

Discover Northern Ireland

Carrickfergus Castle

Let's explore Information Booklet (Key Stage 3)



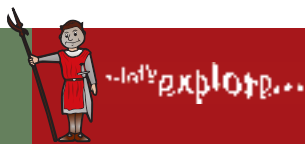
...let's explore...



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Carrickfergus Castle



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Carrickfergus Castle



How Carrickfergus got its name.

Carrickfergus (Carraig Fheargus) means Rock of Fergus. It is named after King Fergus who ruled parts of the west of Scotland from east Ulster in 506 AD. In 531 he was suffering from a skin disease so travelled to Carrickfergus, hoping to find a cure from a Holy well on the rock where the castle now stands. Unfortunately he was drowned when his ship was wrecked on the rock at Carrickfergus.

Today a great castle stands on the Rock of Fergus. It has stood guard over the town for over 800 years and has seen many changes over the centuries. In this booklet you will be able to explore the castle and learn more about its fascinating and sometimes violent history.

Meanings of words in bold, **like this**, can be found at the back of the booklet.



The gatehouse at Carrickfergus



Carrickfergus Castle

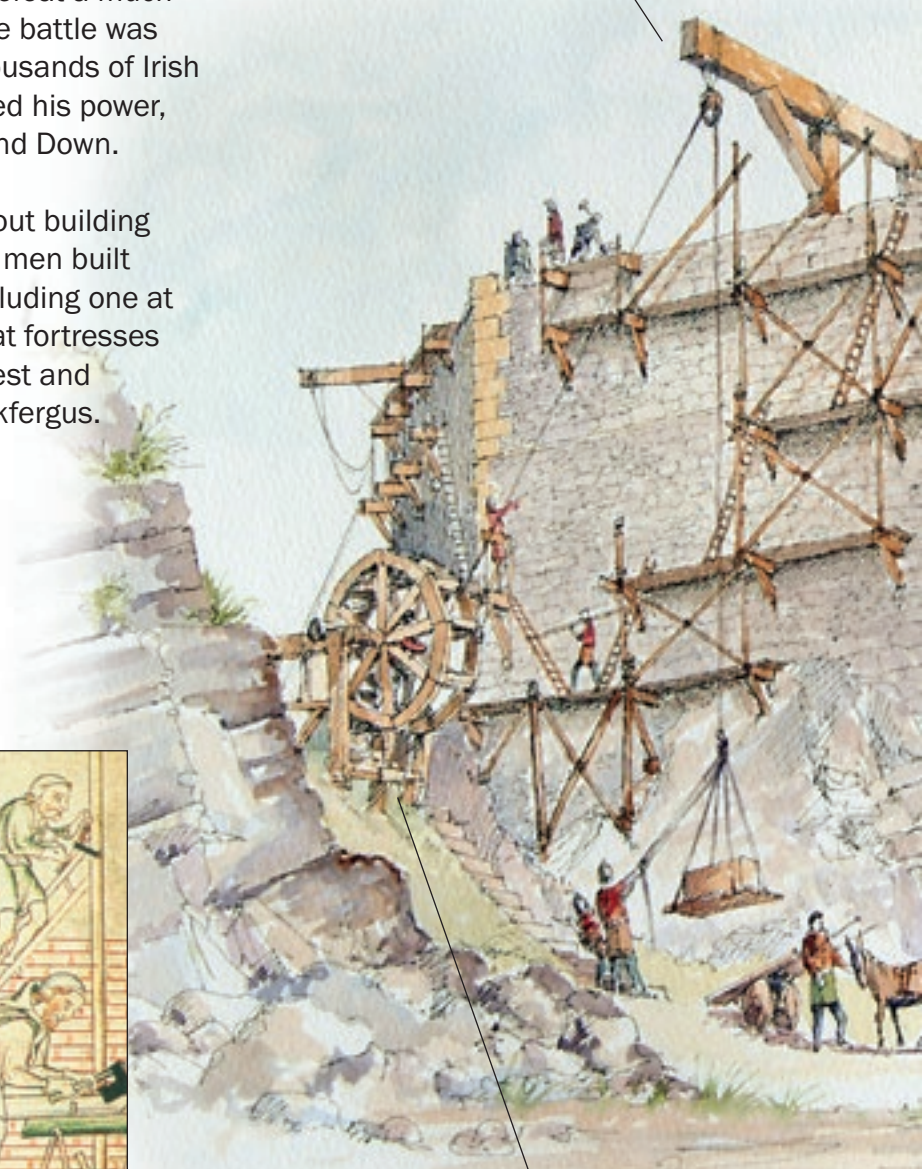


The Anglo-Normans come to Ulster

The **Anglo-Normans** first invaded Ireland in 1169, taking control of Dublin and the surrounding countryside. Two years later, in 1171, a knight called John de Courcy marched north with an army of 22 knights and 300 horsemen. This small force was able to defeat a much larger Irish Army at Downpatrick. A terrible battle was fought at the mound of Down, leaving thousands of Irish warriors dead. De Courcy quickly expanded his power, conquering the coastal areas of Antrim and Down.

With the Irish defeated, de Courcy set about building castles to keep control of the people. His men built many small Motte and Bailey Castles, including one at Clough, near Downpatrick, as well as great fortresses like Dundrum Castle. However his strongest and most important castle was built at Carrickfergus.

Huge cranes raised the stone for the **masons**



The cranes were powered by human **treadmills**



We can learn about medieval builders from old manuscripts



The castle today

Scaffolding was built into the wall then removed when the castle was finished



The architects supervised the building

Ships brought stone across Belfast Lough from Cultra

Carrickfergus Castle



De Courcy's Castle

De Courcy's castle was much smaller than the castle of today. It sat on the outermost tip of the basalt rock, and consisted of a large stone keep with a **curtain wall**.

Why did de Courcy choose Carrickfergus for his most important castle?

- The site consists of a massive basalt rock that juts out into Belfast Lough. This means it is surrounded by water on three sides, making it harder to attack as the enemy would need both ships and a land based army.
- Basalt rock is very strong and hard-wearing. It is a strong foundation for building on and difficult for an enemy to **undermine**.
- The rock is high above sea level so soldiers on the castle walls would have excellent views.
- A spring on the rock provides a fresh water supply for the castle. Water is very important, especially if the castle is under **siege**.
- Belfast Lough is sheltered from bad storms. This makes it a good harbour for ships.
- The land in the vicinity of the castle is very fertile. It could be farmed for food and timber cut from the woods.

To protect the castle further the original entrance gate was in the east wall, making it more difficult to attack. A deep ditch was dug through the rock. This formed a **moat** when the tide came in, and had to be crossed by a **drawbridge**.





De Courcy Model at Carrickfergus Castle



Stables

A small town
began to grow
around the castle

Carrickfergus Castle



De Courcy's Keep

The keep is the strongest part of the castle. It is almost 40 metres high with walls between 3 and four metres thick. Its height allowed people inside to watch for attack but its main role was to provide a safe and comfortable home for the lord and his family.

It has four stories, each originally reached by a **spiral staircase**. The ground floor was a cellar. It was used for storage and also held the castle's water supply – a well. There were no windows on this floor in case of attack.

The only door into the keep was on the first floor, making it very difficult to attack. Inside there was a guardroom for soldiers and a public **latrine**. The windows on this floor are small to prevent enemies climbing in.

The second floor was originally one large room. The lord may have used it to conduct business, for example collecting rent or holding court sessions. Our picture shows it being used to entertain guests. It had a large fireplace and a private **latrine**.

The third floor held the lord's private chambers where he and his family lived and slept. This floor is also called the solar because its large windows allowed in plenty of heat and light from the sun. It also had a large fireplace for warmth and a private **latrine**.



