This article on Castle Rushen was published in the booklet issued for the 21st Conference of the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group which was held in the Isle of Man in 1993.

CASTLE RUSHEN

264675 CASTLETOWN

Castle Rushen is one of the most complete and fully documented castles in the British Isles. It was the seat of the Isle of Man Government from an early period and is accordingly a very complex building.

The Early Period: No positive identification of an early Norse "castle" has been made in the south of the Island but it is likely to have been a stockade near a safe anchorage a category which Castletown could have fallen into. The first foundation of a relatively secure Scandinavian dynasty under Godred Crovan in 1079 is likely to have been of timber and earth and possibly at Cronk Mooar 1ml north east of Port Erin, a 30 ft. high mound surrounded by a wide ditch and traces of a bailey.

The Masonry Castle: Phase 1 circa 1250 probably where King Magnus in 1265 died sometime after the royal household moved to Castletown from Peel donating the latter to the church. This is now thought to have been a keep similar to those of 13th century in the West Highlands and Islands of Scotland - ie courtyard type with strengthening at the point of entry but without any adaptation necessary for the rocky and irregular sites of the latter. Castle Rushen had a square court surrounded by high walls, with a fore-tower and gate on the northern side.

Phases 11 circa 1392 - 1405 while under the control of William le Scrope and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland rebuilding included the erection of a great tower house on the earlier foundations, part of the courtyard wall, the outer castle and the barbican. This arrangement reflected the growing reliance, first noticed by Violet le Duc, on paid soldiers rather than men of feudal levies. The central tower was controlled by the Lord or his deputy without general admission of the garrison. The public and private roles of the castle could function separately or together. A warden of the Inner Ward locked the gate every night but control of the portcullises was in the hands of 2 senior offices with accommodation adjoining, there being very limited accommodation of soldiers within the tower.

The tower internally had 3 floors; at courtyard level a guard/warden's room and (probably) pages room in the gate tower and 3 storage cellars across the courtyard in which was the well. On 1st floor - a waiting room, 2 portcullis chambers in the gatehouse reached from the courtyard by a newel or turnpike stair which also gave access to a long gallery serving the hall which in turn also had a separate staircase from the courtyard. This served also the screen passage to the kitchen. The first floor was the public/official floor. Above was the private suite comprising private hall/Great Chamber, long inner chamber and bed chamber.

The overall design is very austere but proportions so well adjusted and with a remarkable degree of sophistication and awareness of then current architectural fashions that it probably was supplied by John Lewin or an associate who designed other castles/keeps in England.

Circa 1405 - 1426 works included heightening the gatehouse (giving another 7 chambers including one used as a private chapel and 1 large room or loft (occupying the whole of the 4th floor), further chambers to subsidiary towers, the southern stretch of the curtain wall with 4 mural towers and the now vanished Motehall. By 1430 (approx) the Castle was the centre and symbol of power of the Island and included offices of the principal officer of Government, courts and councils and the home of the Lord. Although designed of strength it served no serious military function, and unlike Peel could not have repelled any serious attack.

The Mediaeval Defences The weakest point was the outer gatehouse which could only be approached by an angled passage between high flanking walls with parapeted wall walks covered by a flanking tower in the curtain. Within the Barbican were the pit and a bridge which was pivoted on a cross wall and beyond, the gate defended by a portculis. The outer gatehouse was ill planned for defence as the right angled gate passage gave access to the porter's lodge, guardroom and staircase and thus, once taken, would have isolated those on the outer wall and mural towers. A second pivoted bridge, double leafed door with double portcullis and almost unscalable walls made the Tower House slightly more secure. In all the Castle plan does not suggest its deliberate intention as a military work but rather as the seat of power from which, if necessary, parties could issue to repel invaders.

The Defences 16th and 17th centuries An undefendable castle heading an Island within sight of the coasts of England, Scotland and Ireland was one of the weakest points of England's defence. With the signing of the truce between France and the Empire in 1538 England was open to invasion. Accordingly Henry VIII suggested a programme of coastal defence which Lord Derby took to include the Isle of Man. St. Michael's Island is described as resembling "in general form the outer wall of one of the defences of Calais c. 1541". On the Castle it was necessary to prevent the earlier walls being breached by cannonading at close range. The ditch/moat was partly filled in, encircled by an earth bank on 3 sides and encased in stone to form a glacis and counterscarp which deflected the attacher's fire and ricochet shots. This was strengthened by 3 half-drum or round towers (only the northwest one survives) and by gun and musket emplacements in its thickness. The north side was defended by the harbour with a New Work placed before the barbican in turn strengthened by an outer gatehouse and a musket platform wall. The addition of the battered base to the

tower house protected its walls from shot.

The Civil War With the arrival of the Earl of Derby and his family after the relief of Lathom house in Lancashire there was in effect a royalist stronghold from 1643 to 1651. Following his return to England the Earl was executed and the Island "invaded" by Parliamentary forces who demanded control but only got it after part of the garrison opened the Castle's sally port letting the forces gain control of the glacis, inner wall and curtain walls.

When the Earls of Derby were at the castle their apartments were in a set of rooms/lodgings built on the site of the mediaeval castle but gradually these were abandoned to function areas. The castle continued to be used as a seat for Government and prison; prisoners showed a tendency to break into the Treasury and barracks! Under the Dukes of Atholl the castle was in use but increasingly ruinous - by the 18th century most of the roof and internal floors were missing. In the early years the Dukes were determined to spend as much on it as possible - it was after all not their money - the Board of Ordnance as little as possible and Robert, later Sir Robert, Peel to obstruct everything as only he knew how to and in the most correct departmental way! Captain Galloway of the Royal Engineers was deputed to design and carry out the work including initially the location of a new magazine - officialdom wanted it where it was; the townspeople, with thatched houses, wanted it moved. At length this happened after the captain questioned the wisdom of keeping the powder in a building so damp that to dry it, it was spread on a roof adjoining a chimney, which could only be kept clean by periodically setting it on fire! The main features of Galloway's work were the insertion of the stone staircase which cut off the ends of the galleries and the replacing of many missing floors with stone slabs from Spanish Head, a stone which in half light gives the appearance of heavy weathered timber beams.

By the late 19th century the continued use of the castle for both government and prison offices was unsatisfactory in accommodation terms for the latter and the Government offices were moved out and more and better prison blocks squeezed into the courtyard against the walls of the Tower. Finally the prison was moved out during the Governorship of Lord Raglan and a restoration, conservation not interpretation orientated, of the castle was carried out between 1902 and 1910 by Armitage - Rigby. More recently the Castle has been refurbished internally and the various periods interpreted and highly visually as best as possible given the 19th century intrusions and the retention of the Courthouse within the walls.

<u>The Castle Garrison</u>; Except in times of warfare castle garrisons were not large - possibly only 2 mounted sergeants at arms and footmen. The Isle of Man had, apart from the various officials, 73 men-at-arms according to the Garrison Roll but these were divided between the 2 castles and out-stations. By 1575 this was

reduced to 30. Even so this would have stretched the accommodation available in the Castles and it is clear from regulations and ordinance that men were only on the castle when actually on duty, otherwise living outside with their families.

Courtesy of Manx National Heritage; Sources: H Gordon Slade W Douglas "Castles of Livery and Maintenance"; Armitage- Rigby 1927; B H St John O'Neil ARCHAEOLOGIA V XCIV 1947



CASTLETOWN HARBOUR.