

Report on Carew Castle

Using one of the establishments visited examine the strengths and weaknesses of their collection rationale.



Figure 1 – Carew Castle

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Introduction

Carew castle is located in Pembrokeshire, Southwest Wales surrounded by a mill pond and rich Welsh pasture¹. The castle has a Norman fortress to the West and at the North of the castle it is designed as a luxurious Elizabethan mansion². On site is also a tidal mill, eleventh century Celtic cross, and medieval bridge³.

Through this report, the history of the castle will be observed and the collection within the castle will be examined. After visiting the site, this report will focus on both the strengths and weaknesses of its collection.

¹ Great Castle, *Ghosts of Carew Castle* (2021), <https://great-castles.com/carewghost.html#:~:text=Carew%20Castle%20resides%20in%20the%20wild%20and%20rugged,Tudor%20style%20architectural%20changes%20during%20the%2016th%20century> [24th September 2021].

² Arfordir Penfro Pembrokeshire Coast, *About Carew Castle* (2021), <https://www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales/carew-castle/about-carew-castle/> [24th September 2021].

³ Pembrokeshire Coast <https://www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales/carew-castle/about-carew-castle/>

History

Surrounding the castle that stands today, there is evidence of five prominent ditches near what could have been a settlement from the Iron Age, with large quantities of Roman pottery⁴. Currently, the ditches can be seen, however they have been filled up from their original depth in order to be safe for visitors.

In the tenth century, Gerald de Windsor was the constable of the fortress, and it was made of earth and wood⁵. De Windsor built the fortification on behalf of Henry I on the Carew River⁶. Gerald de Windsor was in charge of the Norman forces in south-west Wales and had ancestors from the prominent Carew family⁷.



Figure 2 – Carew Castle and grounds

This wooden fortress was soon replaced by stone by Sir Nicholas de Carew and towards the end of the eleventh century the Normans expanded their rule in Wales, rebuilding it to tower over the small town of Carew, establishing dominance and stature⁸.

The fifteenth century saw the improvements and expansion of the castle by Sir Rhys ap Thomas, a supporter of both Henry VII and his son, Henry VIII⁹. Rhys ap Thomas altered both the East and West wings as well as introducing Bath stone windows to the establishment¹⁰.

The final development to the castle, to turn it from a medieval fortress to an Elizabethan manor, was made by Sir John Perrot¹¹. He added to the Northern wing, building a huge bay window overlooking the millpond, however Perrot died before construction was completed¹².

During the English Civil War, the castle was owned by Sir George Carew, but was abandoned after 1686, and remained untouched¹³.

In 1983, the National Park Authority leased the castle and surrounding areas for the following 99 years in order to protect and preserve the grounds¹⁴.

⁴ Arfordir Penfro Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History* (2021), <https://www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales/carew-castle/carew-castle-history/> [27th September 2021].

⁵ Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History*.

⁶ Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History*.

⁷ John Lambrick Vivian, *The Visitations of the County of Devon: Comprising the Heralds' Visitations of 1531, 1564 & 1620*, (Exeter: Henry S. Eland, 1895) pp.133-145.

⁸ Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History*.

⁹ Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History*.

¹⁰ Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History*.

¹¹ Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History*.

¹² Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History*.

¹³ Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History*.

¹⁴ Pembrokeshire Coast, *Carew Castle History*.

The Entrance

On entry, there is an archway going through to the larger entrance to the castle itself. This small entry is connected to a wall containing thin arrow slits, and the wall runs to the edges of the establishment. The stone is slowly falling; however, it is in good condition. This archway seems to be designed in a way that it is broader on one side and narrow on the other, thus stopping those on the outside of the castle to see nothing but the walls of the fortress. The museum has added a wooden staircase in order for visitors to enter the first floor, where there is a large window looking onto the fields in front.

Figure 4 – Murder Holes on the ceiling of the second entrance



The second entrance leads directly into the castle.

Upon entry, when looking

up, five holes can be seen. These are known as ‘murder holes’ which are typically found on the ceiling of gateways and would be used to defend the fortress¹⁵. Arrows could be fired down, and harmful objects such as rocks, hot sand, boiling water, oil, or tar would be poured onto any unwanted trespassers¹⁶.

Although both these entrances are slowly crumbling, especially with a steady flow of tourists, they represent what the fortification would have looked

like and gives visitors a strong idea of what the entrance was designed and built for.

The entrance’s strength is that it demonstrates the original intentions for the fortification, that being a fortress to protect and defend. From the beginning of the experience, you get a sense and understanding that the building was made for potential warfare.

Unfortunately, without being told to look up, or told to examine the entrance, many visitors would not notice the murder holes or any other details. The weakness of the entrance is that there are no directions to explain or give a background knowledge on the structure.

Therefore, making it a very easily ignored piece of the castle. This was clear when visiting and watching others simply walk through and paying the entrance no notice.



