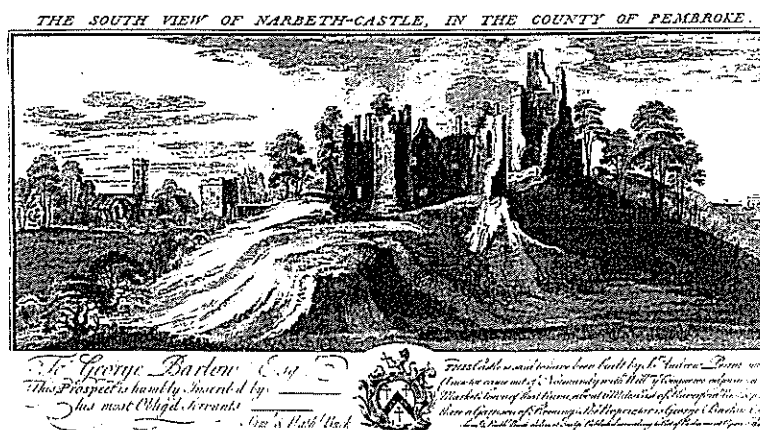


# DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

# NARBERTH CASTLE

## A STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION AND HISTORICAL SUMMARY



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# **NARBERTH CASTLE (DYFED PRN 3748)**

## **A STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION AND HISTORICAL SUMMARY**

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## NARBERTH CASTLE - A STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION

Narberth Castle (Dyfed PRN 3748) was a compact castle of medium size, with defences characteristic of the mid 13th century, represented today by a subrectangular enclosure defined by the very fragmentary remains of a masonry curtain wall. There are four drum towers, one at each corner, in various states of preservation; only the lowest courses survive of the NW Tower, the south-east quarter of the NE Tower stands to 3 storeys, the southern half of the SE Tower survives to its full height of 3 storeys, while the SW Tower is the best preserved standing almost complete to its full complement of 3 storeys. All appear unvaulted. Midway along the long west side is the rather fragmentary remains of a small, hollow 'D'-shaped turret. Opposite this on the east wall is a stump of wall representing the site of a large, 'D'-shaped tower. Within the southern half of the enclosure is a large domestic block represented by an east-west wall defining an unvaulted 2-storey hall block built against the southern curtain wall, communicating with a 2-storey N-S building, with a vaulted undercroft, built against the eastern curtain. The entrance to the castle presumably lay between the NW and NE Towers but no upstanding remains survive.

The fabric is limestone rubble throughout. Most of the facework has been lost except on the two southern towers, and there is very little surviving dressed stone. That which does survive is simple chamfered limestone and suggests that the walled enceinte and towers are of the mid 13th century, and the domestic buildings are from the late 13th century. At present there is structural evidence neither for earlier nor later work.

No earthworks are now associated with the castle which stands on a knoll with steep slopes on three sides. However, it is probable that a ditch formerly lay before the entrance. There is now no evidence for an outer ward. To the south of the castle is a large triangular ravelin of probable Civil War date.

The bailey interior was levelled, excavation trenches dug at various locations and much of the fabric rebuilt/repointed during the 1970s and 1980s by the then owner Robert Perrot. Unfortunately several original features were altered and/or destroyed.

There is no published detailed structural description of the castle. The survey of 1539, a valuable document which describes the then structure of the castle, is reproduced in RCAHM *Inventory*, 1925, no. 737 (Appendix I). A good, but short account of the castle published in 1962 (Harrison, 1962, 328-30) attempts to relate the 1539 survey of 1539 to the remains, while a fairly detailed unpublished account occurs in the field notebooks of the late David Cathcart King held in the library of the Society of Antiquaries, London (King, 1949 and 1976).

## **LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY**

Narberth Castle lies at the southern end of the town of Narberth, at NGR SN 1098 1440, standing on a pronounced elevated knoll. A road runs north-south along its western side, following, it has been suggested, a well-established routeway that pre-dates the castle. Some distance south of the castle the route fords Narberth Brook. The castle site (and its possible precursor, see Part II, 'History') was undoubtedly chosen to control this routeway and ford.

The castle is built upon upon a north-south spur forming a knoll which rises gently from a generally south-facing slope as a level rectangular plateau, undoubtedly artificially enhanced, defining the shape of the castle. The knoll slopes down very steeply to the west, east and south. The underlying geology is Ordovician shale which lies close to the surface and outcrops at at least one location, where the castle is built directly upon it.

The plateau has been further modelled in the recent past by the removal of some demolition debris from the castle and the dumping of the remainder at the north end of the site, producing a strong terraced effect. This has been further enhanced north of the castle proper during the 1970s-1980s by the apparent deliberate levelling of surfaces and perhaps further dumping of make-up. A hedgebank now runs north from the NE Tower.

This level ground north of the castle and approaching its former gateway may have been the site of an outer ward, but all physical evidence for it that may have existed has been thus effaced (see also below). However, a town did develop (or was planted) north and west of the castle during the medieval period.

A well-worn trackway running north-south down the western flank of the knoll may lead from a former postern (see below).

## **THE NW TOWER**

Of the four corner towers, the NW Tower is the least well preserved. Only approximately a third of the exterior face of the south-western arc can be seen, including its junction with the western curtain with which it is bonded; the northern end of this arc appears to be truncated and is heavily overgrown. What may be a small area of the internal face towards the north-east of the arc may be present; however, the entire interior lies below approximately 0.30m of debris, dump material and recent levelling make-up.

Enough remains to demonstrate that the tower was a circular drum tower with a diameter of about 10m and with walls possibly 2.5m thick at basement level. Like the rest of the towers, the NW Tower is faced with good quality limestone rubble, roughly squared and coursed, and again like the rest its base displays a marked external batter, in this case without a string course where it dies into the wall. At its

junction with the western curtain the base lies on a plinth formed by the top of the footings, which continues at the base of the curtain. within this plinth in the angle between tower and curtain is a roughly square chamber formed by the bottom of a garderobe shaft that is exposed where it descends on the face of the tower.

## THE ENTRANCE AREA

The debris/dump layer that lies over the truncated NW Tower continues north and east as a distinct raised terrace. Its straight southern edge may result from having been cut back from the south, but elsewhere has the appearance of having been further made up and levelled.

This material lies over what was undoubtedly the site of the main entry into the castle, which, lying as it does between the NW and NE Towers, would normally have been a simple gap in the curtain. However, the 1539 survey describes the gateway as having 'a prison house, low chambers either side and a chamber over measuring 39ft by 15ft' (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I).

Towards the east an area of unlevelled dump material forms an irregular raised area. This continues towards, and lies within, the NE Tower. A hollow here, with one regular end, may represent the site of one of the excavation trenches cut during the 1970s-1980s by the then owner.

## THE NE TOWER

Only the south-eastern quarter of the NE Tower wall, including its junction with the eastern curtain wall with which it is bonded, survives above ground and now represents 3 storeys. Structural evidence suggests that a fourth storey was formerly present and this appears to be shown on the Buck print of 1740 (NLW, PD 7042, Top. B12/6 B114), and the wording of the 1539 survey implies three chambers over a dungeon (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I). The remainder, with the exception of the 'forebuilding' to the south, has been truncated and lies under the dump material noted above. However, a small area of mortared masonry, probably *in situ*, rises above present ground level to the west of the surviving section and may represent part of the western tower wall.

If so then it indicates that the NW Tower, though similar in plan to the other three towers, was of greater diameter- possibly 15m, with a correspondingly greater wall thickness of 3m at base. The rubble facing is as on the NW Tower, as is the basal batter - where it dies into the wall, however, the batter terminates at a string course.

The internal arrangements within the NE Tower appear from the surviving evidence to have been rather more extensive than in the two southern towers. A battery of garderobe shafts descended through the thickness of the wall at its junction with the eastern curtain, all emptying into a square chamber. This now communicates with the

exterior via a gap in the wall; the whole has been recently rebuilt and repointed but an aperture may always have been present here. The wall separating the garderobe exit chamber from the body of the tower interior has gone but its truncated remains are just visible above ground.

The remains of one chute descend from a garderobe on the first floor, the outline of the chamber for which is visible as facework on the internal wall with a slit light to the exterior. Two more complete shafts descend from a second floor chamber that has now gone, while the impression of a third can be seen on the broken west face of this wall to ascend its full height suggesting that it originated in a third floor garderobe representing the only surviving structural evidence for a fourth storey.

A fireplace is present in the main body on each surviving floor; only the backs remain and there is no evidence for the form of the hoods. An entrance to the tower appears to be on this floor and is shown as a large semicircular headed opening on the Buck print of 1740 (NLW, PD 7042, Top. B12/6 B114); the main entrance was on the first floor (see below).

