitor should climb these but then follow around the base of the keep to the left. Eventually you come to a dead end overlooking a deep pit which adjoins the stables building. In the far wall of the pit the shape of a semicircular arch can be seen. This was the entrance to the 12th century keep and a flight of steps would have run up to the base of the keep tower. The motte itself would have been higher than it is today.

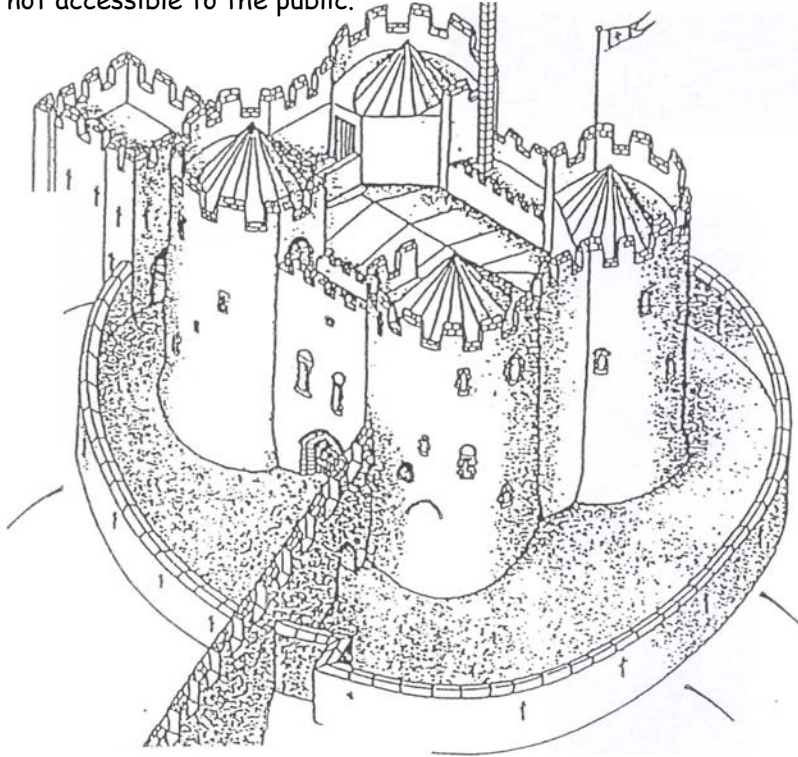
**The visitor should now return to the front of the great tower.**



The keep is a rectangular structure with massive drum towers at each corner. The only entrance is on the north side and, like the triple gate, was also protected by a portcullis and gate. The large rectangular holes for the wooden bolts can still be seen.

The gate gives access to the ground floor which possesses a large fireplace in the south wall; it is likely that this area provided the kitchens and store rooms for the keep. In the north western drum tower a small doorway leads along a passage built within the masonry to a garderobe (a mediaeval toilet) in the north eastern tower a staircase leads up to the first floor.

The southern towers would have been hollow like the northern ones, but were infilled in the Victorian period to provide solid bases for the two cannons now positioned there. These were captured during the siege of Sebastopol in 1855, during the Crimean War, and bear the imperial insignia of the double headed eagle. The drum towers were demolished to their present level in 1647 in the aftermath of the English Civil War. Regrettably, for safety reasons, the ground floor of the great tower is not accessible to the public.



The Keep in the year 1320

Within the entrance to the keep a doorway gives access to a set of steps climbing the north eastern tower. About a third of the way up is a door which would once have given access to the great hall and private chambers within the keep. It is not clear if the tower was lived in by the lord of the castle. It is more likely that he spent most of his time in the domestic buildings in the bailey. It is possible that the castle constable, the lord's lieutenant, lived in the tower.

Going further up the tower visitors will find that the stairs suddenly change direction. The reason for this is not known. The keep seems to have been built in several stages and this arrangement may date to a change of plan in mid build. It is also possible that these stairs were rebuilt during the reconstruction of the battlements in the 18th century.

From the battlements a fine view of the Black Country can be obtained.

The main part of the keep has only two floors below the battlements but in the area of the corner towers there may have been an extra level of rooms to accommodate servants and soldiers.

