



Fig. 1. Lewes Castle. The shell-keep, with later additions, from the north west. Shell-keep early 12th century; semi-octagonal towers added in the 13th century.

Lewes

10. Lewes

The site was established by William de Warenne soon after the Norman Conquest and remained with his family (who were earls of Surrey from 1088) until the mid-14th century. Like Lincoln, Lewes has two mottes. The one now known as Brack Mount (and which carries only a fragment of masonry from a perimeter wall) may be the first motte of the castle built soon after the Norman Conquest. The other motte (bearing the shell-keep, and giving a better view of the town) is assumed to be not much later than the first. The shell-keep is normally seen as a 12th-century replacement of an 11th-century timber structure, perhaps of around 1140, but some (Godfrey 1928, 14; Platt 1982, 28) assert that the shell-keep is late 11th-century in origin and that the employment of precautionary timber reinforcement in its masonry is evidence that the motte was of recent construction when the masonry was added: the wall is 2m thick. Parts of battlements survive, indicating the original wall-height, at the east end of the remaining wall.

Much of the shell-keep's perimeter collapsed long ago, but remains of a large fireplace and other features indicate it had domestic structures built against it. Ascending wing-walls are assumed, but they do not survive. Access to the motte top was probably up a stair protected by the wing-wall coming from the direction of the gatehouse east of the motte. No trace of the entrance itself survives, so its strength, grandness and details of approach cannot be determined. Evidence of timber reinforcement within the shell-wall has been noted.

In the 13th century, polygonal (half-octagon) towers some 7.5m wide, with widely-splayed bases descending the upper slope of the motte, were added to the perimeter of the shell. Two survive and there must have been at least one more (probably two). The two extant were much altered in the 18th-19th centuries, when parts of the shell-keep were converted into a summer house and garden. Enough remains to show the towers were both residential and seriously defensive. They had three storeys: the ground floor



Fig. 2. 'A watercolour view of Lewes Castle in Sussex and the Bray Mount from Mr Shelley's Paddock' (title) drawn in 1785 by S. H. Grimm. (View from the north). © British Library Board, Shelfmark: Additional MS 5672 Item number: f. 6 (no. 10). Reproduced with thanks.

entered from the courtyard and the upper floors (originally) entered from the shell wall-top (which ran behind them). Each storey contained a chamber. The lower floor had arrow-loops in the wall faces, the upper floors had them in the wall angles.

Various fragments of masonry were revealed in a limited excavation carried out in 1884. But Lewes benefits from modern excavation, carried out in the 1980s: an unusual feature for a shell-keep. Remains of domestic buildings were recovered, constructed of flint and chalk with ashlar details, against the northern and southern faces of the shell. On the south, in the 12th century, two excavated structures have been suggested as a hall and adjoining kitchen. The addition of the two (extant) perimeter towers in the 13th century affected this domestic range, which had to be altered (the fireplaces/hearths in the shell-wall probably belong to this phase). At the same time, a domestic range was added on the north side. It consisted of two adjoining domestic chambers, or perhaps a chapel with an ante-chamber. Thus, although the only major above-ground survivals are

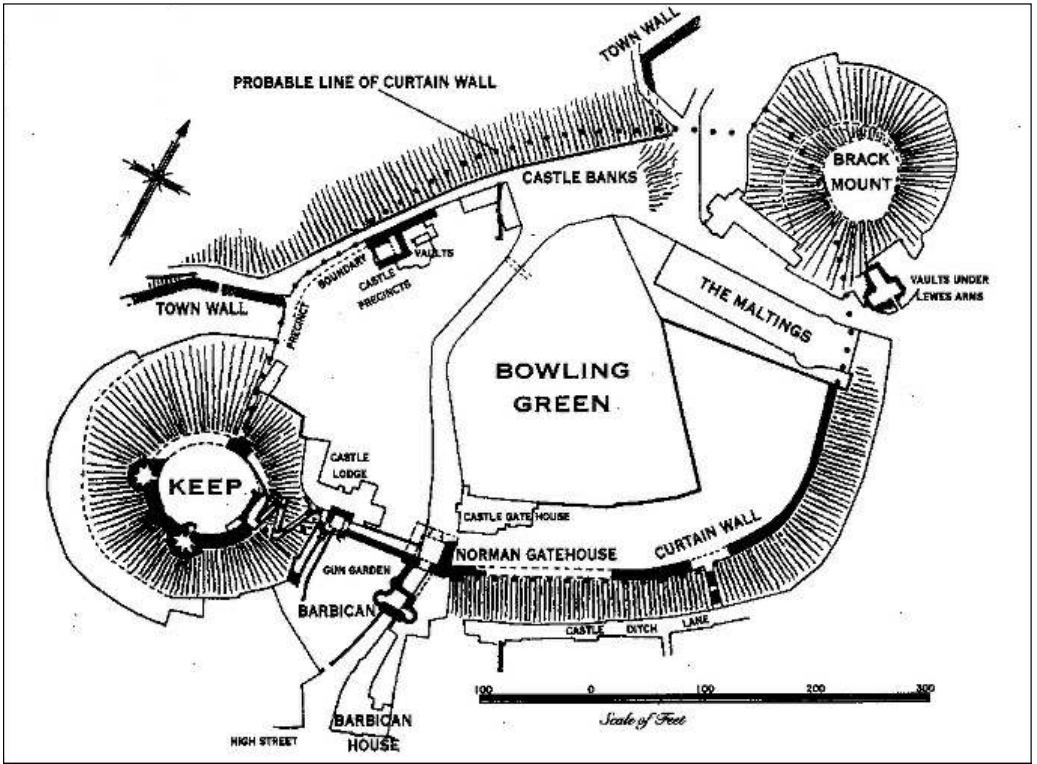
the perimeter towers and parts of the shell-wall, we have here at Lewes some better indications of a shell-keep interior than we have at most places. In the 13th century, these two ranges of domestic buildings occupied most of the perimeter's inner face, leaving an open cobbled courtyard between them. Perhaps these ranges provided communal facilities for private chambers situated in the towers? Interpretation of the facilities is hampered, however, by non-survival of garderobes which must have existed somewhere: in the (now) collapsed shell-wall and/or the towers (where they may have been lost in the post-medieval alterations). The castle as a whole was in decline from the end of the 14th century; from the 16th century it progressively became an area of recreational facilities.