Top floor of the keep



King John on the latrine



Spiral stairs led between the floors

The lord's private chambers were very comfortable

The Royal standard tells us that the King is visiting

Guards on the roof could watch out for enemies

This cat is hunting for mice

A jester entertains the visitors

The well ensured a good water supply

It was cool in the cellars so it was great for storing food

Food was brought in from the kitchens

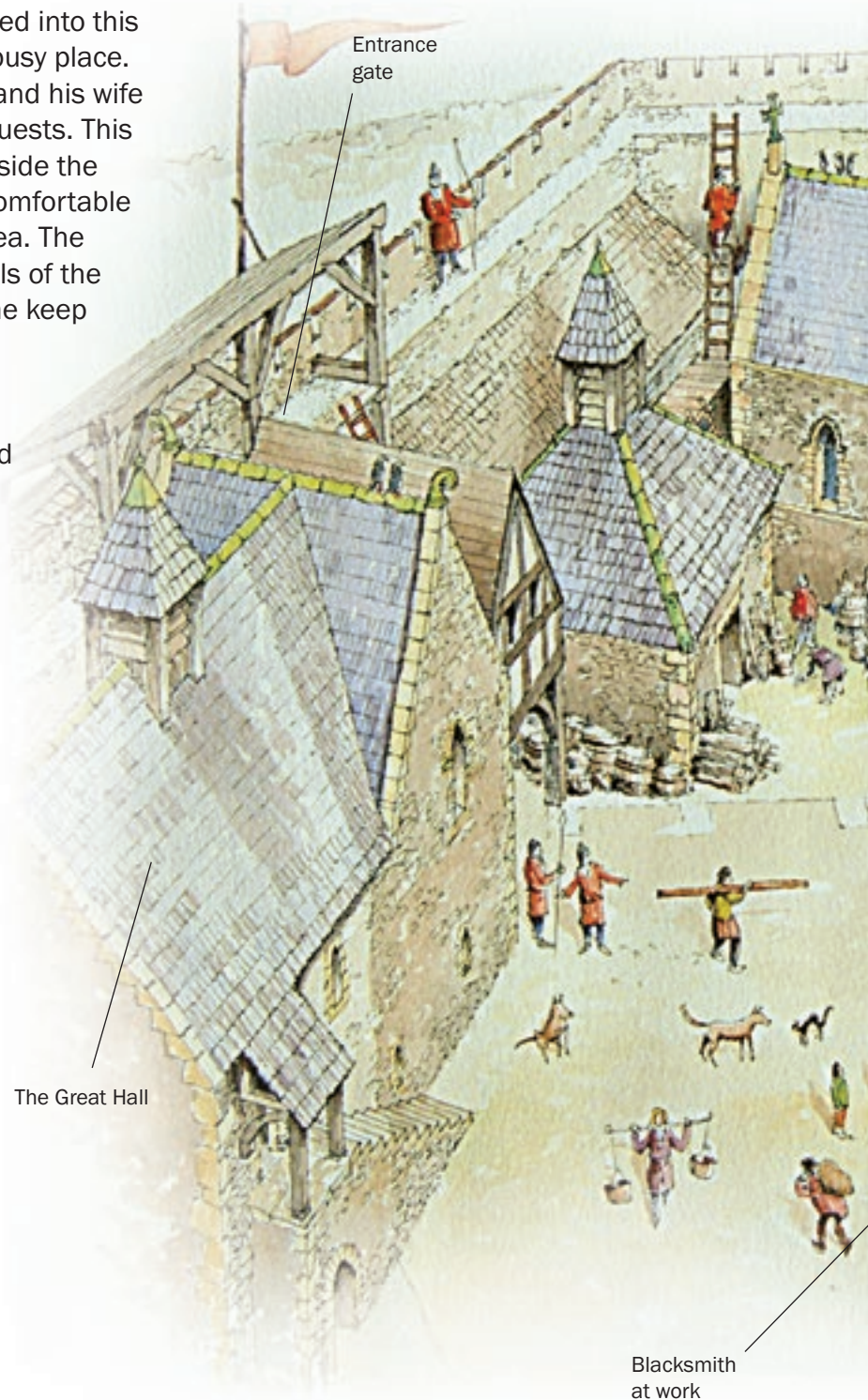
Carrickfergus Castle



The Inner Ward

The inner **ward** of the castle was the area within the curtain wall. Many buildings were squeezed into this small area so it would have been a very busy place. There was a Great Hall where de Courcy and his wife Affreca would have entertained visiting guests. This was a two storey building which stood beside the entrance gate. It would have been very comfortable with beautiful windows overlooking the sea. The kitchens were also housed within the walls of the ward but they were kept separate from the keep and Great Hall in case of fire.

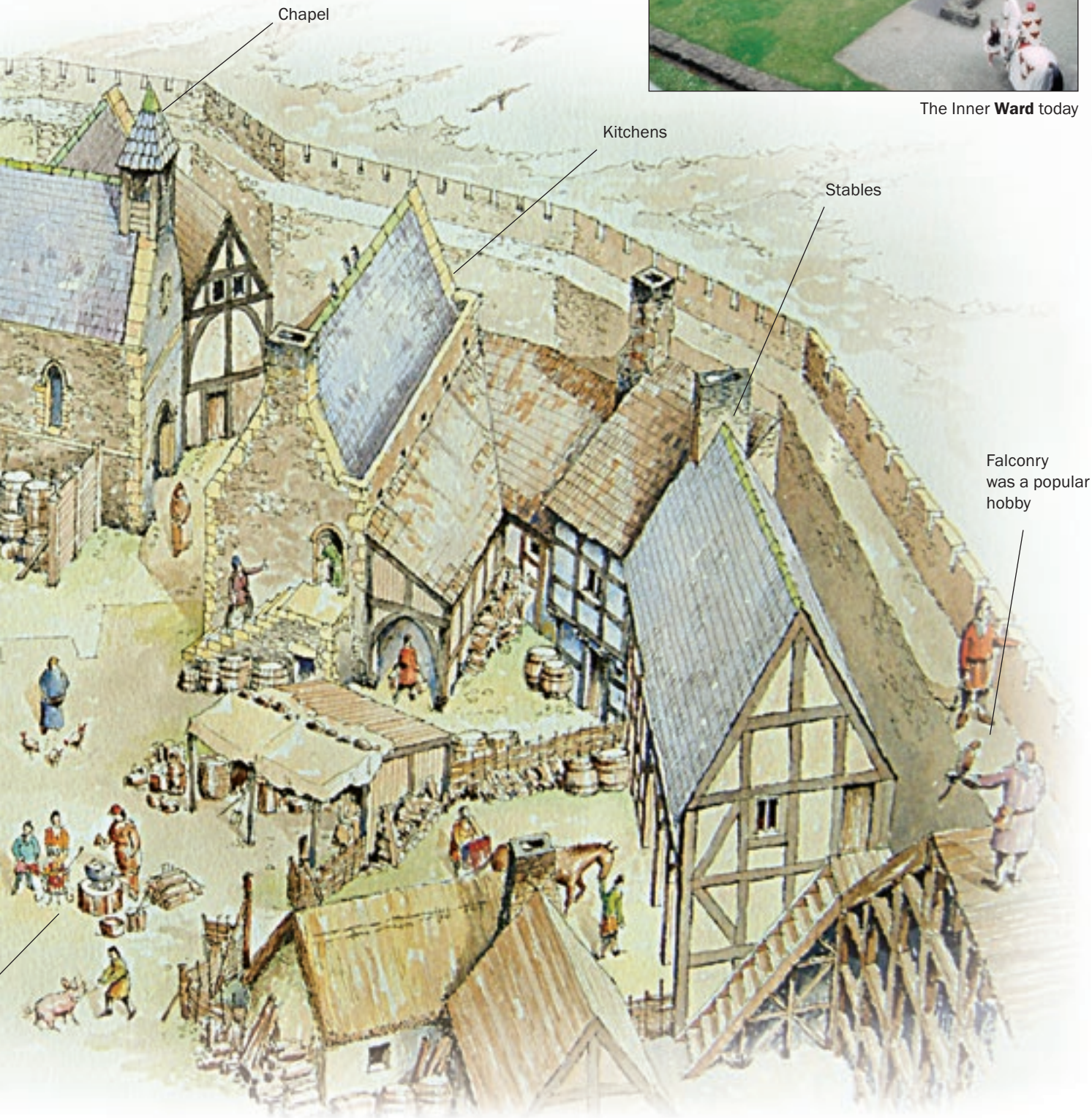
A small chapel stood at the north end of the **ward** and a barn and stables provided shelter for de Courcy's horses.



