GOODRICH CASTLE

Castle Lane, Goodrich, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire HR9 6HY

21st June 2022

During a holiday in the Cotswolds, we realised that Goodrich Castle in Ross-on-Wye was a little less than an hour's drive away. It would be the fifth castle visit in a two-week holiday and seeing we hadn't heard of the castle before, it felt like a definite bonus. We left our accommodation at 09:00 on a sunny morning in order to arrive there for opening time and as the drive was happily uncomplicated, we arrived a little early. As soon as we were allowed in, we were advised a school party was due, so zoomed off to take photos first.

Solidly built on bedrock

Goodrich Castle rises from a high spur of land above a broad loop in the River Wye, another one of the many castles along the Anglo-Welsh border. According to English Heritage, it's one of the "finest and best preserved of all English medieval castles" and after all, English Heritage should know! Approaching from the visitor centre and along a fairly long lane, our first sighting of the south-west tower and the sturdy south-east tower, with the grey-coloured keep further back between them, was most impressive.

As we turned the corner, the view changed to show more detail of the different sections. The south-east tower was prominent on the left, with the garderobe tower beside it, then the east range, the chapel and the gatehouse. The path from the visitor centre, though, took us to the semi-circular courtyard of the barbican, where visitors would have been greeted. A wide stone causeway allowed entrance to the exceptionally substantial gatehouse.

It had once had battlements and an upper fighting platform projecting from the towers, but there is still much of the gatehouse remaining. Where two portcullises would have been is still marked by vertical grooves in the walls, with further protection from murder holes and arrow slits. Halfway along the gate-passage, a door on the right leads to a narrow vaulted passage built into the thickness of the wall, which ends with a rectangular guardroom.

From the south-east tower (left) to the gatehouse (photo by Alan Santillo)

However, I'm getting ahead of myself and it's time for some history. For many centuries there had been an important crossing point on the River Wye that was one of the major routes between England and Wales, close to Goodrich Castle. It's therefore very possible that earthworks around the castle belonged to a hill fort dating to the Iron Age (800 BC–AD 43). Human burials, possibly from an early Christian cemetery, have been found to the south-east of the castle and crop marks in nearby fields show that other buildings were in the same area.

After the Norman invasion of 1066, a significant number of castles were built along the border lands by Norman lords, as defences against Welsh rebels and raiders. As for Goodrich, an English landowner named Godric Mappeson succeeded in having a castle built by 1101-2. The name Godric indicates he was an Englishman, but nothing now remains of that first castle, except the legacy of his name.

Godric Mappeson is thought to have died before 1100 and the castle then passed to William fitz Baderon, who is understood to have been Godric's son-in-law. Following this, the castle became the property of William's son in the 1120s.

By the late 1130s, King Stephen (reign 1135-54) was having difficulty keeping the loyalty of local Hereford barons against his rival to the throne, Empress Matilda, daughter of King Henry I. In about 1138, he transferred Goodrich to Gilbert fitz Gilbert de Clare (a pleasing name) and promoted him to be Earl of Pembroke.

In 1148, Gilbert's son Richard 'Strongbow' de Clare inherited Goodrich and started building. He was probably the one to build the keep with coursed ashlar – a block construction using finely cut worked stone, in this case grey conglomerate that was probably from the nearby Forest of Dean. The keep is the only castle building to have survived from this time, with some fine exterior architecture.

From the style of its architecture, it's thought very likely that it was constructed during a refortification of the castle, although the exact date is not known. The grey keep still forms the core of the castle, but taking decent photos was problematical, being directly into the sunlight on a very bright day.

The keep (photo by Alan Santillo)

As for Richard de Clare, having supported Stephen, he later found himself out of favour when Empress Matilda's son took the throne as King Henry II (reign 1154-89). He achieved fame as conqueror of Ireland when he sailed there at the invitation of an exiled Irish king, although this was in defiance of King Henry II's instructions. He enjoyed great military success in Ireland in the 1170s, including the capture of Dublin (which aroused Henry's suspicions even further).

