



ENGLISH HERITAGE  
EDUCATION

KS2 – KS4

## TEACHERS' RESOURCE PACK

### Portchester Castle

This resource pack has been designed to help teachers plan a visit to Portchester Castle, which provides essential insight into over 1,700 years of history. It was a Roman fort, a Saxon stronghold, a royal castle and eventually a prison. Use these resources on site or in the classroom to help students get the most out of their learning.



#### INCLUDED:

- Historical Information
- Glossary
- Sources
- Site Plan

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Don't forget to download our **Hazard Information Sheets** and **Discovery Visit Risk Assessments** to help with planning:

- **In the Footsteps of Kings**
- **Big History: From Dominant Castle to Hidden Fort**

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Step into England's story

# HISTORICAL INFORMATION

DISCOVER  
PORTCHESTER CASTLE

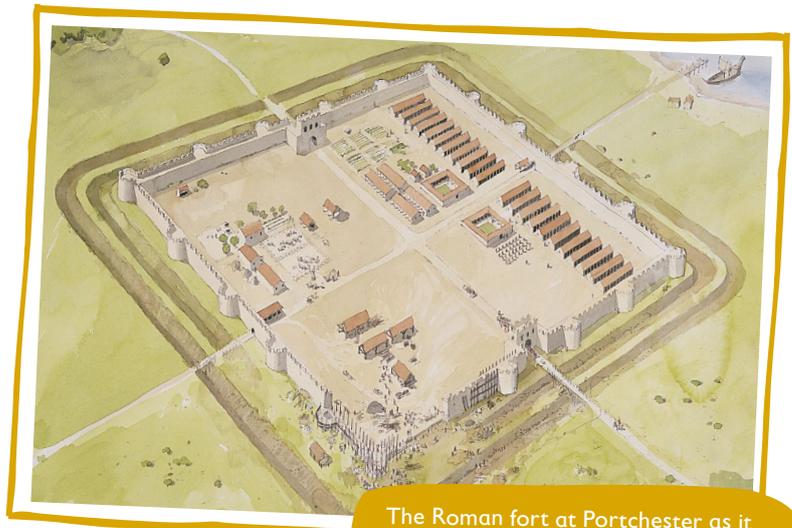
Below is a short history of Portchester Castle. Use this information to learn how the site has changed over time. You'll find definitions of the key words in the Glossary resource on pages 5 and 6.

## A ROMAN FORT

The Roman fort at Portchester was built in AD 285–290. It was one of the so-called 'Forts of the Saxon Shore' that were built around the southern coast of Britain to defend it against raids by Saxon **pirates**.

It was probably constructed by order of Marcus Aurelius Carausius. He was the local naval commander, in charge of protecting the coast with a fleet of ships in the **English Channel**. In AD 286, Carausius used his position of authority to rebel and proclaim himself **emperor** of Britain and parts of France.

The Roman walls at Portchester are nearly 2,000 years old and remain almost complete, making it the most well-preserved Roman fort in northern Europe.

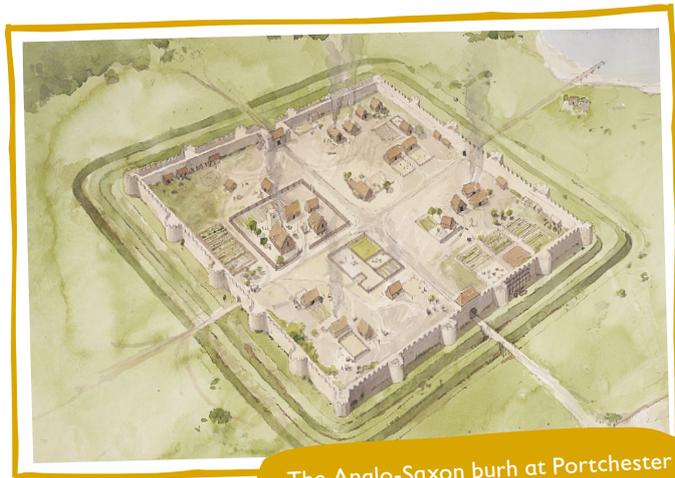


The Roman fort at Portchester as it may have looked when it was being built between AD 285 and AD 290.

## A SAXON STRONGHOLD

After the Romans left Britain in AD 410, people continued to live within the walls at Portchester. In AD 904, the Bishop of Winchester gave the fort to Edward, king of the West Saxons (r.AD 899–924). The site became a **burh** – one of a series of forts that protected the kingdom from **Viking** attack.