Affreca at the window of the Great Hall



The Inner **Ward** today



Chapel

Kitchens

Stables

Falconry
was a popular
hobby

Carrickfergus Castle



A visit from King John

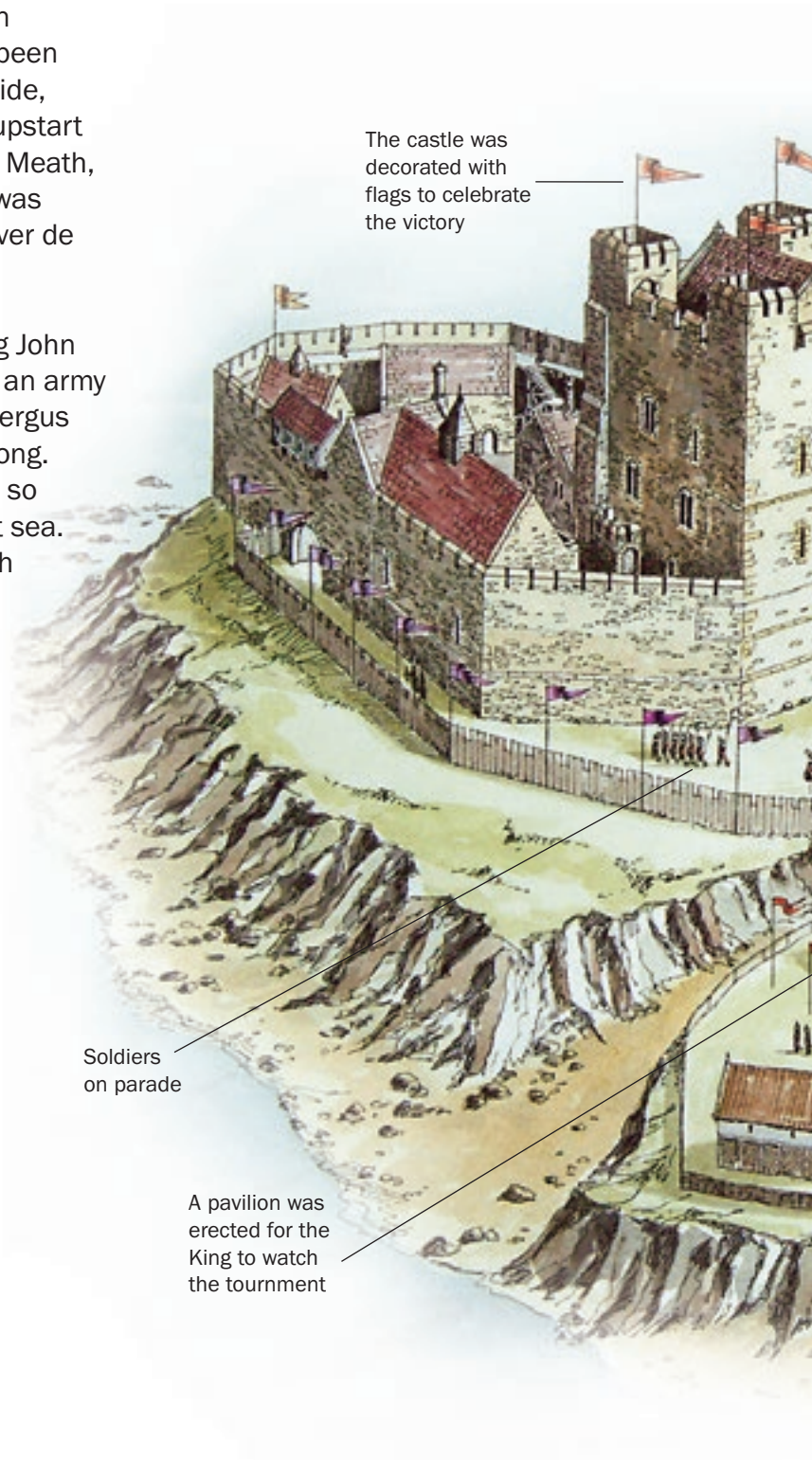
De Courcy's power in Ireland worried King John of England. He had heard that de Courcy had been **minting** coins that had his own head on one side, not the king's. In 1205 he decided to put the upstart in his place. He ordered Hugh de Lacy, Lord of Meath, to expel him from Ulster. As a reward de Lacy was made Earl of Ulster and was allowed to take over de Courcy's lands.

De Lacy's power was short-lived. By 1210 King John was starting to see him as a threat so he sent an army to Ireland. De Lacy's men retreated to Carrickfergus castle and prepared for a **siege**. It didn't last long. King John had 500 knights and 6000 soldiers so was able to surround the castle by land and at sea. After only 9 days de Lacy surrendered although he was able to escape to France.

After his victory over de Lacy, it is said that King John stayed at Carrickfergus. He held a **tournament** to celebrate his victory.



King John



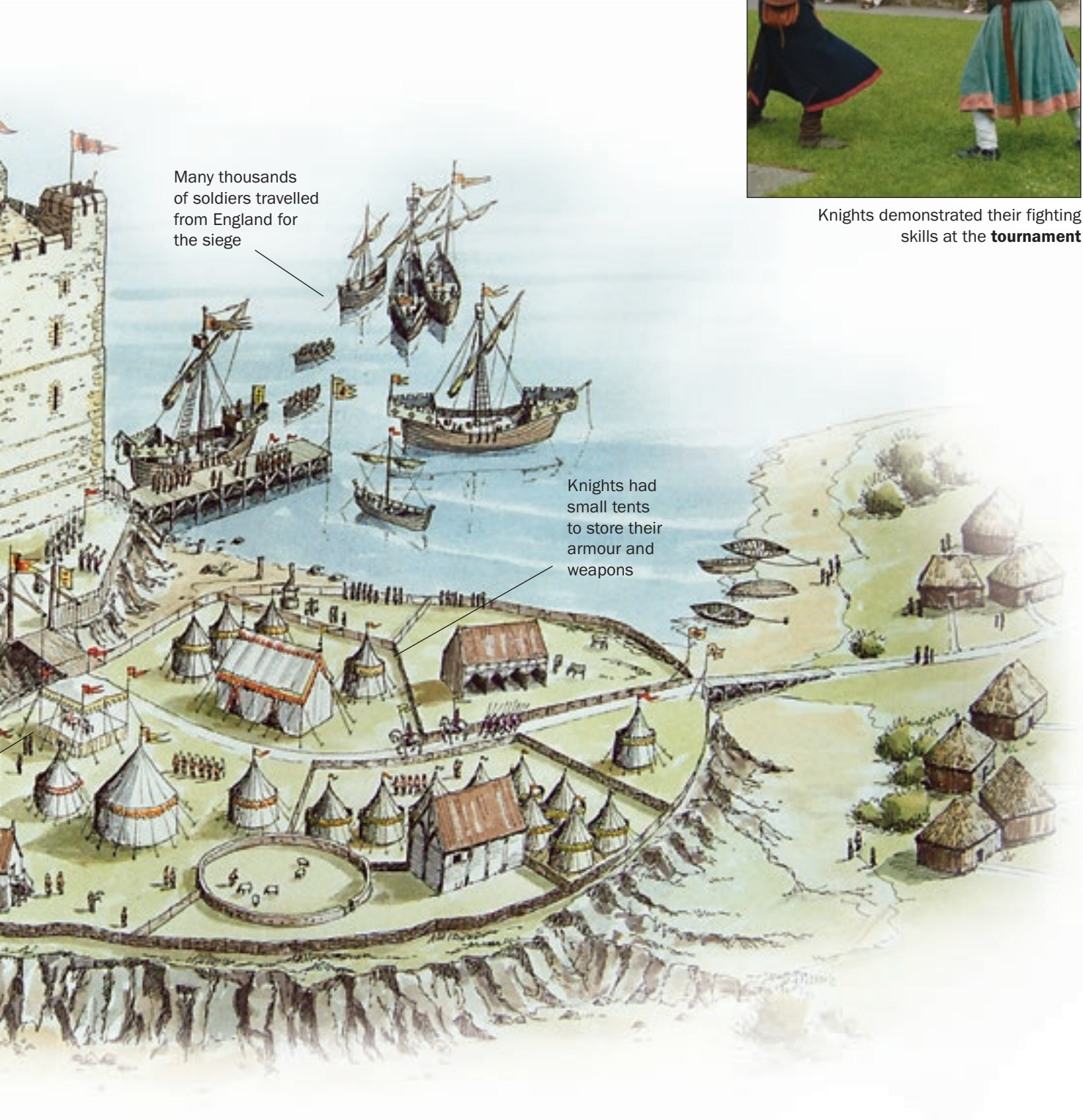
The castle was decorated with flags to celebrate the victory

