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Castle Moats

Description of the castle Moats:

A moat was a deep, wide ditch surrounding a medieval town or castle. It served as protection from assault.

Where were they built?:

Castles were built near a water supply such as a river, stream, lake or spring. A dam was built to control the water supply into the moat. Some moats were up to 30 feet deep and at least 12 feet wide. Sometimes it was impractical to fill a moat with water so wooden stakes were embedded in moats.

Purpose of the Castle moats

The defensive purpose of filling the moats with water was:

- To make the moats too deep to wade through.
- To make anyone attempting to swim across the moat a vulnerable target
- To reduce the risk of tunneling – one of the most serious forms of attack was to undermine part of a castle.
- The water would help reduce the risk of potential fires.

The defensive purpose of filling the moat with wooden stakes was:

- To create a difficult barrier for men and horses to cross.

Other facts:

- Moat water was disgusting – it was stagnant and all the waste from the castle was dumped into the water.
- Most moats were not actually that deep – usually less than a meter of water.

<http://www.ancientfortresses.org/castle-moats.htm>

Castle Drawbridge

Description of the Castle Drawbridge:

The castle drawbridge was a moveable, heavy, wooden bridge which spanned the width of a castle moat or ditch. The drawbridge consisted of a wooden platform with one hinged side fixed to the castle wall and the other side raised by rope or chains. It would be raised vertically and dropped down again when danger had passed. The drawbridge would connect a road to the entrance of a castle. The purpose of a drawbridge was to allow, hinder or prevent easy entry into a medieval castle.

How was the drawbridge raised, lowered or drawn aside?:

- Manpower
- Using a system of ropes and pulleys
- Ropes or chains
- Counter weights so that when one end is lowered the other is raised.

<http://www.ancientfortresses.org/castle-drawbridge.htm>

Castle Outer Curtain Wall

Description of the Curtain Wall:

The curtain was an outer wall which surrounded the castle. It is called a 'curtain' because it covered everything within. The purpose of the curtain wall was to protect the interior of the castle. The wall was often connected by towers which could house castle defenders. Arrow slits were made in the wall which enabled castle defenders to safely shoot at any attackers. Built for defense the curtain wall varied in size from 6 – 20 feet thick, up to 45 feet high and up to 1,500 feet long.

What was it made of?:

Early curtain walls were made of heavy timbers. The wooden wall would sometimes rot when it was built directly on the ground and could be destroyed by fire. These wooden walls were replaced with stone walls. The center parts of the wall were made of rough rocks and rubble. The outer parts were made of gigantic stones similar to modern-day bricks. Crenellations or battlements were added to these walls to provide a fighting platform and a good vantage point for soldiers to launch arrows from.

Other facts:

- Attackers would scale curtain walls with scaling ladders and hooks designed to fit over the wall.

<http://www.ancientfortresses.org/curtain-wall.htm>

Castle turrets, towers, and look out points

Description of castle towers:

Castle towers were built as part of the curtain wall. They were often the last thing to fall during an attack. Towers were made of stone and sometimes wood. Towers came in several shapes: circular, semi-circular, and square. Castle towers were designed to give a panorama view of the countryside surrounding the castle. This would allow lookouts to spot oncoming attackers. Towers were constructed to have arrow loops. Arrow loops are hollow spaces through which archers could fire arrows, stones and fire. Towers typically had spiral staircases. This made it hard for attackers to fight upward but very easy for defenders to fight downward.

Shapes of towers:

Rectangular: These towers were easy to construct and provided a good amount of internal space. The disadvantage is that the corners are vulnerable to attackers.

Round: Round towers were also called drum towers. These towers were more resistant to attackers.

Horseshoe: This tower is a compromise to the round and square tower. It looks like a capital D. They provided a larger internal space and a large fighting platform on top.

Purpose of towers:

- Lookout posts for attackers
- Created firing positions for archers
- Storehouses
- Prisons

http://www.medieval-castles.net/castle_defenses/architecture.htm

Castle Gatehouse

Purpose of the Castle Gatehouse:

The Castle Gatehouse was the main entrance to the castle and needed to be heavily guarded. The gatehouse was an incredibly strong, fortified entrance which made it harder to attack this part of the castle. A road would lead up to the main entrance which would give attackers an easy passageway to the castle. To defend this the gatehouse had at least one portcullis. A portcullis is a heavy gridded door that dropped down vertically to protect the main entrance. The gatehouse might have arrow loops (holes in the wall for arrows to be shot through) in the side walls. Murder holes were another defense system found in the gatehouse. These holes were found in the ceiling and boiling water would be poured through them. With all of these traps and obstacles the gatehouse became one of the strongest parts of the castle.

Description of the castle gatehouse:

- The castle gatehouse was built up to three stories high
 - The ground floor contained the guard rooms
 - The next floor contained guard quarters and the machinery to operate the portcullis.
 - The top floor stored weapons and had arrow loops

http://www.exploring-castles.com/medieval_castle_defence.html

Castle Dungeons

Description of the Castle Dungeon:

The word dungeon comes from the French word “Donjon” which means tower. This means that contrary to popular belief, dungeons were not located in basements of the castle but more often in the castle’s highest tower. The reason for this is that only a few dozen guards would be needed to protect the tower. These towers were for prisoners who would be executed or set free. Underground dungeons were for people who would usually stay there for their whole life. With this second type of dungeon in mind they were dark cells which were usually found in an underground room of one of the towers in the castle. It was different from the ordinary prison in being more severe as a place of punishment. The dungeon was a terrifying prison. In extreme cases the dungeon was used as a place to torture prisoners. Their screams could not easily be heard anywhere in the castle.

Purpose of the Castle Dungeon:

The purpose of the Castle Dungeon was to hold prisoners and in extreme cases torture them.

Instruments of torture:

- Branding irons
- The Rack
- The Scavenger’s daughter
- The color
- Whipping
- Boiling water
- Starvation
- Cutting off various body parts