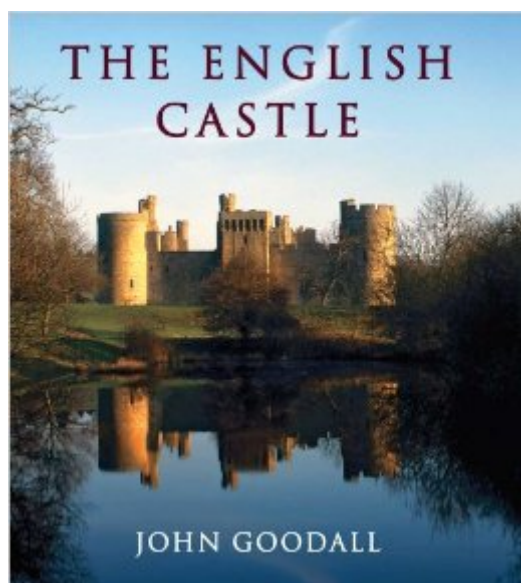


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The English Castle: 1066-1650 (The Paul Mellon Centre For Studies In British Art)



Synopsis

From coast to coast, the English landscape is still richly studded with castles both great and small. As homes or ruins, these historic buildings are today largely objects of curiosity. For centuries, however, they were at the heart of the kingdom's social and political life. The English Castle is a riveting architectural study that sets this legion of buildings in historical context, tracing their development from the Norman Conquest in 1066 through the civil wars of the 1640s. In this magnificent, compellingly written volume, which includes over 350 illustrations, John Goodall brings to life the history of the English castle over six centuries. In it he explores the varied architecture of these buildings and describes their changing role in warfare, politics, domestic living, and governance.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Goodall provides us with an important new overall history, written for an informed general audience, and incorporating the vast amount of recent scholarship which is dramatically changing our understanding of what castles were all about in medieval England. Handsomely produced with color photos, diagrams and plans, this is now the (admittedly weighty) place to turn for an introduction to the sometimes enigmatic secular ruins that dot England, dating from roughly 1050 (before the Norman invasion) to about 1600 (by which time they had become more aristocratic homes than defensive sites). Architectural editor of COUNTRY LIFE, Goodall tells this story in a largely

chronological fashion, from the first stone castles of William the Conqueror in the 1070s to the very different buildings constructed under the Stuart kings (and a notable queen) in the 1500s and 1600s. He wraps up with some discussion of the castles' last appearance on the military and political stage during the English Civil War (1640s) when many were "slighted" (destroyed) to prevent further use. The photos are often new views (I found myself stumped as to which castle I was looking at in some cases---and I have been in easily 200 of them across the British Isles and Ireland). In many cases, Goodall makes effective use of clear numbering within the photos and the relevant descriptive captions. The variation among castles built over a half millennium is vividly portrayed throughout. Some of the historical illustrations--period plans, drawings and early photos--make clear the dramatic changes in castle use and preservation since their heyday.

This book rewards the architectural history buff with a detailed explanation of the architecture of English castles, and a careful discussion of the specialized features of many of the most spectacular surviving examples. Goodall's work reflects remarkable persistence and professionalism. This is not a scholarly academic field, but a topic of intense interest to deeply experienced advocates of historic preservation. Thus Goodall is not an architecture professor, but a prolific author and publisher of highly regarded periodicals on topics related to the history of construction in England. Goodall maintains an excellent focus on his subject. He does not digress excessively into biographies of the nobles who built the castles or discussions of related topics in history contemporaneous to castle construction. A well prepared reader will benefit from familiarity with the history of England from the Norman Conquest to the English Revolution. For example, Goodall notes most English castles were not easily defensible. Rather, they were built in a style that resembled defensible forts. Goodall explains this was in part because castles in the first century or two after the conquest needed to be defensible, in later everyone tried to imitate people with old titles. Think, "the castle my older brother inherited." It also helps to know that knights were heavily involved in Crusading at this point, and that families strove to look substantial, most obviously to improve the marriage prospects of their children. Less obviously, the wealth and military sophistication implied by a castle might affect a Crusader's promotion prospects.

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