Despite later fighting for King Henry II in Normandy, he died in Dublin in 1176, with his adventures commemorated in a Norman French poem entitled *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*. As his son and daughter were still children when he died, his estate reverted to the Crown and remained so until 1204.

Although the Crown withheld the manors and titles of the estate, only releasing them in stages, the right of inheritance passed to Richard's daughter, Isabel. When Richard I became king (reign 1189-1199), he upheld the promise made by his father Henry that Isabella should marry a knight of the royal household, namely William Marshal, who became a great soldier and statesman, as well as earning the reputation of being England's greatest knight.

Upon their marriage, William received the border castles of Usk and Chepstow and spent a great deal of time, effort and expertise in extending the defences at both sites. Ten years later, King John (reign 1199-1216) decided to grant William the prestigious earldom of Pembroke and in 1204, William was awarded Goodrich Castle. This may have been compensation for William's loss of his estates in Normandy to the French, who had eventually succeeded in annexing Normandy from England, for the first time since 1066.

Although no documentary evidence exists, it's considered very probable that William modernised the buildings at Goodrich Castle around this time with stone towers and new curtain walls. Surviving work at his castles of Pembroke, Chepstow and Usk shows he was one of the greatest castle builders of his age. Considering much of Goodrich Castle was likely to have been earth and timber in 1204, it makes complete sense that he would have upgraded the defences at Goodrich.

The tumultuous end of King John's reign gave way to the hasty coronation of his nine-year-old son, Henry, with the event being organised by William Marshal. During the banquet after the ceremony, news came that Goodrich Castle needed reinforcement against a Welsh attack, which William had to repel. William acted as regent during the early years of King Henry III's reign (1216-72) and died in 1239 at around the age of 72, after an exemplary life of loyalty and courage.

View of courtyard from top of keep (photo by Alan Santillo)

William and Isabel had five sons, who each inherited Goodrich in turn. The second son, Richard, made an alliance with the Welsh, which led to the king ordering Goodrich Castle to be besieged. It's not clear if actual fighting took place, but the castle was made to submit to the royal lieutenant and Richard departed for Ireland, where he was killed in battle the year after.

The fourth son, Walter, made Goodrich his home and lived there for some time, although he was also involved in military campaigns elsewhere. He fell ill and died at Goodrich in 1245 (in the keep, according to 19th-century tradition) and the fifth brother, Anselm, died a month later. As all five sons had died childless, the estate was therefore divided between the five daughters and then their descendants.

In 1247, Goodrich passed to William's granddaughter Joan. In the same year, she married William de Valence, a French nobleman. During William and Joan's ownership, Goodrich Castle enjoyed a new period of favour and rebuilding, with much of today's ruins dating from their time. In fact, they made Goodrich one of the most up-to-date castles of that period, with a defensive perimeter concealing complex and sophisticated residential buildings.

As they are now, the buildings have been dated to the late-13th and early-14th centuries and attributed to William de Valence, his widow Joan, or their son Aymer, according to various royal records. Interestingly, architectural features of these buildings show similarities to other castles modernised by both relations and rivals of the de Valences, which are known to date from the late-13th century. Clues can be found from Caerphilly (1270s), Kidwelly (1280s/90s), Castell Coch (circa 1277) and Marten's Tower at Chepstow (completed in 1293).

Ditch with chapel in right foreground (photo by Alan Santillo)

William de Valence was not only King Henry III's half-brother and King Edward I's uncle, but he was one of the leading figures of his time. He was the son of Isabella of Angoulême (widow of King John) with her second husband, Hugues de Lusignan, Count of La Marche – some serious name-dropping there.

Little is known about his early life in Gascony, except that King Henry III invited him to England in 1247. A number of English nobles considered him a foreign upstart, even though (or maybe because) he supported the king in many ways, including during the rebellion of Simon de Montfort and his followers. He fought at the battles of Lewes and Evesham, as well as at the siege of Kenilworth.

When King Edward I came to the throne (reign 1272-1307), William acted as commander of his southern army against the Welsh in 1277-8. He supervised the construction of a royal castle at Aberystwyth and in 1282-3, he captured the Welsh stronghold of Castell y Bere. He also took part in diplomatic and military missions in Flanders and Gascony, but later died in 1296 after being wounded in a skirmish.

