The castle and grounds

The guide map locates the main areas of Dudley Castle. A brief description of many of the areas and the history of the castle is included in this book, but we hope you will make interesting discoveries of your own.

You are free to walk around the castle. The castle is attractively situated in the middle of Dudley Zoo. We hope that you enjoy your visit.

The castle courtyard is a favourite spot for picnickers. The kitchen wing is pictured in the background.
Dudley Castle — a brief history

Barons, Dukes and mighty lords and ladies have strutted life’s stage at Dudley Castle for nigh on thirteen hundred years. Historians believe that an early English Duke named Dudo first set a stronghold on the wooded hill in 700.

He is hidden in the mists of antiquity but the earthworks of his building form the foundation of today’s edifice.

Recorded history for the castle began properly with the Domesday Book when William Fitz Ansceulf was set down as ‘holding’ the lands for the Norman Kings. Troubled times began with the succession to the great if scattered barony of Pulk Paganel, or Paynel. His reported incestuous marriage to his daughter began a black chapter in the history of Dudley.

His grandson, Gervase, supported Prince Henry’s rebellion against his father King Henry II. For this treason the castle was demolished.

The manor house was re-built next year but was not fortified until 1261 when Roger de Sonere started work without licence from Henry III. He was forgiven for helping the King against rebellious barons. The re-building went on long after the death of Roger II continued by a baronial thug John de Somery, who completed the work including the Great Keep which still stands in partial ruin.

John de Somery terrorised the countryside with his armed henchmen.

A current account tells us where the cash for the Great Keep and other features of the castle, which remain today, came from. “It was no abiding for any man in these parts except he well bribed the said John de Somery for protection by yielding him much assistance towards the building of his castle and that the said John did use to beset men’s houses in the country for to murder them as also exhorted large sums of money from them.”

The black countenances of the day must have heaved a sigh of relief when John died without heir.

Gardens line the way to the chief entrance of the Castle. The formidable gateway was believed to have been the principal entrance to the castle courtyard in the fifteenth century.

The castle keep, the enormous thickness of the walls an average of 18 feet thick, is one of the outstanding features of this building.
The castle and Dudley Zoo

The castle is attractively situated in the middle of Dudley Zoo where nearly 300 different species of wild animals are on show.

CHAIRLIFT
After a crawl up the winding stairs to the castle you may prefer to use the chairlift to return to the lower level of the zoo. It is the quick and easy way.

FOOD
The Queen Mary Ballroom is open daily for lunch and is available for dinners and special occasions.

The Safari Steak Bar is situated at the bottom of the chairlift and is fully licensed.

For those who prefer a quick snack there is the Moat Cafe.

LOST CHILDREN
Lost children will be taken to the information kiosk. If this is closed a turnstile attendant will be glad to help you.

FIRST AID
All cafes and larger animal houses have first aid equipment.

The first aid box is situated behind the Moat Cafe.

LOST PROPERTY
Enquiries should be made at the information kiosk or to a turnstile attendant.

CAR PARK
A car park for over 1,000 vehicles is situated at the foot of Castle Hill.

LAND OF THE DINOSAURS
A fascinating journey into prehistoric times.

EDUCATION
Dudley Castle and Zoo are fascinating subjects for study.

The zoo education department runs several different courses.

Facilities range from animal visits for young children to a well equipped study centre on the zoo. For more details contact the education officer.

... and the work goes on

Dudley Castle has stood for thousands of years and will stand for many more thanks to the renovation carried out by the zoo's maintenance department.

George Brough is a senior citizen who has voluntarily come out of retirement to repair the massive walls of the castle.

Every weekday in all types of weather George checks the building making sure it is safe.

The walls are restored exactly in the style of hundreds of years ago. Each stone is placed with precision and bound together with exactly the same materials and colouring as those used by builders centuries before him.

Sometimes, new stone is needed for re-building purposes. Only the original type of stone is used. George hews it from the caverns underneath the castle, in the time honoured way.

For George Brough the castle is a labour of love. He believes that Dudley Castle will be a landmark for centuries to come.
Relatives by marriage brought respectability back to the town. One of the Sutton family improved the castle, building a chapel, and another, John de Sutton VII became Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and Steward of the Tower of London. But his great grandson, John Sutton VII, was a very different calibre. Contemporary reports say that he was "a weak man of understanding, whereby he had exposed himself to some wants, and so became entangled in the usurers’ bonds. John Dudley, then Viscount Lisle and Earl of Warwick (afterwards Duke of Northumberland), thrilling after Dudley Castle (the chief seat of the family), made these money merchants his instruments to work him out of it which by some mortgage being at length effected, this poor lord became exposed to the charity of his friends for a subsistence, and spending the remainder of his life in visits among them, was commonly called the Lord Quondam".

So the castle passed into the hands of that remarkable Elizabethan family, the Dudleys, who provided successively a Speaker for the House of Commons, the husband of one Queen of England, and the favourite of another.

John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, rebuilt the castle on a magnificent scale. Apart from the Norman earthworks and the 13th century keep, the structure existing today is largely his. It is known that Northumberland was at one time issuing his own coinage from Dudley Castle, using the device of the Bear and Ragged Staff.

Edward Dudley was restored to the property and in 1575 he received Queen Elizabeth at the castle. In a less pleasant association with royalty, Dudley Castle was considered as a prison for Mary Queen of Scots, in 1585, but was rejected as unsuitable.

At the start of the Civil War in 1642 the Castle became a Royalist Garrison. Lord Denbeigh started to besiege the castle on June 30th 1644, but withdrew on the following day when troops arrived from Worcester and he was defeated at Tipton. In 1646 the castle surrendered peacefully to parliament and the following year the fortifications were ordered to be destroyed.

