

The story of a **CASTLE**



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illustrated by
Peter Dennis

 Orpheus

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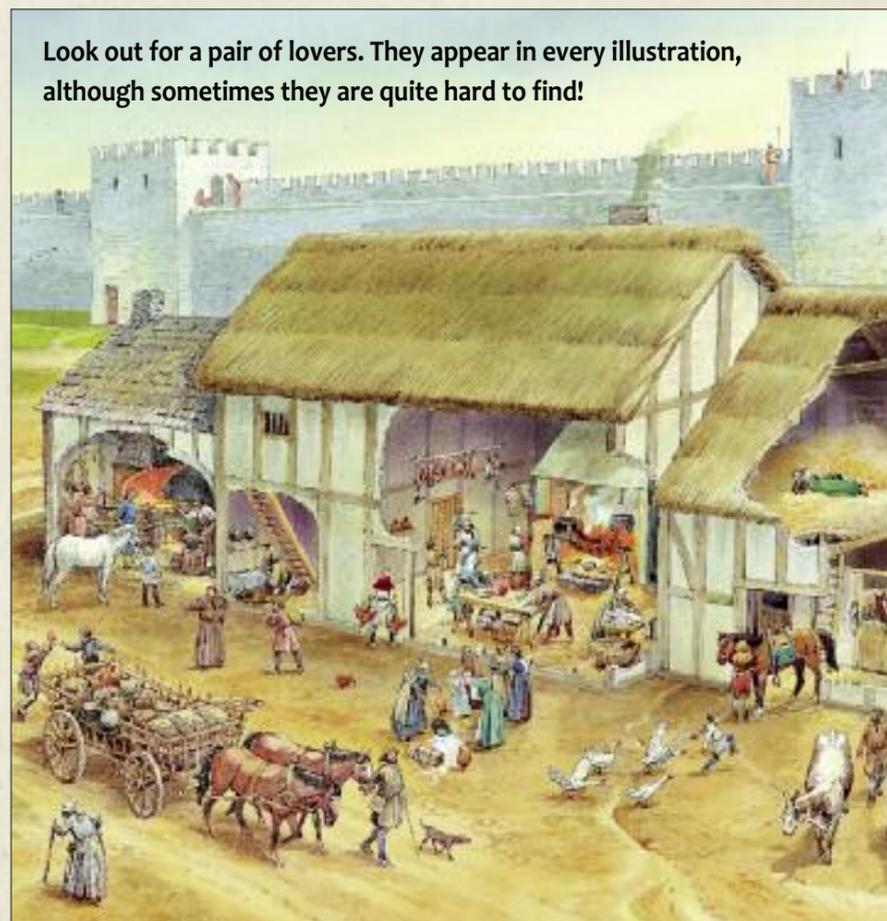
Created and produced by Nicholas Harris, Sarah Hartley, Katie Sexton,
Ruth Symons and Erica Williams, Orpheus Books Ltd.

Text Nicholas Harris
Illustrator Peter Dennis
Consultant Richard Platt

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The Middle Ages

The Middle Ages, also known as medieval times, lasted from the 1000s to the 1400s. In those days, the most powerful person in the kingdom was, of course, the king. But even he had to rely on barons, the most important noblemen, to help him fight wars against his enemies. In the Middle Ages, power and wealth came from the ownership of

land. So, in return for the promise of an army of knights and footsoldiers to fight for him, the king granted the barons land. To control their lands, the barons built great castles on them.