His widow Joan kept Goodrich Castle as part of her dower and spent long periods of time there after his death – her household, according to some detailed records, fluctuated between 122 and 196. Her daughter Isabel often joined her, as well as her son Aymer and his first wife Béatrice. Other eminent guests included Gilbert de Clare with his household and the lady of Raglan Castle.

Joan died in 1307 and Aymer inherited Goodrich Castle. He was one of the final generation of nobles who held significant estates in France as well as in England and played a prominent role in politics, mostly in support of the monarchy. He was involved in negotiations for King Edward II's marriage to Isabella of France and soon quarrelled with the notorious Piers Gaveston, although he did not agree to the capture and execution of Gaveston by the earls of Lancaster and Warwick.

On his return from a mission to the Pope in Avignon, he was captured by a French nobleman, who believed Aymer owed him money. For his freedom, he had to pay ransom payments that ruined him financially and he died in 1324 with no heir.

The lordship of Goodrich passed to his niece, Elizabeth Comyn, but as she was a minor, the castle was taken into custody by the Crown. At that time, there was scandal at the court of King Edward II, concerning his favourites, father and son both named Hugh le Despenser. They pressured the young Elizabeth Comyn into surrendering her possessions to them, kidnapping her and holding her prisoner.

In March 1325, she had no option but to release Goodrich Castle to Hugh le Despenser the younger. However, shortly afterwards she married Richard Talbot, 2nd Lord Talbot, who in 1326 seized the castle in her name. As for Hugh le Despenser, both senior and younger were brought to brutal justice.

As well as being a courtier, Richard Talbot was also a distinguished soldier, taking a military part in the Hundred Years' War in France and fighting in Scotland. In 1338 at Goodrich, for a short time he established a community of priests to sing mass in the castle's chapel and in 1343, he endowed a small priory of Augustinian canons next to the river crossing below the castle.

Chapel adjoining the gatehouse (photo by Alan Santillo)

For many years, along with his descendants, he was caught up in much unrest and fighting. In 1402, the Welsh Marches were threatened by the rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr and orders were issued for the safeguard of Goodrich Castle. Welsh forces invaded the area in 1404 and the following year, Gilbert, 5th Lord Talbot (great-grandson of Richard, 2nd Lord Talbot), was instrumental in repelling them and securing Goodrich. In 1408-9, he recovered Harlech Castle from Welsh rebels.

Gilbert's brother John, who inherited Goodrich Castle in 1421, spent much of his life fighting in France and thus spent very little time at Goodrich.

According to architectural evidence, a number of alterations at Goodrich were carried out by the Talbots in the 15th century. These include an extra storey above accommodation in the north range, also known as the solar block; extended accommodation in the east range; and an internal gallery at the west end of the chapel. The solar block had stood out as an attractively interesting part of the castle as we'd entered the courtyard after coming in through the gatehouse:

North range or solar block (photo by Alan Santillo)

For most of the 15th century, the Talbots were deeply involved in politics and warfare, either overseas or during the Wars of the Roses, which kept them away from Goodrich. As well as this, they were attracted to their more prestigious residences, particularly the castle and manor of Sheffield in Yorkshire.

When John Talbot, 2nd Earl of Shrewsbury, died in 1460 fighting at the Battle of Northampton for King Henry VI (reign 1422-61 & 1470-71), his son John inherited Goodrich at the age of 11. Since he was a minor, the new King Edward IV (reign 1461-83) granted Goodrich to William Herbert of Raglan, who was made Earl of Pembroke in 1468. Thus the connection between Goodrich and Pembroke was briefly reinstated – I love these links, they inspire me to visit even more castles!

In due course, the castle passed to George, 4th Earl of Shrewsbury, who held several judicial posts around Goodrich. This may be why the castle appears to have been used as a judicial centre and prison at that time for the local courts.

