

Beaumaris Castle

DOE Official Guidebook

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LOCATION

The castle stands on Conway Bay opposite Bangor across Lavan Sands. It is 4 miles north-east of Menai Bridge on the A545 road, which is a bus route. O.S. 1 inch map No. 106; ref. SH 607763.

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on behalf of the Welsh Office

BEAUMARIS CASTLE

CASTELL BIWMARIS

AN ILLUSTRATED SOUVENIR

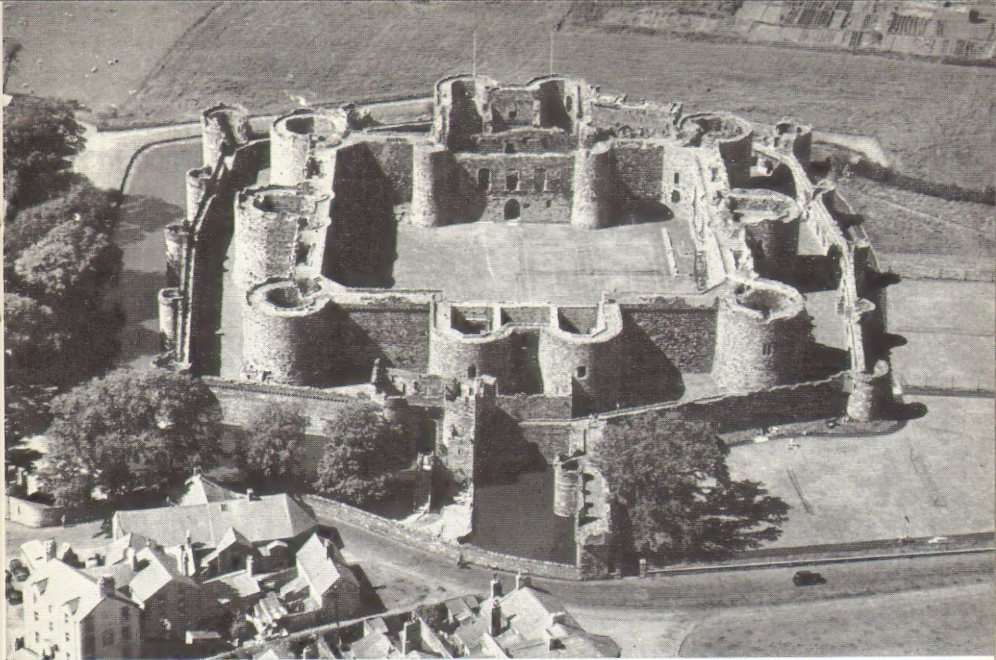
BY ALAN PHILLIPS M A (Oxon)

LONDON

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BEAUMARIS CASTLE

Beaumaris Castle is the eighth and last in the series of strongholds built for Edward the First to ensure the permanent conquest of North Wales after more than twenty years of conflict. Asked to name the finest of his castles most people would pick Caernarvon for its extensive accommodation, Conway for its rock-like power and majesty and Harlech for the grandeur of its setting. In none of these classes does Beaumaris compete. Luxurious, peerless, stupendous, are epithets one would not apply. But students who consider it comes closer than the others to perfection of design have claimed it as the culminating point of medieval military architecture in these islands; and its geometric pattern became one model for builders of smaller castles in England in the fourteenth century.

The principle towards which Edward had been advancing the art of fortification was that of concentric defence. Even in such splendid creations as Caernarvon and Conway he had not been able fully to



*Edward I, the founder,
with Queen Eleanor:
sculpture at Lincoln
Cathedral*

realize it. There were remains of an older fortress to incorporate, or the lines of construction were dictated by factors of geology. At Beaumaris the site was level and uncluttered. So it became possible to improve the old Norman system whereby defences were sited in depth – first the barbican or forecourt with its gateway, next an outer and perhaps a middle ward, then an inner ward, and finally the keep or donjon, each being held as long as possible – and to substitute a new style whereby an outer curtain wall overlooked by an inner wall at greater height could be defended by parties on both walls shooting *at the same time*, and whereby assailants who penetrated into the outer ward would remain under fire from the garrison of the inner.