Internal Diameter: 85ft x 79ft (26m x 24m).

Shell wall height: 21ft (6.5m).

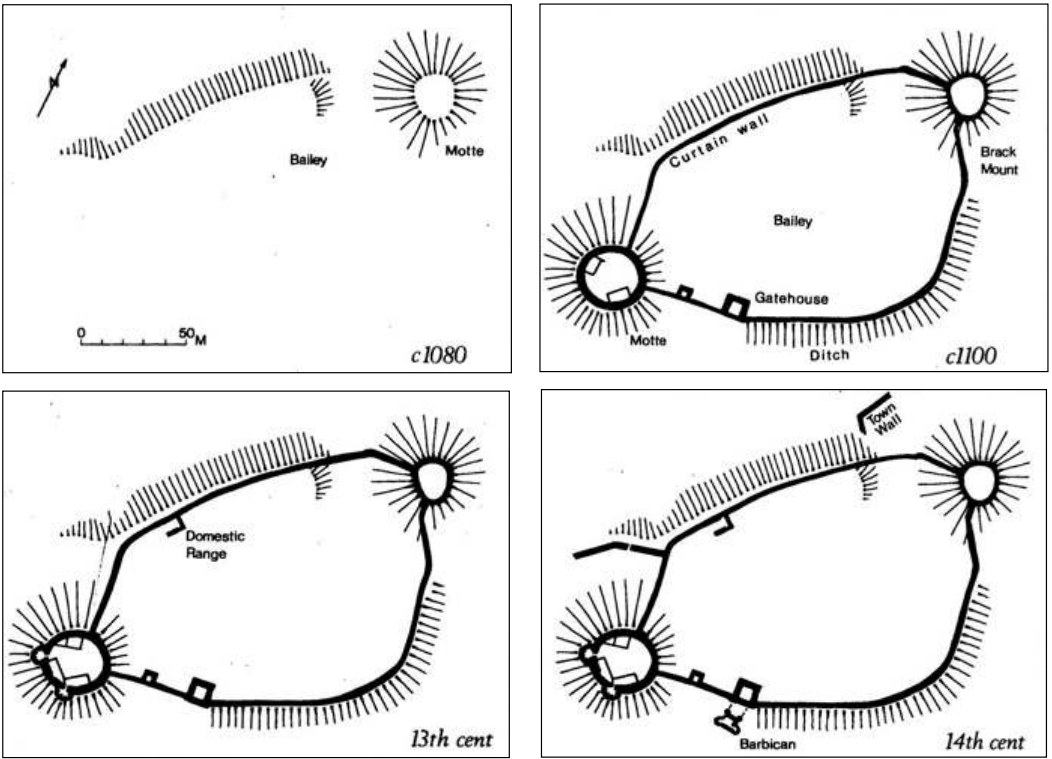
Motte height: 45ft (14m).

Published refs: Clark 1886; Godfrey 1928; Renn 1968, 223-225; Wilcox 1981, 30-31; King 1983, II, 472; Drewett 1992; Farrant 1996; Woodburn 2005-2006 (b); Poole 2009.



ABOVE: Fig 3 Plan from 'A History of the County of Sussex: Volume 7, the Rape of Lewes. Published by Victoria County History, London, 1940'. BELOW: Fig. 4. The on-site model produced on behalf of the Sussex Archaeological Society. (View from the south).





ABOVE: Fig. 5. Lewes Castle. Development of the castle's fortification. From Drewett 1992, p. 104.