Later, George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, became custodian to Mary Queen of Scots between 1569 and 1584, spending much time in Sheffield. Meanwhile, Goodrich provided an income from timber, ironworking and fisheries. George's son Gilbert, with his wife Mary, moved to Goodrich in 1575, as his father's steward.

Gilbert died in 1616 and the castle passed via his and Mary's daughter, Elizabeth, to Henry Grey, heir to the earldom of Kent. The Greys let Goodrich to tenants and in 1632, local attorney Richard Tyler became the castle's constable, living there with his family. Financed by the earl, he undertook several renovations, including replastering, renewal of glass and replacement of stonework and timber.

In 1643, Goodrich Castle became caught up in the struggle for control of the Welsh Marches and Herefordshire, during the English Civil War that had broken out the previous year. The castle was initially garrisoned by Parliamentarians, presumably with the aid of Richard Tyler, but it is largely associated with the Royalist cause.

In late 1643, the Royalists failed to capture Gloucester and needed to repel a Parliamentarian advance northward. A Royalist garrison was billeted at Goodrich under the command of Henry Lingen, who set up permanent headquarters there in September 1644. Meanwhile, Richard Tyler was imprisoned, after attempting to sell property and livestock before it was all requisitioned.

This Royalist takeover became violent, with farm buildings below the castle being burned and destroyed. In the following year, intense fighting broke out in Royalist Hereford when it came under siege from a Parliamentarian army and managed to be saved only by a relieving army under the king's command. By the end of 1645, the Parliamentarians had succeeded in taking control of Hereford and Goodrich Castle had become the centre of Royalist activity in the area.

A surprise attack by Parliamentarians in March 1646 centred on the castle stables, a vital feature of the castle's active life. Under cover of darkness and a diversion at the gates, soldiers climbed over the outer curtain wall and breached a hole in it. After capturing the horses, they led them away and set fire to the stables with catastrophic consequences. According to one source, 80 horses were housed there at the time – but at least, being of value, the horses were led to safety.

North outer ward leading to stables
(photo by Alan Santillo)

Three months later, another attack led to a ferocious siege, described vividly in contemporary letters and later accounts. The Royalist commander refused to surrender and the Parliamentarians, although having dug trenches to shelter their mortars under the walls, found the castle too substantial to overcome. Their commander, Colonel John Birch, ordered the casting of a mortar able to fire a gunpowder-filled shell weighing over 200 lbs/90 kg, designed to fire into the air and drop the shell onto its target, where it would explode.

Birch concentrated on the north-west tower, much of which was destroyed – it is said that he was so excited with his new weapon that he fired the last 19 balls himself! With some buildings in ruins and the threat of more devastation from the powerful mortar, the Royalists surrendered and left the castle as prisoners. The thunderous beast in question was nicknamed Roaring Meg and it's the only mortar surviving from the English Civil War. After its success at Goodrich, it was used at the bombardment of Raglan Castle (another of those satisfying links).

Roaring Meg (photo by Alan Santillo)

The siege had left the castle in a ruinous state, but enough survived for Richard Tyler to move back in, with the result that Parliament ordered it to be slighted. It was finally rendered indefensible in 1648, by damaging the main defences and removing the battlements. To my mind, Parliamentarians have a lot to answer for.

At that time, the castle was the property of the dowager Countess of Kent, whose family had supported Parliament. She received £1,000 in compensation for the damage, but the castle was now uninhabitable. Apart from the ditch being used as a cattle pound, it had become a historical curiosity, with the surrounding estate used for forestry, fishing, ironworking and stone quarrying.

In 1755, the castle became the property of the earls/dukes of Kent no longer, when it was sold to Admiral Thomas Griffin. It remained in the family until eventually passing into the guardianship of the HM Office of Works in 1920.

From the 18th century, it had taken on its latest role as a tourist attraction, since being only about four miles downstream from Ross-on-Wye, it made an ideal stop for day-trippers and travellers on boats. In the early days, though, visits were somewhat hazardous, necessitating the use of ladders to reach high places.

