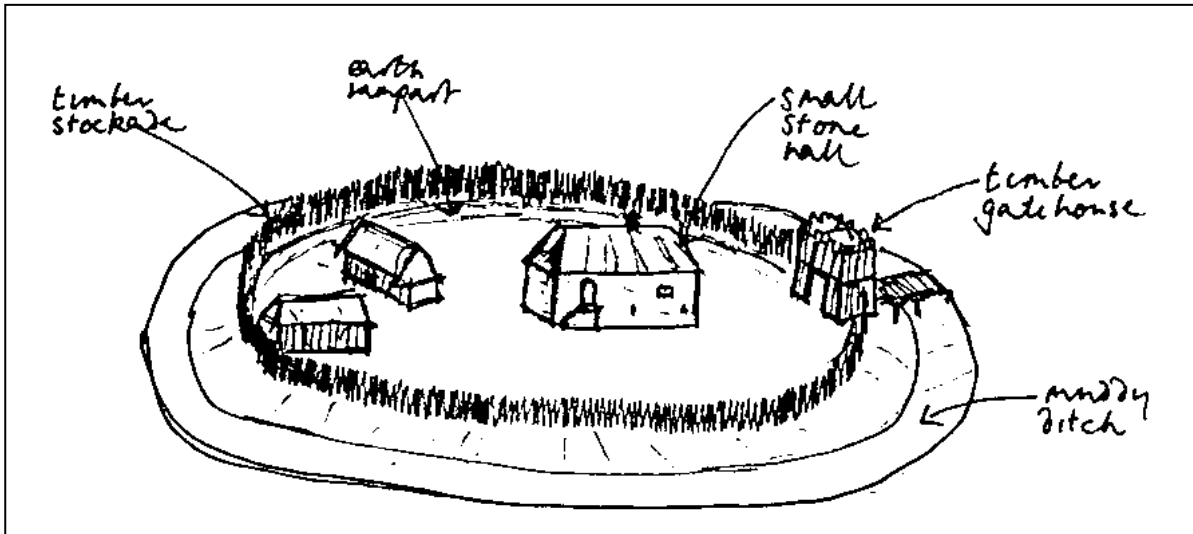


The Landmark Trust

STOGURSEY CASTLE

The remains at Stogursey Castle reflect almost a thousand years of use, first military and then more peaceable. The little cottage now used as a Landmark holiday let was mostly built in the 17th century, but it also includes mediaeval fabric from the gate towers whose site it took. Much archaeology has been done over the years, but the site is very complex and many questions remain, particularly about the castle's exact form in its earliest years. Its history falls into six main stages.

Stage 1: 1066-1100 – the arrival of the Normans



Stogursey Castle began with William the Conqueror's need to consolidate his new kingdom. He granted the manor of Stoke to William de Falaise who built a castle on the site as one of a chain running from Dunster to Montacute, to protect Somerset from invasion from the sea. It seems de Falaise built a 'castle ringwork', that is a hall or keep with a timber stockade, on a flat area defended by a strong bank and a ditch.

Stage 2: 1100-1150 – Norman consolidation and the de Courcys

In the early 1100s, Stoke manor passed by marriage to the de Curci (later Courcy) family. Stoke was made the 'caput' or head of the Honour of Curci, whose lands stretched across several counties. Stoke became Stoke-Curci, and then Stogursey. It was probably de Curci who built the castle mound to strengthen his new seat. The mound filled the area of the original ringwork castle and offered both better observation and drier conditions on the marshy site.

De Curci built a rectangular keep, probably of two or three storeys. It had stone foundations, so may also have had stone walls, a sign of its strategic importance to the Normans. A stockade surrounded the mound, and a stockaded bailey (defensive enclosure) with its own deep ditch was built to the south east, partly surrounding the mound. Later, a second, larger bailey was added to the east, perhaps during the troubled years of the power struggles between Stephen and Matilda.

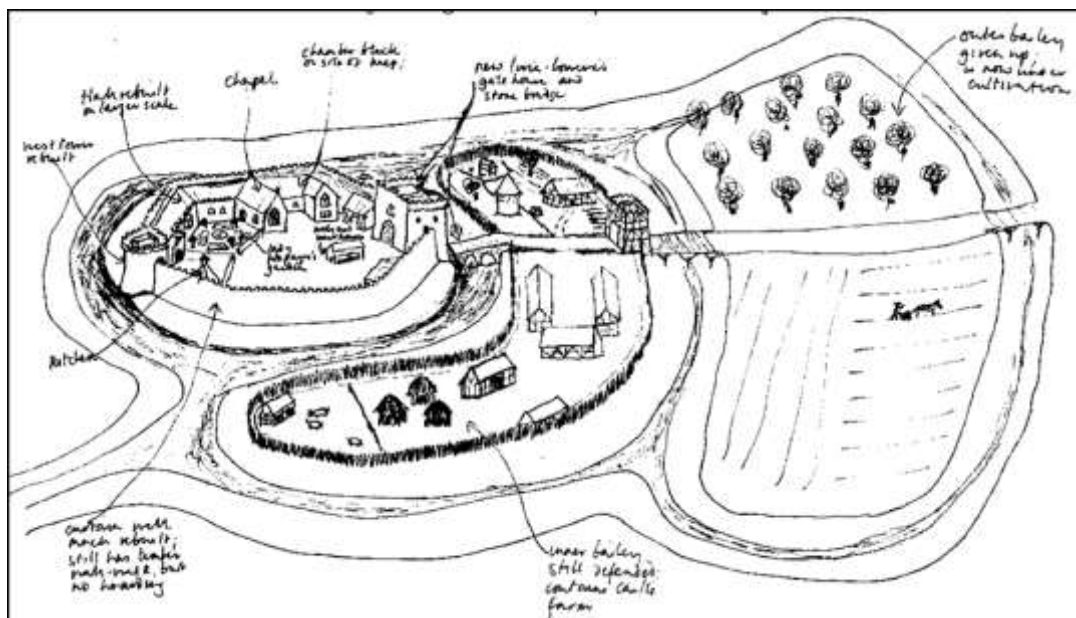
The Landmark Trust is a charity that rescues historic buildings and lets them for self catering holidays. Stogursey Castle sleeps up to 4 people. To book or find out more, visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk or call Booking Enquiries on 01628 825925.

