

The over the river tyne by pons aelius

[Design](#), [Architecture](#)



The Castle Keep dates back more than 1800 years since being the first fortification on the site. It was part of the Hadrian's Wall, built to guard the bridge over the River Tyne by Pons Aelius for his Roman fort. In the 800's, the site was then used as a church for the Anglo Saxon's before the Normans invaded and conquered England in 1066. This invasion then resulted in the castle being built by timber by William the Conqueror's son, Robert Curthuse, back in 1080. However, between 1172 and 1177, it was replaced by a stone castle.

The entrance to the chapel was located "beneath the external stair, could only be entered only from the outside¹". The chapel itself is located towards the North East of the ground or basement floor of the castle. As you walk in, you first enter the nave, a place to accommodate the majority of the congregation before reaching the chancel.

It is also likely the small recess on the left-hand side of the chancel was used by the priests as a vestry. When the Normans took over, Norman Architecture (also known as Romanesque Architecture due to the inspiration from the Roman Style Architecture) was the main influence of the design of the castle. Castle Hedingham in Essex is another example of Norman Architecture built in the same period as the Castle Keep and also similar in form. The chapel in the keep is often referred to its interior as "the most beautiful place in the whole building²" and a place of "richness of decoration³". Examples of the influence can be seen in the arches, formed in a semi-circular shape featured throughout the nave and the chancel.

The ceiling is rib vaulted, meaning “ the surface is divided into webs by a framework of diagonal arched ribs⁴”. This type of vaulting is a lot more difficult to build than traditional barrel vaults. Barrel vaults used transverse arches and not diagonal which “ allows the vault to be built in sections⁵”, giving an advantage in construction. However, the use of ribbed vaults had much greater strength and produced less force onto the walls nearby. Even though its arches are more geometric, the webbing of the arches still gave an impression of being a domed vault.

“ The geometry of the Gothic system (Ribbed Vaults) was a rough use of mathematical truths in which beauty was sought for. ⁶” Looking closer into the entrances and windows of the chapel, I saw the Norman Architecture be used again through the decorations with plentiful of zig-zag patterns and details such as chevrons. However, the actual techniques of creating the chapel can be critiqued, even though the chapel was seen as elegant and intricate with details. The construction wasn't very thoughtful and additionally poorly executed being very irregular in design⁷.

The window facing north in the chancel is maybe what indicates the irregularities in the design. Looking at the plans of the ground floor, it shows the window not in the centre of the two arches⁸. Some people might find this irritating or paranoid about the window collapsing as the window doesn't sit in the middle which doesn't create that sense of balance, which I can agree with. Furthermore, the structure of the chapel which has been pointed out as being irregular maybe referring to the vaulting and its diagonal ribs of the groining being randomly laid out, particularly the one near the arch door

as it hardly touches the supporting corbels⁹. Maurice Caementarius, was the engineer and architect who transformed the original timber structure into a stone one during Henry II's reign at the time. Comparing his works of the Dover Castle, it would seem like two different people had designed it¹⁰. His work on the chapel of the Castle Keep was inelegant and didn't have much consideration in terms of construction.

Chapels were an important part of castles during the medieval times as religion was a significant factor of their lives. It was regarded as a safe haven for the soldiers and also the locals and furthermore described as a sense of significance and a level of prestige within the local area¹¹. Having chapels in the castle also enhanced strategic advantages as people found it a barbaric action to harm an innocent priest which would the opposing/attacking side would then avoid¹². Parts of the castle were also built as bait for the enemy, for example, some stronger structures were hidden behind some weaker structures such as the entrance tower by the chapel which has been pointed out as being considerably weaker than the Keep. "The external walls are very thin, only two feet nine inches¹³" unlike the rest of the castle's walls which are significantly thicker to provide protection.

The castle wasn't used as a defensive structure anymore after the civil war in the 1600's, rather it was leased out to locals which led people to build houses and small shops¹⁴. The area then became known as the "Castle Garth". The plentiful of houses, shops, pubs were the foundation of an active community, moreover, "the chapel in the castle was reused as a beer cellar¹⁵" by the property-owner of the Three Bull's Heads public house.

Even though the community was flourishing, it led to the decline of the castle's physical state. John Dobson, the famed architect from the North of England was given the commission to renovate the castle in 1848. The chapel and the rest of the castle were maintained and protected to its physical state today under his regulations. To conclude, the chapel in the Castle Keep is very ornate and possesses some gothic architectural methods such as the rib vaulting, even from looking at my sources and also sketches that there are some errors in the construction.

I believe with the craftsmanship could've been improved on even with regard to the cultural context. The Normans who replaced the timber castle to a stone castle built it to a moderate standard in comparison to other castles at the time.