After 1873, visiting became easier and attracted more tourists, thanks to a new railway line, but much of the castle was unsafe. The Office of Works cleared vegetation, made stonework sound and rebuilt several areas of degenerated masonry, as well as improving access. Since 1984, English Heritage has taken over the castle's conservation, archaeological recording and public presentation.

English Heritage were clearly doing a great job, as we found it well-maintained and easy to navigate. After our initial exploration of the castle that was mainly to take photos, we were more than ready for some coffee. We'd noticed incoming visitors with audio guides, so it was high time to return via the fairly long lane to the visitor centre and collect an audio guide each, before enjoying cappuccino and cake in a seating area outside the tearoom.

Approach to the gatehouse (photo by Alan Santillo)

Returning to the castle, we were more familiar with where everything was, as we again walked across the stone causeway leading up to the entrance. Although the gatehouse has lost its battlements and an upper fighting platform, it still exuded a sense of power and former defensive strength.

The gate-passage once had a wooden drawbridge and two portcullises still marked by vertical grooves in the wall. There were arrow slits, murder holes through which projectiles could be dropped, and a passage leading to a rectangular guard room with slit windows that allowed the guards to watch for new arrivals.

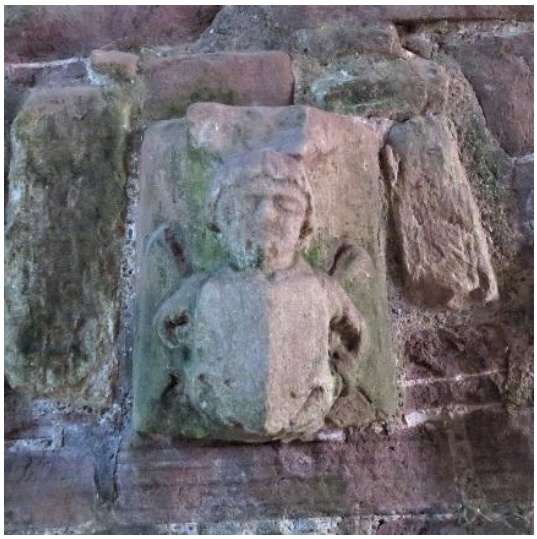
Unusually, the castle's chapel was located on the ground floor of the large tower on the left of the gatehouse, rather than the more common arrangement of being directly over doors or gates. Having been first constructed in the late 13th century, the chapel looked particularly interesting and once we were inside the courtyard, we headed into the chapel for a more thorough investigation.

According to Joan de Valence's household accounts in the late 13th century, there were at least nine chaplains or clerks attached to the chapel, who would have performed administrative duties as well as ecclesiastical ones. The chapel's secular aspect was apparent in its nearness to the gatehouse, as well as the way it was used to store oats – the cellar too was probably a store, rather than a crypt.

Despite slighting damage in 1648 and being roofless and floorless from then until the late 1950s, several original features in the chapel have survived. These include a trefoil-headed sedile (niche containing a priest's seat); an aumbry (cupboard for sacred vessels); and a piscina (sink for washing holy vessels).

Inside the chapel, gatehouse entrance left (photo by Alan Santillo)

As ever, I was very interested in the details all around us, as listed above (I always appreciate a nice piscina). Also of particular interest was a fascinating corbel carved to depict an angel bearing a shield. It had been added by the Talbot family, probably in the first half of the 15th century:



