

# The Gatehouse

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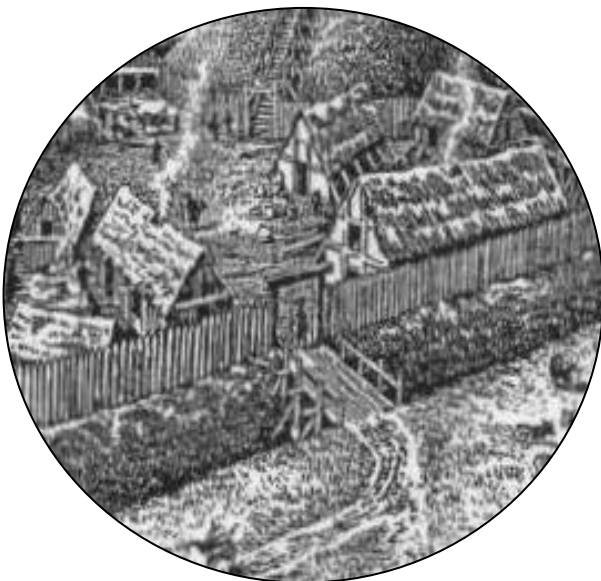
This is the entrance to Abergavenny Castle, it is called the Gatehouse.

It is a **barbican gatehouse**. A barbican was a wall or tower which protected a castle from attack.



The Gatehouse today

When Abergavenny Castle was first built, over 900 years ago, the gate was just a simple opening in the castle walls.



Castle entrance in about 1087



Castle with Gatehouse in about 1300

Illustrations by Michael Blackmore



Walk through the Gatehouse and look closely at the walls around and above you. What can you see?

# The Gatehouse

①

On the first floor above the gate were comfortable rooms for the **Constable** of the Castle and his family to live in.

The Constable was in charge of the Castle when the Lord was away.

The room had a fireplace, large windows and access to the walkways along the walls, as well as a winch to lower or raise the drawbridge. You might be able to spot the two holes above the opening where the chains have worn the stone away?



*Take a close look at the walls either side of the opening. Can you spot any holes where the huge metal door hinges might have been?*

We think that this stone-built Gatehouse was added about 600 years ago. At this time the Welsh, led by **Owain Glyn Dŵr (Owen Glendower)** were fighting the Normans who were in control of much of Wales.

# The Gatehouse

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At that time the Lord of Abergavenny was the Norman, **William Beauchamp (Bee-cham or Bow-sham)**. The English king, Henry IV, ordered Beauchamp to improve the defences of the Castle against the Welsh.