**Archaeologists** have found evidence of wooden buildings within the fort's walls, from the **Anglo-Saxon period**. In the 10th century, a large hall, a courtyard and a stone tower were built within the Roman walls. This suggests that an important man and his family lived here.

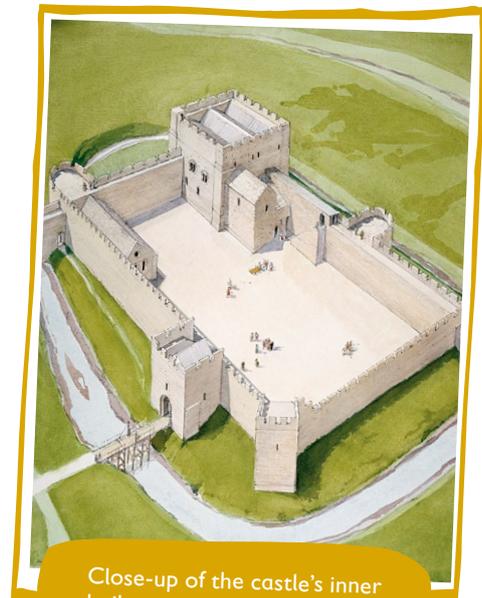


The Anglo-Saxon burh at Portchester as it may have looked in the 10th century, with the hall, courtyard, and tower to the left of centre.

## NORMAN PORTCHESTER

Following the **Norman Conquest** of 1066, William the Conqueror (r.1066–87) gave Portchester to William Maudit, one of his loyal followers. Maudit built an **inner bailey** or courtyard in one corner of the fort.

In 1120, the castle and its lands passed to William Pont de l'Arche, another Norman knight. He built stone walls around the bailey and began building the **keep**. He also founded a priory in 1128, where a community of priests lived together, within the Roman walls, until 1150. The rest of the land was divided into plots and used for farming. Outside the castle walls, the village of Portchester began to grow.



Close-up of the castle's inner bailey as it may have looked in about 1120.

## A ROYAL CASTLE

In 1154, Henry II (r.1154–89) became king of England and took control of the castle. Henry II owned lots of land in France so Portchester was a good place to set sail from when he needed to visit.

King Edward III (r.1327–77) gathered his army at Portchester in 1346 before sailing to France, where he won the **Battle of Crécy**.

Between 1396 and 1399, Richard II (r.1377–99) added to the buildings at Portchester by building a royal palace.

In 1415, Henry V (r.1413–22) launched an invasion of France from Portchester, which ended in a famous victory against the French at the **Battle of Agincourt**.

The castle remained an important coastal defence during the **Tudor period**. In 1632, Charles I (r.1625–49) sold the castle to Sir William Uvedale, whose descendants still own it.



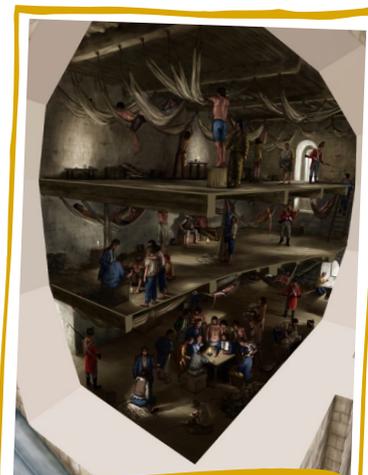
Reconstruction drawing of the castle as it may have looked in the 15th century.

## PRISONERS AT PORTCHESTER

During the **Revolutionary** and **Napoleonic Wars** with France, **prisoners of war** came to Portchester from across the globe.

In 1794, 11 new wooden houses were built inside the walls at Portchester, with room for c.400–500 men in each. The prisoners slept on shared beds in cold, cramped conditions. Some prisoners protested and were eventually allowed some freedoms; they had an **airing ground**, a market and a theatre. Many prisoners practised crafts, such as carving combs and dominoes out of animal bone.

In 1811, French prisoners of war arrived at Portchester, including some who had formed themselves into a theatrical troupe while in captivity. The **troupe** was led by a M. Carré, who had worked behind the scenes in a famous theatre in Paris. They created a theatre on the ground floor of the keep where they put on performances for an audience of up to 300.