Visitors should now return to the bailey and visit the domestic apartments often called:

### 6 The Sharrington Range

At the height of his power in the 1540's John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, decided to remodel the domestic apartments at Dudley Castle. Although he retained portions of the mediaeval structure, for example the chapel, most of the remaining ruins date to this rebuild.

John Dudley invited Sir William Sharrington to design the new buildings. His work also survives at his own house, Laycock Abbey, in Wiltshire. Sharrington was familiar with the very latest architectural styles imported from Renaissance Italy but also chose to incorporate elements of the earlier mediaeval style both at Laycock and Dudley.

The external decoration of the building range and the importance of its balanced facade provide an excellent example of the style. Despite this the ground plan and the use of available space are in the mediaeval tradition.



The Sharrington Range

The large windows openings and numerous fireplaces as well as the renaissance decoration indicate that the building function had changed from that of a mediaeval fortress to that of a Tudor Palace.

Some appearance of military function was still important to the Tudor Lord as a symbol of his status and although the keep was partially rebuilt its defensive function was not disguised. The resulting contrast between palace and fortress is therefore most vivid at Dudley.

## 8 The North Gate



The gateway at the Northern end of the courtyard provides access to what was once the outer bailey. It is now occupied by the Queen Mary restaurant. There is no evidence to suggest that there was any gate here before the Tudor period indeed in this area of the castle the whole of the huge thick mediaeval wall was replaced by a thinner Tudor one.

The building associated with the north gate could have been more extensive when first constructed and, indeed, a doorway from the gate gives access to now vanished rooms. Surviving fireplaces and other details indicate that there would have been a whole range of buildings around the bailey wall, as far as the motte. These might have been stables and guest chambers.

Next to the north gate are the servants quarters that would probably have been used by the most important members of the Lord's household staff. The curved alcove in the south eastern corner may have housed a timber staircase making the upper floors accessible.

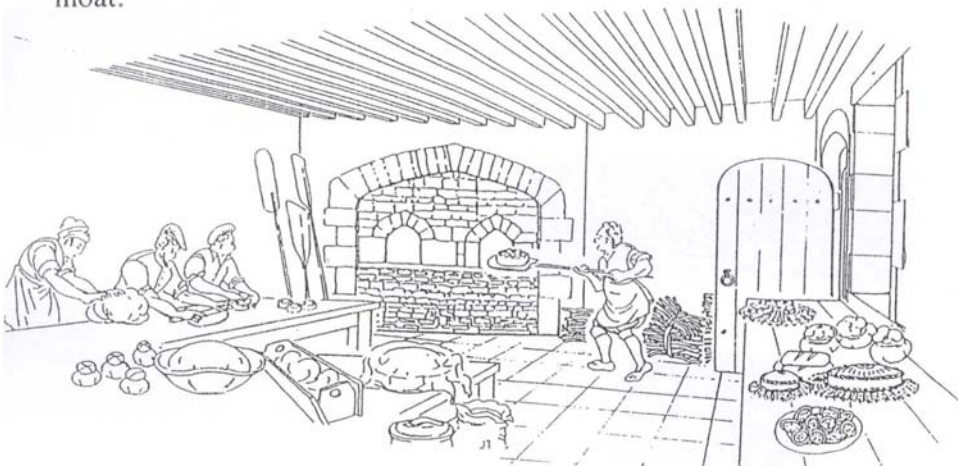
In the angle between the servants' quarters and the pantry is a small octagonal tower called a vyse which once contained a spiral staircase giving access to all floors within the range.

## 9 The Pantry or Bakehouse.



In one corner of this chamber are the remains of two domed bread ovens made from brick. Above them is a rectangular area which would always have been rather warm, it possibly served as a drying area. Excavations within the pantry suggest that once the ground floor was divided into three rooms. The name pantry is derived from the French word pain; - for bread

On the first and second floors doorways in the south end of the eastern wall gave access to latrines which eventually drained away into the moat.