The east, south and part of the west walls of a rectangular 'forebuilding', lying within the bailey against the southern face of the tower, survive to first floor height, the east wall being represented by the eastern curtain wall with which the south wall is bonded. The internal facework of this wall continues through a gap into the NE Tower ground floor suggesting the presence of an entry from forebuilding to tower here; this is reinforced by the presence of two sockets through the wall which may be drawbar holes. However, that a first floor doorway was also present is indicated in the 1539 survey which describes the building as having '29 steps from the courtyard to the Great Tower' (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I). The west wall of the forebuilding is incomplete and terminates to the north as broken corework; however, an entry may have been present here. There is what appears to be the base of a chute on the external SE corner of the forebuilding; this area is built directly on a shale outcrop.

## **THE EASTERN CURTAIN, FORMER TOWER AND VAULTED BUILDING**

The curtain wall between the NE Tower and the vaulted building to the south has not survived. There is however a short length of footings which follow the projected line, but are very narrow. They may represent medieval curtain footings from which the external facing has been robbed but may equally be the remains of a low post-medieval wall. The plateau now extends east of this line for a short distance with a sharp break of slope downhill possibly representing the pushing of debris from the curtain out onto the slope; it is now consolidated and overgrown.

At the south end of this wall line, at its junction with the north-east corner of the vaulted building, is the stump of an east-west return. The 1539 survey suggests that this was the site of a tower nearly as large as the NW, SE and SW Towers but presumably 'D'-shaped. The survey describes a tower 'on the east side' with a

'compass of 66 feet', comprising 3 storeys, two chambers over a buttery (Harrison, 1962, 329).

The east-west wall north of the vaulted building shown on Harrison, 1962, 329 and in King's notebook plan is no longer visible, and may lie below the rubble dump here - it may be the site of the 'House 33ft long with low parlour, closet and chamber over' mentioned in 1539 (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I)..

The vaulted building is a rectangular limestone structure measuring 12m by 8m and aligned north-south, with two surviving storeys, built against the eastern curtain. At its south end the eastern curtain has weathered away exposing a smooth vertical masonry face where the south wall of the building was constructed against the curtain. The ground floor has two entrances, one in the long west wall represented by a semicircular headed doorway which lacks surviving detail, and one towards the west end of the south wall communicating with the hall block. The latter was been much rebuilt in the 1980s and given a semicircular head of concrete blocks; the small lobby opening from the entrance passage, however, though repointed, appears to be original.

A large segmental headed window embrasure lies either side of the western doorway. The facework has been entirely lost on this wall including the external window openings and any dressings - it is now impossible to define their original nature. They have both given iron railings in recent years but those in the southern embrasure have been removed.

The ground floor chamber is a vaulted undercroft with a cobble floor, at the same level as the bailey surface, that appears to be original. A shallow stone-lined drain, probably contemporary with the cobbling, runs down the western half of the floor. The vault is a low barrel-vault with a full-centred semicircular profile, springing from floor level. Where it forms the floor of the first floor chamber the vault masonry appears to have been finished in recent years and is now covered with a layer of builders' sand.

Only the eastern wall of the first floor chamber survives, the remainder probably being represented in part by the rubble neatly piled to the north of the building. The internal facework is in a similar rubble to that seen in the towers though rather less well squared. A large embrasure midway along the east wall may represent a former fireplace but again the detail has been lost. What appear to be the jambs of reveals that survive to both the north and south may represent flanking windows. There is no access to the first floor chamber and it must have been reached by an external (timber?) stair. There is no evidence for a third floor. The vaulted building is clearly the 'Pantry and Cellar vaulted, with Great Chamber and closet over' mentioned in the 1539 survey (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I).

A short stretch of narrow footings similar to those to the north of the vaulted building lead to the SE Tower.

## THE SE TOWER

The SE Tower is better exposed and rather better preserved than either of the northern towers. Its internal circumference of 5m is complete at ground level, and a good half of the body of the tower wall survives to varying heights outside the line of the curtain walls, with a diameter of 10m at the base. The southern quarter stands 11m to the probable full height of 3 storeys but the parapet has gone.

The fabric, and batter, are as seen in the NW Tower although the latter is rather more pronounced. The present earth ground floor is at the same level as the hall basement floor ie slightly lower than the bailey, but nearly 4m above external levels; this, coupled with the fact that the internal wall face apparently descends for at least some distance, may suggest the presence of an infilled basement. The truncated exterior face on the west side displays damaged features apparently secondarily (recently?) finished; to the south-west the curving face of a former spiral stair shaft that descends to the level of the exterior, and north of this a slightly curving finished face which may represent the eastern side of a postern passage from the hall to the north, associated with the spiral stair.

Each floor level is represented by an internal offset so that the wall diminishes in thickness through height. An internal corbel at mid-height to the south, associated with a vertical chase, probably represent the site of a brace-post for one of the second floor joists. Sockets let into the ground floor internal facework may be secondary.

A large unsplayed window embrasure, its sill at floor level, opens to the east on the ground floor but its outer half has been lost. Above it on the first floor a similar embrasure has a curious 2-centered arch headed blind alcove (piscina?) in its southern reveal. The eastern jamb of a similar embrasure survives to the south. On the third floor is a smaller embrasure, again unsplayed, with a segmental head and square window opening to the south-east; its dressings have been lost.

The surviving evidence read with the 1539 survey suggests that the ground floor was occupied by a bakehouse, the first floor by a chapel, and the third by a chamber (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I).

## THE HALL BUILDING

The curtain wall between the SE and SW Towers has been entirely lost, but its ragged bonded end survives on the SW Tower. It appears to have run parallel to the wall that survives 8m to the north that forms a westward continuation of the south wall of the vaulted building. A two-storey hall building lies between the two wall lines, and between the SE and SW Towers, forming, with the vaulted building, a reverse 'L'-shaped block. The end walls of the building are formed by the eastern and western curtains and only the latter survives to any height. The fabric of the north wall is a similar rubble to that in the vaulted building.

The hall building averages 20m east-west by 12m north-south, and at its highest point the north wall survives to 10m. The ground floor is now slightly lower than the present surface of the bailey, which forms a very level platform in this half of the castle interior, probably established in the 1970s-1980s..

The ground floor forms a large unvaulted basement, the joists for the low timber floor of the hall above being supported on corbels that survive on the internal face of the north wall. It is entered from the bailey via two doorway, and from the south door of the vaulted building. The eastern entrance from the bailey has been lost but its position is indicated by the sloping path; the western door with its low segmental head is a creation of the 1970s-1980s replacing a reversed splay light (King, 1949, 146). Three embrasures with similar heads lie between the two, their sills at floor level, each displaying a square window; however, their outer halves have been lost in the general robbing of facework that has occurred here leaving only an external plinth. No dressings have survived on the ground floor.

The first floor was again a large open chamber with a lofty roof. There is no evidence for a doorway from the bailey but one was undoubtedly present in the north wall, above the eastern ground floor entry and reached via an external (timber?) stair. Three windows survive in the north wall, each at a different level. The westernmost is the best preserved - its internal sill is at floor level and the segmental head of the reveal still displays a section of its chamfered limestone surround, stylistically typical of castellar architecture from the late 13th century. As with the other windows the outer half has been lost. The weathered western and better eastern jamb of the middle embrasure survive; the sill is above floor level. Only the weathered western jamb and sill survives from the eastern window but demonstrate that the very high sill included a cut-out for window seats. A nearly full-height segmental recess in the west wall at this stage carries a squinch reducing the acuteness of the angle here; however, as part of the curtain it may pre-date the hall and relate to an earlier, unknown arrangement. A drawing of 1849 shows a further large window through the west wall just to the south (Dyfed SMR DRF PRN 3748).

The hall building is described in 1539 as 'Kitchen, with Hall over, measuring 65ft by 26ft (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I). There is no evidence for a third floor. The Buck print of 1740 (NLW, PD 7042, Top. B12/6 B114) shows a plethora of chimneys but no fireplace now survives.

At some period after the middle ages the entire southern half of the ground floor surfaces, to a point 5m into the building, were truncated to the level of the exterior. The event appears to be associated with the demolition of the southern curtain wall, and possibly relate to the construction of the ravelin in the 17th century. It appears that material from the demolition was simply pushed down the slope to form the ravelin base.

## THE SW TOWER

The SW Tower is much the best preserved of the four. It stands complete to its full complement of 3 storeys on all sides except to the north-east where it is now open to the bailey - the area including any ground floor doorway from the hall basement has thus been lost. Its dimensions and general layout are as the SE Tower, including the possible infilled basement, but the batter is rather less pronounced; like in the SE Tower the parapet has been lost. The junction with, and a short stretch of the adjacent western curtain wall has been rebuilt obscuring the former spiral stair shaft which however is still discernible.

