

16 FORTS AND CASTLES

For thousands of years, forts and castles have been strongholds for defence. The best place to build a fortress was usually on a hilltop, as this is the best position to see approaching attackers and because a hilltop is usually easiest to defend. Some medieval castles still tower above the surrounding landscape today.

➡ Maiden Castle was defended by ditches and banks, and by wooden fences and gates.

Who built Britain's strongest castles?

The Normans and the medieval kings of England who followed them. After

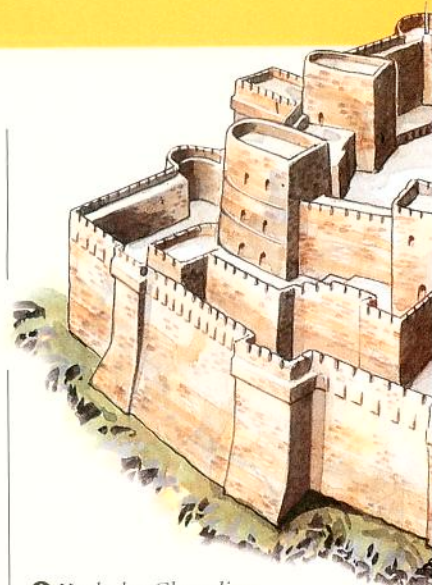
the Norman Conquest, in 1066, Norman barons built stone motte and bailey castles: the motte was an earth mound, the bailey and the enclosure around it.

Later, in the Middle Ages, when Edward I, who was king of England from 1272 to 1307, conquered Wales, he built huge stone castles to subdue the Welsh. Cannons brought an end to the age of castles in the 1400s.



What was Maiden Castle?

A hillfort, built by Iron Age people in Britain. Over 2,000 years ago these people, who were Celts, lived in groups or tribes. To protect themselves, and their farm animals, they built fortified villages on hilltops. Maiden Castle in Dorset was one of the biggest hillforts ('Mai Dun' is Celtic for 'great hill'). It was captured by the Romans after they invaded Britain in AD 43. Some of its ramparts rise to a height of 6 m.



➡ Krak des Chevaliers castle in Syria. It was built by Crusaders, but Muslims added extra defences after they captured it in 1271.

What is the Krak des Chevaliers?

A mighty Crusader castle. During the Crusades, or religious wars, of the Middle Ages, both sides (Muslims and Christians) built castles. Each side did its best to capture the enemy's castles, and castles often changed hands several times. The Crusader castle that is best-preserved is Krak des Chevaliers. It has very high walls on three sides and a fourth. It has a keep that is surrounded by a precipitous slope of smooth rock, and was known to the attacking Muslims as 'Mountain' because it was impossible to

➡ Edward I's castles, such as Conwy Castle, were the wonders of their age.

Built to last

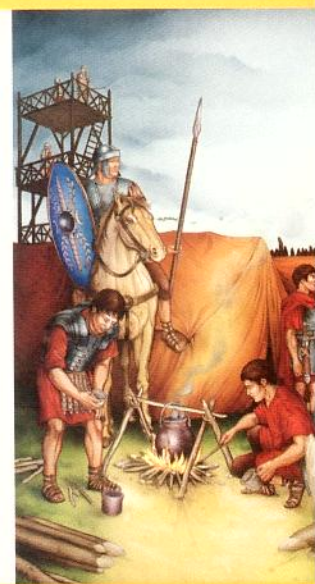
Strength in numbers

Earliest castle	Hattusas, Turkey	1500 BC
Oldest British castle	Richmond, Yorkshire, UK	1075
Biggest brick castle	Coca, Spain	1400s
Last of their line	Maginot Line forts, France	1930s

Roman forts

The Romans built small army forts to guard their frontiers. They also built legionary fortresses that were as big as small towns. They were smart too. Roman fort-builders made forts look stronger than they were, plastering over wooden walls to make them look like stone.

➡ Enemies would think twice before attacking a Roman fort.



Castles had to be well-protected, with many outer walls.

