British Castles Essay, Research Paper

BRITISH CASTLES

Great Britain s castles exemplify artistic characteristics and were essential elements in the lives of kings, lords, nobles, and chieftains. The word castle means a building or group of buildings usually intended as a residence of a king, lord, noble, or chieftain. There are many different types of castles, and the features about them are simply amazing. Warfare was also an important issue involving castles. They had to have some means of protection.

The castles reached their fullest development in the medieval period, even though fortified building had been around much earlier. The castles created a feudal system, which gave them their greatest importance. The feudal system was divided into three classes: the knights and nobles, clergy, and peasants. The knights and nobles job was to defend society, the clergy was to pray, while the peasants had the duty to till the soil and support other classes (Collier s Encyclopedia 532). The origin of has been traced back to the late Roman times when men placed themselves under a man stronger and wealthier than themselves (Rowling 31). The knights lived in castles built upon hilltops or in the bend of rivers. There they received vessels, held meeting: and upon occasion, defended themselves from rivals.

There are many different general styles of castles in Britain. One of the styles is a motte and bailey, which was one of the first types of castles built. The castle was made of a motte, which was a large man-made mound of earth. The top of the mound was surrounded by wooden palisades, which were like logs. Within those logs was a wooden keep. This was used as a lookout tower and a last refuge or keep (Farndon 7). The only way to get into the motte was across a sloping bridge, placed on high pillars. The bailey was next to the motte, and wooden palisades also surrounded it. A ditch of water protected the bailey. The motte and bailey were connected by a flying bridge that could be torn down if the bailey was not needed anymore. Since the motte and bailey were made of wood and earth none of the castles have survived completely today (Remfry 1). Norman s were few so they must have had to force people to help build it (Farndon 6). By the eleventh century the motte and bailey form of castle was widely spread (Alistair 3).

Another type of castle is a shell keep. This was one of the first stone castles built. The keep was a circular wall that had buildings surrounding it. The keep was surrounded by an open-courtyard. This had the advantage of clustering the major components of the castle into a single strong, easily defensible keep (Remfry, Types of castles 1). Due to the fact that the shell keep was light enough to be supported by a man-made mound, many of the keeps were added to the existing motte and bailey castles. This keep was so much stronger and larger that it took longer to build than a motte or bailey.

A Masonry Tower was a square that was 30 or 40 feet high. This tower was made of paste and stones, but brick and rubble were often used to fill walls at times. These towers were freestanding and the stone led to a better defense if needed. A later development of the design was a Welsh D-Tower which is a combined square keep with a round tower that made the masonry tower even stronger. The Tower of London is the most famous of these Towers (Remfry, Types of castle 2).

A donjon was quite common and found in many shapes. The donjon

Was considered to be a last line of defense. They were surrounded by a stone curtain wall, which was defended by several towers. The wall was very thick, as, much as nine or ten feet thick and maybe 40 foot in height. The wall has an apron like based on it to thicken the wall base, and causing solid or liquid material (Simpson 14). A later design to these towers was a gatehouse. The gate caused a weak defense so they later surrounded it by a pair of Towers. These other towers would allow attackers to be defeated from above or on the side of the gatehouse. A portcullis was also used to protect the gate with a metal grate (Remfry 2).

Finally, a concentric castle was an unusual type of castle. It represented the highest form of a castle. It usually consisted of a donjon and curtain wall, even two or more walls. The second wall was lower than the first, allowing archers to drop from both walls and fire upon attackers. The tower also consisted of round towers, large moats, and gatekeeps. If the first tower was destroyed, the attacker was still faced with a whole other complete castle. If the castle were constructed properly, it would be invincible. Edward I built a majority of the castles to put down the Welsh rebellions (Remfry 2).

Warfare was very important with the lords of the castles. A good built castle could rarely be taken down by a direct attack. During a siege, the attacking army would surround the entrance of the castle and prevent supplies from entering (Mfeinberg 1). The army would literally starve everybody to make him or her surrender. This would take months or even years, and in this time they would demolish the castles appearance with weapons. The most common of these weapons was a catapult, which would hurl stones at the castle wall and at the defenders. A catapult could also be used to hurl other things at the castles such as heads or bodies. That would get very messy! It could also be used to hurl things at one point of the wall because they were so accurate. This could cause the castle to crumble. Another weapon of the middle ages was a ballista. This was a huge crossbow that hurled arrows the size of trees. It could also be used to hurl large stones (Brown 64). This would really start to destroy the castles in little to no time at all. A different siege weapon was a battering ram brought close to the gate and rammed until broken (Mfeinberg, Siege warfare 1). Other methods were used to get around the wall. A rolling tower, the height of the wall, was used to get close to the wall and drop soldiers at the top of the wall.

Castles on cliffs were common and made it hard for the enemy to attack. There was good visibility to see attackers and made an excellent source of water and supplies. A castle with access to supplies could withstand a siege longer than one that did not. A moat was added to castles to make them stronger. A moat is a large ditch that went around the castle, filled with water. It also contained a drawbridge that limited access to the castle. Another addition to a castle were arrow loops, which were small slits in the wall that allowed archers a long field of fire and made him hard to hit. On the top of the wall crenellations served a purpose of arrow loops. A crenellation is an alternating pattern of high a low spots that affords an archer a place to hide (Mfeinberg, siege warfare 1). Instead of an archer, a crossbowman was used but a second assistant was needed to reload a second crossbow. Since windows were the only source of natural light, secesses behind them were the size of small rooms. They had built in seats behind them. For security windows near the bottom of the castle were very narrow, whereas the top ones were wide (Macaulay 31).