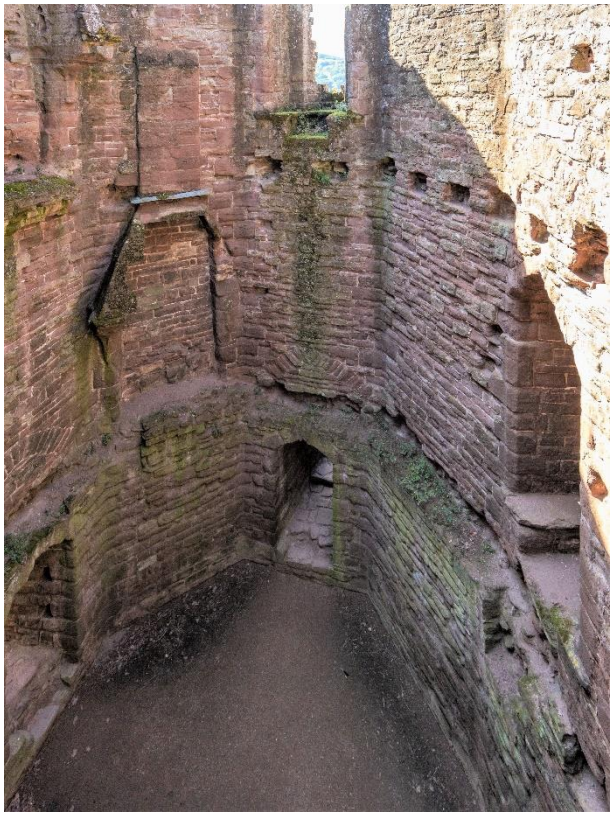
Corbel in the chapel

Leaving the chapel, a spiral stair led out to the east wall-walk, from which there excellent views over the whole of the courtyard, as well as outwards to the barbican. When the Valences had built the east range in the 13th century, it had consisted of only one storey and because it had direct access to a cellar and the latrines, had probably been used by servants.

However, by the 15th century, Goodrich was beginning to feel very cramped. The Talbot family, who had been owners of the castle since the early 14th century, needed more space for themselves and their staff. They rebuilt the east range with three floors, which included galleries overlooking the courtyard and a larger number of rooms to allow greater comfort and privacy to the household.

The east wall-walk from the courtyard (photo by Alan Santillo)

At its south end, the wall-walk passed through the huge south-east tower, the one with the most immediate impact as we approached the castle. From the walkway, it was easy to notice that the round tower contained three storeys of polygon-shaped rooms with no connecting stair. The top floor would probably have been entered from the wall-walk, as it is currently, or via a stair from the courtyard.



The south-east tower (photo by Alan Santillo)

As well as being obvious strong points in the castle's defences, the corner towers were also the location for some of the most important accommodation at Goodrich.

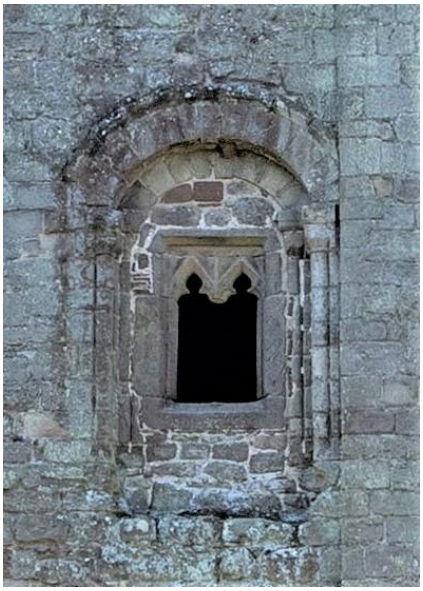
Each of the corner towers were three storeys high, with a sunken basement, a middle floor at courtyard level and an upper room with battlements above. There was an independent entrance for each storey, which meant it wasn't possible to pass from one room to the others. In the two upper floors, the window seats, washbasins and fireplaces indicated that the rooms were designed to be comfortable, as this would create a good impression of wealth and sophistication.

The south-east tower was later called the Prison Tower and although this doesn't seem to have been its original purpose, it's considered very possible that prisoners were once kept there. In the past, carved graffiti could be seen on the middle floor, possibly made by prisoners in the 14th century, but it has eroded away. This is a great pity, as I do love some medieval graffiti.

At the south end of the east range stands the garderobe tower, which was added to the east curtain wall sometime between 1300 and 1500, to replace a single latrine. I discovered after our visit that this tower is an exceptional feature of Goodrich Castle, since an example this large is extremely rare in England and Wales. It was a communal latrine for the whole household, which could be used by several people at a time – not an exceptional castle convenience in my book…

The garderobe tower

It was time to explore the keep through a door facing the courtyard, which had been inserted in the 14th or 15th century. The original entrance had been at first-floor level, but was later blocked and converted into an unusual window. In fact, the four faces of the keep's exterior all vary slightly in detail and the intended purpose of the Goodrich keep remains somewhat unclear. In times of attack, it would have served as a good lookout point and as a retreat during a siege, but in peacetime, it only provided room enough for one chamber on each floor.