Soldiers on parade

A pavilion was erected for the King to watch the tournament



Knights demonstrated their fighting skills at the **tournament**



Many thousands of soldiers travelled from England for the siege

Knights had small tents to store their armour and weapons

Carrickfergus Castle



Fortification of the site

When King John left he ordered that the castle should be enlarged, with a new section of wall to add more protection. This wall strengthened the defences on the **landward** side of the castle, making it harder for enemies to attack the keep.

Postern gate – the back door of the castle

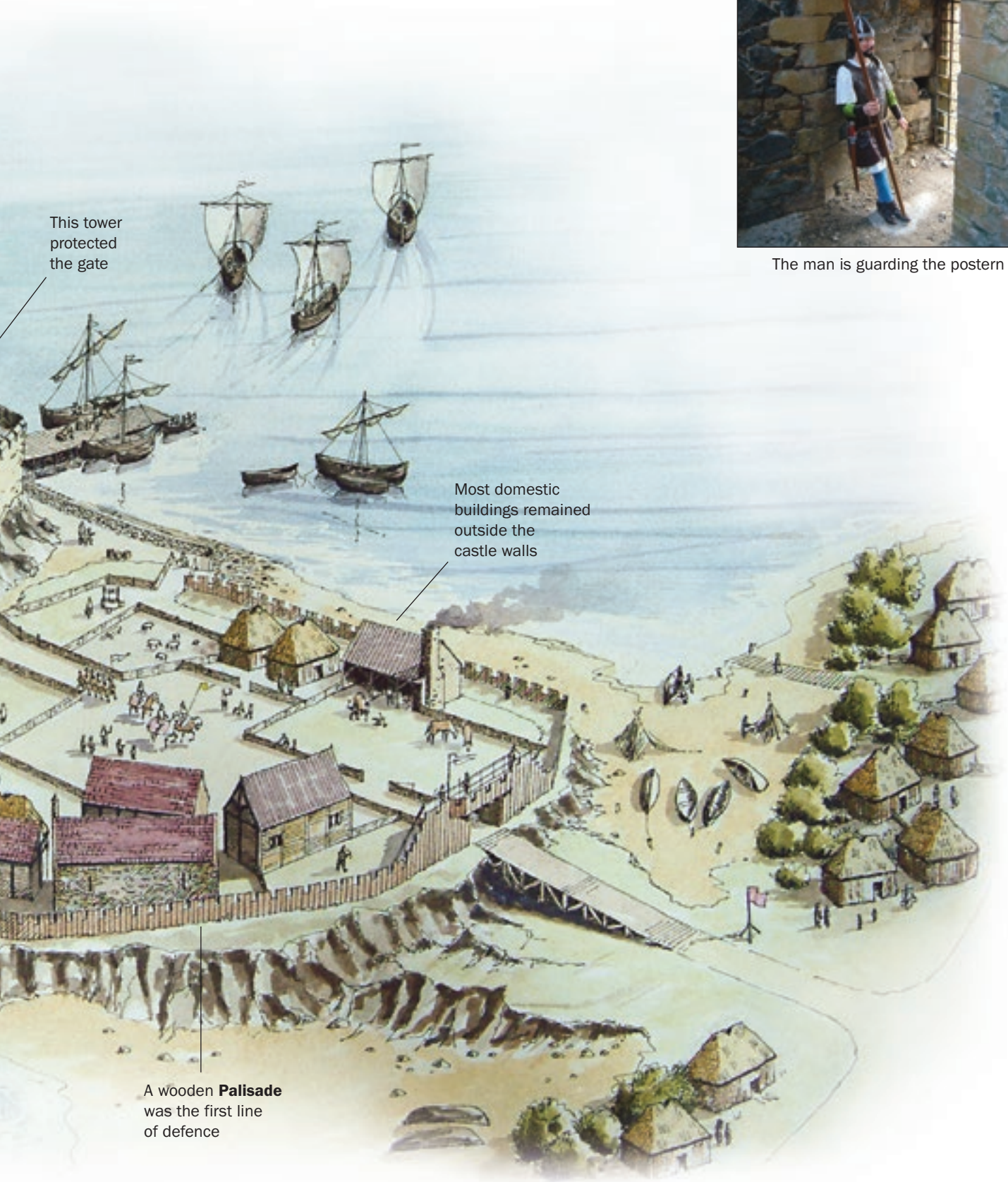
The area between the walls is called the middle **ward**

The sea tower protected against an attack by ships

A fighting platform gave guards extra protection



The sea tower was ideal for crossbowmen



This tower protected the gate

Most domestic buildings remained outside the castle walls

A wooden **Palisade** was the first line of defence



The man is guarding the postern gate

Carrickfergus Castle



De Lacy's Castle

In 1227 Hugh de Lacy was allowed to return to Ireland by King John's successor, Henry III. As Earl of Ulster between 1228 and 1242 he strengthened Carrickfergus Castle further. He added the outer **ward** and a twin towered gatehouse.

This meant new buildings and much stronger defences had been added. Any enemy wishing to reach the keep would have to pass through three different walls while under attack at all times.

A wall walk allowed soldiers to patrol the length of the curtain wall

A huge stone gatehouse protected the castle

The round towers were strong and hard to **undermine**



The outer **ward**





The outer **ward** today

Latrine chutes
carry waste to
the sea

Many more buildings
could be housed
within the walls

Carrickfergus Castle



Inside the Gatehouse

The gatehouse had to be the strongest part of the castle because it was the place most likely to be attacked. This was especially true at Carrickfergus as it was the only part of the castle not protected by the sea.

