

What to Look For Inside the Castle

Imagine that most of the castle would have had a roof.

The rectangular holes in the walls would have held large timbers supporting the floors and roof.

The gun embrasures (windows) in each of the semi-circular bastions may each have had a cannon. The cannons created much smoke when fired, so each embrasure has an elaborate chimney.

The fireplaces have a herring bone pattern brickwork.

The two bread ovens are of a domed tile construction.

The guarderobe (toilet).

Inside the central tower look for:

- The original tower was only half the height of the later tower, can you see the join?
- The lower original windows that have been filled in.
- The later tower had three levels, can you see the stairs and fireplaces?
- The square stone blocks on the floor were the base for wooden supports for the floors.

On the outside of the tower can you see the carved stones in the form of a Tudor rose, a cross, a Fleur-de-lys and a lion's head?

Plants growing on the walls include **Wall Pennywort, Pellitory-of-the-wall, Wall Flower, Wall Germander** and **Wall Pepper** .

For further information about Camber Castle and the Nature Reserve see the web site
www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/ryeharbour

Visiting Camber Castle

Camber Castle (also known as Winchelsea Castle) lies between Rye and Winchelsea, and was originally located on a shingle spit which protected the approach to these towns. It was taken into Guardianship in 1967, and initial consolidation work was carried out between 1969 and 1975. This involved structural work, particularly to the keep, hard capping the wall tops and extensive repairs to the brickwork. A further programme of consolidation, particularly to the courtyard surfaces and re-pointing of brickwork in lime mortars, was completed in 1995. This work has enabled a limited public opening of the castle.

It is open on the first Saturday in July, August and September at 2pm, or by guided walks on various dates.

However, when visiting Camber Castle you must remember that there are some hazards:

- **Floors are uneven and may be slippery when wet.**
- **The tunnels are dark and the headroom is limited.**
- **There are many places where there is a long drop.**

This property is managed by **Rye Harbour Nature Reserve** and **Sussex Wildlife Trust** by agreement with **English Heritage**.