Converted from door to window
(photo by Alan Santillo)

Inside the keep, the lowest room was once lit by a narrow slit window and only entered by a ladder or stair from the room above, so was presumably used for storage. Nowadays a modern stair leads up to a platform on the next floor, from which the ex-door window can be seen. This room was more than 20 feet/6 metres high, but apparently had no window or fireplace and must have felt cheerless.

In the 12th century, visitors could go through a door into the passage beyond and up a steep and narrow spiral stair to the tower's highest room. With fine windows and stone window seats allowing views to the north and west, it was the grandest room in the keep, possibly used as the lord's chamber.

We were able to ascend to the roof of the keep, to look out over the Wye Valley and the castle itself. The battlements are no longer there, but there is evidence of earlier construction work of a roof and another subsequent roof at right angles.

South-west tower (left) and great hall (photo by Alan Santillo)

The kitchen was at the west side of the keep, situated next to the great hall, although only a few traces remain at ground level. Despite being small, very large meals could be provided – according to records, Easter Sunday in 1297 was celebrated with beef, bacon, boar, salmon, mutton, veal, capons, hens, pigeons and eggs. Kudos to the kitchen staff, it must have been a logistical nightmare!

Running along the west side of the courtyard, the great hall was a multi-purpose focal point of the castle, as well as an expression of the Valence family's lordship. Grand ceremonies took place in the hall, important guests were entertained with lavish feats and petitioners attended here to argue their case in local disputes.

Great hall facing the south-west tower (photo by Alan Santillo)

Four doors gave access to the south-west tower beyond. Two doors on the right led to the pantry and buttery in the tower's ground floor, where bread and wine were served and stored, while a door on their left led down to a storage cellar.

Great hall facing north (photo by Alan Santillo)

The stairs on the far left of the tower led to the upper floor, where there was a luxurious (in medieval standards) room for high-level guests. In the great hall, these important guests would have been seated close to the lord and his family at their table, probably on a raised dais, at the hall's north end.

Unlike many other great halls with a central hearth in the middle of the floor, Goodrich had a huge fireplace in the western wall, with three windows between them that were as tall as the height of the room. On the other side, the windows were smaller and higher up, with a stone bench running along the wall below them, which no doubt originally had a long table placed in front. At a later date, a gallery was built at the north end, entered through a door in the north wall.

A small lobby once connected the great hall to the north range and the north-west tower, which may have contained the private quarters of the lord and his family. The lobby would have been used as a waiting room for visitors to the inner rooms of the household. However, thanks to the slighting in the 1640s and serious falls of masonry in 1919, the tower's remains are unable to be reconstructed.

This north-west tower would once have been externally similar to the impressive south-east tower with its high pyramid-shape buttresses. Furthermore, the remains of the north-west tower suggest the great height of its rooms and their good facilities, suggesting these rooms would have been the bedchambers for the owners of Goodrich. Even the tower's basement had a fireplace and window seats.

Since first setting eyes on the paired arches of the north range, or solar block, I was eager to enter this area. Despite the high-quality of its architecture, English Heritage admit that its original function is hard to interpret, with only two walls surviving above basement level. It's thought the wonderful arches may have emulated paired arches at nearby Chepstow Castle – another lovely link.

From the solar block towards the gatehouse (photo by Alan Santillo)

Built in the late 13th century, the range has two window seats at courtyard level and another in the basement, but the south and east walls are completely missing above the basement, with no surviving fireplace on either level.

A well-preserved 13th-century basin is located in the south-east corner of the basement, with a drain in the sink below and a spout above:

13th-century basin

Where the north range is situated within the castle indicates the upper floor served as a private solar, a great chamber for the most important members of the lord's household. The stonework above the arches indicates that in the late Middle Ages, the height of the roof was raised to accommodate a third floor, with more rooms level with the top of the two arches. These may have been used as bedchambers.