Each floor level is offset as in the SE Tower and a brace-post corbel can be seen on both the ground and first floors. The tower is well-lit on all floors; there are two square windows at ground floor level in large unsplayed embrasures with segmental heads, that to the west with its sill at floor level and that to the east with a cut-out window seat which is a recent insertion but may reflect an original arrangement. On the first floor are two windows and the jambs of the reveals for a third. The western window displays an original window seat and the surround for a lancet with chamfered limestone two-centred arch; the southern window has no seat and the dressings for its narrow light have been lost. The weathered remains of the openings for two more windows can be seen at second floor level.

A doorway with a weathered head leads off from the first floor interior towards the line of the former south curtain wall exiting through a doorway in the ragged stump of the curtain visible on the exterior face of the tower. This either led to the south curtain parapet or a mural passage within the thickness of the curtain. The end of the tower wall where it stops on a line projected westwards from the inside face of the south curtain appears finished at this level, as if the tower was open to the hall. Within this area is the outline of a second, blocked doorway leading from the same first floor door. There is no evidence for a fireplace at any level.

The surviving evidence read with the 1539 survey suggests that the ground floor was occupied by the Larderhouse, with two chambers over (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I).

## THE WESTERN CURTAIN

Very little of the western curtain wall now survives above ground except at the south end where it is described in the sections discussing the hall and SW Tower (above). North of this, the external face can be discerned for 7m until interrupted by fragmentary remains of a hollow, thin-walled 'D'-shaped turret, open to the bailey. It is described in 1539 as 'a larger compass than the wall for men to stand' (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I).

North of the turret the line of the curtain can be seen as a sharp break of slope which may represent the line of the internal face, the thickness of the wall having been robbed away, before fading completely. Evidence for the wall picks up again just south of the NW Tower. This location was surmised by Harrison to be the site of the 'Gallery, 76ft by 10ft, with three chambers under' mentioned in 1539 (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I).

A slight but apparently well-worn pathway leads up the western slope of the knoll towards a point midway between the turret and the NW Tower - might a further postern have been situated here?

## **THE RAVELIN**

The sloping ground at the end of the spur south of the castle is now occupied by a large, triangular earthwork platform defined by low, wide banks with scarped external faces to the south, and ditches at the foot of the towers to the north. Between the towers is a ramp leading from the interior of the castle down into the platform; however this was created in the 1970s by the then owner (King, 1976, 57).

The whole is typical of the ravelins constructed, as a defence against artillery, outside many Welsh castles during the Civil War. At least part of its make-up appears to be derived from the former south curtain and from the hall interior surfaces (see above), which were merely pushed down the slope. This can be seen as a series of 3 terraces, the central terrace extending south as the ramp.

## **THE AREA TO THE NORTH**

The area to the north of the castle has been subject to the dumping and make-up mentioned above. This has obscured the evidence for any ditch that may have fronted the castle here. In all likelihood such a ditch was cut from east-west across what was the main approach to the castle but only archaeological excavation would resolve the issue.

Likewise all evidence for an outer ward is now obscured. There is a large area of unoccupied space, 40m from north-south, between the castle and the southern termination of Market Street/Castle Terrace and it is highly probable that the area remained empty precisely because it belonged to the castle. The steepness of the scarp slopes to the north and west may mean that a ditch was only required to the east, while such an outer ward may not necessarily have been walled in stone. Early map and print evidence offers no further information.

However, if an outer ward was present its condition may have declined rapidly after the middle ages. In April 1996 burials were noted at the north end of this area where an extension is being built onto 6 Castle Terrace. These are cut through a possible

buried soil but the condition of the bone seems to indicate a post-medieval date. The burials are in turn sealed by the north-south hedgebank noted above.

## CONCLUSIONS

### *Dating of the fabric*

Narberth Castle is a compact stone castle typical of the mid 13th century, and none of the masonry that is visible today can be attributed to an earlier date (but nb. King, 1976, 58, rather doubtfully suggests that there might be some below the NE Tower). The lack of underlying earthworks makes any suppositions as to the form of the pre-13th century castle difficult, and the historical documentation offers few answers to the many questions; for instance, did the castle remain entirely of timber until this date? Again, only excavation can resolve the issue.

The castle is now a single enclosure and unditched, but the possibilities of a former outer ward and main ditch are discussed above.

The defensive features of the castle, ie the four (or five) towers and intervening curtain walling, are all of one build, being stylistically very similar and the towers visibly bonded with the curtains. Only one area of detail survives in the dressings of a first floor window in the SW Tower; it is characteristic of the mid 13th century. The enceinte is similar in concept and style to that at White Castle, Gwent, there regarded as dating from 1255-60 (Knight, n.d., 46).

The turret, however, represents a type of feature rarely occurring at this early a date and may be a later addition. There are no close parallels locally but something similar is to be seen in the outer wards of 'concentric castles' of the late 13th century.

The hall building is demonstrably late 13th-early 14th century work. Its fabric is slightly different from that seen in the towers and the one surviving dressing, in a first floor window, indicates that the opening was a sharp segmental arch very much in vogue c1300 and seen at eg. Harlech and Beaumaris Castles. The vaulted building has lost all its detail and cannot be closely dated; it articulates as a single domestic block with the hall building and the whole may therefore be of the same build; however with its vault, which are generally assigned to the 14th-15th century in Pembrokeshire, it is rather unlike the latter and so might be later - it can, at any rate, be seen to butt against the eastern curtain. The vaulted building has affinities with the hall range at the nearby castle of Llawhaden (Radford, n.d., 3)

None of the exposed masonry can be assigned to any later date, however most of the architectural detail has now been lost while it is known that the castle was still habitable in the 16th century (see 'History'), while the northern half of the castle lies beneath a debris layer that may represent any number of former buildings. The 1539 survey (Harrison, 1962, 329) describes '18 chambers great and small', a few of which may have lain beyond the existing remains. The description of the western

gallery in the same survey has a post-medieval ring. Furthermore the Hall building chimneys shown on the Buck print of 1740 have a markedly 'Tudor' appearance (NLW, PD 7042, Top. B12/6 B114).

Physical evidence of its post-medieval use is dramatically furnished by the large earthwork ravelin constructed during the Civil War.

The context for the burials sealed by the hedgebank is unknown - none of the documentation suggests a chapel site here either from the medieval period or later, but the preservation of the bone suggests that they post-date the disuse of any outer ward.

### *Form and function*

The NE Tower is considerably larger than the other three and much better appointed, with its batteries of fireplaces and garderobes - the best surviving of the others, the SW Tower, displays neither. The NE Tower also carries external embellishment in the form of a string course. Though dating from the mid 13th century, the NE Tower is a legacy of the keep-and-bailey castle plan (which indeed persisted to a greater or lesser degree throughout the medieval period), a phenomenon discussed by Knight (Knight, 1987, 83-4). A close parallel, but of slightly earlier date, is Hadleigh Castle in Essex (HMSO, 1971); less similar parallels exist locally at Cilgerran (Craster, 1957) and Laugharne (Avent, 1995). The forebuilding is unusual but has similarities with the often highly elaborate entrance arrangements seen in the round keeps of many French castles, and in Britain at Barnard Castle in Co. Durham.

The three other towers were primarily guard chambers. However, the SE Tower is described as containing a Bakehouse and a Chapel in 1539 (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I). The alcove within the first floor window embrasure in the SE Tower appears very liturgical in form and the embrasure may represent the sanctuary of a chapel occupying this floor while the bakehouse undoubtedly occupied the ground floor next to the kitchen; no oven survives.

From the evidence of the 1539 survey (Harrison, 1962, 329) the gatehouse appears to have been a structure of some complexity occupying the entire space between the NW and NE Towers as a range.

The 1539 survey also suggests that a large tower was formerly present on the eastern curtain, represented today by a small stump of masonry.

The hall building was indisputably the site of the Great Hall, being very well appointed. The basement appears to have been used as the castle kitchens (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I).

The drain present in the undercroft of the vaulted building is suggestive while the fireplace and large window embrasures in the floor above suggest its use as a solar or private chamber; the building is clearly the 'Cellar and Pantry, with Great Chamber

and Closet over' of 1539 (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I). The building to the north - possibly the 'House with Parlour and closet' of 1539 (Harrison, 1962, 329 - Appendix I) - has gone.

There were possibly two sallyports, one through the south curtain, reached from the hall or via the SE Tower spiral stair, and one in the east curtain indicated by a trackway up the slope.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To: Ken Murphy, Dyfed Archaeological Trust, for project management; Ken Murphy, Ian Darke and Pete Crane for the field survey and survey drawings.