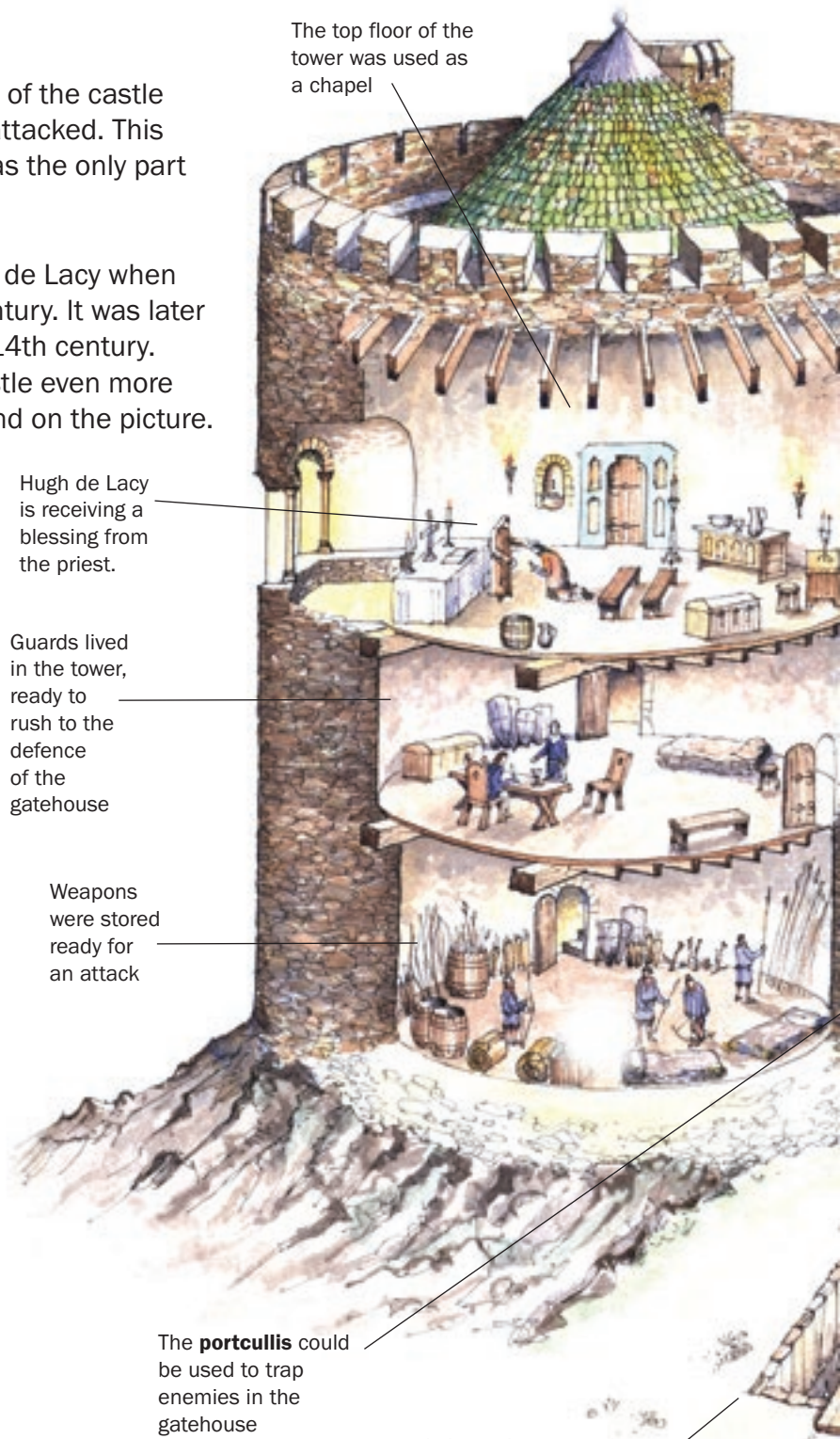
The castle's gatehouse was added by Hugh de Lacy when he built the outer ward in the mid-13th century. It was later improved by Richard de Burgh in the early 14th century. He included many features to make the castle even more difficult to attack. See how many you can find on the picture.



Guards using the murder hole



Interior of Chapel



The top floor of the tower was used as a chapel

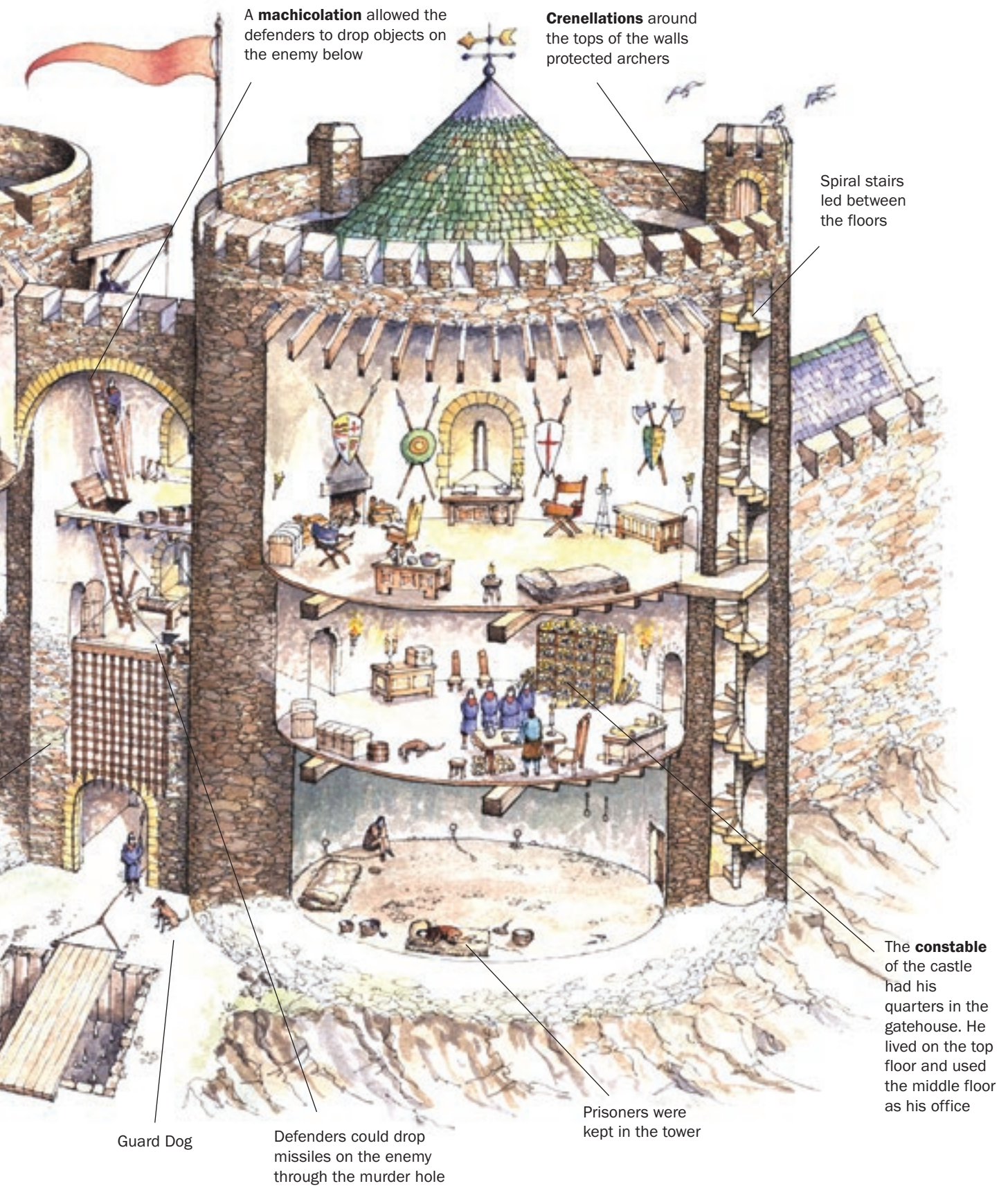
Hugh de Lacy is receiving a blessing from the priest.

Guards lived in the tower, ready to rush to the defence of the gatehouse

Weapons were stored ready for an attack

The **portcullis** could be used to trap enemies in the gatehouse

A deep pit protected the gate. Its bridge could be pulled away if an enemy attacked



Carrickfergus Castle



The siege of Edward Bruce, 1315

In 1314 Robert Bruce, King of Scotland, defeated Edward II of England at the Battle of Bannockburn. Soon after he sent an army commanded by his brother Edward Bruce to help the Irish fight the **Anglo-Normans**. In September 1315 he **besieged** Carrickfergus Castle and burned the town. Attempts to bring food to the castle failed and by April 1316 the starving garrison were forced to eat animal **hides**. It was even rumoured that they ate 8 Scottish prisoners. In September 1316 the castle finally surrendered and Edward Bruce was able to use it as a base for further attacks on the **Anglo-Normans**. It remained under his control until he was killed in battle in 1318.