At the end of the 17th century the buildings between the keep and the gateway were erected. In 1750 fire destroyed a part of the living quarters. The fire is rumoured to have been caused by a gang of counterfeiters who were working in the cellars. They thought that they had been discovered and started a terrible fire to destroy evidence of their work.

William, 8th Baron Ward owned the castle 1788-1823. He restored the ruins. From this time the castle and its grounds became a place of recreation for the townspeople. Fetes were held annually for many years and the caverns, caused by the 19th century limestone mining, were the scene of spectacular entertainments.

In 1937 Dudley Zoo was opened, making inspired use of the disused surface mineral workings as open-air pits for the animals. The castle itself is scheduled as an ancient monument.

The two cannons in the keep were placed on the walls of the dismantled circular towers about the year 1585. Today they fascinate children and adults alike.
An Architectural Profile

The famous Sir William Sharrington who was a pioneer of the Italian phase of the Renaissance in England, was largely responsible for most of Dudley Castle as we know it today. The layout of the Castle is entirely conservative, traditional and English in character. Most of the building and work was undertaken by the Duke of Northumberland under the direction of Sir William Sharrington. The buildings erected in the reign of Edward VI were considered to be very advanced concerning the comfort and the convenience of the buildings.

**GREAT GATE**

Some of the masonry in the great gate dates from the 12th century but most of the building is the work of John de Somery in the 14th century. The Barbican with the two drum towers was added by John Sutton towards the end of the 14th century. When all the work was completed there were no less than six obstructions to defend the entrance.

A drawbridge with doors behind it, a portcullis also with doors, a second portcullis, and yet another door. The grooves for the portcullises can still be seen. Above the entrance is the guard room.

The triple gateway was built at a time when protection was needed against rebelling barons. The gateway itself is 27 feet long by 17 feet wide. The side walls, built in the 12th century, are six feet thick.
KEEP

Erected in the 14th century by John de Somery on top of a Norman mound. Its extreme dimensions are 520 ft by 271 ft, and the walls are 10 feet thick. It was two storeys in height, the upper floor contained the hall with ante-chambers in the north-western tower. The pantry and the buttery were in the north-eastern tower from which there was a stair to the kitchen and the servants' quarters on the ground floor.

The two southern towers were destroyed when the castle was 'slighted' after the Civil War.

The upper part of the north-west tower was rebuilt late in the 18th century.

HALL

This portion of the castle was altered by John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, about mid 16th century. The hall was on the first floor and measured 78 ft long by 31 ft 6 in wide.

On the west front and facing the courtyard was an open loggia formed by a colonnade of the Ionic order and approached by a straight flight of steps in the centre. At the northern end was a porch through which the hall was entered.

High up in the north wall can be seen a two-light window surmounted by a pediment through which observation of the hall could be made to ensure that good order was being kept. The dais with the high table at which the Lord and his family sat was placed at the south end.

STABLES

These buildings are usually called 'the stables' but there is no evidence as to their actual use. They were erected about 1690 and it is probable that they were never completed.

An aerial view of Dudley Castle courtyard and the kitchen wing.

CHAPEL

The chapel was 50 ft long and 23 ft wide and dates from the 14th century. It was a first floor room and was approached by a flight of steps and entered from an external door in the south wall.

Under the chapel is a cell covered with a barrel vault.

KITCHEN

It measured 35 ft long by 29 ft wide, and was of the full height of two storeys. It was built in the early part of the 16th century. There are fireplaces in the north-west and the north-east walls, the former being 13 ft wide and 4 ft deep, and the latter 15 ft wide and 4 ft 8 in deep. When the kitchens were in use large fires were kept burning on the hearth and meat was roasted by the turnspits and other fittings that would be attached to the lintels.

An amazing feature of Dudley Castle is that 738 ft above sea level, a fresh water well exists in the courtyard. The well is 90 ft deep and can still supply fresh water even today.

An aerial view of Dudley Castle

The Gatehouse seen from a side window in the chapel.
LARDER
This room was divided into two parts by a partition in order to form a pantry kitchen and the larder. In the eastern angle can be seen two of the backing ovens. On the upper floor were the sleeping quarters for the household officers.

BUTTERY
The north-west wall is one of the oldest in the castle and dates from the 12th century. In it is a part of a round arch of that period can still be seen. On the upper floor was the pantry, 4½ft by 2½ft, with a partition at the north-east end to form a serving passage from the kitchen to the hall.

Some of the principal bedrooms were situated on the second floor.

SERVERY
Food for the meals in the hall was served through a hatch in the north-west wall. Traces of a staircase can still be seen in the north-east.

NORTH GATEHOUSE
It is believed that this portion of the building is about 16th century. Originally there were rooms on both sides of the entrance but those on the west have been destroyed.

GREAT CHAMBER
The great chamber, measuring 50ft by 24ft, was the withdrawing room at the south end of the hall. Above it were two bedrooms.

WITHDRAWING ROOM
This room, 40ft by 22ft, formed part of the extensive alterations made in the Castle to provide suitable accommodation for the visit of Queen Elizabeth in 1575.

LINE OF POSSESSION

William Fitz Ansulf ➔ Fulk Paganel (probably married Ansulf's daughter) ➔ Ralph Paganel

Roger de Somery ➔ Ralph de Somery (Gervase's nephew) ➔ Gervase (son)

John de Somery ➔ John de Somery (died without heir) ➔ The Sutton family inherited through marriage with John de Somery's eldest sister

John Dudley ➔ John de Sutton VII ➔ John de Sutton II

William 8th Baron Ward (1788-1823)