## **NARBERTH CASTLE - AN HISTORICAL SUMMARY**

There is no proper recent account of the history of Narberth. Its medieval history has been subject to some analysis but much of the earlier work is somewhat doubtful and led by dubious secondary sources. A good, but short account of the castle was published in 1962 (Harrison, 1962, 328-30). The account below is a synthesis of the known primary sources but includes some of the more reliable secondary source material.

### **THE FOUNDATION OF THE CASTLE**

#### *Early traditions*

The foundation of Narberth Castle is popularly attributed to Sir Stephen Perrot and said to have occurred in 1092. This assertion apparently first appears in Fenton's 'Pembrokeshire' of 1811 (Fenton, 1903 edn., 169), is repeated by Lewis in his 'Topographical Dictionary' (Lewis, 1833), in the RCAHM(W) Inventory of 1925 and by a number of subsequent authors (inc. King, 1988, 395; Soulsby, 1983, 188; Stickings, 1972, 68-9). It has gained wide currency and thus some degree of respectability; however it appears to be entirely without foundation and has no supporting historical source documentation. There is no authentic pedigree for either 'Stephen Perrot' or his alleged grandson, Andrew Perrot; a recent PhD thesis on the antecedents of the known Pembrokeshire Perrot family concluded that the two probably never existed (Turvey, 1988).

Tradition further has it that this castle was not immediately sited at the present Narberth Castle, but that Sentence Castle at Templeton represents the initial Narberth Castle. Whilst it is agreed that Sentence, a fine example of a motte-and-bailey castle, is 12th century in origin there is no reason to suppose that at any time in history it was the 'Narberth Castle' referred to in the sources. Furthermore, it is traditionally asserted that the Sentence Castle site was abandoned after it was destroyed in 1257 and that a new castle, of stone, was built at Narberth by Sir Andrew Perrot. The destruction of Narberth Castle was a documented event (Jones, 1952, 111) but there is no suggestion in the contemporary chronicles that the castle was relocated.

#### *The context of the settlement*

The Norman conquest of Dyfed was a piecemeal affair conducted by the Anglo-Norman aristocracy under their own initiative and not as a result of any central command or strategy. The death of the Welsh prince of Dyfed, Rhys ap Tewdwr, at the hands of the Norman lord of Brecon in 1093 signalled a free-for-all for his former lands. A Norman lord of Devon, William Fitzbaldwin, sailed from Barnstaple up the estuary of the River Tywi to establish a foothold at Rhyd-y-gors,

below what is now Carmarthen, where he built a castle. Neither the extent of his control of the surrounding country, nor the nature of his tenure (if indeed it was ever formally recognised) is known. At the same time the Norman Earl of Shrewsbury, Roger de Montgomery, gathered his followers and marched south-west across the spine of Wales and into Dyfed, building a castle at Cardigan before moving on to his objective, Pembroke, which he fortified and established as the chief power base of the district. This he granted to his son Arnulf.

Pembroke may already, prior to the arrival of the Normans, have been the site of the administrative centre for Cantref Penfro, one of the so-called seven cantrefs of Dyfed. Penfro comprised the south Pembrokeshire peninsula northwards to the Eastern Cleddau and east to the present boundary with Carmarthenshire, but excluded what are now the parishes of Llanddewi and Lampeter Velfrey, which made up the commote of Efelffre - part of Cantref Gwarthaf. The Narberth district formed the commote of Arberth, lying within Cantref Penfro. North of the Haven, the western part of the modern county as far north as Mynydd Preseli represented Cantref Rhos, and the eastern half north to Preseli represented Cantref Daugleddau.

From Pembroke Arnulf set about the task of carving himself a slice of territory from this available area. It must be stressed that during these initial few years no formal government of the new territories was in place and no boundaries drawn. The extent of Arnulf's territories and the nature of his tenure during this early period is not known, but by his downfall in 1102 the three Cantrefs Penfro (presumably including Arberth), Daugleddau and Rhos looked to him as overlord and he was styling himself 'earl' - a title he was never formally given (Lloyd, 1912, 290). His estates were seized by the Anglo-Norman crown in the person of Henry I, who reorganised their administration upon Anglo-Norman civil lines. Estates in Penfro were granted to loyal Anglo-Normans and later planted with Flemish and West Country immigrants - largely under Henry's ultimate control via his sheriff at Pembroke (see below). The Carmarthen district also fell to the crown.

### *The Lordship of Narberth*

The history of West Wales during the earlier part of the 12th century is rather vague, and the detailed history of any one settlement has to be pieced together from a number of primary sources, often rather disparate. The chief sources are the accounts of contemporary chroniclers, the *Brut y Twysogyon*, *Annales Cambriae* etc. Fiscal records, mandates/charters to individuals and institutions, and the highly personal accounts of Giraldus Cambrensis help fill some of the gaps. The secondary sources are notoriously unreliable.

The Narberth district - in Welsh 'Arberth' - contains a known pre-Norman cultural and administrative centre, appearing in 'The Mabinogion'. The location of this centre and its *llys* or hall is not known, but the present castle site is a strong contender. It has been convincingly argued (James, 1992, 8-12) that the medieval settlement at Narberth developed alongside an existing SW-NE through route, passing immediately below the knoll upon which the castle was to be sited. If this is indeed

the case then it may be proposed that the earlier power centre lay close to the line of communication. It appears to have been common practice, moreover, for the Normans to take over existing administrative centres as their castle sites.

The first recorded reference to a castle at Narberth is in 1116, when it was burnt - and apparently taken - by a resurgent Welsh attacking force (Jones, 1952, 40). The period 1093-1120 when the Normans were consolidating their hold on the district is an appropriate context for its foundation. There is no accurate record of the name of the founder but it may have been a follower of Arnulf de Montgomery or an individual acting under the authority of Henry I.

At a subsequent but unknown date the lands comprising the former commote of Arberth were granted to Henry FitzRoy, a bastard son of Henry I via his mistress Nest - the daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr (Howells, 1987, 81, citing NLW Slebech MS 3224; Thorpe, 1978, 189). Henry FitzRoy styled himself 'Lord of Narberth' (Lloyd, 1912, 495-7, citing Giraldus Cambrensis, *De Rebus*, I, 9) - presumably administering his estates from Narberth Castle.

Henry FitzRoy may have held the Lordship of Narberth until his death during an attack on Anglesey in 1157 (Thorpe, 1978, 189-90), during which time he was also granted the first stewardship of the Lordship of St Davids on behalf of the Bishop, a post which came with lands in Preseli (Davies, 1946, no. D.194).

The Lordship of Narberth appears to have been from the first semi-independent from crown authority as vested in the sheriff of Pembroke. Unlike the rest of the former Cantrefs Penfro, Rhos and Daugleddau, Narberth does not appear in the royal accounts that make up the 'Pipe Roll' for the year 1130 - the sole surviving fiscal document for this early period in West Wales (Hunter, 1929 edn., 89). By extension the Lord was not answerable to the sheriff. Such a status seems to have persisted when, in 1138, the three former cantrefs were granted as a unit to Gilbert FitzGilbert de Clare, who was in 1138 created Earl of Pembroke (Chibnall, 1963, 111-12). These lands were now formally defined, the Earldom of Pembroke, and henceforth subject to palatine rule. The rights and privileges of the earls however, do not in these early years appear to have extended into the Lordship of Narberth.

Henry FitzRoy's successors as 12th-13th century Lords of Narberth are not known. There is however an indirect reference in a charter of properties belonging to the Knights Hospitaller, dated 1231 but reiterating an original of 1176-98, to a grant made by William Herrizon and one William of Narberth (Davies, 1946, no. D499) - figures of obvious status, one of whom may represent the Lord.

Templeton, the site of the Sentence Castle formerly attributed with being the site of the original Narberth Castle as noted above, was a manor of the Lordship of Narberth. The history of the castle, and of the settlement during these early years, is unknown. However, the castle is likely to be another early 12th century foundation, established by a tenant lord of the Lord of Narberth, as is the nearby motte at Crinow. The two represent the only other castle sites within the boundaries of the

initial Lordship of Narberth. Both may have been abandoned fairly soon after their foundation.

### *Efelffre*

Prior to the Norman conquest the commote of Efelffre formed part of Cantref Gwarthaf, representing what is now western Carmarthenshire. It was to become united with Arberth and incorporated within the Lordship of Narberth; however, this union was later, being a product of the 13th century (Howells, 1987, 81, citing NLW Slebech MS 3224).