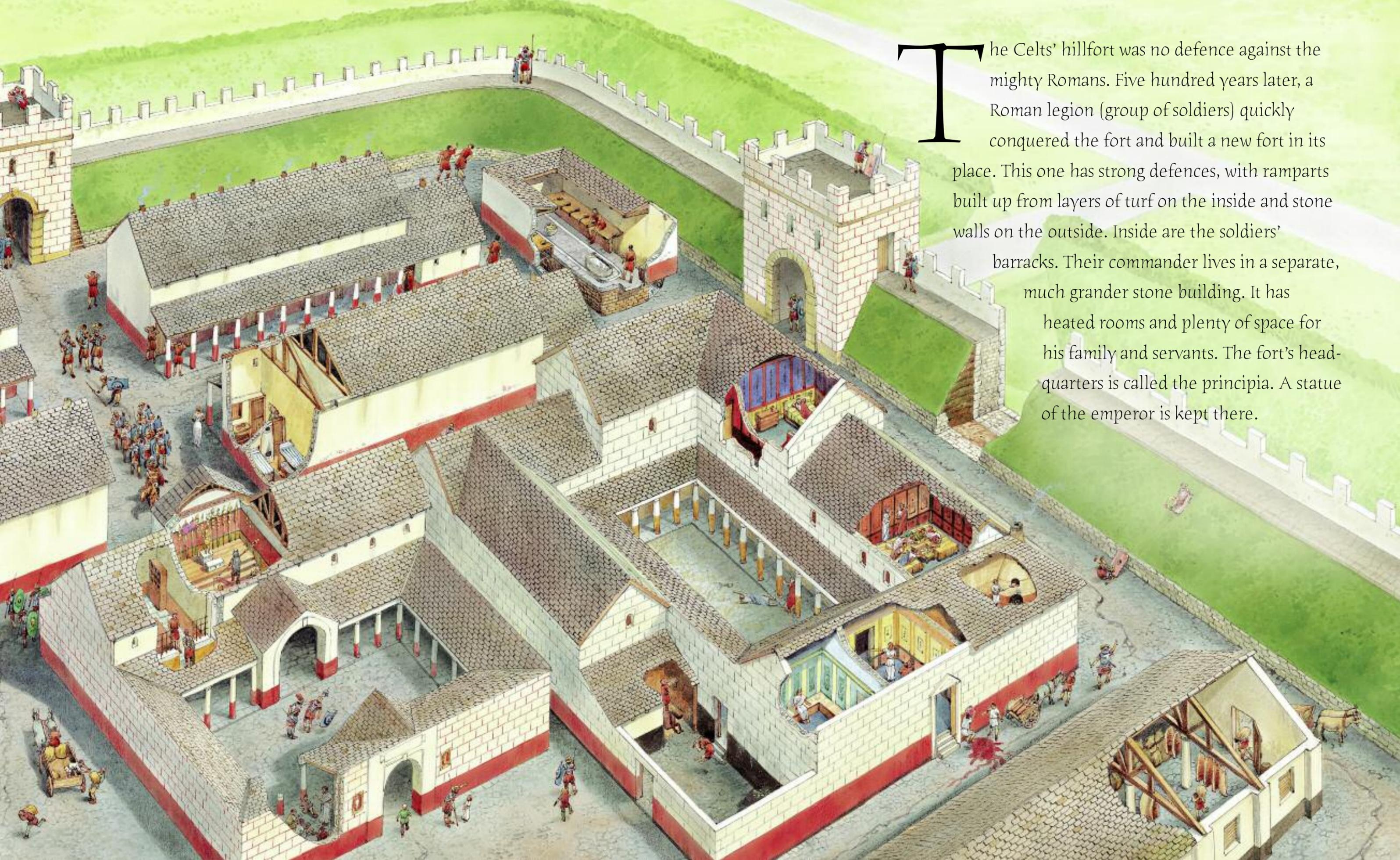
However, the story of castles actually starts many hundreds of years before the Middle Ages ...



It is the year 600 BC. Some farming people decide to build their village on a hilltop. The villagers' houses are round and made mostly of wood. Each has a cone-shaped framework of branches held up by posts driven into the ground. Bundles of reeds (a thatch) form a roof, while dried mud or stone makes up the outside walls.

To protect their village, the people build up "walls" of earth called ramparts all round it. On top of the ramparts they erect wooden fences called palisades. Safe inside the hillfort, the villagers tend their animals, cook food, chop wood, grind corn and weave cloth.