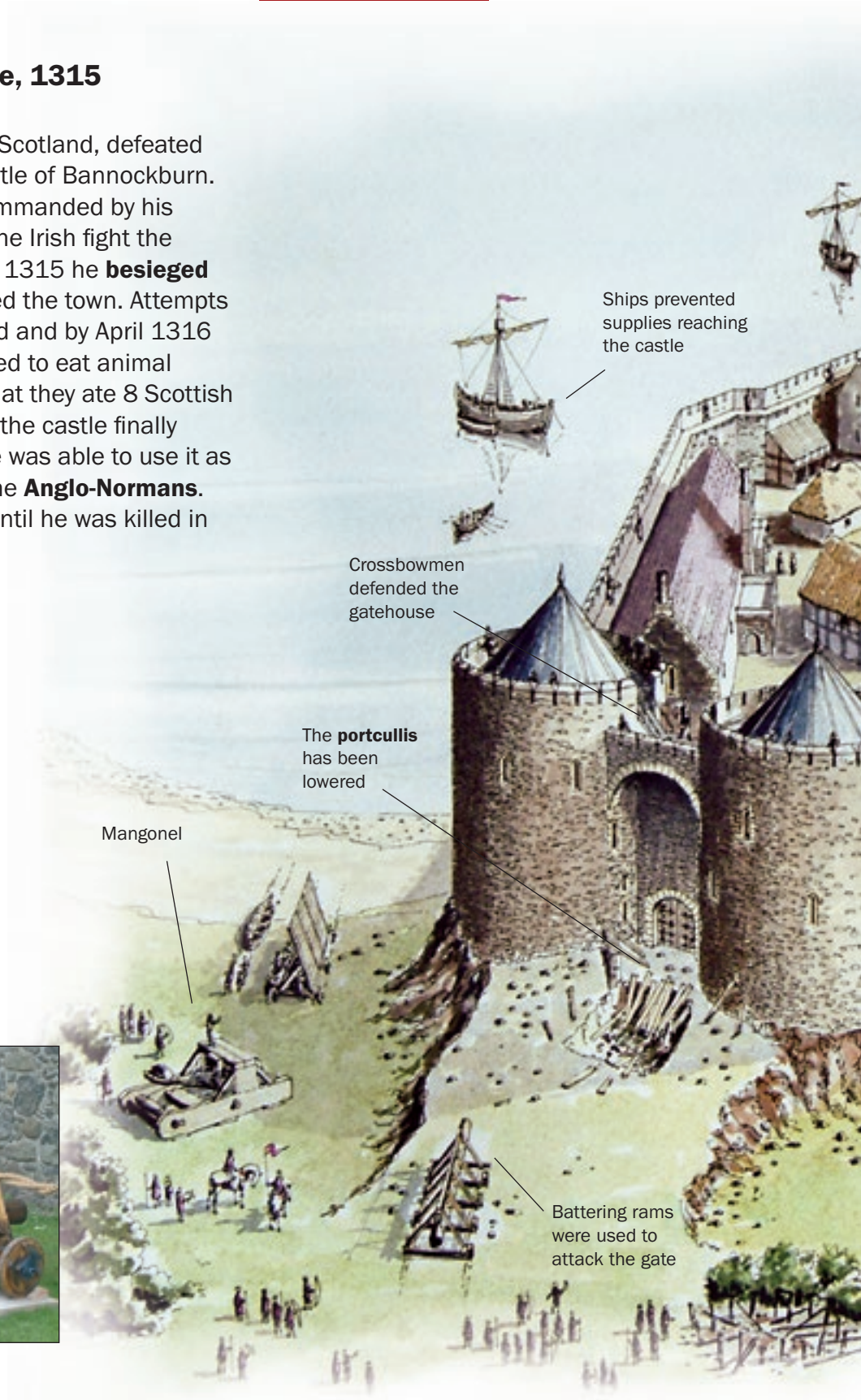
These model **siege** engines can be seen at the castle today



Mangonel



Battering Ram



Ships prevented supplies reaching the castle

Crossbowmen defended the gatehouse

The **portcullis** has been lowered

Mangonel

Battering rams were used to attack the gate



Trebuchet



Trebuchet could fire huge stones over the walls

Screens protected soldiers

The villagers' houses have been destroyed

Carrickfergus Castle

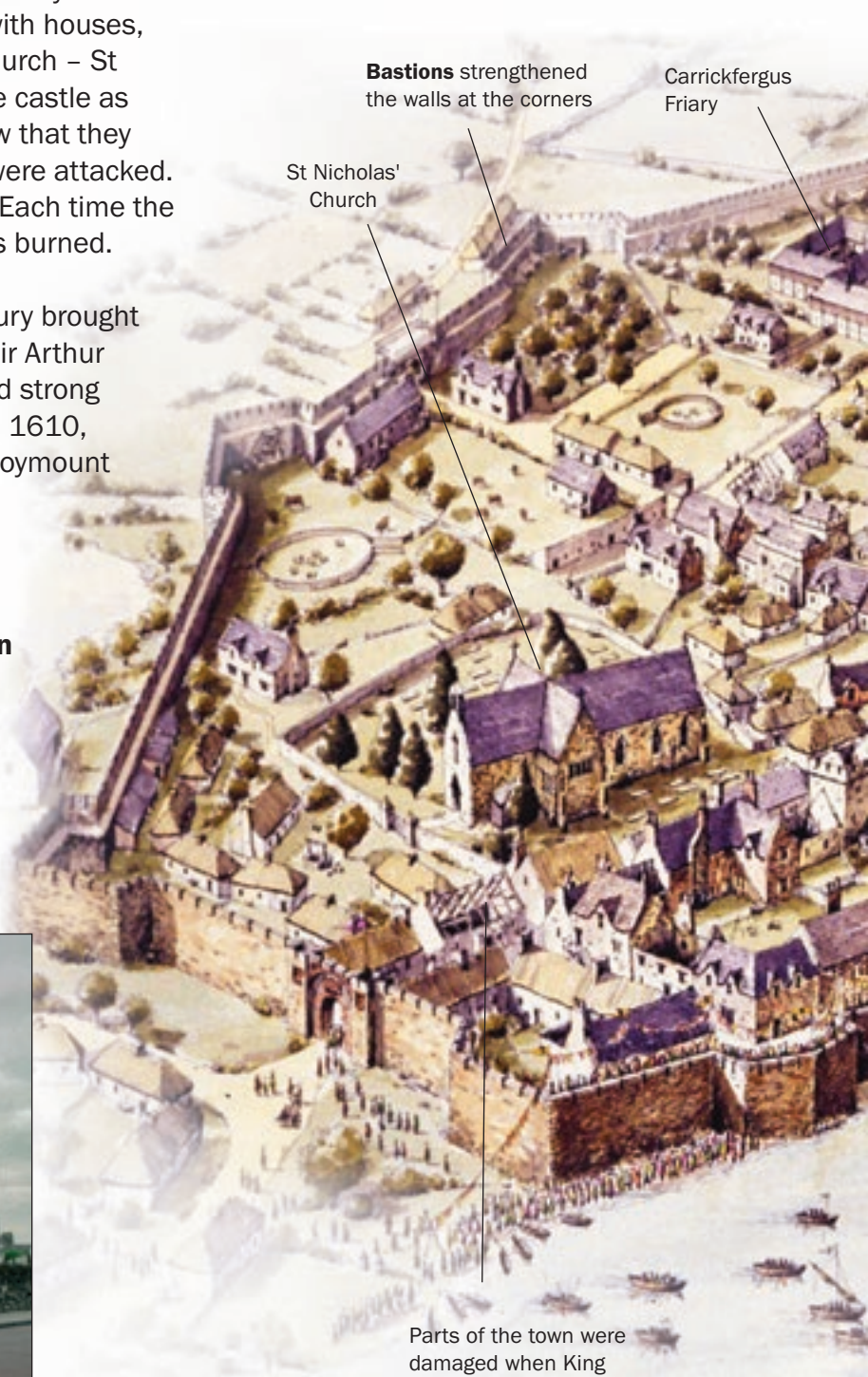


Carrickfergus Town

The building of the castle was soon followed by the growth of a small town outside its walls, with houses, workshops, a **Friary** and a small parish church – St Nicholas'. Traders and **merchants** saw the castle as a good source of business. They also knew that they could find shelter behind its walls if they were attacked. However it was a dangerous place to live. Each time the castle was attacked, the town outside was burned.

