

# Great Archaeological Sites in the Vale of Glamorgan



## 6. OGMORE CASTLE



When Robert Fitzhamon, lord of Gloucester, conquered the lowlands of Glamorgan towards the end of the 12th century, he parcelled out his new lands as feudal holdings to his principle supporters. One of these new lordships was Ogmores, which is recorded in 1116 as being held by William de Londres. He built Ogmores Castle as an earth and timber castle ringwork, in a strategic position on a ford across the tidal reach of the River Ewenny (SS 8818 7697). The oval earthen ringwork survived until the start of the 13th century when it was levelled and replaced by a defensive rock-cut ditch which connected with the river so that it filled with water at high tide. However, the earliest surviving building on the site is the stone keep probably built by William's son and successor, Maurice to replace the earlier timber structure.

The keep is one of the earliest in Wales, rectangular, with a staircase against the east wall. It is embellished with typical Norman architectural features – scalloped capitals on the pillars framing the fireplace, and round-headed windows. The keep originally had two storeys as is shown by the mark of the original roof which was left on the west wall when another storey was added later. The other walls only survive to basement level. A second rectangular building, smaller than the keep, was added on the east side of the bailey sometime in the 12th century. All that survives of it is

its basement and its vaulted entrance passage. The rest of the building may have been in timber.

In the early 13th century, the bailey was provided with a new curtain wall on the line of the original ringwork. It incorporated a simple gatehouse on the west side next to the keep, and a new hall. The keep was heightened as part of this makeover, and was provided with a stair turret and garderobe, but we cannot be sure when the only other surviving building within the inner bailey was constructed. The small outer bailey on the south-west side of the castle contains a single storey building. This was described as the chapel on the 1st edition OS 6" map, but others have identified it as the courthouse which we know from documentary record was rebuilt here in 1454-55. This building was constructed over a limekiln, which in turn overlay another building.

A pre-Norman cross-slab recording that one Arthmail gave a field to the church was found in 1929 built into a 19th century limekiln in the castle. Unfortunately we do not know whether it was on the site originally or whether it came from somewhere else in the vicinity.

Crossing the River Ewenny at the castle is a row of stepping stones, placed where the river is shallow and flows slowly. These are also believed to go back to the Middle Ages. Although there is nothing to date them directly.

Ogmore Castle is a guardianship site run by Cadw, with free admission. It stands alongside the B4524 between Bridgend and Ogmore-by Sea. There is a car park, but it is unsurfaced and prone to flooding. The nearest railway station is Bridgend. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 151.

**Timeline** (the asterisks indicates 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. Ogmore Castle has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00234m, the cross-slab is 00289m and the stepping stones are 00273m. 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.