It was through an attack on Caernarvon, at the south-west end of the Menai Strait, that the borough and castle of Beaumaris came into being. In 1294 Prince Madog, a kinsman of the dead Llewelyn the Last (Edward's



As drawn by T. H. Fielding in 1825

most dangerous opponent), raised a rebellion in which many colonists within the town walls were slaughtered. The English king restored the position and then, besides rebuilding at great speed the walls of his regional capital, decreed the construction of another castle to control the rich corn-lands of Anglesey and to guard the north shore of the Menai Strait at the point where troops could embark in haven and be ferried to the mainland across Lavan Sands. "He discovered", observes old Pennant, "that it was necessary to put another curb on my headstrong countrymen." Edward himself is said to have bestowed on his new foundation the name that clearly comes from Norman-French words meaning "beautiful marsh". "Bo-morris" and "Bew-marris" are pronunciations heard nearby. The marsh was anciently far more extensive than it is now and was covered with bulrushes. It seems that the desired site belonged to several proprietors whose rights were made good by grants of forfeited land elsewhere. As architect the king called in James of St. George, that

Rhuddlan
(1277-1282)



Harlech
(1283-1290)



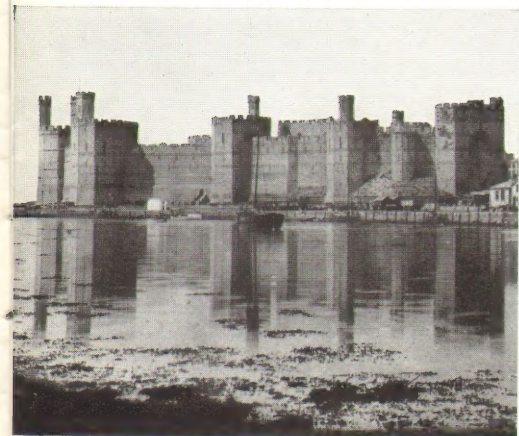
Beaumaris
(1295-c.1330)



Edwardian Castles



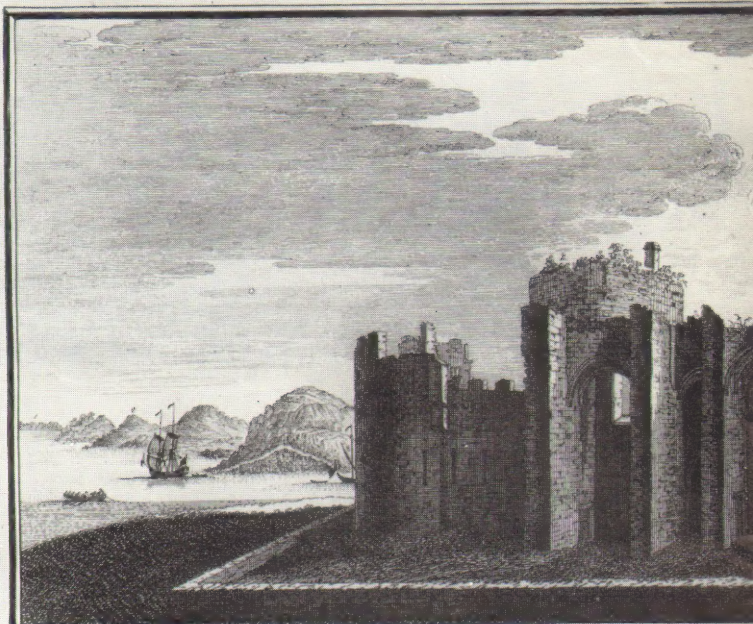
Flint
(1277–c.1285)



Caernarvon
(1283–1327)

Conway
(1283–1289)





*THIS Castle is situated in a Low and moorish
This Place derives its Name Beau-Marish and in*

1. Crundgeon. 2. Penmon Bay. 3. Penmon Moor.

Saml. & Nathl. Buck del. et. sculp. Publishd.

Savoyard genius responsible for most of the outstanding castles in North Wales. The first governor was Sir William Pickmore, a knight from Gascony.

Work began in 1295 at high pressure, and luckily we have for the very next year a progress report. Some 400 masons were employed, together with 2000 labourers; there were jobs for 30 smiths and carpenters; while 200 carters with their wagons were bringing stone from Penmon – it is grit and limestone rubble, mostly darkish grey but often varying so much between adjacent blocks as to look like chequerwork. Though the area was not yet wholly enclosed, ten towers had been started on

CASTLE, IN THE ISLE OF ANGLESEY.



*Ground adjoining to the Sea, opposite to Aberconway.
Latin Bellomariscus, from its fine Situation*

According to Act of Parliament April 3. 1788.

