

Norton Priory Museum & Gardens

Halton Castle

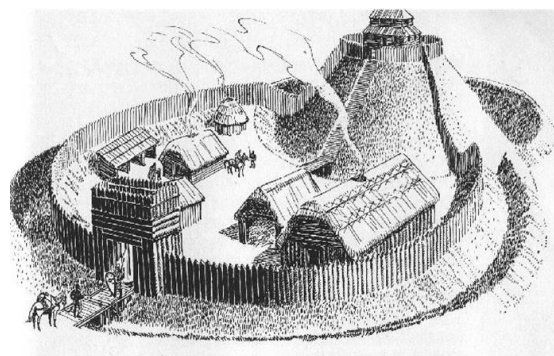


Halton Castle is very important as it is one of only 2 surviving Norman Castles in Cheshire. It is owned by the Duchy of Lancaster but in 2002 Norton Priory took on management on behalf of Halton Council. It is a scheduled Ancient Monument and a Listed Building so it has legal protection.

The castle is inextricably linked to Norton Priory. The original Priory was founded in Runcorn in 1115 by the third Baron of Halton William Fitzwilliam. The Barons would have

visited the Priory Church and some would have been buried there. They also provided the Priory with substantial sums of money.

After the Norman Conquest in 1066, the country was divided into earldoms to secure the country. William the Conqueror installed his nephew Hugh as Earl of Chester. Hugh divided his Earldom between 8 tenants-in-chief and the most important was Nigel, 1st Baron of Halton. It is thought Nigel set out the original Castle, which was originally built of timber. In the 11th Century it was common to build a motte and bailey castle (*right*) – this was not found in the excavation but it doesn't mean there wasn't one. This was replaced with a stone castle in the 12th century. The site was chosen because of its elevated position, which meant it would be a good military stronghold and observation point.



Nigel's son, William Fitznigel, (*coat of arms, left*) endowed a religious community at Norton Priory in 1134, which was visible from the Castle, which began the long connection between the Priory and the Castle.

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There are a number of fascinating features and finds in and around the castle, including the sally porte, the garderobe, the tower and the folly wall.

The Sally Porte (*on the right in photo above*) was an escape chute, through which soldiers could drop with aid of rope or ladder. It was actually use to make surprise attack by the castle defenders on anyone attacking it. This is where the phrase "Sally forth" comes from!

The Garderobe (*on the left in photo above*) was a medieval toilet – it was a rectangular chamber built into the wall of the castle and it vented into pit which was emptied from time to time.