A drawing of the inside of the keep showing how it was racked out with hammocks for the prisoners of war to sleep in.

## BLACK PRISONERS OF WAR

In 1793, the islands of the Caribbean, then under European rule, were drawn into the global Revolutionary Wars between the European powers, including Britain and France. When the French **abolished** slavery in 1794, many ex-slaves living in the Caribbean served in the French army.

Some of the fiercest battles between British and French forces were fought in the Caribbean. In May 1796, the French army on the island of **St Lucia** surrendered to the British. Soldiers of European and African descent were put onto ships, some with their families, and transported to Britain as prisoners of war.

In October 1796, 2,080 black and mixed-race soldiers, 333 European soldiers and 99 women and children arrived at Portchester. The Caribbean prisoners were given extra clothes and a special diet to protect them from the cold British winter, but life in prison was difficult; the European prisoners often stole their clothing and belongings.

The men and women from St Lucia were eventually **exchanged** and sent to France while others joined the British army and navy or returned to the Caribbean. Captain Louis Delgrés, a mixed-race soldier who was imprisoned at Portchester, returned to the Caribbean and became a key figure in the continued struggle against **trans-Atlantic enslavement**.



Captain Louis Delgrés led an anti-slavery campaign in the Caribbean, taking up arms against France. On 28 May 1802, he and his followers were surrounded at Matouba in Gaudeloupe. They blew themselves up rather than be captured and enslaved. Captain Delgrés is commemorated here on this French stamp.

## HISTORY UNCOVERED

Between 1961 and 1979, major archaeological digs took place at Portchester, which transformed our understanding of its long history.

The excavations produced many finds from the Roman period. A Saxon **cemetery** dating from the early 11th century was also uncovered, revealing the skeletons of 21 men, women and children. A lot of vital evidence was found for life in the castle during its first 800 years – for which there is no written record. Many of the best finds are on display in the castle today.



Aerial view of Portchester Castle as it looks today, seen from the west.

# GLOSSARY

TRICKY TERMS AND  
WHAT THEY MEAN

Below is a list of words you might come across while exploring Portchester Castle. Use this Glossary to find out what they mean.

**abolish** – formally put an end to a system or practice, e.g. slavery.

**airing ground** – a secure outdoor space where prisoners could go to get some fresh air and exercise.

**Anglo-Saxon period** – the years between 450 and 1066 when the Saxons settled in England. The Norman Conquest in 1066 marks the end of the Anglo-Saxon period.

**archaeologist** – someone who studies the past by examining the remains of buildings and objects found in the ground.

**Battle of Agincourt (1415)** – a major English victory in the Hundred Years War between Henry V (r.1413–22) of England and Charles VI of France. Henry V won and married the French king's daughter.

**Battle of Crécy (1346)** – a battle between an English army, led by Edward III (r.1327–77), and French, Genoese and Majorcan troops, led by

Philip VI of France. The English army won, leaving the crippled French unable to defend Calais, which fell to the English a year later and remained under English control until 1558.

**burgh** – a fortified location used for defence in the Anglo-Saxon period, usually on high ground or within secure walls.

**cemetery** – a place where the dead are buried, usually in the grounds of a religious building.



Fragments of medieval painted glass, which were found in the ground at Portchester and may have once formed part of the window in Richard II's great hall.



The jawbone of a young Saxon man from the 11th century, found in the ground at Portchester.

**emperor** – the ruler of the Roman state during the imperial period (usually dated 27 BC to AD 284).

**English Channel** – the stretch of water separating Britain from mainland Europe.

**exchange** – an agreement between two enemy countries to swap prisoners of war.

**inner bailey** – the strongly defended area at the centre of a castle, often surrounded by a moat and an outer wall.

**keep** – the central tower of a castle, often used as a final refuge during a siege.

**Napoleonic Wars (1803–15)** – a series of wars fought between France (under the leadership of the general turned emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte) and several other countries, including Britain. Napoleon was eventually defeated at the Battle of Waterloo in Belgium in 1815.



William the Conqueror, the Norman leader who won the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and became the first Norman king of England.

### Norman Conquest

– the invasion of England by the forces of Normandy after William the Conqueror defeated King Harold at the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

**pirate** – a person who attacks and robs ships at sea and raids coastal locations.

**prisoner of war** – a person who has been captured by their enemy during a war. Prisoners of war came to Portchester from across the globe and were kept in the keep and purpose-built huts.



