The City Wall Trail

Exeter City Council

Norman Stronghold

After the Norman conquest in 1066, Exeter was the centre of the West Country rebellion against William the Conqueror. In 1068 William's forces came to the city, which at the time was described as a *'wealthy and ancient city, strongly fortified'*. The wall prevented Exeter from being overrun and a siege ensued. The city finally surrendered after 18 days of siege.

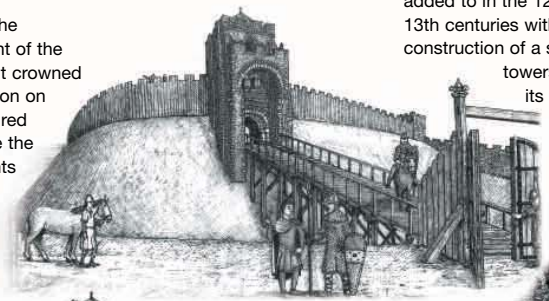
Rougemont Castle

William established a castle at Rougemont within the city walls. This approach of castle building became the template for control of the whole country.

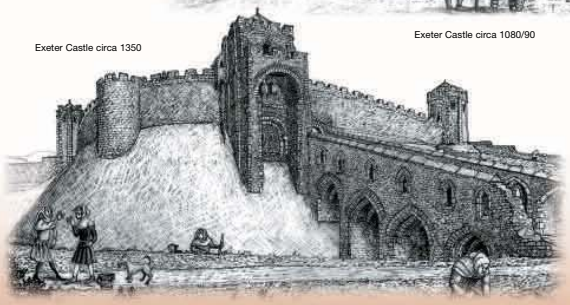
The castle was the strongest element of the city's defences. It crowned a strategic position on a hill of volcanic red rock, which gave the castle's occupants sight of all the city and beyond.

The castle took the form of a large bank and ditch surrounding a small enclosure within the Roman walls.

This gatehouse, which dominated the entrance to the enclosure, is the oldest castle building standing in Britain. A mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Norman features suggests that Saxon masons were forced to build it. The castle defences were added to in the 12th and 13th centuries with the construction of a series of towers around its perimeter.



Exeter Castle circa 1080/90



Exeter Castle circa 1350

Exeter Castle circa 1600.

Reconstruction drawings by R.W. Parker Exeter Archaeology

King Stephen's Siege

During the reign of King Stephen (1135-1154), there were attempts by some of the Norman barons to remove him from the throne. One such baron – Baldwin de Redvers, was the custodian of Exeter. In order to regain control of the strategically important Rougemont Castle King Stephen besieged it in the 12th century. Stephen established a new earthwork castle (Danes Castle) on the opposite side of Longbrook Valley. The siege lasted several months until the entrapped Redvers was starved out, and direct royal control of the castle was re-established.

Crown and Control

Since the establishment of Rougemont Castle, there has been an enclave within the city under the authority of the Crown rather than the local authorities. This has influenced Exeter's loyalty to the Crown, and has also reflected the city's national importance.

Exeter was seen as the most loyal of cities. At the end of the Tudor period Elizabeth I had bestowed the title 'Semper Fidelis' which means 'ever faithful' and is still seen on the city's coat of arms.

All the gatehouse arches were made in 2 different shapes. Are they triangular, square or curved?

answer triangular and curved

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