Cantref Gwarthaf appears to have been part of the territory that fell under the control of William Fitzbaldwin in the years after 1093 (Jones, 1952, 24). History is again vague but it appears from scrutiny of the main source, *Brut y Twysogyon* (Jones, 1952), that it remained in the hands of Fitzbaldwin's descendents during the earlier years of the 12th century. It further appears to have become, during the same century, more-or-less formally a part of the Lordship of St Clears, under the overall tenure of William FitzHai, Lord of St Clears and half-brother of Henry FitzRoy via Nest (Jones, 1952, 54 n.25; Rowlands, 1980, 157).

However, the names of two tenant 'lords' of Efelffre are preserved in the Records of Slebech held at the National Library of Wales, which cite that 'Howell and Walter were...owners of Efelffre, Narberth being then the possession of Henry FitzRoy' (Howells, 1987, 81, citing NLW Slebech MS 3224). An earthwork castle was founded by one of these early tenant lords at Lampeter Velfrey.

In 1171 Efelffre was granted to Rhys ap Gruffydd, the 'Lord Rhys' of history and grandson of Rhys ap Tewdwr, former King of Dyfed (see above). The grant was from King Henry II himself (Jones, 1952, 66-7) and may imply that by this time William FitzHai had died and his lands reverted to the crown.

### *The early castle*

The precise nature of the castle during these early years is not known. No part of the present masonry dates from any earlier than the mid-13th century and the references to burning in the chronicles imply that the castle may have remained entirely of timber until this period; it is certainly consistent with the structural history of many Welsh castles that the use of timber should persist for this length of time. The earthworks that define the present castle may or may not relate to the earlier timber castle.

As noted above, the first reference to a castle at Narberth by name is in 1116 when it was taken and burnt by followers of Gruffydd ap Rhys, the son of Rhys ap Tewdwr, former King of Dyfed (Jones, 1952, 40). This was one scene in the resurgence of the Welsh princes, Gruffydd in particular, that punctuated the history of the 12th century in West Wales and culminated with the Norman recognition of Gruffudd's son Rhys

- 'the Lord Rhys'. They cannot have held the castle for long for shortly afterwards Gruffydd was forced into semi-exile by Henry I. Howells, 1968, 229 refers to a further attack in 1159 but his source is not cited.

The form of the accompanying settlement, later to become the town of Narberth, suggests that it was deliberately established in the 12th or early 13th centuries (James, 1992, 8-12). It has been noted above that the castle (and pre-Norman centre?) was established alongside a pre-existing through route. St Andrew's Church is situated 1200m west of the castle some distance from the routeway and it is suggested by James that it was newly built on this site during the 12th-early 13th centuries as part of a planned settlement laid out between the church and the routeway; however, it is equally possible that its distance from the castle may prove pre-Norman origins for the church if the castle was indeed a pre-Norman administrative centre. Neither the nature nor indeed presence of any pre-Norman civil settlement is known, nor whether any informal settlement around the castle gate was swept away when the present layout was established.

## **WELSH RESURGENCE**

### *The Lord Rhys*

Rhys ap Gruffydd, son of Gruffydd ap Rhys (see above), via the acquisition of land through both grants and politics, grew sufficiently in power from his base in what is now East Carmarthenshire to be confirmed as Justiciar for South Wales by Henry II. The death of the king in 1189, however, signalled a major revolt against Anglo-Norman rule, firstly among Rhys and his kinsmen and then from the princes of North Wales, whose territorial ambitions extended into Dyfed.

The castle and Lordship of Narberth appear to have remained in Anglo-Norman hands throughout the first part of this period of upheaval when territory after territory was taken by the Welsh. Indeed Narberth, Penfro and Rhos were the sole surviving Norman-held territories in West Wales by 1193. However, Rhys' death in 1197 heralded a period of feuding among his sons, which permitted the reconquest of much of this territory by the Normans and the involvement in Dyfed's politics by the Princes of North Wales.

### *William Marshal*

It is not known who held tenure of the Narberth Castle and Lordship during this period, and there is no information in the contemporary chronicles or accounts. However, it was at this point that there appeared on the scene the Anglo-Norman baron who was to be chiefly responsible for regaining the lost territories, William Marshal I. Formally created Earl of Pembroke in 1199, Marshal was granted Efelffre - presumably still in the gift of the crown - in 1200 (Lloyd, 1912, 619 citing Charter Roll 47). However, such grants were on paper only until 1204 when Marshal arrived

in West Wales at the head of an army to assert and re-establish Norman control. Marshal's power base was the Lordship of Pembroke - the former Cantref Penfro - but Daugleddau with its castle at Wiston appears to have recognised his suzerainty. Rhos - from here on formalised as the Lordship of Haverford - remained under the overall control of the crown. Of Narberth the chronicles are again silent but the lordship possibly recognised Marshal's overall suzerainty.

### *Llywelyn ap Iorwerth*

The subsequent peace was short lived. The Prince of Gwynedd, Llewelyn ap Iorwerth, assumed overall leadership of the Welsh campaign. In 1215, under his command, kinsmen of the dead Lord Rhys, Rhys Ieuanc and Maelgwn ap Rhys, 'fell upon Dyfed and subdued it' (Jones, 1952, 90), but the area of subjugation was largely confined to modern Carmarthenshire. Narberth Castle was once again burned, implying that it was still predominantly of timber, but there is no suggestion that the castle was actually taken or occupied by the Welsh. However, it can be inferred that, if Efelffre was still regarded as a part of Cantref Gwarthaf, it fell to Maelgwn ap Rhys by share (Lloyd, 1912, 646).

Llewelyn's conquests were recognised in the 'Peace of Worcester' of 1218, but in 1220 he again attacked Narberth Castle, recently rebuilt after its destruction in 1215, and 'threw it to the ground, killing some of the garrison, burning others, and capturing others' (Owen, 1914, 72-3). He went on to destroy Wiston Castle and ravage Daugleddau and Rhos.

### *Narberth and Efelffre*

The Lordship of Narberth was by now apparently firmly recognised as a Marshal holding, for later in 1220 a royal mandate went out to the Norman settlers of West Wales to assist William Marshal II, son of the recently deceased Earl, to 'repair his castle of Narberth' (Owen, 1914, 73). Marshal II arrived in West Wales in person in 1223 to enforce Norman control and consolidate his holdings. The Lordship of Narberth, along with Daugleddau and Rhos, had in effect been added to the Earldom of Pembroke, and it is probable that it was now that Efelffre was absorbed within the Lordship of Narberth, doubling its size; this, however, is not demonstrated until later in the century (see below). Efelffre remained a 'Welshry' ie. subject to Welsh forms of tenure and law.

## THE STONE CASTLE

### *The Marshal Partition*

The Lordship of Narberth with Efelffre remained in Marshal hands until 1247 when, with the death of the direct family line, the Marshal estates were divided among the numerous co-heirs.

The precise status of the Lordship within the larger Pembroke holding at this time is somewhat unclear. It is now that Penfro and Rhos, with Daugleddau and Narberth, begin to be referred to as the 'County of Pembroke' but this was not a county in the sense of having been formed by royal decree, subject to crown administration. In the same sense nor was it a county palatine proper - nevertheless the earls held their own court and their territory in West Wales was subject to their jurisdiction alone.

A 20th century study (Walker, 1950) describes the Lordship of Narberth ('newly formed' in 1247) as a demesne manor of the Earls of Pembroke, but this unlikely in the formal sense - the demesne manors of Pembroke existed solely by service to the earls and were concentrated on the Castlemartin peninsula (and see below).

Nevertheless Narberth was subject to the earls' writ and in 1247 was subject to the partition of the Marshal estates. The Lordship fell to Roger Mortimer, Lord of Wigmore and with estates in Powys, through his marriage to Maud de Braose, daughter of Eva Marshal. A third of the lordship of Haverford was included in Eva's share. A third of the Lordship of St Clears, including the castle and town, also fell to Mortimer though never having been a formal Marshal possession (James, 1991, 60).

### *Llywelyn ap Gruffydd*

The nature of Narberth Castle in 1247 is not known. As stated above, the earliest masonry cannot be firmly dated beyond a broad mid 13th century date range, and it may be that the castle was still entirely of timber when it passed to Roger Mortimer. Only archaeological excavation may resolve the question.

The later 13th century rising of the Welsh under Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Gwynedd, was the most far-reaching of their campaigns and the most notable. Narberth Castle again features in the campaign.

The campaign began in 1256 in North Wales from where, amongst other territories taken by Llywelyn's armies, Roger Mortimer's Powys estates were attacked and taken. It spread rapidly and in 1257 Llywelyn's armies moved against Dyfed. In a move that included the burning of Llanstephan and Maenclochog Castles, Narberth Castle was attacked and burnt (Jones, 1952, 111). The castle was apparently totally destroyed, and among the slain was Mortimer's constable, Henry Wigan (Owen, 1914, 73 n.6). Subsequently, and into 1258, the army attacked the surrounding area; Rhos, except Haverfordwest, was burnt, and the north of the county was taken. However, the gains were not consolidated and the army eventually turned back.