The Bakehouse in Tudor Times

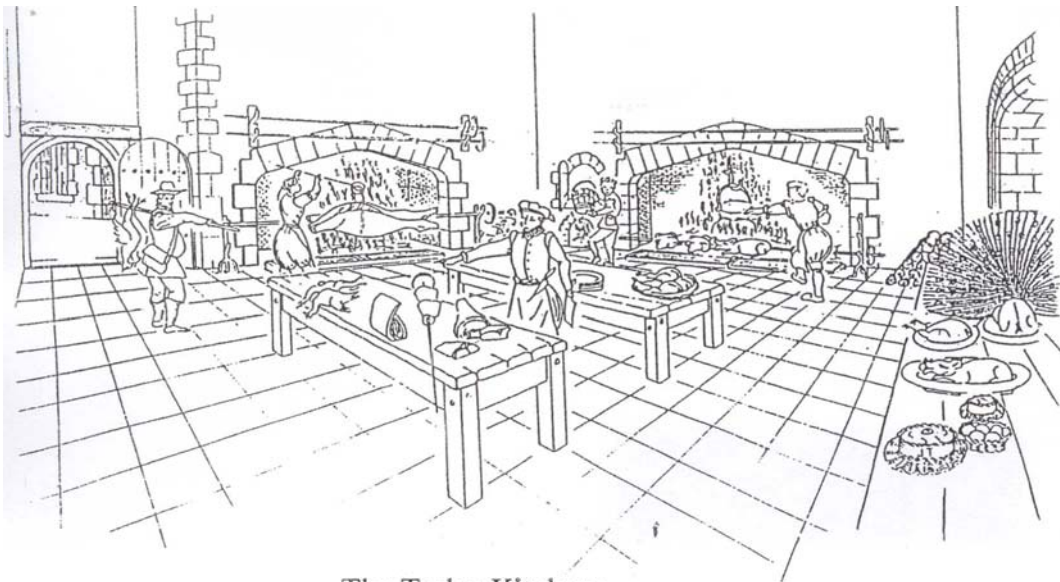
Accommodation on the first floor might have been for important castle officers whilst the second floor was for family and visitors. Servants would have slept in the attics.

### 10 The Kitchen



Next to the pantry is the castle Kitchen which can be recognised by its two massive fireplaces. The small domed opening next to the eastern fireplace may have contained a copper for boiling water.

The kitchen was very high, extending through the first floor to allow the great heat generated by the fires to rise above the working area and provide some relief for the servants working there.



The Tudor Kitchens

Above the kitchen on the second floor there are three fine fire places which, at first sight, appear to be serving one room. The original arrangement however consisted of a gallery running along the eastern side divided by a timber partition from two large chambers on the west.

The provision of large windows and fireplaces suggest that these were important chambers occupied by the family of the lord or his most important guests.

### 11 The Servery

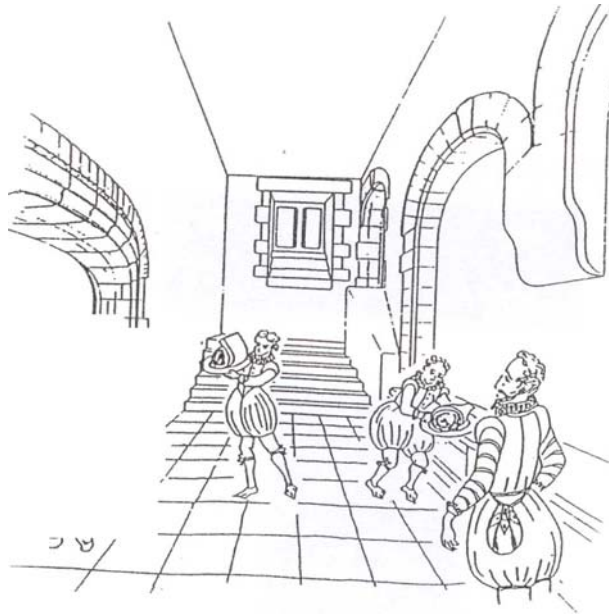


In the South wall of the kitchen are two openings which lead into the servery. The larger of the two was never a door but was in fact a serving hatch where food could be passed from the kitchen servitors to the finely dressed household servants. The food was then carried up the stairs and along a corridor to the Great Hall where it could be served.

Opposite to the serving hatch is another opening which leads into the buttery. As far as can be seen there was no door here in Tudor times.

However close observation of the wall will reveal a large, round headed, arch in orange/brown sandstone.

This arch is of typical Norman construction and is one of the few visible remains of the first stone castle built in the 12th century.



