

Ely Castle

William the Conqueror vs. Hereward the Wake

William the Conqueror

William of Normandy, known as William the Conqueror, was the King of England from 1066 until his death in 1087.

Although he was born into a French family, he became one of the most influential kings in English history!

William I built a motte & bailey castle in Ely in around 1070 after it became a safe place for the fighting English forces against the Norman invasion.

William I also built a castle at Aldreth, about 10 miles away & used both of these castles to defend Ely.



Hereward the Wake

Born c.1035, Hereward is the hero of many Norman and English legends!

Hereward was a local 'theign' or servant who was exiled by Edward the Confessor. While he was exiled he fought as a mercenary, a type of professional soldier for foreign armies in Flanders, France.

He returned to England to find his land had been seized and given to Normans. Hereward led a group of rebels against the Normans & he was concerned that the riches of nearby Peterborough Abbey would be taken by the Normans too. He led a successful raid of the Abbey with the Danes.

As William I & the Normans advanced towards Ely, Hereward & the Earl of Northumberland prepared to defend the Isle of Ely. William I was able to capture the island and Hereward & his rebels dispersed.

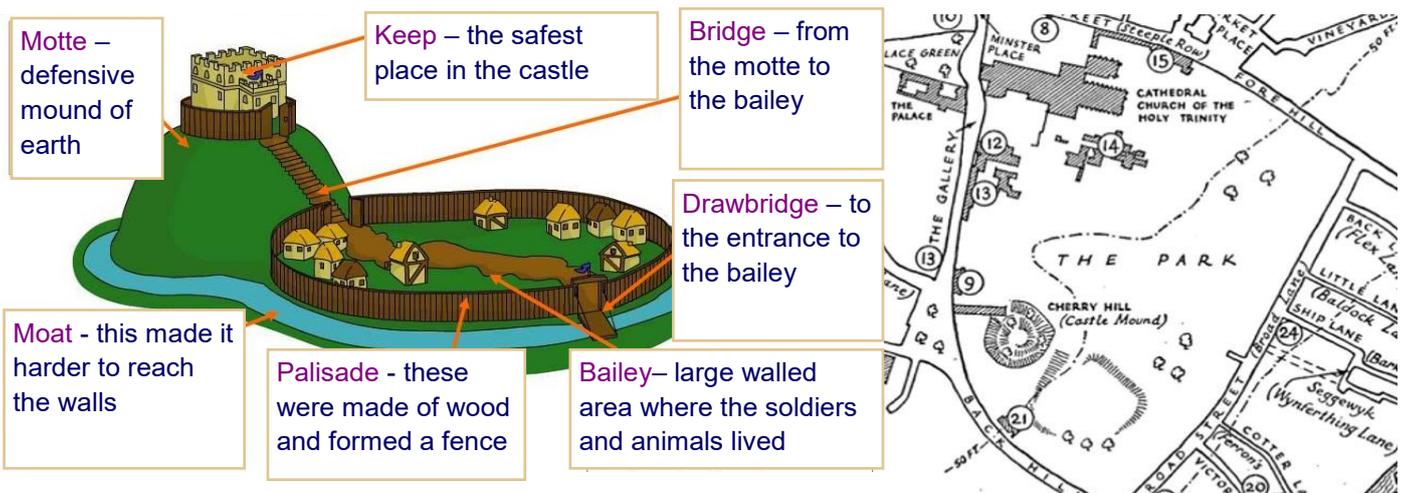
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The castle in Ely was originally a wooden motte and bailey castle. It was re-fortified in the 12th Century before being finally destroyed in the mid 13th Century.

A motte & bailey castle is made up of two parts. The 'motte' is a raised mound or earthwork which would have a stone or wooden 'keep' on top which is a type of fortified tower. The bailey is an enclosed courtyard that was protected by a ditch and a 'palisade' which is a wall made from wooden stakes. The name motte and bailey come from Norman words. Motte means mound or 'clod of earth' and bailey means an enclosure.

Motte and bailey castles were first used by the Normans to make their settlements more secure after they won the Battle of Hastings, led by William the Conqueror, in 1066.

As many as 1,000 motte and bailey castles may have been built in England by the Normans.



Historians and archaeologists believe that the remains of this castle can be seen at Cherry Hill, but because accounts written at the time of the castle say different things, nobody is really sure! It is possible that the mound at Cherry Hill are from an even earlier castle! What do you think?