BELOW: Fig. 6. Lewes Castle 1985-88. Excavated areas (A-D) on the south-western motte and section lines (low). The shell wall is approx 2.0m in thickness. From Drewett, 1992, p. 74. Images on this page are reproduced with the kind permission of the Sussex Archaeological Society.

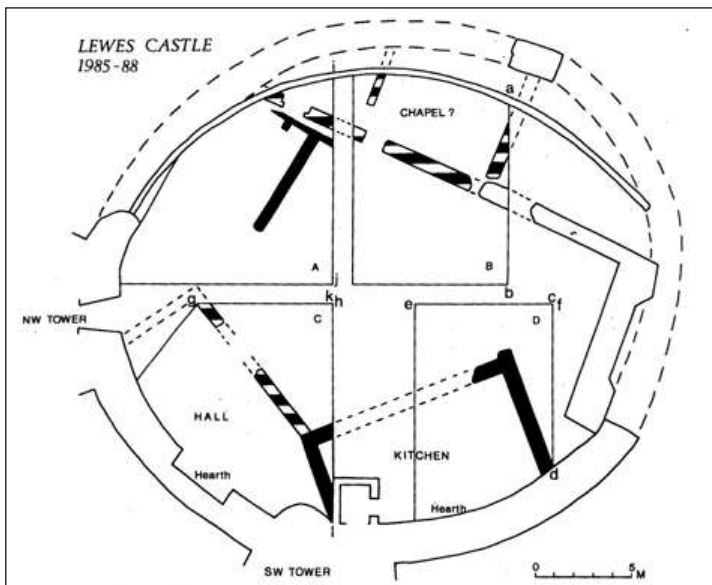
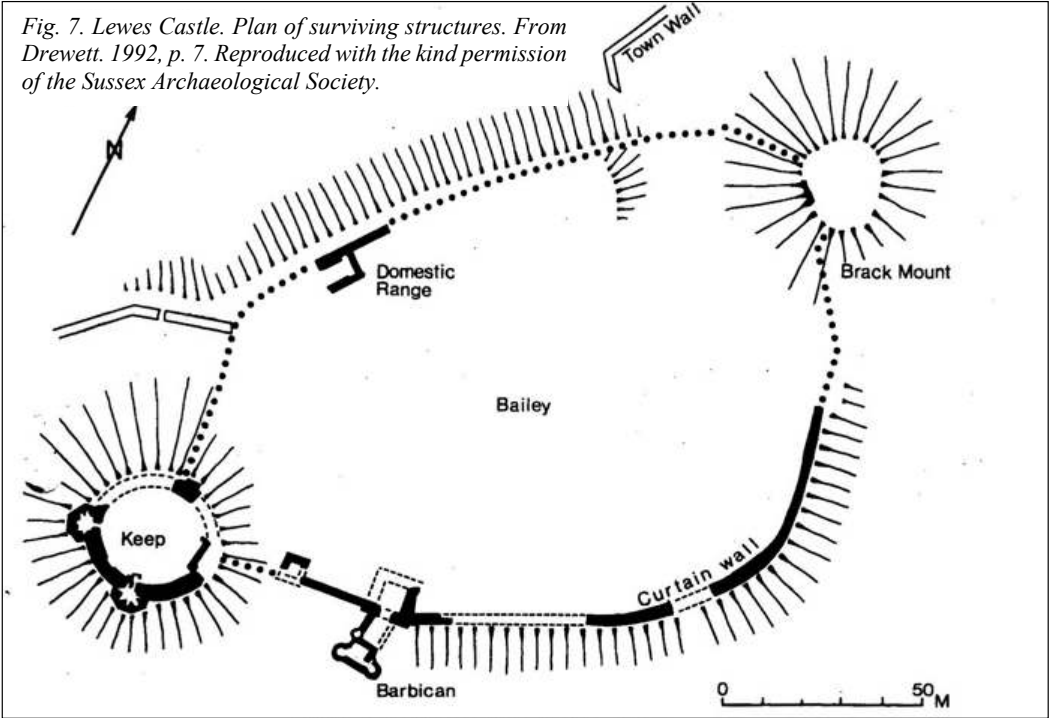


Fig. 7. Lewes Castle. Plan of surviving structures. From Drewett, 1992, p. 7. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Sussex Archaeological Society.



BELOW: Fig. 8. Lewes shell-keep from the north with the zig-zag 19th century steps. Shell walls with remains of crenellations along the battlements indicate an accurate assessment of their original height.





ABOVE: Fig. 9. The shell-keep courtyard looking south-west towards the 19th century buildings

BELOW: Fig. 10. The interior of the south shell wall. Bill Woodburn looking at various features of the kitchen fireplace.





ABOVE: Fig. 11. Lewes Castle, Engraved by Ravenhill and published in the *Topographer* in 1790. Copper engraved with more recent hand colouring, (from the north). Painted prior to any major 19th century neo-gothic additions.

BELOW: Fig. 12. A similar view from the bowling green.