### *The stone castle*

It is following its destruction in 1257 that Mortimer is traditionally viewed as having rebuilt Narberth Castle in stone (King, 1988, 395 *et al.*). As noted above, it is a view that at present cannot be contradicted. The nature of both the defensive circuit with its stout drum towers indicates a mid 13th century date when castle design was shifting from the keep-and-bailey principle towards the walled enclosure with several defensive towers doubling as accommodation. Narberth's towers are of fairly sophisticated design, but a date before the later part of the century is suggested by a vague hangover of the keep principle at the NE corner where the former drum tower was considerably larger than the rest - again consistent with a mid 13th century date. Narberth, as completed, would have represented the latest in both military and domestic architecture for the period.

### *Narberth in 1282*

Roger Mortimer died in 1282, having presumably seen the completion of the transformation of Narberth Castle.

His *Inquisition post mortem* demonstrates that at his death Mortimer's West Wales estates comprised 'the lordship and out-lordship of Narberth' (Owen, 1914, 74). The inlordship was represented by the former commote of Arberth, including the vill of Narberth itself, Templeton and Robeston Wathen, and rent of lands at Sodston. The motte castle at Templeton appears to have been abandoned prior to the laying out of the settlement for which, despite its name, there is no firm evidence to link to the Knights Templar. All these estates were held from the crown 'in chief' by knight-service for the defence of Carmarthen. Other documents show that there were demesne lands of the manor of Narberth at Camp Hill to the south of the town and at Atheston, and that the lordship also embraced the townships of Canaston, Castell Dwyran and Newhouse (Walker, 1950, 348). The last-named, in Newton North parish, still displays a late medieval hall-house

The out-lordship comprised the commote of Efelffre, still a 'Welshry' and like Arberth held of the crown in chief. Efelffre appears to have comprised just the one vill - presumably Lampeter Velfrey, whose castle was by now probably disused - but included a mill at Molleston, and was probably early on (Rees, 1932) divided into the two parishes, Llanddewi Velfrey and Lampeter Velfey, whose parish churches both have medieval origins.

The Lordship of Narberth, though held of the crown, was still viewed by the Earls of Pembroke as falling as a whole within their jurisdiction. The 1247 Marshal partition saw William de Valence receive Pembroke. He claimed right of jurisdiction over Penfro, Daugleddau, Rhos, Narberth and Cemais in the north of the county, a claim that was to bring him into frequent conflict with the crown. Nevertheless, the subjects of the lords of Narberth continued to perform suit at the county court of the earls at

Pembroke (Owen, 1897, 349). Any dues that were once rendered to Pembroke in the form of service or goods, however, appear to have ceased, if indeed they had ever been levied.

## THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The history of Narberth Castle and Lordship during the 14th and 15th centuries is largely compiled from the primary source entries contained within Owen, H., 1914 (ed.), *A Calendar of Pembrokeshire Records*, Vol. II, Cilgerran and Narberth. The entries have been collated from a variety of sources including Rolls (Close, Patent and Fine), Minister's Accounts, Subsidies, and miscellaneous letters and papers. A valuable collection of papers dealing with Narberth including Minister's Accounts from 1357 and other early records of the lordship form part of the Records of Slebech held at the National Library of Wales (Charles, 1948, 188) and a schedule of this has been compiled; they are however largely unpublished.

### *Further attacks*

Narberth remained in Mortimer hands though appears to have been administered by the crown immediately following Roger's death (Owen, 1914, 75). However, the castle and lordship was to fall to his grandson Roger Mortimer III, Earl of March, along with his other estates in West Wales.

The region was not affected by the great wars of Welsh independence of the 1270s and 80s, nor by the Welsh Revolt of 1294-5 that resulted from the impositions of the Statute of Rhuddlan. However, sporadic discontent still broke out and it was during one of these episodes in 1299, while Roger Mortimer III was in the king's service fighting in Gascony, that Narberth Castle was once again burnt, along with his castle at St Clears, and 'his men killed' (Owen, 1914, 76).

The subsequent repair work implicit from the attack may be the context for the construction of the domestic buildings at Narberth Castle. The Great Hall displays window detail of a broadly late 13th-early 14th century date, and may be of one build with the adjacent vaulted building. The castle was fully repaired by 1330 at the latest (see below).

### *Mortimer's rebellion*

Roger Mortimer III was one of the chief opponents of King Edward II and rose in open rebellion in 1321-2. As a result, Narberth was in the king's hands by 1322 and the castle under the control of a constable, Rhys ap Gruffudd. His son Hugh was given the rectory of St Andrews Church (Owen, 1914, 76).

Mortimer was not to regain his estates, He became lover to the queen and together they deposed the King in 1327 putting his son on the throne as Edward III. However, the new king suspected Mortimer as a usurper and had him executed in 1330..

A Minister's Account of Mortimer's Welsh holdings, drawn up for Edward III by Robert de Hasley, gives a valuable insight into the contents of the castle in 1330 when it was transferred to the keeping of Henry Gower, the Bishop of St Davids. (Owen, 1914, 77). It is reproduced in full in Appendix II. The presence in the list of a siege-engine, the mangonel, and of possible instruments of torture and restraint, is interesting.

### *Royal control*

The castle and lordship soon reverted to crown administration and remained thus, ostensibly due to the minority of the Mortimer heir, another Roger, the cousin of Roger Mortimer III; they were to remain so, and eventually be regarded as crown property, for over 100 years. In 1333 they were granted - on behalf of the crown - to Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd, Justiciar of South Wales, who appears to have held them until his death in 1356 (Griffiths, 1972, 100). John ap Llywelyn was acting as steward in 1357-8 (Griffiths, 1972, 109). They were briefly granted to the Bishop of Winchester in 1359 but the grant was soon revoked and the lands assigned to Roger III's widow, Philippa (Owen, 1914, 81-2); it is apparent that the gift was still very much at royal discretion and was short-lived. The Mortimer heir, Roger, was never confirmed in his inheritance; the holding was later to be claimed by a further Mortimer kinsman but was again withheld (Owen, 1914, 90-91). Stewardship of the castle lay with a succession of crown officers, often, as in the case of William Jouet in 1382, responsible for a number of crown holdings (Owen, 1914, 83).

At some prior point lands in the episcopal Lordship of Llawhaden had been amassed into the lordship and were now regarded as demesne; however, the share of the Lordship of St Clears that had been in Mortimer hands had been granted to Rhys ap Gruffydd (Owen, 1914, 80).

During the French invasion scare of 1367 the constable of Narberth Castle was ordered to garrison and provision the castle 'against the king's enemies' (Owen, 1914, 82-3). It was a pattern that was to be repeated at many castles over the next two decades and is one of the first real attempts at a national defence. An associated incident occurred a few years later when, in 1389, Thomas Fort of Llanstephan recieved a pardon for having shown the secrets of Narberth Castle (and others) to the Spanish (Owen, 1914, 84).

## THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

### *Owain Glyndwr*

In 1404 Sir Thomas Carew, of the nearby Carew Castle, was granted 'custody' of Narberth Castle and Lordship, for life, but remained a crown functionary (Owen, 1914, 86-7). He was, however, permitted to receive the issues and profits of the lordship in return for maintaining 10 men-at-arms and 20 bowmen for the king's service and also received the Mortimer share of St Clears.

The necessity for this garrison lay with the gathering forces of Owain Glyndwr who, by 1403, had led a successful campaign through Brecon and the Tywi Valley to Carmarthen, and now threatened West Wales. However, Narberth Castle appears never to have become involved in the conflict and in common with most castles was bypassed by the unsuccessful invading French army, allied to Glyndwr, that landed in Milford Haven in 1405.

### *The castle in decay*

Maintenance of the fabric of Narberth Castle was apparently not subsequently kept up and by 1424 all 'the houses in the castle' were in a state of decay (Owen, 1914, 90). This was a common enough occurrence at this time in the absence of resident landlords; the constable of Pembroke Castle, for instance, even stripped the lead from the roofs for profit. Narberth Castle passed into the stewardship of Geoffrey Don five years later, reverting to the previous arrangement - he received 'the usual fees and wages' (Owen, 1914, 92).

The castle and lordship were finally granted to a Mortimer descendant, Richard, Duke of York, by Henry VI some time before 1449 (Owen, 1914, 92) when he mortgaged 'the castle, town and lordship' of Narberth to John de la Bere, Bishop of St Davids, and Gruffydd ap Nicholas, Sheriff of Carmarthenshire and Deputy Justice for South Wales (Griffiths, 1972, 203. Gruffydd ap Nicholas apparently considered himself Lord of Narberth (Rees, 1990, 3) but there is no suggestion that this was ever formally recognised - in 1453, and again on behalf of the Duke of York, Walter Devereux (later Lord Ferrars) was given a moiety of the castle and lordship (Evans, 1995 edn., 50).

