

# Great Archaeological Sites in Newport



## 4. NEWPORT CASTLE



Photo: Owain at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12684197>

When Newport Castle was built in the 14th century, at some time between 1327 and 1386, as far as we can tell from what remains, it seems to have been put up on a new site rather than being an upgrade of an earlier castle as for example at Swansea. It is, however unlikely that no castle existed in Newport before then. A large mound on Stow Hill near the cathedral has been interpreted as a Norman motte, but as this disappeared in the mid 19th century when the tunnel for the railway was dug, we cannot be certain.

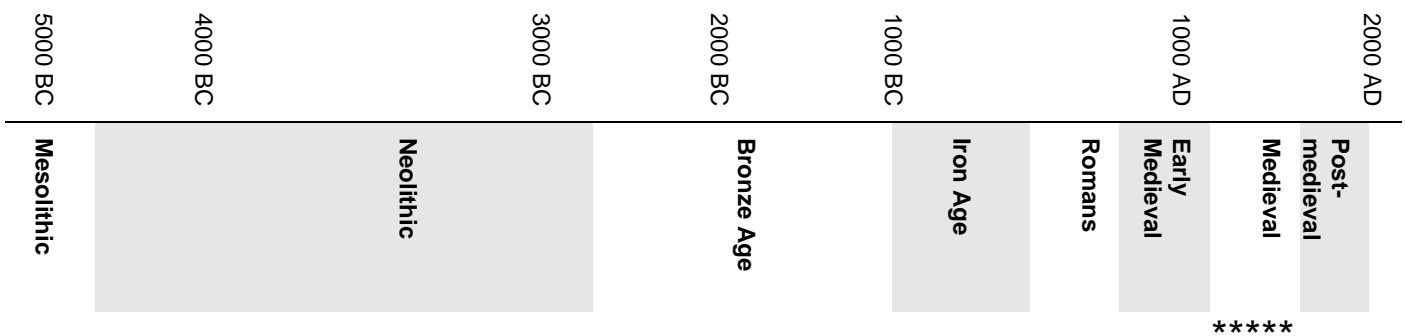
The only part of the 14th century castle to survive is its impressive river frontage (ST31168845) featuring a water gate. These were always important, as sea and river transport often provided the most efficient way of travel, and certainly of moving goods around. We know from documentary sources that castles on the South Wales coast often had supplies arriving by boat, and the discovery of the Newport ship a short distance away shows how Newport was linked into international trade providing luxuries, like wine, that were essential for a lordly household.

In the central, square tower is the arch of the water gate with a groove for a portcullis. However the room above, rather than containing the mechanism to work it, has a large window that would at one time have been embellished by tracery. It seems that this was part of a makeover of the castle in the 15th century when it was turned into a magnificent reception room. The two towers that flank it symmetrically are octagonal, with buttresses on four sides making a square at foundation level. The southern one was probably the lord's private apartments, and the rather plainer rooms in the north tower perhaps for his steward. In the wall that stretches between this tower and the central one are two windows, described by the antiquary Archdeacon Coxe at the beginning of the 19th century in his *Tour of Monmouthshire* as being 'richly decorated'. This was this was the outer wall of the great hall.

The plan published by Coxe shows that behind these buildings on the frontage was a rectangular bailey. It would probably originally have been crowded by other buildings providing accommodation for other members of the lord's household, not to mention essential services such as the kitchen. Coxe was told by a friend who lived in Newport that the walls had originally been surrounded by a deep moat that had only recently been filled in with the spoil produced by digging the Monmouthshire Canal. It apparently filled with water at high tide.

Newport Castle stands within the city centre area (NP20 1HG). Although the interior is not normally open to the public, there is a good view from outside, including from trains as they enter and leave the nearby railway station. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 152.

**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. Newport Castle has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00192g, 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.