Continued in Plate 1153

Engraved from a drawing by S. and N. Buck more than 200 years ago

the outer curtain walls and four on the inner, while the masonry between them had gone up at least 20 feet. The garrison was made up of ten men-at-arms, twenty bowmen, and a hundred foot soldiers. By 1298 the castle was said to be ready. It had cost over £7,000, much less than its predecessors had called for, equal perhaps to £700,000 today. Since the year of its construction coincided with the crisis of Edward's reign, in politics, finance, domestic and foreign warfare alike, he must have been relieved to scale down the bill wherever he could.

In fact it is plain, both from later reports and from the condition of the castle, that in many respects the original design was never fulfilled.

The great hall and other structures in the inner ward; the inner portion of the southern gatehouse; the upper storeys of all towers; the curious north gate: these were left incomplete. Between about 1306 and 1313 improvements were made, without the stress of a campaign or threats from the Welsh to apply the spur of urgency. The castle was cut off from the town by conjunction of the outer curtain on two sides; the northern gatehouse was built up, though not provided with a barbican or forecourt such as had been recommended; the moat was deepened and cleaned, after which no doubt it presented a width exceeding the fifty feet it shows today.

Results of the abrupt stoppage of work and of failure to roof over most of the fabric were seen by the middle of the fourteenth century. Eight major towers and sundry turrets lacked lead, and nearly all the timbers had perished from damp. It was fortunate that the place was never needed in serious warfare. Indeed it recalls scarcely any history either violent or peaceful, but was left to decay. "A strong Fotresse if it had bin manned and victualled", is Stow's comment in 1580.

There was a constable of the castle, who was almost always appointed captain of the town also. One early incumbent was the gallant Harry Hotspur who allied himself with the Welsh against Henry the Fourth and fell at Shrewsbury. "The black fray of Beaumaris" is alluded to in chronicles of the reign of Henry the Sixth, but it is not known who was attacking whom. In the Civil Wars Beaumaris Castle was yielded "with all the Ordnance, Armes, and Ammunition therein" to Major-General Mytton, a Parliamentary commander, in 1646, after Caernarvon and before Conway had been besieged by him successfully. The antiquary Grose noted in 1786: "Great plenty of Julyflowers grow about the whole building, and no where else in the island". An Eisteddfod was held in the courtyard in 1832. For centuries the local family of Bulkeley had owned the castle when in 1925 Sir Richard Williams-Bulkeley placed it under guardianship of the Commissioners of Works, now incorporated within the Department of the Environment.

A glance at a scale plan shows this ruin to have been easily the most

The only known portrait of the commander to whom the castle was yielded in 1646: from ENGLAND'S WORTHIES, by John Vicars



symmetrical of the royal foundations in Wales. Its pattern will suggest to some an orrery, that old mechanical toy devised to teach rotation of earth, planets, and satellites; to others a memory from chemical analysis representing the disposition of atoms to form a molecule. Although we speak of concentric defence, none of the building lines was actually circular. The inner ward was a rectangle, with a drum tower at each corner, stirrup-shaped towers in the middle of the east and west sides, and double gatehouses in the middle of the north and south sides. To find gatehouses intentionally made of equal strength is rare. The outer ward was an octagon, having a drum tower at every angle except on the south and an intermediate tower or gate on all sides save one.

The towers are skilfully sited to give the maximum field of fire upon an approaching enemy. The most striking feature is that the outer gateways north and south are out of alignment with their corresponding gatehouses, a single but effective defensive device. For the foe to make an



Reconstruction by Alan Sorrell of



the intended appearance of the castle

oblique onset against the most powerfully fortified point would be disconcerting; to turn sharply in the narrow passage of the middle bailey upon carrying the outer curtain in order to form up against the gatehouse would be a most perilous manoeuvre. There would be neither time nor space to set up a catapult or crawl beneath a penthouse. Visitors will note too how in both curtain-walls the arrow slits are at varying heights and distances apart. Round holes in series set in the walls are not decorative but mark the places where scaffolding was fixed at an incline for loads of stone to be wheeled or dragged up. Rows of small corbels relieve the prevailing austerity.