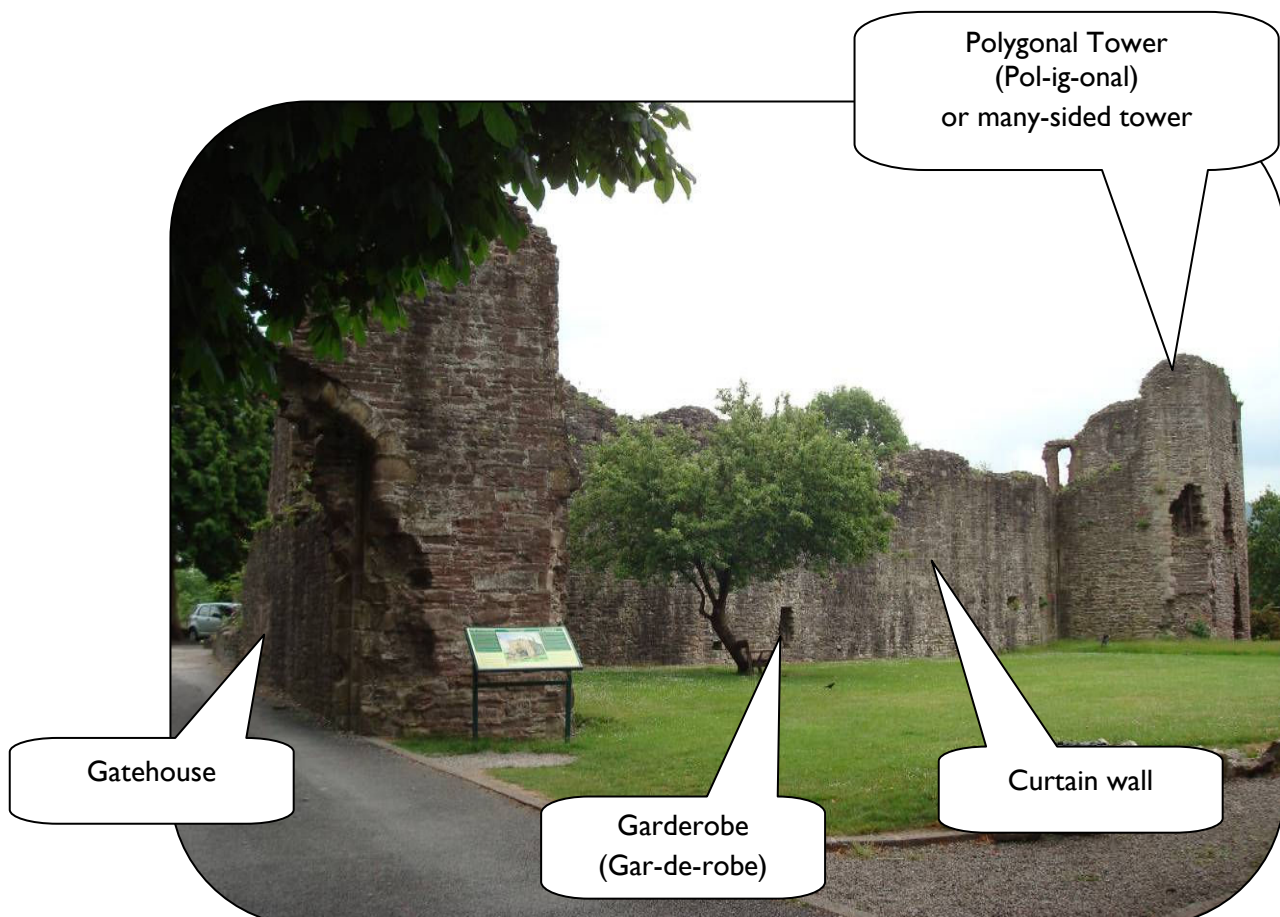
The Castle was surrounded by a **dry ditch** rather than a water-filled **moat**. There appears to have been a **drawbridge** which could be lowered by a winch.

The wall that remains between the Gatehouse and the Tower is called a **curtain wall**. It protected the Castle against attack.



Look at the picture on the display board.  
Can you see the coat-of-arms of the Beauchamp family with a star and six crosses?

Which of the men in the picture do you think might be the Constable? Why do you think that?





# The Gatehouse

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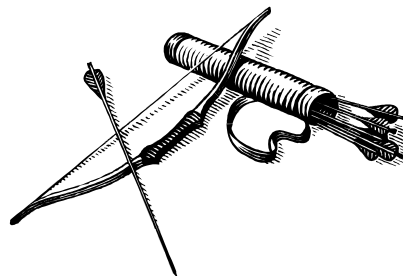
## Were you wondering what a garderobe was?

It was an early type of toilet. In Medieval times the toilet was just a hole in a wooden or stone seat with a chute for the waste to go down. The hole you see in the wall is where the waste came out into the dry ditch around the castle.

It was also a place to hang clothes as the ammonia from the toilet waste was said to keep moths and bugs away! Garderobe is probably a word that changed to wardrobe over time.

People, called **Gong Farmers**, were paid to collect the waste to use in the nearby local tanneries – it was used to soften the cow hides for use as leather for shoes and other items.

Now walk alongside the curtain wall towards the tower. What do you think the castle is built from? Have you seen the same materials anywhere else?



Imagine you are a Welsh rebel planning to attack this Castle.

Why does the dry ditch make things more difficult for you?

Now imagine you are a Norman sentry on duty in the Gatehouse. What would you do to defend the Castle if you saw the Welsh rebels approaching?