Devereux took the Yorkist side during the Wars of the Roses. However Narberth, despite its position in the middle of Lancastrian held territory, appears not to have been attacked or exchanged during the wars and the assumption may be that the castle was neither garrisoned nor indeed occupied.

York's holdings ultimately became forfeit and in 1460 he was killed at Wakefield. A crown steward, John Owen, was once again appointed.

In 1477 Narberth Castle and Lordship were granted, along with extensive lands in Wales, by Edward IV to his son Edward, Prince of Wales. Upon succeeding to the

throne as Edward V in 1483 he in turn granted them to Henry, Duke of Buckingham and Lord of Brecon (Owen, 1914, 94). Buckingham was executed later in the same year for his part in organising the revolt against the usurper Richard III and Narberth once again reverted to the crown.

### *Sir Rhys ap Thomas at Narberth*

Following Richard III's defeat at Bosworth in 1485, passed to his successor Henry VII. His son Henry VIII in 1515 granted the castle and lordship, and the third of the Lordship of St Clears that comprised the Mortimer holding, to his father's friend and ally Sir Rhys ap Thomas (Rees, 1987, 31), grandson of Gruffydd ap Nicholas (see above). Rhys ap Thomas was a ruthless estate builder and held extensive lands and offices - Justice of the Principality of South Wales, Steward, Receiver and Chancellor of the Crown Lordship of Haverfordwest, Lord of Carew and Knight of the Garter. He held Narberth until his death in 1525.

There is no record of the condition of Narberth Castle as it was received in 1515; as has been stated above, it was subject to neglect early in the preceding century and all the indications are that its decline was allowed to continue. However, Rhys ap Thomas's construction work at Carew Castle is renowned and it is evident that he repaired Narberth Castle - if not on the scale of Carew - and maintained it well. Leland, writing shortly after his death in the 1530s, describes it as 'a little pretty pile of old Sir Rhys's' given unto him by King Henry the VIII (Smith, 1910, 62); there is however no visible evidence within the castle of any 16th century work. He describes the town as 'a poor village'.

Rhys's lands and possessions largely fell to his grandson, the 17 year old Rhys ap Gruffydd (Rees, 1987, 33). He was arrested for alleged treason in 1529 to be executed in 1531 and Narberth again reverted to the crown, from 1532-8 under the stewardship of Morris Parry (Griffiths, 1972, 225).

### *The Act of Union*

The term lordship is most often used in contemporary accounts to describe the status of Narberth, but it is described as a Barony at least once, in a 16th century source (Owen, 1897, 374). The terms in this case may be rather arbitrary; moreover, in 1536 the Lordship of Narberth as a feudal marcher lordship ceased to be.

In the Act of Union that was passed in that year the Marcher Lordships were abolished, and replaced by shires. In SW Dyfed the former Cantrefs Penfro (including the whole of the Lordship of Narberth, ie with Efelffre), Rhos and Daugleddau were united with Pebidiog, Cemais and Rhos to the north to form the county of Pembrokeshire, as it exists today. Feudal rights, privileges and obligations ostensibly ceased to operate within its borders, and its various administrations were reorganised on civil lines.

As the head of a new hundred Narberth remained an administrative centre and indeed the courts were held within the castle. Furthermore the 'Lordship of Narberth' remained a territorial as well as a purely titular entity and the demesne lands were retained as well as a number of privileges - for example, in 1540 the new steward John Hughes was given responsibility for the castle with 'the forests, chases, etc belonging to the premises and for the government of the *mandrede* (men fit for military service)', in the manner of his predecessor Maurice Parry (Owen, 1914, 105). He was succeeded by Sir Thomas Jones in 1543.

### *The survey of 1539*

In 1539 the castle was subject to a detailed survey (PRO, Treasury of Receipt, Miscellaneous Books, Vol. 151, m.12), reproduced in RCAHM(W), Inventory, Pembrokeshire no. 737. *The Archaeological Journal* Vol. CXIX (Harrison, 1962, 328-30) attempts to relate it to the remains. It is unusual to be provided with such a detailed contemporary account of the layout of any castle, and the document is invaluable. It is reproduced as Appendix I and discussed in Part I 'Structural Description'. It proves the castle to have been fully occupied but in a condition of decay; however this analysis may have been somewhat subjective.

## THE CIVIL WAR

The main sources for the history of Narberth Castle from the 17th century onwards are the Records of Slebech held at the National Library of Wales and a schedule of this has been compiled; they are however largely unpublished. The abstract (Charles, 1948) has been used here, supplemented by a number of secondary sources including Howells, B., *Pembrokeshire County History Vol. III: Early Modern Pembrokeshire 1536-1815*, and Leach, A. L., 1937, *A History of the Civil War (1642-49) in Pembrokeshire and on its Borders*.

### *The squirearchy*

The forfeit 'Lordship, manor and forest of Narberth' remained with the crown but were leased to several people in the 1530s and 1540s; Sir John Vaughan was probably responsible for the establishment, out of the lord's demesne, of the nearby Plas Mansion which replaced the castle as the chief seat of domestic habitation (James, 1992, 17). A survey of 1609 records that 'the castle is decayed and wasted for twenty years and more' (Harrison, 1962, 330), but at least parts may have been in use (see below).

In 1617 lordship and castle were granted to the Prince of Wales, the future Charles I (Charles, 1948, 187). The grant did not include Efelffre and the manors of Robeston Wathen, Canaston and Newhouse which had, in 1601-2, been purchased from the crown by George Barlow. A legal battle followed between Barlow and the Prince

over ownership, boundaries generally, and rights. In the end Barlow was forced to purchase Narberth in order to have a compact estate.

George Barlow was the grandson of Roger Barlow who had purchased from the crown the Commandery of the Knights Hospitaller at Slebech in 1546, shortly after the dissolution of the order (Charles, 1948, 184 citing NLW Slebech MS 12462). The Hospitaller estates included much of the upper end of the Eastern Cleddau estuary and formed the nucleus of what were to become vast family estates in Pembrokeshire. The Barlow family became typical members of the Tudor Pembrokeshire squirearchy.

### *Narberth Castle Court*

As manorial lord George Barlow was unpopular. Among other complaints his tenants disliked his Courts Leet, being used to the courts of the Lordship of Narberth which had under the crown, been held at the castle (Charles, 1948, 188). It can be assumed therefore that at least parts of the castle were occupied and maintained right through the 16th and into the 17th centuries. There is no structural evidence for any post-medieval work within the present fabric; however, most of the architectural detail has now been lost, while the northern half of the castle lies beneath a debris layer that may represent any number of former buildings.

### *The construction of the ravelin*

Narberth passed to George Barlow's son John in 1628. He was, almost alone among his Pembrokeshire neighbours, a Royalist. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, Pembrokeshire represented a Parliamentarian outpost in an otherwise Royalist Wales. However, the county as a whole took no active interest in the war - only Tenby, Haverfordwest and Pembroke declared their cause while the Welshries were to all intents and purposes ignored (Leach, 1937, 34).

Barlow appears never declared for king and Narberth's location on the fringe of the larger Englishries of South Pembrokeshire ensured that it had a quiet war (notwithstanding that the decisive battle in the Pembrokeshire campaign took place at nearby Colby Moor where the Royalists were defeated). However, as a Royalist, his estate was sequestered in 1651. It was later restored by Charles II (Charles, 1948, 188).

Despite his quietitude John Barlow must have been a victim of some insecurity during the Civil War years; at any rate they provide a context for the construction of the massive ravelin at Narberth Castle, a construction that appears to have involved the demolition of the southern curtain and Great Hall. If this was indeed the case then it suggests that the castle was no longer habitable.

## THE CASTLE AS ATTRACTION

### *The ruined castle*

In common with most deserted castles Narberth Castle's later history is one tourist attraction and subject for the artists brush.

The castle remained in Barlow hands and in 1688 Sir John Barlow, the first baronet, secured the grant of a weekly market and three annual fairs to be held at Narberth (Charles, 1948, 188 citing NLW Slebech MS 874), giving the town the impetus that was to transform it from the 'village' of Leland's description into the regional economic centre that it remains today. However it is apparent that under the Barlows and their successors, the de Rutzen family who retained Narberth Castle until the early years of the present century, that the castle was allowed to decay. It is clear from the present evidence that any outer ward had completely decayed and it is crossed by a hedgebank that seals burials that are probably from the early post-medieval period; however, no context is known for the existence of the latter.