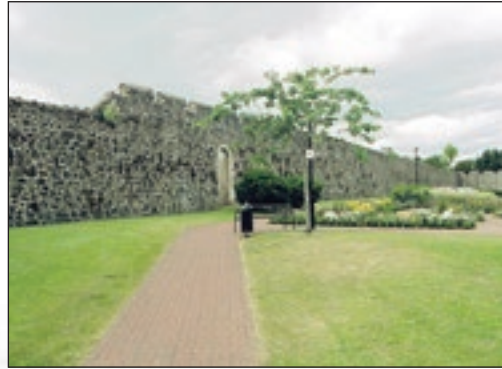
The **Plantation of Ulster** in the 17th century brought great changes to Carrickfergus. In 1608 Sir Arthur Chichester, **governor** of the castle, ordered strong walls to be built around the town. Later, in 1610, he began work on a new mansion called Joymount for his family.

Carrickfergus town and its castle were at the centre of many great events in the 17th century, including the **1641 rebellion** and the **Williamite Wars**. It was captured by King William III's forces in 1689, with the King himself landing at Carrick in June 1690, before making his way south to the Battle of the Boyne.



St Nicholas' Church

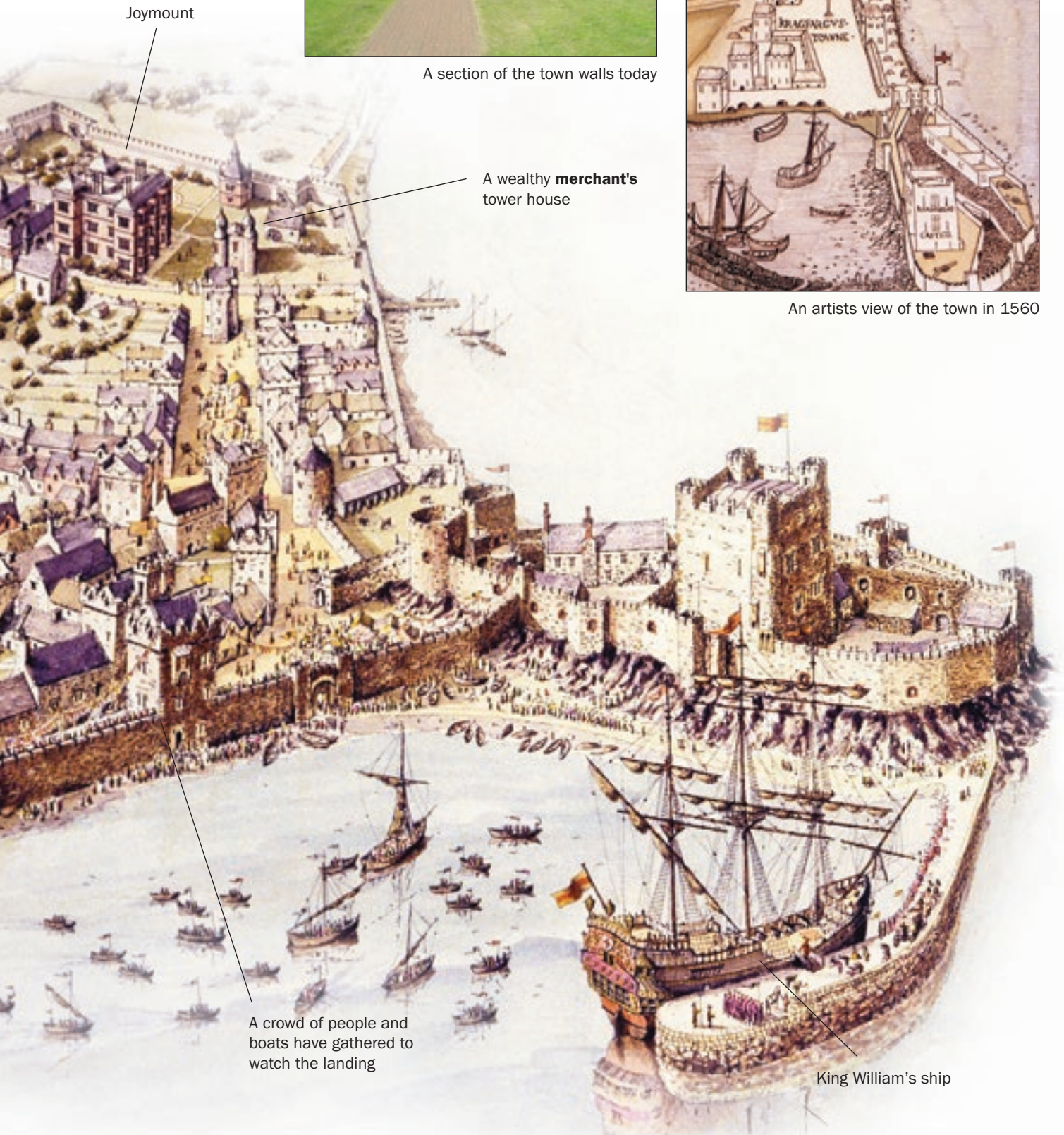
Parts of the town were damaged when King William's army captured the town



A section of the town walls today



An artists view of the town in 1560



Joymount

A wealthy **merchant's** tower house

A crowd of people and boats have gathered to watch the landing

King William's ship

Carrickfergus Castle



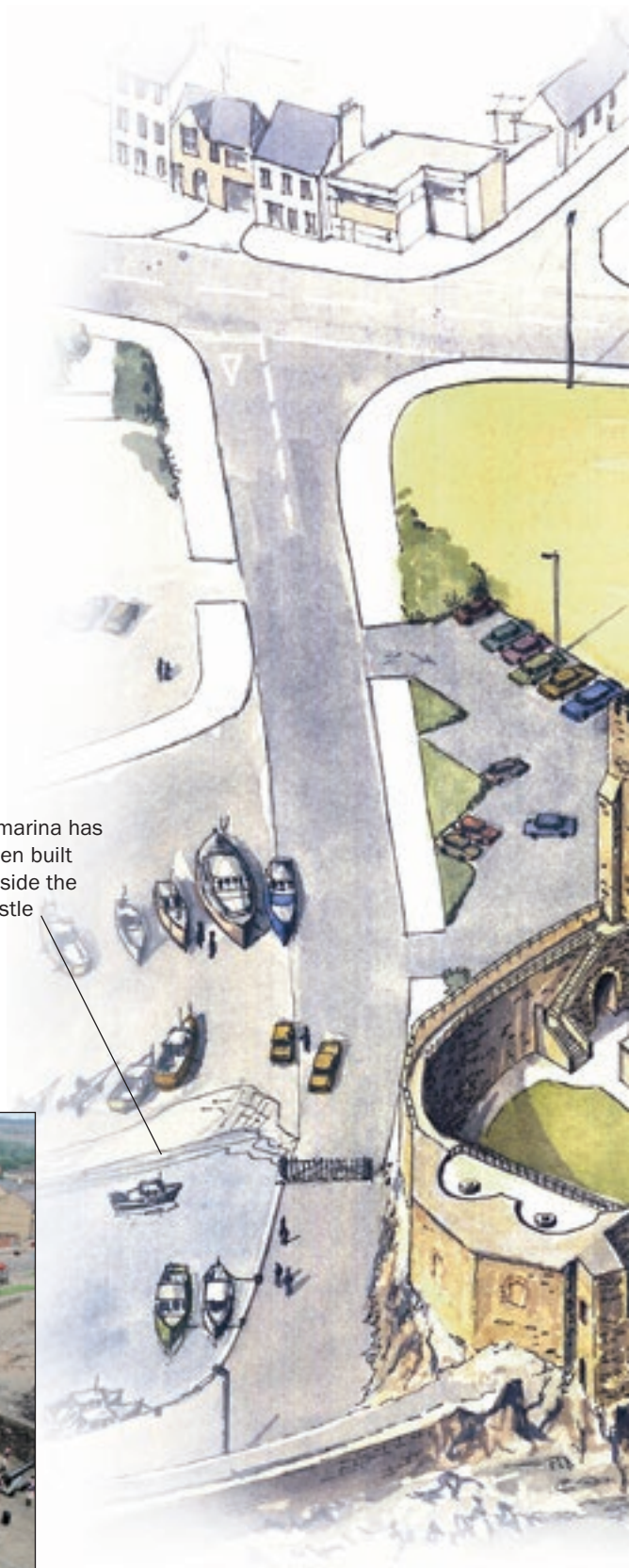
The Castle today

Carrickfergus Castle has seen many changes in its 800-year history. It has changed from a place of war to a place of education and enjoyment. It has survived attack from land and sea, standing guard over the entrance to Belfast Lough. It even protected the local people during WW2, when its vaults were used as an **air raid shelter**.