Figure 3 – Entrance one, from the castle perspective looking out

¹⁵ Waterman D. M., ‘Tully Castle, Co. Fermanagh’, Third Series, Vol. 22 (1959), pp. 123-126.

¹⁶ Waterman, pp. 123-126.

The Kitchen

The kitchen is located underneath the castle ground floor, in a dark and cold room. Although this room is decorated with two large wooden tables and a few vases, there is no real sense of where kitchen equipment would be and no real atmosphere. The only lighting comes from the large window at the back of the room and to the right-hand side, as seen in figure 5, making it extremely difficult for visitors to see and experience what this room looks like.

However, the room does have a fireplace that draws guests in to have a look around. Although interesting, the lack of lighting and decorations made this room slightly lacklustre for the everyday tourist, especially with no plaque or information board to give anyone knowledge or facts about this small kitchen.

The main weakness for this room is the lack of lighting, atmosphere, and information. If these things were solved by the room would have more attention. When at the site, this room was overlooked by many due to the fact it was underwhelming.

However, unlike other rooms this space's strength is that it has a physical set up, allowing the visitor to imagine how it would have appeared whilst in use. This is what the museum would have been aiming for when curating this area.



Figure 5 – Carew Castle kitchen

The Chapel

According to the information board from the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, the ceiling would have been painted in bright red, blue and gold, however that cannot be seen any longer.¹⁷ There are still remains of the stoup, which is where to holy water would have been held, as well as an aumbry for storing holy vessels and a piscina for pouring away the water.¹⁸

On the North facing window there is a carving of the game Nine Men's Morris which is a strategy board game for two players, that originated in the Roman Empire¹⁹. It is said that the game is carved into the wall to distract the devil from entering the chapel²⁰.



Figure 6 – Carew Castle chapel



Figure 7 – Stain glass window in the chapel

Unlike other rooms, the chapel has a substantial amount of lighting, an information board, and props which give visitors a sense of what the chapel would have looked like. Upon entering the chapel, a stain glass window can be seen. For a guest this could potentially be a highlight, as this is an extremely attractive point. However, on close inspection, the glass window is fake, and is in fact plastic that has been painted. This can be disappointing, hindering the experience for many tourists.

¹⁷ Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Carew Castle Information Board (2021).

¹⁸ Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Carew Castle Information Board (2021).

¹⁹ Friedrich Berger, 'From circle and square to the image of the world: a possible interpretation for some petroglyphs of merels boards', *Rock Art Research*, Vol. 21 (2004), pp. 11-25. [PDF Retrieved 1st October 2021].

²⁰ Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Carew Castle Information Board (2021).

Celtic Cross

The cross is situated outside of the castle, alone on the outskirts of the whole property. As a Welsh monument it is separated from the English grounds, with only a small plaque to provide any information.

The Celtic Cross is a Grade One listed monument from the eleventh century²¹. The memorial is believed to be in honour for Hywel ab Edwin and his brother Maredudd ab Edwin, who were joint rulers of Deheubarth²². The monument was first placed in Carew in 1690; it is unknown where it was before this²³. The cross has evidence of flaked away stone and damaged before its arrival at Carew²⁴.

This artifact could potentially be a fantastic and exciting spot for visitors if it was used and presented correctly. It currently swept to aside, with visitors not even having to pay unlike they would with the English heritage site.

The Welsh and English history has been clearly separated and treated very differently. If the Pembrokeshire National Park connected more Welsh heritage to the castle, and included the Celtic Cross monument, they would benefit from this greatly.



Figure 8 – Carew's Celtic Cross

²¹ Cadw. *"The Carew Cross (Grade I) (5938)"*. National Historic Assets of Wales. [Retrieved 30th September 2021].

²² *"The Carew Cross, Carew"*. British Listed Buildings. [Retrieved 30 September 2021].

²³ *"The Carew Cross, Carew"*. British Listed Buildings.

²⁴ *"The Carew Cross, Carew"*. British Listed Buildings.

Conclusion

Carew Castle is a magnificent fortress, with a rich and long heritage and history accompanying it. The castle itself holds stories and great rooms that could help bring the fortification to life.

Unfortunately, upon visiting, the space was not used correctly and seemed slightly disorganised. The fortress lacked any type of tours, information, or direction boards. Looking from a tourist's point of view, visiting the site, it would be extremely difficult to understand any of the castle's history, objects, and architecture.

Due to the current pandemic, this could be the reason behind the lack of signage, and tour guides. A few rooms in the castle had lighting, giving it vibrancy, however others lacked this, making it difficult to see. This can be seen as a weakness as it has hindered the experience.

However, the day was entertaining with many aspects of the castle to observe and enjoy. The fortification's strengths and pleasant aspects include the chapel, beautiful landscapes, Bath stone windows and fully intact staircases, and rooms.

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