A tour of the monument begins at the Gate next the Sea. Here a modern bridge of wood has superseded the original drawbridge which when raised barred the gate. Beside it is the small dock for ships on which the castle would depend for news of the outside world or for supplies in times of siege. Because of the presence of this dock, it was never necessary to dig the moat right round on the seaward side. We learn that already by 1296 a fully laden vessel of 40 tons could sail up to the main gate when the tide served. The ring to which such boats were made fast has remained fixed in a buttress shaped like a bent horseshoe on the stone extension known as Gunners' Walk. This buttress contained the castle mill, whose sluice and spillway leading from the eastern moat into the dock may be traced.

Gunners' Walk on the flank of the dock protected it altogether. for the sea in early days came up to its southern edge. At the extremity is a group of holes whereby missiles or liquid could be dropped on attackers from three sides of a raised platform, on which stood an engine for hurling stones. A wall attached to the east side of the walk guarded the moat from inroads of the sea. West of the dock, to the right of the Gate next the Sea, appear vestiges of projecting masonry no doubt intended originally to join the castle to the combined town and sea wall enclosing Beaumaris.

Passing under several arches through the Gate next the Sea, we gain the outer ward. This gate should be inspected on both sides of the



The Gate next the Sea



Looking from wall walk on outer curtain towards the Gate next the Sea

entrance for its fascinating assemblage of chambers, some provided with fireplaces and privies, one evidently meant for a cellar which in the time of Henry the Eighth was used as a powder store, all built with different angles and curves. If time allows, the monument can be best appreciated in three distinct perambulations: on the outer walls; within the green bailey of the outer ward; and from the buildings, towers, and wall walk of the inner ward.

A promenade on the octagon of the outer curtain walls covers roughly 400 yds (366m) at a height of about 27 ft (8m). It includes a tunnelled passage at the north gate, and passes a dozen towers of two storeys each. Those at the north-west and north-east corners are much the biggest, having five windows on the ground floor, rooms with fireplaces, and privies attached. But all these creeper-clad and pebbly turrets might once have sheltered a garrison. To glimpse the moat through slits in their walls gives slightly the sensation of glancing through a porthole upon the dockside before a vessel sails.



Passage through southern gatehouse



West outer curtain with five towers

In a stroll round the bailey it will be perceived, by an aperture at the north gate leading to the bank above the moat, that this entry was not extended by a passage with towers and drawbridge, as was the Gate next the Sea. Any such design was abandoned, the doorways being walled up and the unfinished ends of the side walls roughly squared off. Loopholed bastions placed for defence are thought to be unique.

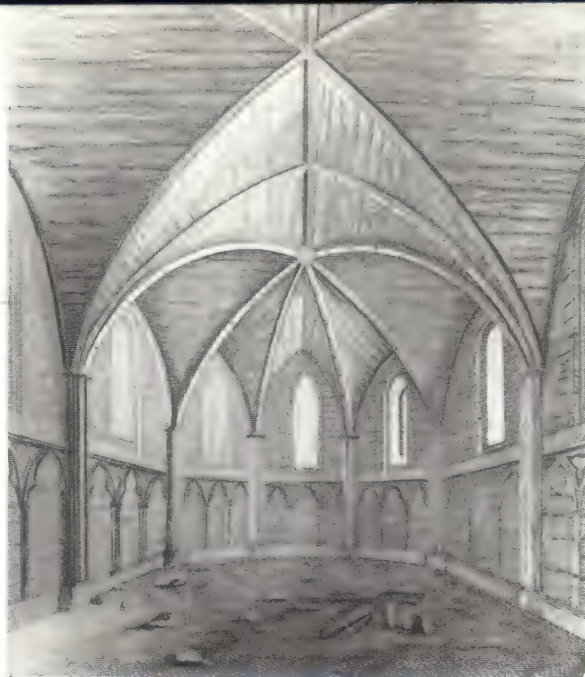
After touring the outer curtain wall and bailey the visitor is ready to enter the inner ward; yet even nowadays this has to be done obliquely, as it was when slings and arrows might have curbed his curiosity. The path leads under a decayed pointed arch into a small barbican that forms an annexe to the southern gatehouse. Those with keen eyes will note that the arrow slits in its south wall exactly cover the entrance to the dock. Of the gatehouse itself, foundations inside reveal that it was planned to correspond closely with the better preserved northern gatehouse, which faces it across the inner ward. It may have served as stables in the Civil Wars. How the castle, had it been perfected, might have looked about 1313 is conjectured in the reconstruction drawing.