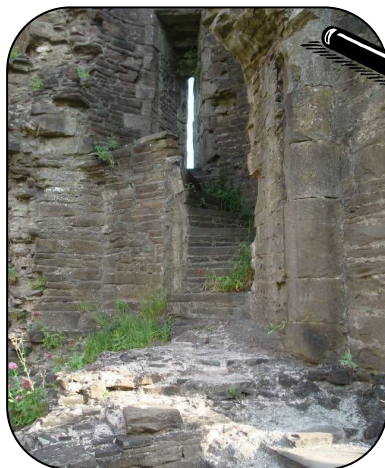
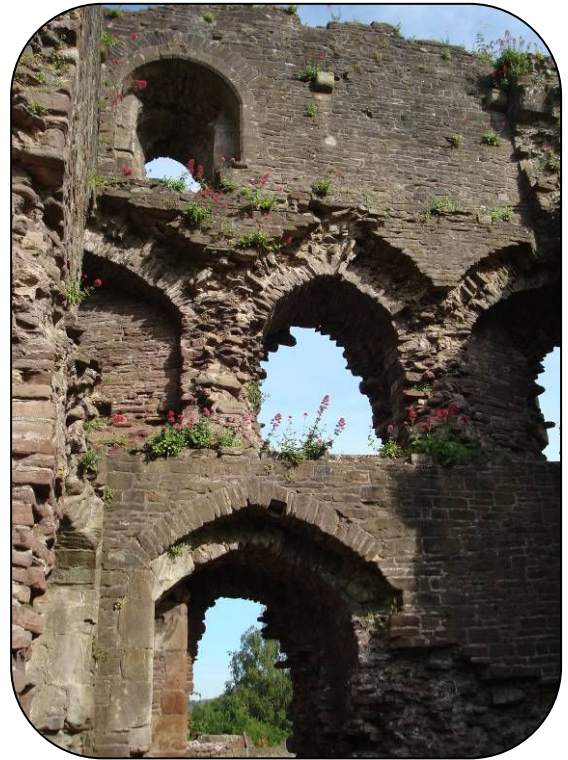
Think about how you would attack and defend Abergavenny Castle.

# The South West Tower

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*Walk towards the Museum. At the bottom of the path up to the Museum you will see, on the right, a high section of wall with a large tree stump in front. The tree has only been there since Victorian times and not when the castle was lived in.*

There are two **towers**. To the left is a **circular tower** and to the right is a **polygonal (pol-ig-onal)**, or many sided tower. These were the private rooms for the Lord and his family. Before this everyone would have lived together in the Great Hall with very little privacy.



Can you see the remains of stairs leading up to all the floors of the tower on the right?

Windows that were long and narrow were often used by archers to shoot arrows through at the enemy. We think this one was just to let light in as there isn't room for an archer to pull back his bow to shoot arrows. It was a good place to spot the enemy approaching!



How many different window and door shapes can you see? Which of the windows do you think had glass in them?

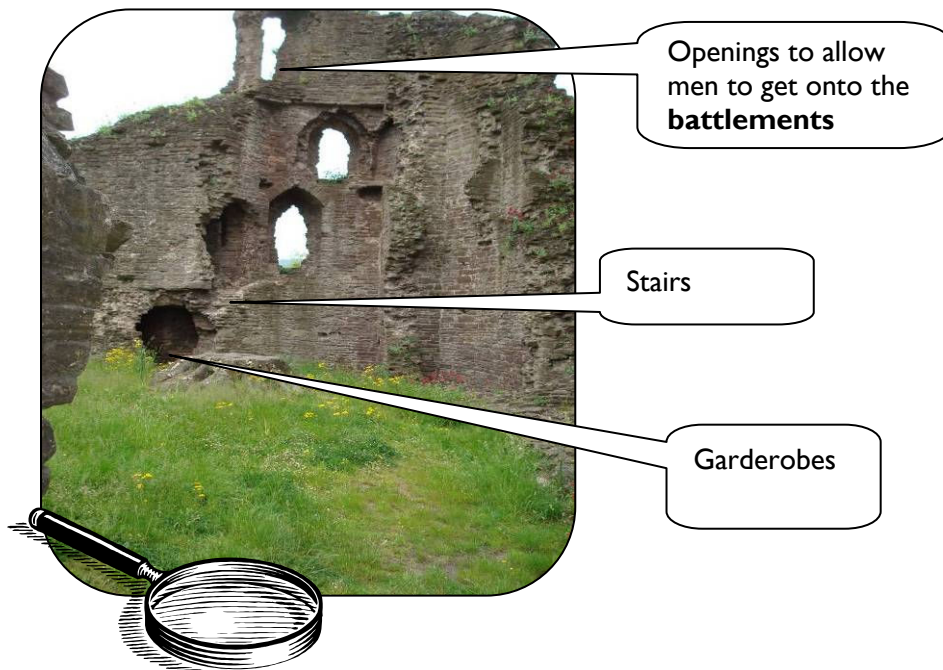
Glass window panes were very expensive and a luxury in the early 1400s when this tower was built.