### *Visitors at the castle*

Like many other castles and 'antiquities' Narberth became an item of interest for early antiquarians and artists seeking the 'picturesque'. The latter provide a valuable record of the condition of monuments and of features that have subsequently been lost.

The view of the castle taken by the brothers S & N Buck in 1740 (NLW, PD 7042, Top. B12/6 B114) shows that little more fabric had survived at that time than is present today. A large square gartehouse shown to the north-west of the castle appears to represent a former gatehouse to Plas Mansion. The same condition is recorded in a print of c1785 (NLW Drawing Vols. 63, 119). A view south from the interior of the castle from the early 19th century shows the remains in detail but much as today (NLW, Original Drawings, Parker Colln., Drawings Vol. III, 87) as does a view by the French artist Alfred Dousseau from 1830 (James, 1992, 45). A view of the Great Hall interior from 1849 (Dyfed Archaeological Trust Sites and Monuments Record DRF, PRN 3748) again shows little more than survives today and does not add greatly to current knowledge.

Narberth Castle's potential as an attraction continues to the present, but is a potential yet to be fully realised and decay has been permitted to continue through most of the present century. The bailey interior was used as a garden. The ruins were bought from a local doctor by Robert Perrot, from New Zealand, who in 1984 produced a scheme for restoration and management plan for the development of the castle as a tourist attraction and a written proposal was drawn up. However, since the mid 1970s Perrot had levelled the bailey, dug excavation trenches and repointed/rebuilt substantial areas of the fabric. Much of the work was irresponsible and altered/damaged some original features. The plans came to nothing and by 1986 had been shelved.

The castle was subsequently acquired by the former South Pembrokeshire District Council who initiated the present survey, structural report and history in 1996. As Pembrokeshire County Council the authority hopes to pursue further proposals.

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## APPENDIX I

In 1539 the castle was subject to a detailed survey (PRO, Treasury of Receipt, Miscellaneous Books, Vol. 151, m.12), reproduced in RCAHM(W), *Inventory*, Pembrokeshire no. 737.

*'The Castle of Nerberth (sic) -*

*This said castle is hard by the town...and hath 5 towers within the same, whereof one is a very strong tower and higher than the others by reason of the of the high ground there, and a quadrant court within the said castle. And the entering into the same at the north end, which containeth in length 102ft; and at the south end 84ft; and at the west side 150ft.*

*The north end of the said castle wherein is builded the gatehouse with two low chambers on either side the entering, in which is a prison house under one of the chambers; over which chambers and entering is builded a chamber which containeth in length 39ft and breadth 15ft.*

*Item, the Great Tower over the east part of the said gatehouse, and on the east side in compass within the battlements 108ft, wherein is a great deep dungeon, greater in compass than the said tower, with three chambers or lofts one above the other; and above the battlements two little turrets, the thickness of this wall in the midst of the tower 9 1/2 ft, and one place a great deal thicker.*

*Item, adjoining to the said tower is builded a little storey four square, with 29 steps leading forth of the court into the said storey, which is the way into the said great tower and over the same a chamber or lodging now partly in decay.*

*Item, on the same east side a house containing in length 33ft, wherein is a low parlour, a closet, with a chamber over.*

*Item, on the same east side at the south end of the said lodging, a storey or building of 46ft long and 25ft broad, wherein is a pantry and a cellar vaulted, with a great chamber and a closet over them.*

*Item, on the east part of the aforesaid buildings is builded a tower which containeth in compass within the battlements 66ft, wherein is builded a buttery with two chambers over one above another.*

*Item, at the south end of the said east part and the south end of the castle is builded a tower which is in compass within the battlements 81ft, wherein is builded a bakehouse, a chapel over, with a chamber over the same.*

*Item, on the said south end is a storey which containeth in length 66ft and in breadth 26ft, wherein is builded the kitchen, with the hall over the same. And at the east end of the hall a tower wherein is builded a larder house with two chambers one above another.*

*Item, on the west side of this castle on the top there is a walking of a man's height, and in the midst of the same a larger compass than the wall for men to stand on for the defence of the castle; to the which wall within the castle is builded a gallery or walking place, with three chambers or lodgings under the same, which said gallery containeth in length 17ft and in breadth 10ft.*

*The aforesaid castle goeth greatly in decay etc.*

*The contents of the buildings within the said castle:*

*First a hall, a chapel, a kitchen, a larderhouse, a bakehouse, a buttery, a pantry, a cellar, a prison house, a great deep dungeon, two closets, 18 chambers great and small.*

## APPENDIX II

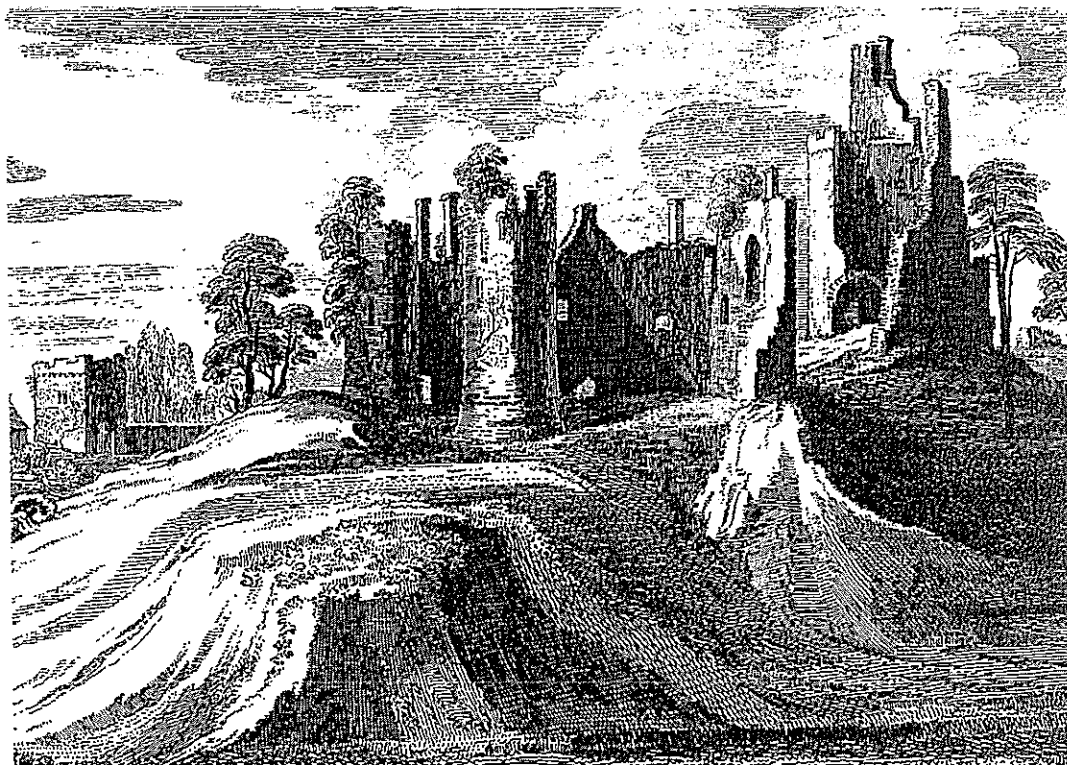
Reproduced from a Minister's Account of 1330, drawn up for Edward III by Robert de Hasley, published in Owen, 1914, 77.

*'Goods and chattels of the Castle of Narberth -*

*2 dining tables with trestles, 12d each.  
3 tables with trestles, 3d each.  
4 benches, 2d each.  
1 tub, 6d.  
2 old coffers, 2d each.  
1 tin, 2d.  
1 dresser, 1d.  
2 chairs, 4d each.  
3 benches in the Hall, 4d each.  
5 table dressers in the kitchen, 5d each.  
1 ladder, 2d.  
timber for the mangonel, 12d.  
1 cask for butter, 4d.  
2 tubs, 3d.  
4 stones for the hand-mill, 12d.  
2 dressers for the larder, 4d each.  
4 pairs of 'Ginorn' (instrument of torture?) with 1 handcuff, 10d.  
1 chest, 6d.  
1 brass pot, 3s 4d.  
1 basin with laver, 8d.  
1 brass plate, 3s.  
1 iron with lock, 9d.  
1 barrel for cleaning the armour, 6d.  
2 crossbows, 2d each.  
2 empty casks for keeping corn, 6d each.*

## ILLUSTRATION

*Narberth Castle in 1740, from an engraving by S & N Buck*



# NARBERTH CASTLE

DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST  
FEBRUARY 1996  
SCALE 1:200  
SURVEY BY: K. MURPHY, P. CRANE, I. DARKE

