

# Great Archaeological Sites in Caerphilly



## 6. CAERPHILLY CASTLE



Caerphilly castle (ST 1555 8701) was built by Earl Gilbert II de Clare in the second half of the 13th century to consolidate his hold on the cantref of Senghenydd, which he had recently seized, and to strengthen his border against Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, Prince of Gwynedd, who had recently seized Brecon.

It is what is known as a 'concentric' castle, designed to make an enemy fight his way through successive rings of defences, and was at the cutting edge of military thinking of the day – the equivalent in South Wales of Edward I's slightly later ring of castles around Snowdonia in the north. The Inner and Middle Wards each have a gate in the east and west sides, and the Inner East Gate could be isolated from the surrounding structures in case they were overrun. The Inner Ward also has a tower at each of its four corners and covered passages built into its curtain walls. The Middle Bailey is surrounded by a moat, which was expanded into lakes on the north and south sides of the castle. A bridge leads from the Middle Bailey's West Gate over the moat to the Outer Bailey. Another bridge from the East Gate leads to the substantial embankments on the east side of the lakes, which form a barbican with another moat in front of them to the east. On these embankments, Earl Gilbert built the main entrance to the castle, the Outermost East Gate.

The Great Hall, the administrative centre of the castle, was in the Inner Ward constructed against the south curtain wall with sets of lodgings at either end. The

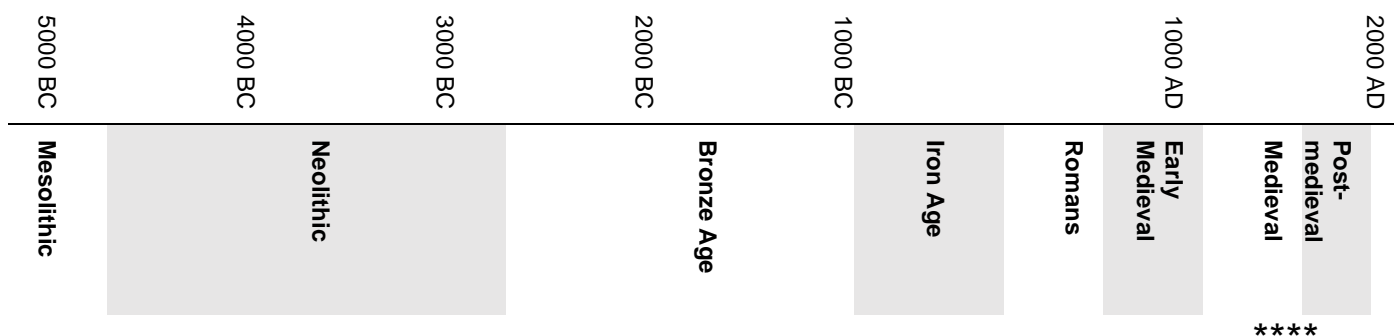
main surviving structures within the Middle Ward are the Kitchen Tower and a store building.

Careful analysis of the architectural details show that Earl Gilbert's builders worked there in four phases, starting with the curtain walls of all the wards, the gatehouse and corner towers of the Inner Ward and part of the gatehouses of the Middle Ward. These, and a Great Hall, had been finished by the time it was briefly captured by Llwelyn in 1270. The subsequent three phases saw the defences strengthened and suites of accommodation added. The great hall was rebuilt in 1325-26 by Earl Gilbert's son-in-law and successor, Hugh Despenser the Younger, in a fifth phase.



Caerphilly Castle (CF83 1JD) is a guardianship site run by Cadw. See the Cadw website for opening times and entrance charges. Caerphilly is well served by public transport, with a regular train service from Cardiff (Rhymney line), and there are plenty of car parks around the town centre (charges apply). Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 166.

**Timeline** (the asterisk indicate the possible time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. Caerphilly Castle has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00696m, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about the Romans in South Wales at [http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/romans\\_in\\_south\\_wales/index.html](http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/romans_in_south_wales/index.html)