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ENGLISH HERITAGE



Historical Description

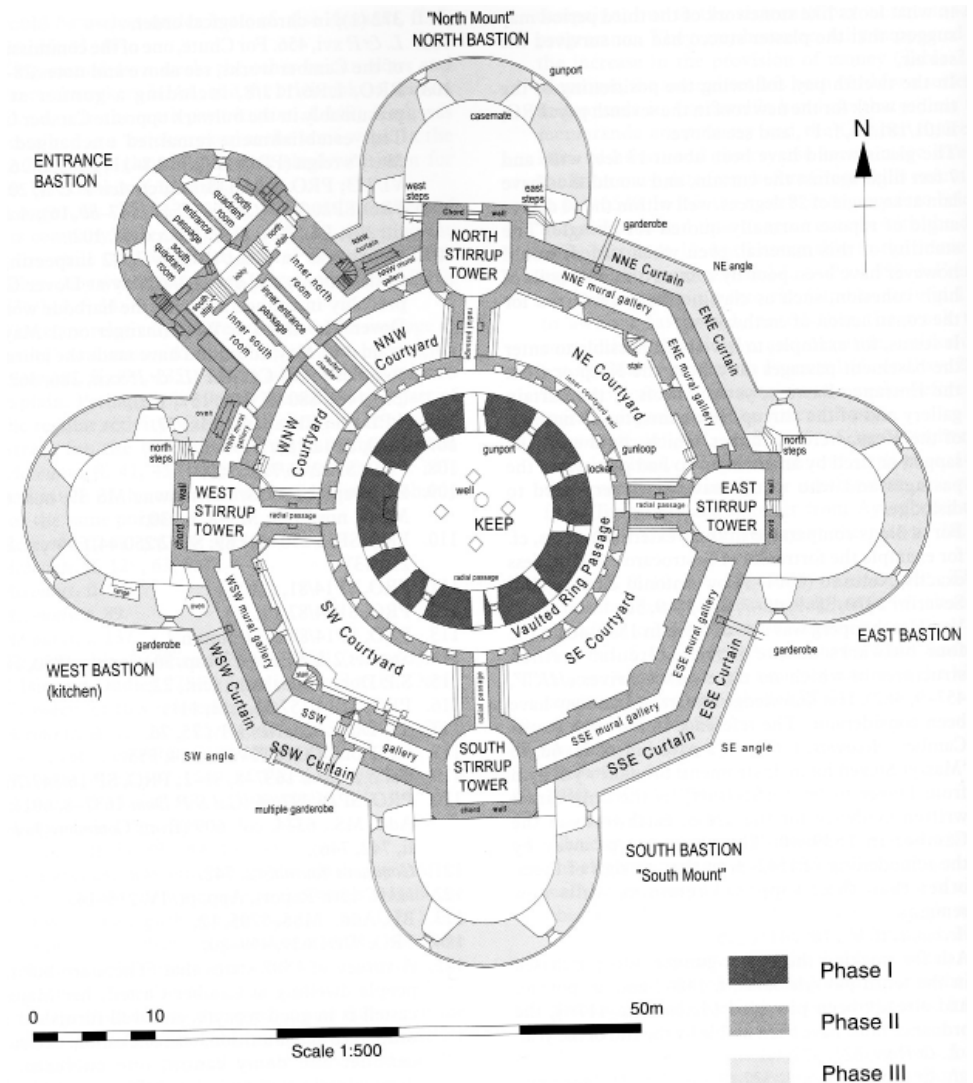
Until late in the 16th century, most of the low lying ground between Rye and Winchelsea was a shallow harbour - the Camber - protected from the sea by a long series of shingle banks. Between 1512 and 1514 Sir Edward Guldeford built a circular tower at the end of one of these shingle spits to defend this harbour, although it was not provided with any ordnance.

In 1538 a treaty between France and Spain left England more vulnerable to attack from these countries. Henry VIII took steps to protect likely points of invasion around the south coast by ordering artillery forts to be built at strategic positions, such as Deal and Walmer. Use was made of the earlier circular tower at Camber, as it was incorporated into the central tower of the planned artillery fort.

Camber Castle is second in size only to Deal Castle and, like all Henry VIII's fortifications, it is highly symmetrical. It was built in 3 phases – see plan. Four rectangular gun platforms or bastions, were backed by 'D' shaped towers linked to each other by an eight sided curtain wall. This wall had a defensive passage behind it. Each tower had a vaulted way, leading to a second defensive passage built around the base of the central tower. Work on Camber Castle began in 1539. Much of the building material was from local sources. Timber came from Horne Wood near Appledore, and Knell Wood in Beckley. Vast quantities of wood were needed, for the roof and internal fittings, for scaffolding and for fuel. Quarries at Hastings and Fairlight provided some of the stone, and other stone was obtained from the demolition of buildings in Winchelsea. The castle is built of Wealden and Sussex sandstone with some local limestone and Caen stone (from France) for dressings. An estimated 600,000 bricks were manufactured on site.

By its completion in 1544 the castle had cost £16,000 and by 1553 the garrison strength was twenty nine men (captain, deputy, porter, deputy, 16 gunners and 9 soldiers). However, by the end of the 16th century the silting of the Camber, and the eastward shifting of the harbour entrance, were already making the castle obsolete. In 1637 the garrison was disbanded. It is this short period of use that makes Camber an interesting castle to study.

Plan of Camber Castle



The castle is sited on old shingle ridges that have a very thin soil. This is a very unusual habitat and the plants and animals that live here have to cope with drought, little food and high summer temperatures. Many of the species are scarce, or nationally rare. The whole area is designated by **Natural England** as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Some of it is part of the **Rye Harbour Nature Reserve**, managed by **Sussex Wildlife Trust**.