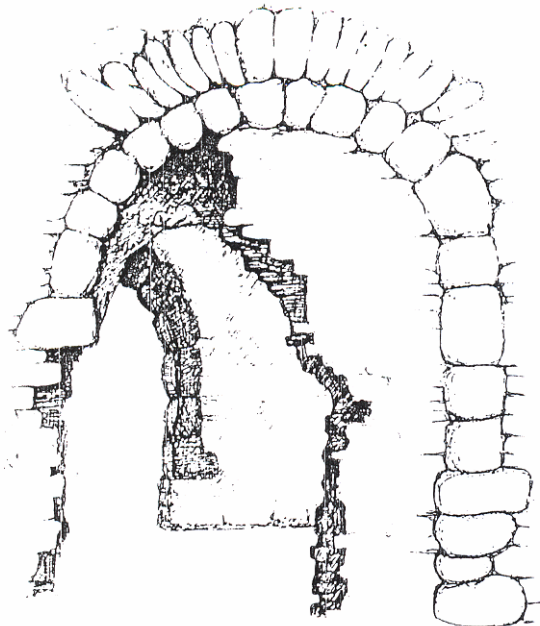
The Servery

## 12 The Buttery



Adjacent to the servery is the buttery. It is here that the castles supply of wine and beer would be stored. The name 'buttery' is derived from the butts or barrels where the drink was stored under the watchful eye of the butler. Against the outer wall of the castle are two large arches.

Although these would have been an ideal place to store large barrels as far as can be seen their true function was to support the corridor above which ran from the servery to the great hall. On a level with this corridor would have been a chamber above the buttery. Its function is unknown for although it would have been quite a fine room with a bow window. It did not have a fire place and therefore would have been cold on all but the warmest days. Above that would have been another room of similar proportions but in this case a large fire place is preserved (two floors above the Norman arch) which would have made it far more comfortable. A door on the south side of the buttery connects with the cellars under the great hall (now the castle visitor centre) and would also have given access to a stair leading to the great hall.



The Norman Arch in the Buttery



### 13 The Great Hall

The great hall at Dudley Castle was at first floor level and regrettably in not accessible to the public. It can therefore only be viewed from the bailey area. From outside you will note the stage like area. This was once approached by a flight of steps and was covered by a balcony supported on classical pillars. The whole arrangement was known as a loggia and formed the entrance to the great hall. The western wall with its large windows, visible from the courtyard, would have been matched by an eastern one now unfortunately vanished. In the north wall there were four doors. Three seem to have dead to the service corridor whilst the other gave access to a stair which went down to the buttery or up to the private chambers. Above the serving doors is the weathered sandstone of a once magnificent window. This would once have provided a vantage point from where the activities within the hall could be viewed. In the past this window has been referred to as a spy hole, its presence indicates that this north wall could be seen from the hall. This was a change from the usual mediaeval and Tudor idea of placing a screen across the end of the hall. In this respect the layout of the hall at Dudley would have been revolutionary but the idea did not catch on.

At the southern end of the hall above one of the few original surviving vaults is the dais, a low stage at one end of the hall where the lord and his family would have sat. In the eastern corner behind the dais a doorway leads to the private chambers of the lord.