Bone gaming counters shaped like fish, made by a prisoner of war held at Portchester in the 18th century.

**Revolutionary Wars (1792–1802)** – a series of conflicts between the revolutionary French Republic, which wanted freedom and equality but used increasing levels of violence to achieve these ideals, and several European countries who feared the revolution and tried to crush it.

**St Lucia** – an island in the Caribbean where the French army surrendered Fort Charlotte to the British in 1796.

**trans-Atlantic enslavement** – the forced transportation of people living in Africa who were kidnapped to provide the unpaid labour that major European countries thought was necessary to build their colonies in the Americas. Britain outlawed the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1807 and abolished slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833.

**troupe** – the French term given to a group of actors, dancers and entertainers who tour around different venues putting on shows.

**Tudor period** – the years between 1485 and 1603 when the Tudor royal family were on the throne. Henry VII (r.1485–1509) was the first Tudor monarch and Elizabeth I was the last (r.1559–1603).



King Henry VIII (r.1509–57), the Tudor monarch famous for having six wives.

**Vikings** – seafaring pirates from Scandinavia who raided and settled in many parts of northern Europe, including England, between the 8th and 11th centuries.

# SOURCES

PEEK INTO THE PAST

A historical source is something that tells us about life in the past, such as a document, a picture or an object. It may be a primary source, from the time, or a secondary source, created later. Experts at English Heritage have chosen these sources to help you learn about Portchester's history.

## CARAUSIUS COIN (AD 291)

A silver Roman coin from AD 291, minted by Carausius, self-proclaimed emperor of Britain and the builder of Portchester Castle. You can see this artefact on display at Portchester Castle.



## ROMAN SHOE

A fourth-century Roman child's shoe made leather. This type of shoe was known as a 'calceus' or closed shoe, as opposed to a 'solea' or sandal. This is the smallest and most complete example of a number of Roman shoes found at the castle.



## SAXON SKULL

The skull of an 11th-century Anglo-Saxon man. During excavations, a small cemetery was found containing the skeletons of 21 people. This skull is from an elderly man who suffered from a disease, which deformed his bones.

