

# Castle & Siege Terminology



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**Allure** - Wall-walk, passage behind the parapet of a castle wall.

**Arrow Loop** - A narrow vertical slit cut into a wall through which arrows could be fired.

**Bailey** - Courtyard.

**Ballista** - Engine resembling a crossbow, used in hurling missiles or large arrows.

**Baluster** - A short shaft, such as is used in balustrades, usually thicker in the middle than at the ends.

**Barbican** - An outwork or forward extension of a castle gateway.

**Bastille** - Redoubt or outwork.

**Bastion** - A small tower at the end of a curtain wall or in the middle of the outside wall.

**Batter** - A sloping part of a curtain wall. The sharp angle at the base of all walls and towers along their exterior surface.

**Battlement** - Narrow wall built along the outer edge of the wall walk

**Bay** - A constituent portion or compartment of a building, complete in itself and corresponding to other portions.

**Berm** - Flat space between the base of the curtain wall and the inner edge of the moat.

**Buttery** - Room for the service of beverages.

**Cat** - Assault tower.

**Catapult** - Stone-throwing engine, usually employing torsion.

**Cesspit** - The opening in a wall in which the waste from one or more garderobes was collected.

**Chamfer** - A surface formed by paring off an angle.

**Chemise** - Inner walled enclosure of a castle.

**Corbel** - A stone or timber bracket supporting a projection from a wall.

**Crenelation** - A notched battlement made up of alternate crenels (openings) and merlons (square saw-teeth).

**Curtain** - Those portions of a fortified wall which connect adjacent flanking-towers.

**Daub** - A mud of clay mixture applied over wattle to strengthen and seal it.

**Dead angle** - An angle, the ground contained by which cannot be seen by the defenders, and is therefore indefensible.

**Dongjon or keep** - The inner stronghold of a castle, usually found in one of the towers.

**Drawbridge** - A heavy timber platform built to span a moat between a gate house and surrounding land that could be raised when required to block an entrance.

**Embrasure** - The low segment of the alternating high and low segments of a battlement.

**Enceinte** - An enclosing wall, usually exterior, of a fortified place.

**Escalade** - Scaling of a castle wall.

**Finial** - A slender piece of stone used to decorate the tops of the merlons.

**Forebuilding** - A projection in front of a keep or donjon, containing the stairs to the main entrance.

**Garderobe** - Small latrine or toilet, either built into the thickness of the wall or projected out from it.

**Gate House** - The complex of towers, bridges, and barriers built to protect each entrance through a castle or town wall.

**Great Hall** - the building in the inner ward that housed the main meeting and dining area for the castle's residents.

**Groining** - The angular edges formed by the intersection of vaults in a ceiling.

**Half-timber** - The common form of medieval construction in which walls were made of a wooden frame structure filled with wattle and daub.



**Hall** - Principal living quarters of a medieval castle or house.

**Hall for hynds** - Servants' hall.

**Herring-bone pattern** - The placing of stones aslant in a wall so that each two rows form a succession of angles resembling the backbone of a herring.

**Hoarding** - A temporary wooden balcony suspended from the tops of walls and towers before a battle, from which missiles and arrows could be dropped or fired accurately toward the base of the wall.

**Inner Curtain** - The high wall that surrounds the inner ward.

**Inner Ward** - The open area in the center of a castle.

**Keep** - See donjon.

**Lantern or louvre** - A small open turret placed on a roof as an outlet for smoke.

**Lights** - The spaces between the mullions of a window.

**Machicolation** - A projection in the battlements of a wall with openings through which missiles can be dropped on besiegers.

**Mangonel** - A form of catapult.

**Merlon** - The high part of the square "sawtooth" between crenels in a battlement.

**Meurtriere** - Arrow loop, slit in battlement or wall to permit firing of arrows, or for observation.

**Moat** - A deep trench dug around a castle to prevent access from the surrounding land. It could be either left dry or filled with water.

**Motte** - An earthwork mound on which a castle was built.

**Mullions** - The vertical divisions of stone or wood between the lights of windows.

**Oriel** - Projecting room on an upper floor.

**Outer Curtain** - The wall which enclosed the outer ward.

**Outer Ward** - The area around the outside of and adjacent to the inner curtain.

**Palisade** - A sturdy wooden fence usually built to enclose a site until a permanent stone wall could be erected.

**Parapet** - Protective wall at the top of a fortification, around the outer side of the wall-walk.

**Pier** - The mass of masonry between arches and other openings.

**Pilaster** - A square or rectangular pillar, engaged in, and projecting slightly from, a wall.

**Portcullis** - Vertical sliding wooden grille shod with iron suspended in front of a gateway, let down to protect the gate.

**Postern or sally-port** - Secondary gate or door.

**Putlog Hole** - A hole intentionally left in the surface of a wall for insertion of a horizontal pole.

**Quoins** - Dressed corner-stones.

**Ram** - Battering-ram.

**Rubble** - A random mixture of rocks and mortar.

**Sapping** - Undermining, as of a castle wall.

**Scaffolding** - The temporary wooden framework built next to a wall to support both workers and materials.

**Screens** - Wooden partition at the kitchen end of a hall, protecting a passage leading to the buttery, pantry, and kitchen.

**Solar** - Originally a room above ground level, but commonly applied to the great chamber or a private sitting room off the great hall.

**Springald** - War engine of the catapult type, employing tension.

**Steward** - The man responsible for running the day-to-day affairs of the castle in the absence of the lord.

**Trebuchet** - War engine developed in the Middle Ages employing counterpoise.

**Truss** - One of the timber frames built to support the roof over the Great Hall.

**Turret** - A small tower rising above and resting on one of the main towers, usually used as a lookout point.

**Ward** - Courtyard or bailey.

**Wattle** - A mat of woven sticks and weeds.