Fragments of a timber bridge from this period have been found, suggesting that the moat may by now have been filled with water (the leat system was extended soon after to power a mill, still referred to as 'new' in 1225). As well as a military role, Stogursey was permanent home to a constable and his household. Every so often de Curci and his retinue (otherwise in attendance on the king) would arrive to take up residence. The keep would have provided limited, rather uncomfortable accommodation, and evidence suggests that a main hall was also built on the western side of the inner ward, adjoining the garderobe tower. Other service buildings also sprang up.

Stage 4: 1216-1300 – King John's castle at Bridgwater takes over

But soon Stogursey Castle was superseded by a new castle to protect the crossing of the Parrett, built at Bridgwater by King John. Stogursey and its owners lost control over the area and the de Courcy line petered out. Stogursey passed through marriage to Warin FitzGerold, John's chamberlain. In 1210, the king came to stay with FitzGerold at Stogursey; they no doubt enjoyed good hunting on the Quantocks and then, royal accounts record, the king lost 20 shillings gambling. Although FitzGerold was a loyal signatory to the Magna Carta in 1214, two years later his monarch became suspicious of him and ordered the constable of Stogursey to hold the castle directly for the king, with extra men to defend it in case FitzGerold tried to regain it. Fortifications seem to have been strengthened again. In 1224, Stogursey was held for the rebels against the regents of the young Henry III and besieged. It did not fall, but there is evidence of much patching and repair afterwards. A gatehouse with at least one semi-circular tower was built on the east side of the site.

Stage 5: 1300-1325 – Robert Fitzpayne's 'modernisation'



Passing through the hands of various owners through the troubled 13th century, Stogursey came to rest in 1309 with the Fitzpaynes, a family of rising importance in the west. The castle remained in their hands until the late 17th century.

Robert Fitzpayne 'modernised' his small castle, the outer bailey possibly becoming the castle garden. Defences to the inner ward were strengthened, including a twin-towered gatehouse, a new bridge and a semi-circular tower built against the western wall. A stronger, more compact castle resulted.

Stage 6 1450-1550 – Wars of the Roses and more peaceable times under the Tudors

While there is no written or archaeological evidence, local tradition has it that in 1455 or 57 (accounts vary) Stogursey once again became caught up in national events, as the rallying point for the Lancastrian cause in the south-west. It was reputedly besieged, overthrown and destroyed, never to be repaired as a fortified site again. Certainly the gatehouse defences were improved around this date and then in the 1490s accounts show the gatehouse and a 'new' tower were extensively repaired. The advent of the Tudors brought more peaceable times, however, and like fortified manors across the country, from now on Stogursey passed gradually into domestic and agricultural use.

The later years

In 1670, a major sale of the Earl of Northumberland's (as the Fitpaynes had become) lands took place to offset debt. Stogursey Castle and 27 acres were sold as a tenanted farm, known as Mill Farm from its association with the old mill. The castle buildings gradually became derelict while the site was increasingly cultivated. Mr Percy Caple lived in the cottage from 1919 until 1963, a great gardener who produced hundredweights of potatoes from the former inner ward. In 1963, Mill Farm was sold but the cottage remained empty and was left to decay. Local conservationists got the local Council involved, who were advised on the site by architect John Schofield, who suggested an approach to the Landmark Trust, who acquired the castle site.

THE LANDMARK TRUST'S RESTORATION

The gatehouse was derelict when Landmark arrived in 1981. Undergrowth needed clearing across the site. The north wall, in danger of imminent collapse, was repaired first, in tandem with the cottage. Conservation work continued to the castle remains over the next few years by mason Michael Haycraft. The cottage already had emergency scaffolding: the floors were weak, lintels cracked and sagging, windows and doors boarded up against vandals. The west wall re-attached to the main body of the building. The north gable was largely rebuilt and the north-west corner underpinned. The walls were rendered except for the south elevation where the masonry is of higher quality and lime-washed. The 19th-century tiled roof was replaced with thatch, as originally. The chimneys were rebuilt. The 17th-century window oak frames needed only minor repairs and reglazing. 19th-century windows were repaired and renewed; only the one that lights the stairs is new. 17th-century windows were reglazed with rectangular panes, the mediaeval arrow-loops of the gatehouse tower with diamond-shaped.

Inside a new oak stair was made in the 17th-century turret, whose brickwork needed much repair. The ground floor is much as we found it with old doors and paved floor. All walls were replastered and limewashed. Upstairs, a bathroom was created by blocking a 19th-century door. The ceiling was removed in the south bedroom to show a surviving 17th-century truss, now part of the partition with the bathroom. Floorboards were renewed, and plumbing and wiring completely renewed.

The bridge was perhaps the most exciting discovery of all. Once the mud had all been dug away, an almost-complete bridge from about 1300 was revealed, and then repaired, repaved and repointed. The moat was dredged in 1983 when finds included an archer's wrist band, leather shoe soles and sections of chain mail. Once the moat was cleared, the leats bringing water to the moat from Stogursey Brook could be re-opened and the castle stood guarded once more by water and ready for adventure.

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