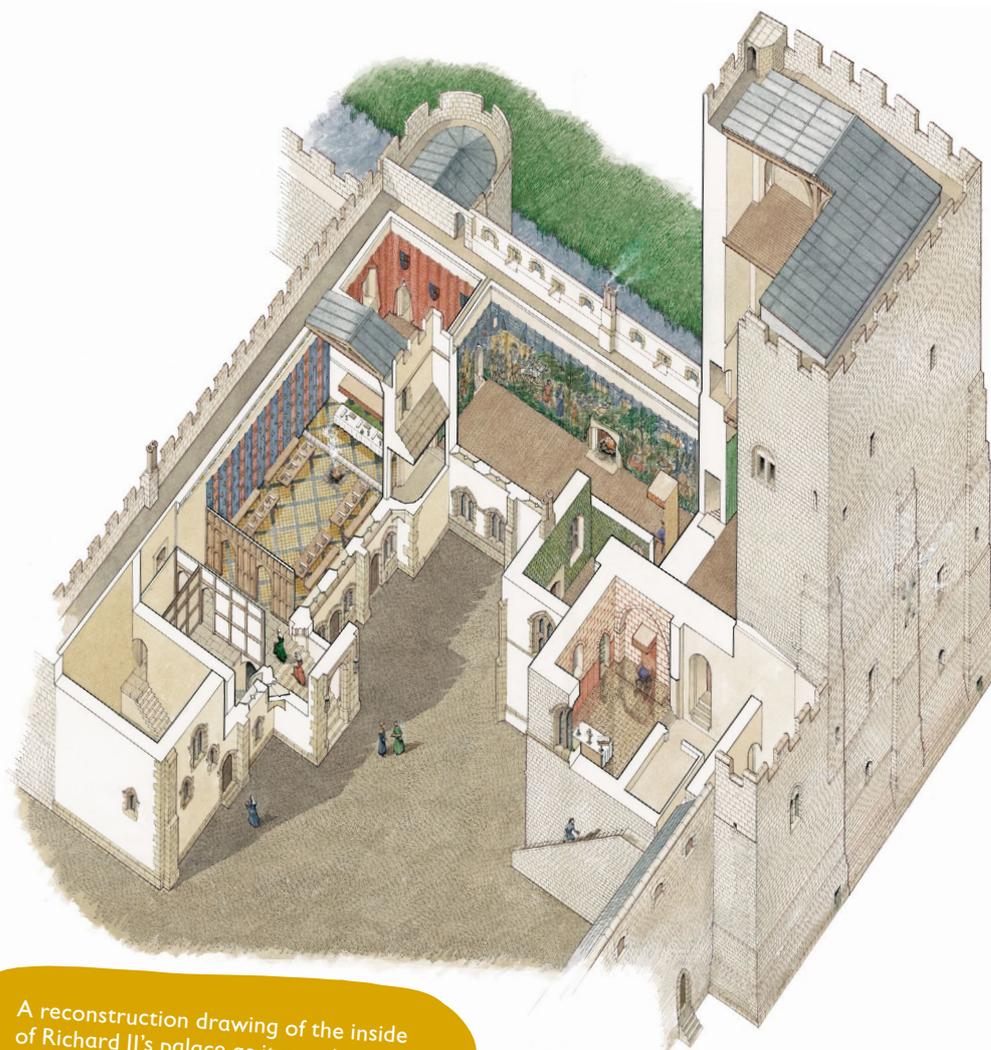


'1381. June 5.

Westminster.

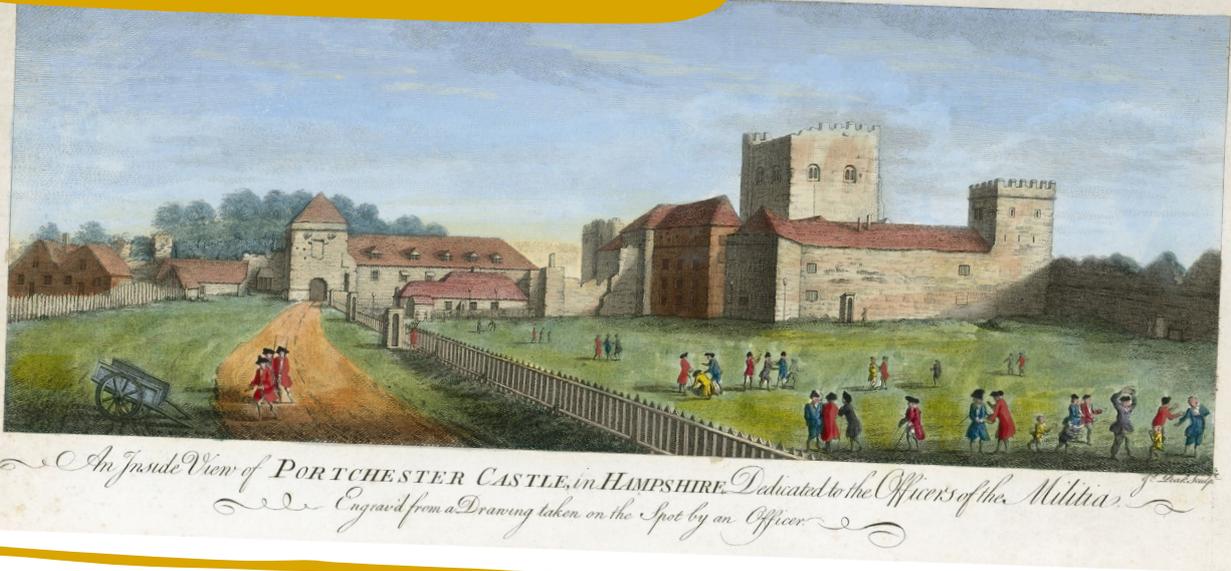
Appointment of the king's esquire, Robert Bardolf, keeper of the Porcestre castle, to take men-at-arms and archers and place them therein for its defence, there to remain for the summer; on information that the French are proposing to invade England.'

Extract from **Calendar of the Patent Rolls 1381–5**, p.16. The patent rolls are a series of official royal records, started by King John (r.1199–1216) in 1201, running to the present day. This entry shows some of the measures taken by Richard II (r.1377–99) to guard against French invasion in the later 14th century. You can access this source online at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015009337612;view=1up;seq=28>



A reconstruction drawing of the inside of Richard II's palace as it may have looked in the 1390s when Portchester was in use as a royal castle. The walls were decorated with colourful tapestries and painted wall hangings to make the rooms more attractive for royal visitors.