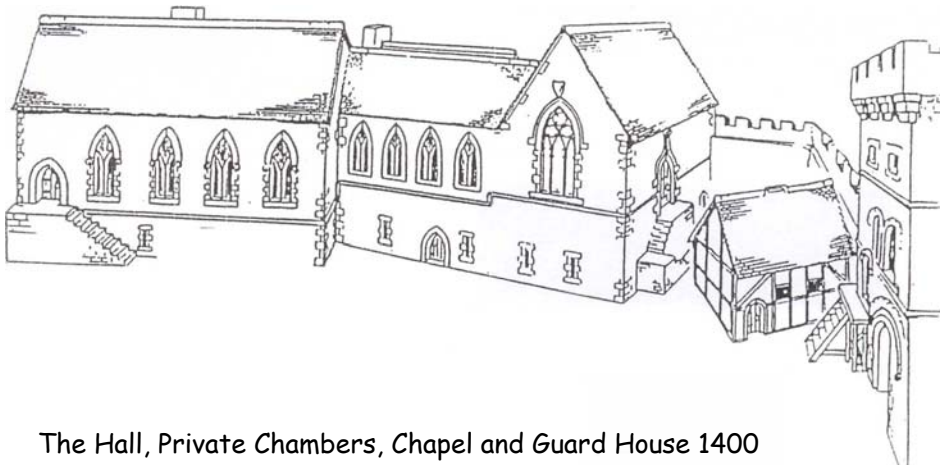
### 14 The Great Chamber and Chapel



The great chamber, incorporating the chapel to the south, can be dated to the mid 14th century from the architectural details surviving within the building. The whole of this block was much remodelled by John Dudley in the 16th century. The main apartments are situated on the upper floors and are supplied with all the usual conveniences, for example fireplaces in the north and west walls and a latrine in the east.



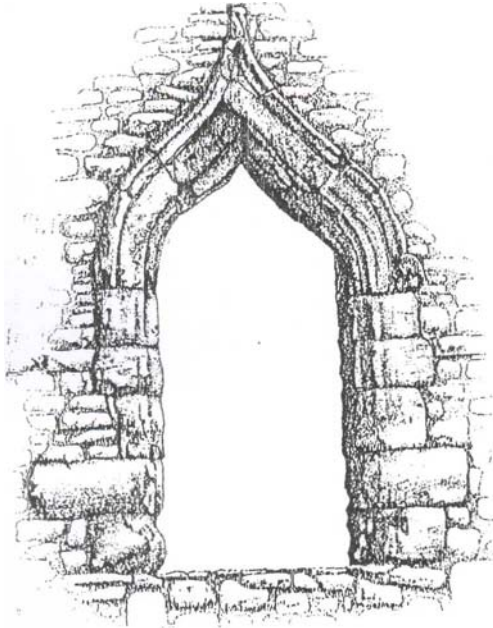
Overlooking the courtyard John Dudley replaced the mediaeval windows with two large rectangular windows each with three rows of lights.



The Hall, Private Chambers, Chapel and Guard House 1400

Architectural features still visible within the surviving masonry of the chapel are the remains of the once magnificent west window and the first floor doorway in the south wall. The window would have been glazed with coloured and painted glass, large quantities of which have been excavated from the building debris. John Dudley was a Protestant and did not find this flamboyant decoration to his taste. He seems to have thrown out both the stained glass and the floor tiles from the chapel. Some of this debris he used to backfill the moat around the inside of the motte which is where it was found by the castle archaeologist in the late 1980's

The doorway with its exotically pointed 'ogee' arch was originally approached via an external stairway.



Below the chapel would have been an above ground storage area which is accessible through a door in the eastern end of the south wall. The later insertion of a fireplace into this room suggests that by Tudor times it was used for accommodation. The fine barrel vaulted ceiling contains much brickwork and is the result of modification by John Dudley.

The Ogee arch of the chapel door

The undercroft, as this chamber is termed, is now home to the castle lecture theatre and Audio visual presentation which is currently being upgraded, this tells the story of Dudley Castle over almost one thousand years. Amongst the fittings in the undercroft are two stone coffins of mediaeval date. The smaller of the two is believed to originate from St Edmunds Church Dudley whilst the other comes from Dudley Priory where the lords of Dudley Castle were traditionally buried. Rumour has it that coffin contain the remains of John de Somery the alleged robber baron of Dudley.

Archaeological excavation in the gravelled area outside the undercroft has revealed a long sequence of buildings in this area. In the 13th century what may have been a guardhouse occupied this area. The foundations were fairly slight and it may have been a timber building.

In the 16th Century John Dudley built, in this area, probably with the intention of creating a balanced facade between the north gate and the triple gate. This building was demolished in 1647 after the civil War. A clearance of the site in 1900 removed all traces of its floor surfaces consequently it is impossible to state the function of this long vanished structure.

As explained earlier a disastrous fire in 1750 put an end to the castle's long and varied occupation. Since then the castle has become a picturesque and romantic ruin watching over the changes wrought by industry and urbanisation

### *15 The Castle Visitor Centre.*

The area below the great Hall is now occupied by the castle visitor centre. This walk through experience gives visitors an idea of some aspects of the history of the castle. It is open during the middle of the day from mid February to the end of October and more extensively during peak months.

#### Acknowledgements:

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