# The South West Tower

②

We know that there were **wooden floors** because there are holes in the walls where the wooden beams fitted to support the floor.

We don't know as much about the **Round Tower**, which is to the left. However, we do know that there was a garderobe (gar-de-robe) and a small chimney.



The castle was originally built of local wood. Why do you think it was rebuilt using stone?

The towers were eventually destroyed during the Civil War, over three centuries ago, in the 1640s. The blast blew out the windows and part of the wall under the Guard Room.

You might have noticed that there isn't a **kitchen** in this part of the Castle. They were usually built well away from other buildings because flour dust could start fires.

What do you think it was like to live at Abergavenny Castle? Do you think it was the same for the rich and the poor living in the Castle?

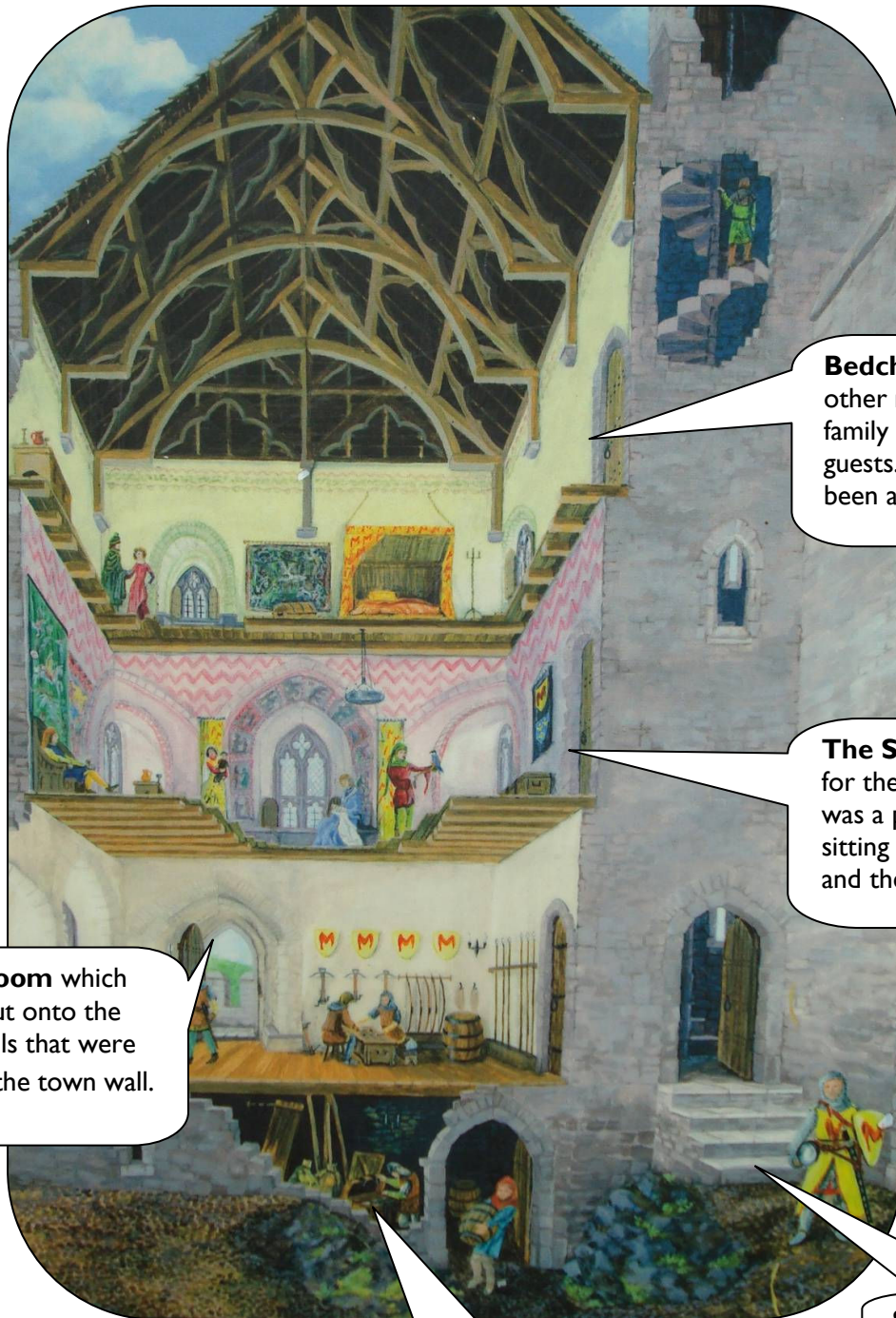


# The South West Tower

②

This is a modern drawing of the tower. The artist used historical information to work out how the tower might have looked.

The drawing is also on the display board on the right-hand wall of the tower complex. Try to match the rooms with what you can see today.



**Guard Room** which opened out onto the Castle walls that were joined to the town wall.

**Bedchamber**, possibly for other members of the family or for important guests. It could also have been a small **chapel**.

**The Solar** was a private room for the Lord of Abergavenny. It was a place to meet visitors, sitting room with window seats and the master bedroom.

**Stairs** to upper rooms and roof.

**Cellar** with a cobbled stone floor. Used for storage.

Illustration by Frances Baines

Abergavenny Castle Trail