This coloured engraving is called 'An Inside View', dated 1720. It shows the outer bailey of Portchester Castle in the 18th century, when it was in use as a prison. The prison guards can be seen on the left and the prisoners of war are using the fenced-off airing ground on the right.



'T.O.

1st November 1796

Sir Evan Nepean

Account of Prisoners of War lately arrived from the West Indies, and already landed in this country, according to the last Returns:

White... 333

Black... 2080

Women & Children... 99

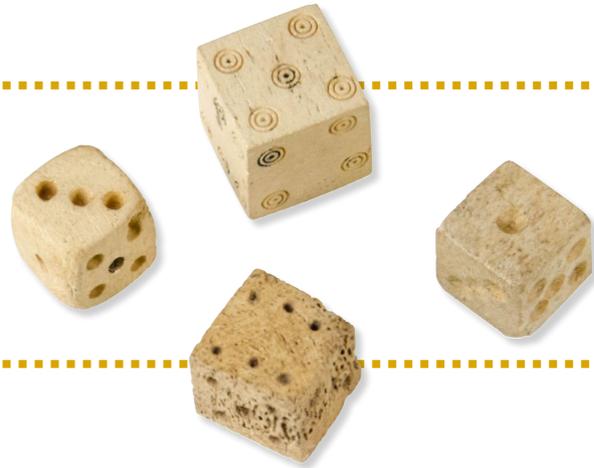
Total... 2512.'

This letter was sent from the Portchester Commissioners to the Transport Office in London on 1 November 1796.

By the end of October 1796, all the prisoners from the Caribbean had arrived in Portsmouth Harbour and had been counted. The whole process took about 15 days. In this letter, the Portchester Commissioners informed the Transport Office in London of the total number of prisoners, broken down into black, white, and women and children, as requested.

## BONE DICE

These dice are from various dates, with the earliest at the top dating to the 17th century, the dice on the left and the bottom to the 18th century, and the one on the right dating to around 1810. They were carved and sold or used for gaming by prisoners of war at Portchester Castle.



A reconstruction of the prisoners' theatre as it may have looked when it was built in 1811 on the ground floor of the keep by French prisoners of war. English Heritage has rebuilt the theatre at Portchester for you to enjoy when you visit.

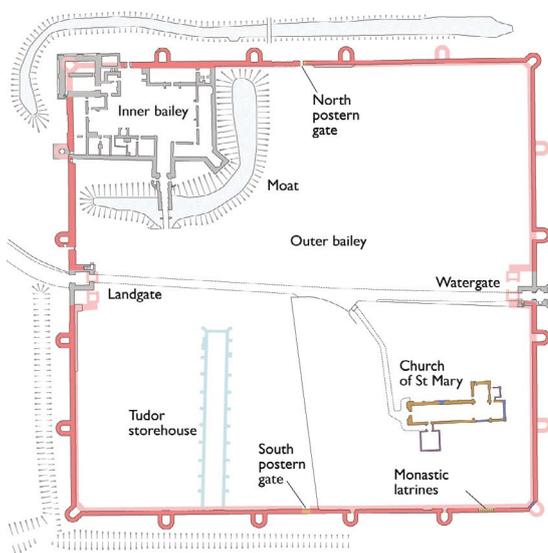
'In addition to what is allowed Europeans the West Indians have each a flannel under waistcoat and a thick pair of yarn socks. These advantages have been of little avail to defend them from the inclemency of this climate. [...] Others have been robbed and plundered by the European Prisoners, they considering themselves as a superior race of beings to the unfortunate Blacks.'

This extract is from an undated report from Commissioner William Otway and Dr Johnston (commissioner for prisoners of war at Portchester) to the Transport Board. Dr Johnston wrote many letters about the prisoners' health, diet and living conditions at Portchester Castle. He expresses particular concern for the prisoners from the Caribbean who needed extra clothing because they weren't used to the cold British climate. He also highlights the persecution faced by the African-Caribbean prisoners.