In 1928 it was declared an Historic Monument and placed into State Care. Today it is the care of the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities which continues to work to make sure that the castle will stay standing for many years to come.



A marina has been built beside the castle





Thousands of visitors come to the castle every year

shop

The gatehouse towers were altered to house cannons in the 16th century

The wall between the middle and outer **wards** has gone

19th century cannons face out to sea



Conservation work is carried out regularly

Carrickfergus Castle

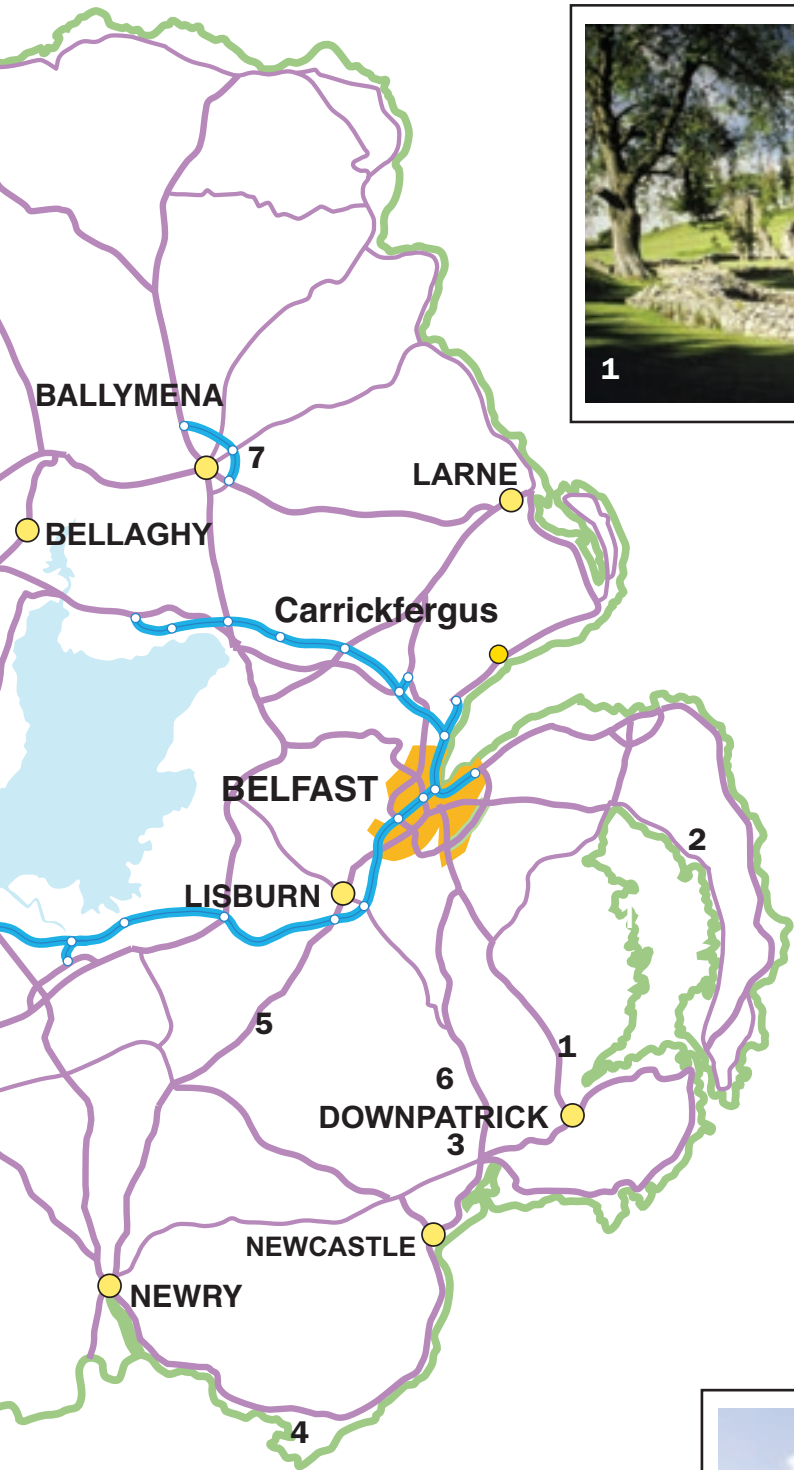


Other Norman Sites to visit

There are many other **Anglo-Norman** sites in N. Ireland. Many of these are in the care of the HED and are free to visit.

1. Inch Abbey
2. Grey Abbey
3. Dundrum Castle
4. Greencastle
5. Dromore Motte & Bailey
6. Clough Castle and Motte & Bailey
7. Harryville Motte
8. Mountsandel Motte





Carrickfergus Castle



Glossary

Air raid shelter – a place of protection from bombing from planes

Anglo-Normans – Normans who lived in England after the Norman Conquest of England in 1066

Bastion – a strong point in a castle or city wall

Besieged – surrounded and laid siege

Curtain wall – wall enclosing a bailey, courtyard, or ward

Constable – the person who manages the castle from day to day

Crenellations – battlements at the top of castle walls

Drawbridge – a bridge across a moat that can be raised to stop people crossing

Friary – a religious community of Friars

Governor – the person appointed by the King to run the castle

Hides – animal skins, leather

Landward – the side facing the land

Latrine – the toilet

Machicolation – an opening in a turret above a gate, used for dropping things on attackers

Masons – tradesmen who worked with stone

Merchants – business men who buy and sell goods

Minting – making coins

Moat – a deep trench, usually filled with water, that surrounded a castle

Palisade – wooden fence

Portcullis – a heavy wooden or iron grille which could slide down protected the gate

Plantation of Ulster – in the 17th century the English government brought people from England and Scotland to live in Ulster. This is called the Plantation of Ulster

Rebellion 1641 – An uprising by the Irish against English rule

Siege – surrounding and attacking a castle to try to force it to surrender

Spiral staircase – a twisting staircase built into a tower

Tournament – a type of medieval entertainment which included displays of combat

Treadmills – a machine powered by men or animals walking in a wheel

Undermine – tunnelling under the castle walls to make them collapse

Ward – courtyard of a castle

Williamite Wars – Battles fought in Ireland between 1688 and 1691



Time Line

531 – King Fergus is shipwrecked on the rock

1177 – John de Courcy begins work on the castle

1205 – de Courcy is expelled by King John. The castle is granted to Hugh de Lacy

1210 – de Lacy is besieged and expelled by King John

1227 – de Lacy returns to Carrickfergus Castle

1228 – 1242 – The Castle is expanded by de Lacy

1316 – 1317 – The Castle is besieged by Edward Bruce

1689 – The castle is besieged by King William III

1760 – The French Army captures Carrickfergus Castle

1914 – 1918 – Throughout the First World War the Castle is used to store weapons

1928 – The Castle is declared an historic monument

1939 – 1945 – During the Second World War the Castle cellars are used as an air raid shelter





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Our aim is to protect, conserve and promote our natural environment and built heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

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