# The South West Tower

②



In the Resource Box by the South West Tower display board you will find...

**Medieval and Tudor hats** that may have been worn by people living at Abergavenny Castle.

These are **replica** hats made from modern materials but based on drawings and pictures from the past. Take a good look at the hats and decide whether they were for a rich or poor person. You will find extra information in the box.

- Cotton or linen **Coif** was worn by both men and women. This version is for a girl.
- The cone or flower-pot shaped hat is a **Hennin** worn by rich women such as Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV and grandmother of Henry VIII.
- The **Monmouth Cap** was a knitted woollen hat worn by men, women and children over the age of seven.
- The **Gable Hood** was a style of hat worn by Henry VIII's first wife Katherine of Aragon
- The **French Hood** is similar to those worn by Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife.
- The **Flat Hat** was worn by most men. Rich men might have chosen velvet or other fine materials and added a jewelled brooch or feather for decoration. Less well-off men would buy hats made of plain wool.

When you have finished please put everything back into the box and put the lid on for the next group.

Thank you.



# The Great Hall

③

*This is the flat space between the South West Tower and the Gatehouse.*

This was the **Great Hall**.

It was originally built of wood but later built out of stone.

It was a room where everyone living in the Castle would once have eaten their meals and slept on straw mattresses, if they were lucky.



walk around the floor of the Great Hall. Can you measure it out in paces or steps?

Can you imagine it with walls on all sides?