# SITE PLAN

## PORTCHESTER CASTLE PLANS

Outer bailey and Roman fort

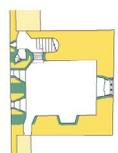


0 50 100 150 metres  
0 50 100 150 yards

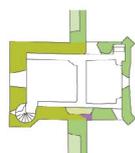
- Roman
- 11th century
- Early 12th century
- Late 12th century
- Early 13th century
- Early 14th century
- Mid-14th century
- 1380-99
- 1489-1540
- 1580-1608
- Uncertain or modern



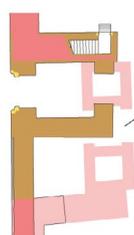
Landgate first floor



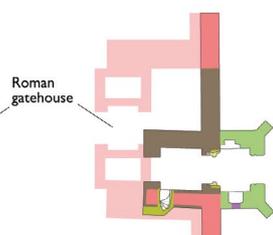
Watergate first floor



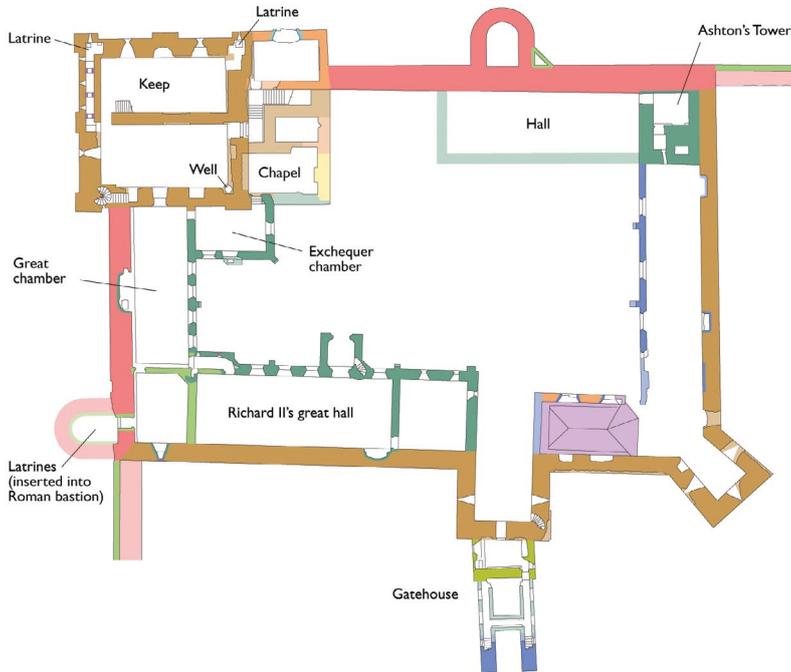
Landgate ground floor



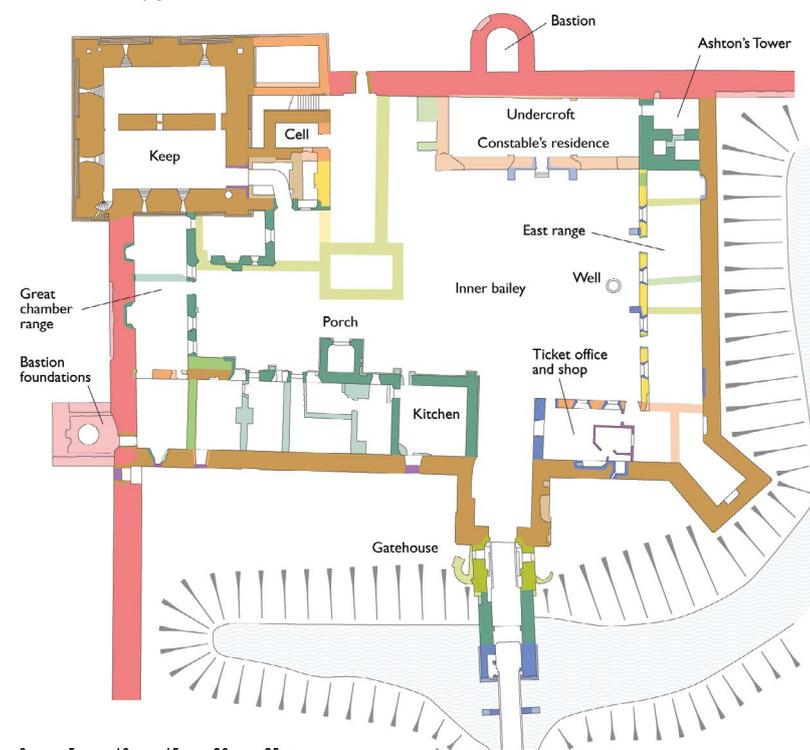
Watergate ground floor



Inner bailey first floor



Inner bailey ground floor



0 5 10 15 20 25 metres  
0 5 10 15 20 25 yards