Looking east towards the entrance

When we cross the inner bailey to the northern gatehouse we find superbly embodied the principal of aggressive defence. No tucking away the ultimate shell wherein to do or die, here the strongest point was set up almost directly facing the enemy. Consequently it was equipped with a doorway and portcullis at each end and another portcullis in the middle. It blocks each section of the wall walk on the north curtain, and formerly its two sides communicated with the walks by small drawbridges; when these were raised from within, the gatehouse was isolated from the rest of the castle and could be defended both from within and without. Two flagstuffs give hint of its pre-eminence.

Here, on the first floor, were the most splendid apartments, where the great hall seems to have taken up the whole southern side; it has two fireplaces and five huge windows looking into the court. Of all that remains at Beaumaris this yields the most impressive and memorable view. The upper parts of windows with their shallow curves are an alteration of the sixteenth century or later. Two chambers lying northward from the hall, also with fireplaces, could have been retiring rooms or solars at different



*Eighteenth-century
engraving by
Moses Griffith*

*Opposite,
the chapel today*

hours of the day. In the original design a second hall was to have been placed in the inner ward against the east curtain wall, between Rustycoker and Chapel Towers. Two vast fireplaces were actually built into that wall, but obviously no fire has ever been lit in them. Likewise there is no evidence in any tower fireplace of fuel having been burnt there. As to the position of the well – a vital provision in such a building – none has as yet ever been identified.

The most beautiful apartment in the castle will be found on the first floor of Chapel Tower. Access formerly was from wall passages by twin doorways; now it is reached from the court by a timber stair. This is the lime-washed chapel with vaulted ceiling in Gothic style, its ribs springing from the capitals in elegant columns. The walls are panelled in their lower parts by trefoil-headed arcading. Light comes through five lancet windows above the arcading, three in the east end and one on each side. An unusual amenity is a shaft for light and air at the west end. Placed high outside the chapel were two chambers from which persons could





The northern gatehouse had five huge windows facing the sun

peep in upon services without being observed. The room above, with fireplace and privy attached, was presumably intended for the priest but is yet another portion of the castle where work lapsed; its cobbled floor is new. There is a tale that the vault below the chapel contains treasure and that it has been dug in search.

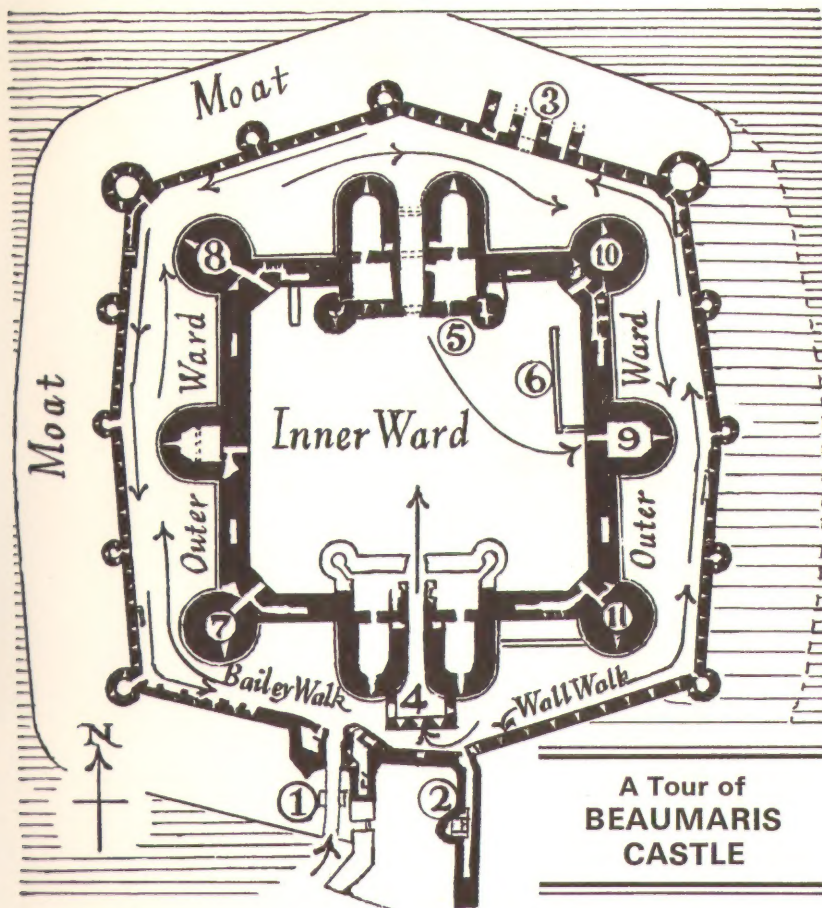
Curtain walls on both sides of Chapel Tower are pierced by passages which continue, much as they do at Caernarvon, round large sections of the inner ward, linking the gatehouses and towers. They are ventilated by small shafts, but even on bright days are apt to be gloomy and confusing. It is easier to wander along the tops of the walls, 43 ft (13m) high and nearly 16 ft (5m) thick, to study the construction of towers. Those in the corners, Rustycoker and Pilardesbathe, North-West and South-West, have a family likeness, with their bases which gradually taper from curve into straight – the “batter”, a fashion prominent also at Conway – and with their circular basements and octagonal rooms, often with window seats. The basement of Rustycoker Tower was possibly a prison. From the