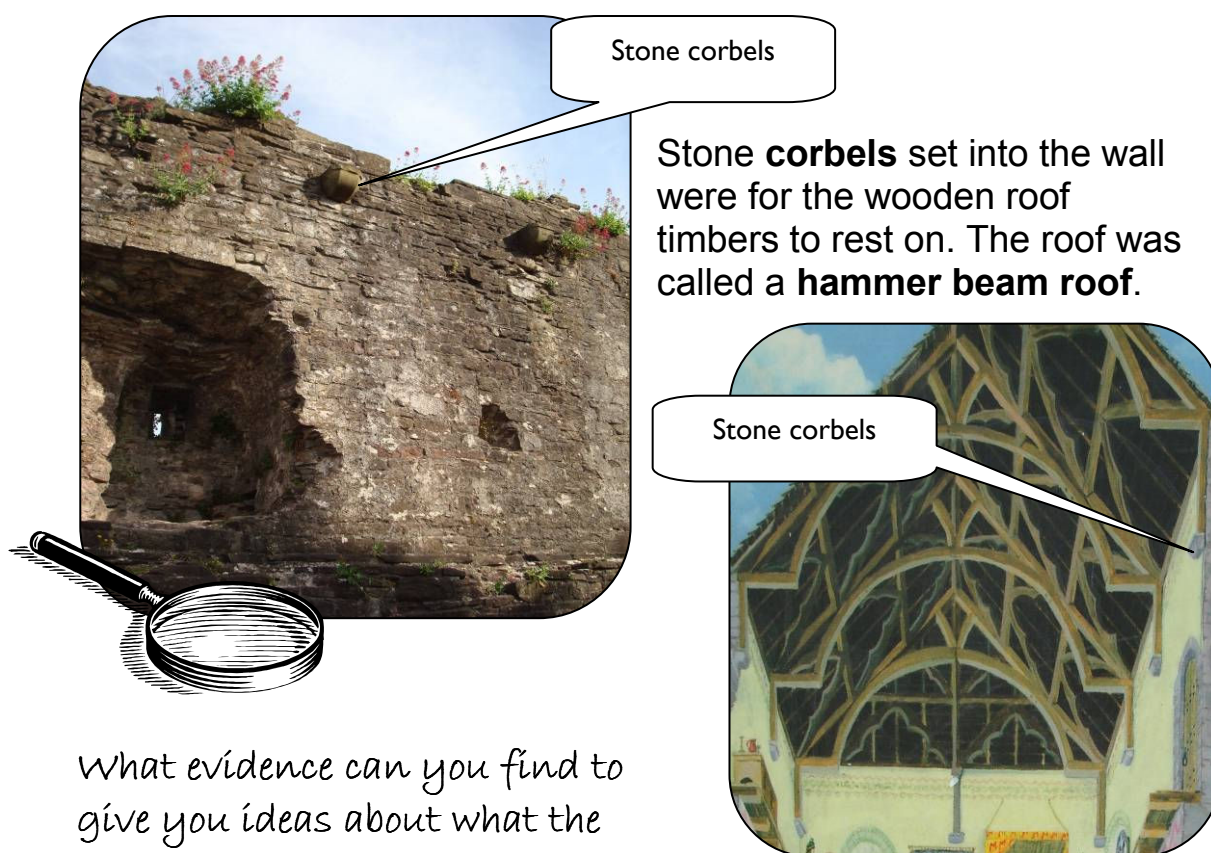
In later years the Lord and his family began to have more privacy by living in the South West Tower but would have eaten their meals in the Great Hall with their guests and some of their servants.

Illustration of the Great Hall by Frances Baines

# The Great Hall

③

The **Great Hall** would actually have been up on the first floor. The ground floor that you are standing on was a storage area.



What evidence can you find to give you ideas about what the Great Hall may have looked like?

The Lord of Abergavenny would have sat and dined on a **dais** (**day-us**) or a raised platform. A door would have led to the Lord's private rooms in the towers from here.

Long wooden tables or **boards** on stands (trestles) would be brought out for people to eat at. The more important you were the nearer to the Lord you sat.

**Constable** – One of the most important servants as he was in charge of the running of the Castle when the Lord was away

**Master Sergeant** – He was in charge of the fighting men of the Castle

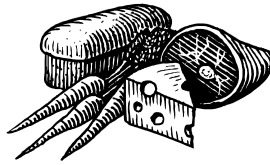
**Servants** – These were the men, women and children who did all the chores

**Cooks** – They prepared and cooked food for the whole household

**Archers** – These men were skilled at shooting longbows and crossbows

# The Great Hall

③



## Roles of people at the Castle

Many people would have lived and worked within Abergavenny Castle. Here are some of the different jobs they did.

<b>Armourer</b>	Would fit and repair armour
<b>Baker</b>	Bread was an important food for everyone
<b>Blacksmith</b>	An important job as horses were used to ride on and pull wagons and carts
<b>Butler</b>	Looked after the beer and the stores called the buttery
<b>Candle-maker</b>	Made candles for the household
<b>Carpenter</b>	Made and repaired all items made of wood
<b>Constable</b>	Was in charge of the Castle
<b>Cook</b>	Many cooks would prepare the food for the whole household
<b>Fletcher</b>	Fixed the feathers onto the arrows
<b>Marshall</b>	Was in charge of the horses, wagons and transport in general
<b>Minstrels</b>	Sang and played instruments to entertain the household



# The Christmas Massacre



*Walk over to the Victorian garden at the bottom of the path leading up to the Museum. There are benches to sit on. There is a pouch with copies of an illustration of the Christmas Massacre story for the group to look at.*

Abergavenny Castle has seen much fighting over the centuries. Long ago the Welsh fought battles against the Norman kings and lords when they came to take their castles and their land. This story was told by Gerald of Wales, a man famous for writing about Welsh history.