It had become really hot by the time we headed to the portcullis chamber above the guardroom. Although the workings were beyond me, this room apparently contains a very rare survival in an English castle, namely evidence for the mechanism that would raise and lower the portcullises directly below.

Portcullis chamber (photo by Alan Santillo)

Doors at the far end led to a turret room and a fighting platform, now demolished, as well as a small latrine. A large fireplace and window seats indicate that this room did not just have a functional purpose, but was also residential, probably housing soldiers, or the constable of the castle.

Adjacent to the portcullis room was a brilliant view of the causeway and barbican below. The barbican was where visitors would arrive and be greeted – somehow the semi-circular design made it easy to imagine them dismounting from their horses and being dealt with in whatever way was appropriate. There was originally a small gatehouse and guard chamber facing the approach, although now only the lower parts of the walls remain, with built-in stone benches.

View of the barbican and causeway (photo by Alan Santillo)

Lastly, we went for a meander around the outer areas, past a postern door in the north side and around the corner to the site of the stables, where low stone footings and cobbled floors were all that survived from the 1646 Parliamentarian raid. It's thought these remains date to the 17th century, whereas the medieval stables were probably on higher ground outside the castle. Unfortunately, strong sunlight prevented us from taking a good enough photo of the stable remains.

Postern door (photo by Alan Santillo)

We had enjoyed wandering around with our audio guides, listening to descriptions downloaded from information panels. Some of them didn't seem to work, but we still enjoyed listening to the ones that did. We'd encountered a number of enthusiastic junior school children on our wanderings, but they were accompanied by teachers and assistants who were teaching and guiding them well.

After being at the site for three hours, though, we were hot and tired, so left to seek some shade where we could eat our picnic lunch. It had been a surprisingly compelling visit, especially as I hadn't previously been aware of Goodrich Castle. It's somehow comforting to know that many of our important historical buildings are in the capable hands of English Heritage.

So the audio guide system was a little faulty, but a member of staff saw us looking puzzled and took it upon herself to walk back along the fairly long lane to the shop, pick up two other audio guides in case our batteries were faulty (I think mine have been faulty for years) and then walk back along the fairly long lane to give them to us. It was service with a smile and you can't fault that 😊

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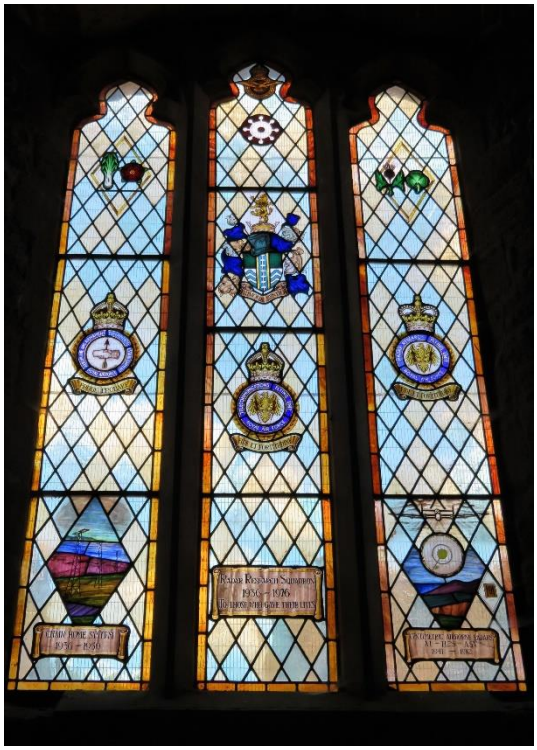
In the chapel there was a memorial window to commemorate Service and civilian aircrews who had lost their lives in radar development flying duties between 1936-76. It was unveiled on 7th June 1992 to mark the anniversary of a tragedy when a Halifax aircraft, carrying the prototype of the first ground mapping radar bombing aid, crashed near Goodrich Castle, with all eleven on board killed. The castle's chapel seemed a very fitting place for this colourful, poignant memorial.



Memorial window