- Shoot arrows from the battlements
- Drop rocks on enemy soldiers
- Pour hot water and hot oil on them
- Set fire to wooden siege towers
- Push away the ladders with poles

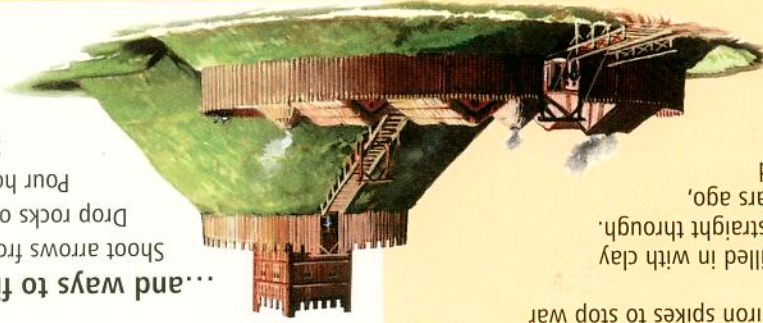
...and ways to fight off the attackers

- Smash down the gates with battering rams
- Tunnel or mine beneath the walls
- Blast holes in the walls with giant catapults hurling stones
- Climb ladders and siege towers to get over the walls
- Sit and wait for the people inside to starve, get sick or surrender

Ways to capture a castle under siege...

ny medieval castles had a flooded ditch or moat. The big square tower was called a keep. Outer 'curtain' walls were arranged in rings. Downs were like slits, for archers to shoot through. me medieval castles had stone walls up to 7m thick. India, castle doors sometimes had iron spikes to stop war rhants battering them open. anese castles had wooden walls filled in with clay plaster. A cannon ball just went straight through. longest siege was over 2,600 years ago, on the Egyptians besieged Ashdod in Israel) for 29 years.

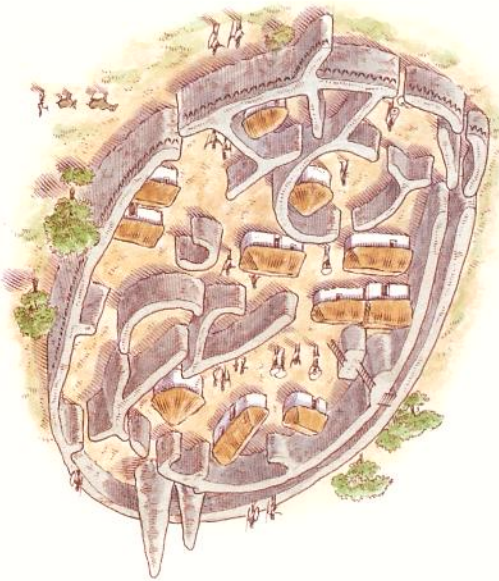
Amazing facts



In Zimbabwe, in Central Africa. It is a fortified settlement, and one of the most impressive and famous ancient ruins in Africa. The walls of Great Zimbabwe are made of granite rock. Historians believe that the fort was built some time after AD 1000 by the Shona people: the word 'zimbabwe' means 'house of stone' in the Shona language. It is thought to have been built over a long period, beginning in 1200 and ending in 1450.

Where is Great Zimbabwe?

Great Zimbabwe was a trading city. Its walls measured up to 10 m high and 240 m long. Its stone walls protected the people and cattle inside.



Edinburgh Castle houses Mons Meg, a massive siege gun given to James II in 1457.

Edinburgh Castle, in Scotland. The volcano it is perched upon, known as Castle Rock, is extinct. There has been a settlement at Edinburgh since 850 BC. The city grew in the AD 1000s when David I established his court at Edinburgh Castle. David built a tiny chapel in the castle, dedicated to the memory of his mother, Margaret. The chapel is the oldest surviving structure on Castle Rock.

Which castle sits on a volcano?



Indian castles, such as the Red Fort in Delhi, often had bigger gateways than European castles – so that elephants could through.

In the Indian city of Delhi. Qal'ah, and the name comes from the reddish colour of its sandstone walls, which stand over 20 m high. The building of the Red Fort was begun in 1639 at the orders of the Mogul emperor of India, Shah Jahan. Within the walls there was space for Shah Jahan's royal palaces, gardens, soldiers' barracks, as well as all the important government buildings.

Where is the Red Fort?