*It was Christmas 1175 and **William de Braose (Bray-ose)** was the Lord of Abergavenny. He was a Norman knight.*

*His uncle, Henry, had recently been killed and William wanted to punish the men who had done this terrible deed.*

*He invited the men he thought were responsible to Christmas dinner at the Great Hall. **Seisyll ap Dyfnwal (Cecil ap Duv-un-ooal)**, his son **Geoffrey** and the '**Best Men of Gwent**' came along to Abergavenny Castle.*

*Thinking they were safe from attack, under the Welsh laws of hospitality, the Welshmen accepted the invitation. De Braose and his men trapped their guests in the Hall and then killed them. William then went to Seisyll's home and killed his son **Cadwaldr (Cadwallader)**.*

*Seven years later some of the sons and grandsons of the Welshmen killed returned to Abergavenny Castle. They hid in overgrown ditches near to the Castle. One of the group went to see the Constable of the Castle and told him, as a joke, that they were going to break into the Castle where the walls were lower.*

*The Constable and his men stayed on guard all night and went to bed at dawn feeling safe because nothing had happened. The waiting men used long ladders to climb the Castle walls. The Constable, his wife and men were all captured and the castle was again in Welsh hands.*

*The Welshmen took over the castle and then burnt it to the ground.*

# The Christmas Massacre

④



Illustration of the Christmas Massacre by Frances Baines

This painting shows what we think the first floor Great Hall might have looked like, about 800 years ago. There are several large copies of the picture in the Resource Box.



Where do you think William de Braose (Bray-ose) would be sitting in the Great Hall?

Where do you think the least important people were sitting?

How would you describe the Great Hall?

Was it the home of a rich person? Why do you think that?

Look at what the two Norman soldiers standing by the door are wearing. What do you think they are about to do?

Have you spotted the jester yet?

# The Christmas Massacre

④



In the Resource Box on the Victorian garden benches you will find...

**Medieval and Tudor Household items** linked to what you might have seen on the trestle tables in the Christmas Massacre painting. They are all **replicas** made from modern materials. You will find further information in the box.

- Wooden trenchers
- Pewter plate
- Leather tankard
- Horn bowl
- Horn spoons
- Pewter spoons
- Horn book
- Beeswax candles

When you have finished  
please put everything  
back into the box and put  
the lid on for the next  
group.  
Thank you.



# The Cellars

5

*Now look for the black railings beyond the Crab-apple Tree*

These cellars were below what would have been the Mill Street Tower. The cellars would have had different uses over time. They may have been used for storing food and supplies, a sleeping area for soldiers or even a prison.



There would have been a square opening in the ground with metal bars, or grilles, across to let light and air into the underground rooms.

It would have been possible for an adult to stand upright.

The rooms would have been cool so maybe they were for storing food or for weapons. Soldiers and archers may have used the rooms as accommodation.

The reason we think it may have been a place to hold prisoners was that, in about 1256, account records show that two pairs of handcuffs or manacles were bought for six pence, in old money.

The cellars are no longer safe to explore.

# The Motte

⑥

*Walk around the base of the castle mound at the back of the Museum building. A Motte is a mound and a moat is the defensive ditch around the castle site. There is no moat at Abergavenny Castle.*

This **Motte**, which means 'mound of earth', was probably built under the orders of the Norman Lord Hamelin de Ballon in about 1087. There may have been some sort of castle here even earlier than that.

It was built by local labourers who were forced to dig the circular ditch and then pile up a huge, smooth-sided mound within it. A defensive wooden **palisade** or wall surrounded it.

The tower, or **Keep**, you can see at the top is not the original building. We think that the original Keep may have looked like this drawing, about 900 years ago.



What has changed between this drawing and the Museum building you can see today? Is it the same or different?

Can you think of any reasons why the tower was originally round in shape?

Illustration by Michael Blackmore

# The Motte

6

## Why build a castle here?

It is a good position above the River Usk. Enemies can be seen approaching from across the valley in all directions. It is always better to defend from a higher place looking down on attackers.



Take a look out over the Castle walls to see how high up you are.

Imagine you were attacking the Castle, how would you go about it?

Where would the best place be to launch your attack?

