

# Great Archaeological Sites in Cardiff



## 3. CARDIFF CASTLE AND ROMAN FORT



Cardiff Castle now stands in the middle of Wales's capital city (ST1806076590), but its history goes back way before Cardiff was even a town, or Wales was a country. As the Romans pressed westwards into the territory of the Silures in the middle of the 1st century AD, they built a series of forts in earth and timber as winter quarters for their troops. Cardiff was one of these, and the traces of it that have been found by excavation suggest that it was big enough for a legion. It was replaced at the end of this century by a smaller earth and timber fort, which in turn was very quickly replaced by one in stone. Nothing is now visible of these above ground, but there is plenty to be seen of the fourth Roman fort on the site. This was built at the end of the 3rd century in the most up-to-date style, with projecting bastions on the outside of the defensive walls as well as the D-shaped towers flanking the gates in the middle of each side.

Although there is no evidence that the site was occupied between the end of Roman rule and the coming of the Normans at the end of the 11th century, enough of the walls of this last Roman fort survived for William the Conqueror to reuse them for the outer ward to his new castle. However, rather than repairing the stonework, the Normans encased what was left in massive earth banks. There was now a single gate, on the south side. Inside, an inner ward with a massive motte was constructed

in the northwestern corner. On the motte, the keep will have been of timber – like the Romans before them, the invading Normans needed to construct their strong points as quickly as possible without having to spend their time on building in stone. It was eventually replaced by the polygonal stone shell keep which still stands there, probably built in the 1130s. We do not know how much other building work took place at this time, but over the next couple of centuries both the defences and living quarters were updated and improved.

However, the castle as we see it today is very much the achievement of the 3rd Marquess of Bute and his son, the 4th Marquess. The 3rd Marquess commissioned the architect William Burgess to rebuild significant parts of it in a romantic 'gothic' style like his summer retreat at Castell Coch, and the 4th Marquess sponsored the excavation and restoration of the remains of the last Roman fort.



Cardiff Castle is on Castle Street (CF10 3RB) in the city centre, equidistant from Cardiff Central and Cardiff Queen Street railway stations. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 151.

For more information on the work that GGAT carried out at the castle visit [http://www.ggat.org.uk/cardiff\\_castle/cardiff\\_postex/cardiffcastle\\_post\\_ex\\_index.html](http://www.ggat.org.uk/cardiff_castle/cardiff_postex/cardiffcastle_post_ex_index.html)

**Timeline** (the asterisks indicate the 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. Cardiff Castle has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00102s, and the Roman fort is 00101s. 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 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)