wall walk also can be reviewed the curious lay-out of groups of latrines against the parapet on all eight sections of wall. The inner quadrangle upon which the walls look down measures about 194 ft (59m) east to west by 175 ft (53m) north to south, and space has been found there periodically for lawn tennis, fives and bowls.

Beaumaris Castle is not an exhilarating place. Its impact may be compared to that of a classical symphony in a minor key. As a quarry of information no student of military arts can neglect it. From the more bustling life of the Menai Strait in the holiday season it offers a retreat in both place and time. For this some hundreds of people a day are grateful.



Conway Bay and the Snowdon range viewed from northern gatehouse



Outside Gate next the Sea (1) note dock, with ring where boats were tied. West of dock, foundations of town wall. Cross wooden bridge on site of original draw-bridge. Passing through gate, inspect chambers on either side (one became powder store). Turn right to climb upon outer curtain wall; on right again runs Gunners' Walk (2). Continue on wall anticlockwise round outer ward (roughly 400 yards at height of 27 feet), passing twelve towers. Next make clockwise circuit of green bailey between walls; at north gate (3) look through aperture above moat. To enter southern gatehouse, pass under pointed arch (4) into barbican, where arrow slits command dock. In gate passage observe reconstruction drawing showing

how castle might have looked if it had been completed. Inner ward measures 194 feet E.-W., 175 feet N.-S. Remains of five windows of hall in northern gatehouse (5) straight ahead; on wall to right, fireplace (6), never used, where great hall would have been. For towers, start at south-west (7); ascend wooden stairs and cross plank bridge to explore wall passages as far as north-west (8), returning same way. In passage under northern gatehouse, look first right, then left for staircase which should be climbed to top. Go down flight between flagstaves. Cross inner ward to east and mount timber steps to chapel (9) (vaulted ceiling, arcaded panelling, lancet windows). Placed outside were two chambers from which to look in upon services. At exit, turn right and follow passage as far as possible; retracing steps nearly to chapel, find on left staircase up to modern cobbled roof. Complete wall walk, 43 feet high, continuously round inner ward from and to northern gatehouse, where it was always blocked but originally connected by drawbridges. Compare internal arrangements of corner towers. Basement of Rustycoker (10) was probably a prison. Descend from walls through Pilardesbathe (11) to courtyard.

HANES CASTELL BIWMARES

Dechreuodd Edward y Cyntaf adeiladu'r wythfed a'r olaf o'i gestyll Cymreig ym 1295. Yr oedd yn barod i'w ddefnyddio ar ôl tair blynedd, ond ni fu ei angen erioed fel amddiffynfa nac fel palas. Gwnaed gwelliannau yn ystod 1306-13, ond peidiodd yr adeiladu tua 1327 gyda'r cynllun heb ei orffen. Bu'r castell yn nwylo teulu'r Bulkeley am ganrifoedd. Un ohonynt hwy a'i rhoddodd ym 1925 i Gomisiynwyr Gweithfeydd Ei Mawrhydi, sef y Weinyddiaeth Adeiladu Cyhoeddus a Gweithfeydd.

Yn arddangos cymesuredd cynllunio sydd bron yn berffaith, y mae'n dangos yn ardderchog yr egwyddor o amddiffyniad consentrigrig. Ni fyddai'n rhaid i warchodlu ei amddiffyn fesul darn, ond gallai gwahanol bartion saethu o'r wardiau mewnol ac allanol ar yr un pryd. Y mae'r ward mewnol yn bedryalog gyda chwe thŵr a dau dŷ porth; y mae'r ward allanol yn wythonglog gyda deuddeg tŵr a dau dŷ porth.