The keep was surrounded with a courtyard below called the **Bailey**. This style of castle is called a '**Motte and Bailey**' castle.

You are standing in part of **Bailey** right now and there would have been outbuildings such as stables, bakery, blacksmith, kitchens and store rooms crowded onto the flat area.

It was a very busy place.



# The Motte

⑥

## Defending

When under attack everyone would be locked inside the Keep. Food and weapons would be stored in the Keep for emergencies.

Narrow **arrow slits** or loops made it difficult for arrows to enter. We don't think there were any windows suitable for shooting arrows from at Abergavenny Castle, as the ceilings were too low.

Archers could shoot from the walls and boiling water or oil, stones and rocks could be dropped on the attackers from above. Earth would be pushed up against the walls at the bases to make it difficult to prop ladders against them.



The weakest part of a castle was the gateway. Having a drawbridge that could be raised added protection to a castle entrance.

## Attacking

When castles were built from wood it was easy to fire lit arrows or start bonfires by the wooden walls. They had to think of other ways to breach the walls when castles were built of stone.

The attackers might use battering rams to knock walls and gates down. They could throw stones, rocks, fireballs and even dead sheep at the castle using catapults or trebuchet (tray-boo-shay) engines.

Siege or belfry towers were later built with roofs to protect the people on the ladders and wheels to move them nearer the castle walls. Often miners were used to tunnel underneath the castle walls.

The best way was to surround the castle and 'lay siege' by stopping food and supplies going in. Starvation and sickness usually worked.

# The Motte

⑥

The wooden Keep was eventually destroyed in 1233 by Richard Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, and the Welsh Princes. There were many battles for hundreds of years between the people of England and the Welsh.

The new Keep was built from stone and was a round tower with pointed windows and doorways. The whole castle was **fortified** to make it stronger against attacks from the Welsh rebels. It was one of many built along the Welsh/English border.

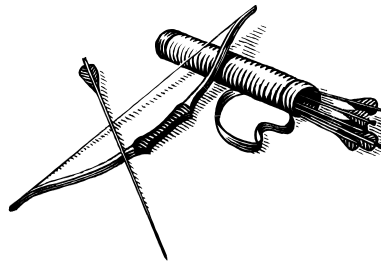
The Lord of the castle could control a large area of land. Infantrymen, or foot soldiers could walk 30 miles in a day and a horseman could ride further.

The Keep, along with most of the Castle was destroyed during the Civil War, in about 1645.



The building you see today was built on top of the Motte as a hunting lodge for the Marquis (Mark-wis) of Abergavenny in 1818.

This is now the Museum.



## Roles of the Castle defenders

Many people would be involved in defending Abergavenny Castle. Here are some of the different fighting roles they would have had.

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Lord</b>   | In overall charge of all the fighting men within the Castle. He made the decisions about fighting tactics.   |
| <b>Knight</b> | Only men from rich families could become a knight, usually by the age of 21 years. They would be loyal to a certain Lord and fight on his behalf. They would have their own set of armour, weapons and a horse or horses.  |
| <b>Squire</b> | They were usually teenagers who had trained for several years living in a Lord's household. They would learn about horsemanship, how to use weapons including swords, how to behave correctly and know the Code of Chivalry.   |
| <b>Page</b>   | At the age of seven boys from rich families were sent away to live in other rich households where they would look after a certain knight, dressing him, serving him at the table with food and drink and start weapon practice. They would also be taught how to read and write.     |
| <b>Archer</b> | Men of poorer backgrounds could train over many years to become an archer, using a Longbow. An 'arbalestier' using a crossbow could be trained in a month. They could fight for one Lord in return for food and lodgings or go away to other Lords who might pay them money instead. |



# The Motte

⑥



In the Resource Box at the base of the Motte you will find...

**Medieval Arms and Armour items** linked to what we imagine knights, soldiers and archers might have used to defend or attack the Castle.

Please note: Some of the resources are heavy and pupils will require teacher and adult supervision.

- Longbow
- Leather quiver for arrows
- 'Pigface' Basinet helmet (NB: please look at and handle but do not try on)
- Arming caps
- Chainmail coif (coi-f)
- Gauntlets
- Small shield painted with the coat of arms of William de Braose (Bray-ose).

When you have finished please put everything back into the box and put the lid on for the next group.  
Thank you.