Later advancements were even better for the castles. A round tower stronger than the square had a better platform for fire and was harder to undermine. A glacis or sloping wall was placed at the bottom of the tower to prevent ram attackers. A murder hole was used to drop cold water to put out fires. Rocks and hot water were also dropped upon attackers to annoy them. The combination of these things resulted in the gatehouse. These consisted of a pair of towers that if attackers managed to enter the gate murder holes and arrow would attack them loops from close range. A final characteristic added to castles was a posten gate. That was a small gate that allowed escape incasing the castle started to fall. During a siege it was also used to send out a huge number of troops to harass the attackers. Many of these methods made a castle almost defeatless. But in the 16th century these methods all changed when gunpowder was invented. Then everyone started using canons to defeat the castle. The canon had more power than a catapult or ballista. The canons could level walls sometimes within a couple tries. Gunpowder revolutionized warfare and the use of castles and sieges became part of history (Mcfeinberg, siege warfare 2).

The lord and lady of a castle wore beautiful garments. They would sleep naked and put on linen under garments when rising for the day. After they bathed in cold water, which was only once a week, they would put on their outer garments. Their garments were basically the same. A long sleeved tunic slipped over the head and fastened at the neck with a burch. The second tunic went over the first. It was shorter with either sleeveless or with wide, loose sleeves and often lined with fur. Finally a mantle made with a circular piece of material, lined with fur and fastened at the neck with a chain. The lords garments were shorter that the ladies and had looser sleeves. Both wore belts tied at the waist or fastened with a metal buckle. The man s costume was completed with a long hose attached to the belt that held up his pants. The women s hose were shorter and suspended from garters below the knees. The lord and lady both wore shoes: sandals for around the castle and boots for the outdoors (Gies 110).

The colors of there tunics, mantles, hose, and shoes were bright blues, yellows, crimsons, purples, and greens. Their garments were usually made out of wool, though fine silks were often worn. Camlet was sometimes used for winter robes, which was woven from camel or goat hair. The fur trimmings were of squirrel, lambskin, rabbit, otter, marten, beavers, fox, ermine, and sable. For festive occasions belts might be silk with gold or silver threads with jewels attached to them. Both men and women wore head coverings indoors an outdoors. The lord usually wore a linen coif tied by string to his chin. Feathers and buttons decorated this. The lady wore a linen wimple either white or colored that covered her hair and neck. Outside, hood and caps were worn over the coifs and wimples. Elegant gloves, jewelry, necklaces, gold rings with stones, pins, hairbands, shoebuckles and bracelets completed the costume (Gies, 111).

The morning was spent in routine task depending on whether the castle had quest. The lord had conferences with members of his counsel. The lady conversed with her quest or stayed busy with embroidery and other projects. The knights practiced fencing and tilting, while children did their lessons with a tutor. The tutor was usually one of the lord s clerks. When the lesson was over the children would play. The girls played with dolls and the boys with tops and balls, horseshoes, and bows and arrows. In the courtyard, the grooms swept out the stables and fed the horses. Smith s worked on horseshoes, nails, and wagon fittings (Gies, 112).

In the kitchen the cook and his staff turned the meat on a spit and prepared stews and soups in iron pots hung over the fire on a hook and chain that could be raised and lowered for different temperatures. Some of there meat was pork, beef, mutton, poultry, and game. When the boiling meat was ready it was lifted out of the pot with an iron meat hook, a long fork with a wooden handle and prongs attached to the side. The soup was stirred with a long-handled slotted spoon. Salting or smoking preserved the meat. Most common was to keep the meat alive int l ready for use. On fast days they served fish (Gies, 113).

The lords had to use hunting as a way of life. At dawn on summer days the lords, his household, and quest would go into the forest while the huntsman, a professional and regular member of the lord s staff would hunt the deer down with their dogs. There were three kinds of dogs: the lymer, a bloodhound, bachet, and a gray hound. The bloodhound was kept on a leash and used to finish off the prey at bay. The bachet was a smaller hound and a gray hound was larger than the modern breed and capable of killing a deer on its own. When the animal was brought to the bay it was usually beheaded. Sometimes they would use bow and arrow to kill. Skinning and dividing up the meat, including the hound s share (Gies 125) followed the kill. A meal would also include beer. The lords and there acquaintances love to drink beer (Quenells 43).

Dinner would be served between 10:00 a.m. and noon. The dinner consisted of two or three courses each served in separate dishes. All of the courses consisted of the same kinds of food except for the last course, which consisted of fruits, nuts, cheese, wafers, and spiced wine. On holidays and weddings a large quantity of food would be served. When Henry III daughter married there was more than sixty pasture cattle eaten at the first and principal course at the table (Gies, 117). During dinner the quest might be entertained with music or jokes, and stories. When dinner was over one of the quest would entertain the company with a song of their own.

The way of life lived in these times were very different from how we live things now. Their way of attack then was very brutal and took strong men to pull the job off. Now gun-power is invented so it is easier to defend us from attackers. The lords and ladies were very creative in their ways of doing things. It would have been amazing to live in those times.