

Castles were not just buildings, they were fortresses made to protect people during military conflict. As a result, most castles shared some basic parts that helped them serve their purpose.

The first thing that you might come to at a castle was the moat or ditch.

The only way to cross a moat was on the drawbridge.

These wooden structures could be raised or lowered depending on whether or not the people in the castles wanted you to come in.

Ropes or chains were attached to the end of the bridge and then rigged to a pulley so that guards were able to quickly raise it.

Most were filled with deep water to prevent enemies from coming in, but even those without water stopped intruders because the deep, steep walls prevented the enemy from entering.

Upon crossing the drawbridge, you would reach the curtain, or wall.

This wall surrounding the castle was strong enough to survive a battering ram, a common weapon, and could be anywhere between 8 and 20 feet thick. (That's as wide as the height of a 2-story building!)

A gatehouse or barbican was built into the curtain.

At first it was just a simple door by which to go in and out of the castle, but over time that changed.

Because enemy armies often came to this area, an iron grate, called a portcullis, was added that could be put down to block entrance, in addition to heavy wooden doors.

Small holes, called murder holes, were added to the ceiling above the main entrance to pour boiling liquid down on entering enemies.

The Keep of the castle was the highest point and the centre of defence.

The strongest and most secure place in a castle.

Inside the castles walls were many things.

There was a kitchen where the cooks made meals.

The great hall was where everybody ate and the servants slept.

Court jesters often sang, juggled and told stories here to amuse the lord and his family.

Stables were used to house livestock of all sorts and each castle had a chapel that could be located in a tower or gatehouse.

The chapel sometimes served as a private church for the lord and his family even when there was another church in a nearby town.

Castles also had one or more houses built in for people to stay.

Often there was a lord's house and then one or two others, depending on how many people were living at that particular castle.