**Northampton Castle Fun Facts**

Northampton once had a massive and important castle.

* Simon de Senlis, Earl of Northampton, had part of the town cleared to start building work on a large and strong stone castle before he joined the First Crusade in 1096. The new castle probably replaced either a wooden ‘motte and bailey style’ castle built after the Norman Conquest of 1066 or on top of existing defences originally constructed by the Saxons and later the Danes.
* The sandstone castle had thick walls, towers and a moat of dry ditches, with the river on the west side of the castle as extra defence; the main gate to the castle was to the north protected by the barbican.
* One of the largest urban castles in England and ideally located in the centre of England; it was the first major castle, only a day’s ride or two day’s march, northbound from London.
* To seize control of the castle a hostile force had to first lay siege to the town, fight its way through or over the town’s thick surrounding wall, then through the town; finally, to attack the strongly fortified castle. Northampton’s townsfolk had to endure such attacks quite a few times during the royal tussles with the barons in the 13th century.
* Northampton Castle was one of the four great castles that the barons demanded of King John that he hand over control to them when he sealed the Magna Carta in 1215.

A Royal Castle

* Completed in the early 12th century, it was a royal castle for most of its active use.
* Every English King from Henry I to Edward III stayed at the castle.
* A meeting between King Henry I and his elder brother Robert, Duke of Normandy in 1106 is the first recorded evidence of the castle being used by a king as a royal court.
* During the medieval period many Great Councils/early parliaments were held at the castle; laws were passed, treaties signed, money raised for wars, and royal justice handed out.
* Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, was summoned before a Great Council being held at the castle in 1164. After a week-long trial, worried that he might be imprisoned or sentenced to death, he escaped with the help of monks from St. Andrew’s Priory through the town’s north gate to France before the trial ended.
* Notable prisoners in the castle include William the Lion, King of Scotland, who in 1174 was captured at Alnwick and brought down to Northampton to face King Henry II.
* The castle was the venue for a number of treaties finalised between England and Scotland including the giving up of English royal overlordship of Scotland in 1328.
* Hunting was a favourite royal pastime and with rich hunting grounds near Northampton the castle was an ideal base for kings. King John stayed thirty times during his eighteen-year long reign and even moved the Royal Treasury to the castle in 1205.
* The Northampton mint was one of the royal mints for over 250 years.
* There is recorded evidence of great feasts and tournaments taking place in the castle.



For more information visit **The Friends of Northampton Castle**

www.NorthamptonCastle.com; facebook.com/NorthamptonCastle; twitter.com/NptonCastle

**More Northampton Castle Fun Facts**

Decline of the Castle

* The later medieval period saw the decline of Northampton as a prosperous town, the Black Death being a major factor, and the castle no longer in frequent use fell into disrepair.
* However, in the 17th century Northampton became the main South Midlands garrison for Parliamentary forces during the Civil War and the town and castle were refortified, but the castle’s fate was sealed after Restoration of the Monarchy when in 1662 King Charles II ordered that the town’s walls be pulled down and the castle demolished to prevent their possible future use as a defensive stronghold against the monarchy.
* This order was amended, partly due to the amount of work involved, for the castle to be only ‘slighted’ so that the castle could continue to provide room for a courthouse, lodgings for visiting judges, and the castle’s prison used as the County gaol.
* Trials were still held at the castle until after the Great Fire of Northampton in 1675 when a new Sessions House and lodgings were built in George Row during rebuilding of the town.
* Stone from the ruinous castle was ‘recycled’ for the next 200 years in town buildings.
* Parts of the castle and lands were sold off and orchards planted inside the castle walls.
* Photographs taken in the mid-19thcentury show people sitting, relaxing, or fishing near the picturesque grassy ruins of the castle.

Castle Station

* In 1859 the Northampton to Market Harborough railway-line opened with a simple station built on part of one of the old castle orchards.
* In the 1870s construction of the ‘Northampton Loop’ gave the town direct rail access to the London-Birmingham main line, plus a new larger station and a goods yard; however, this resulted in the demolition of the visible castle ruins, levelling of the land and even diversion of the river. The townsfolk were not happy, but protest and petitions failed.
* Only a lonely postern gate was saved and even that was moved and rebuilt near the entrance to the new station. By the mid-1960’s, being the only railway station still operational in the town, ‘Castle’ was dropped from the official name of the station.
* Following strong lobbying from *The Friends of Northampton Castle* (FONC), commuters and visitors passing through the new railway station building and concourse can today see many references to the castle and read the information boards on the historical significance of the area.

The Castle Today

* Excavations in the 1960s found buried remains of the castle’s royal apartments on an area alongside St. Andrew ‘s road opposite the station carpark. At present the site, although accessible to all, is just a grassy area in need of loving attention and celebration of what historical gems lie below.
* Excavations of the railway station concourse in 2012/13 unearthed just below the surface remains of a 12th century building, Saxon pits and a very rare style of Saxon brooch.

What other exciting remains of Northampton Castle await to be uncovered?



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