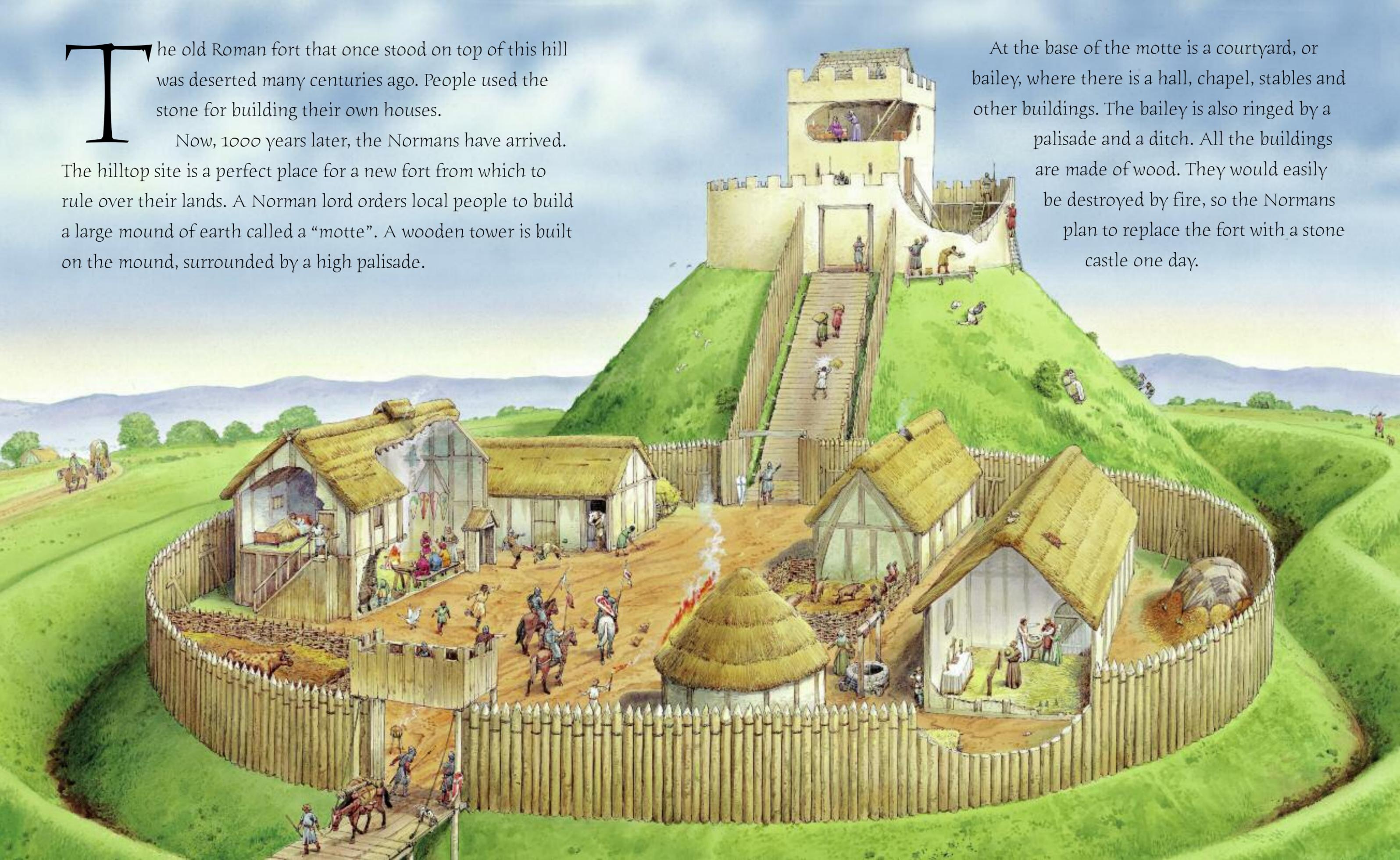


The Celts' hillfort was no defence against the mighty Romans. Five hundred years later, a Roman legion (group of soldiers) quickly conquered the fort and built a new fort in its place. This one has strong defences, with ramparts built up from layers of turf on the inside and stone walls on the outside. Inside are the soldiers' barracks. Their commander lives in a separate, much grander stone building. It has heated rooms and plenty of space for his family and servants. The fort's headquarters is called the principia. A statue of the emperor is kept there.

The old Roman fort that once stood on top of this hill was deserted many centuries ago. People used the stone for building their own houses.

Now, 1000 years later, the Normans have arrived. The hilltop site is a perfect place for a new fort from which to rule over their lands. A Norman lord orders local people to build a large mound of earth called a "motte". A wooden tower is built on the mound, surrounded by a high palisade.

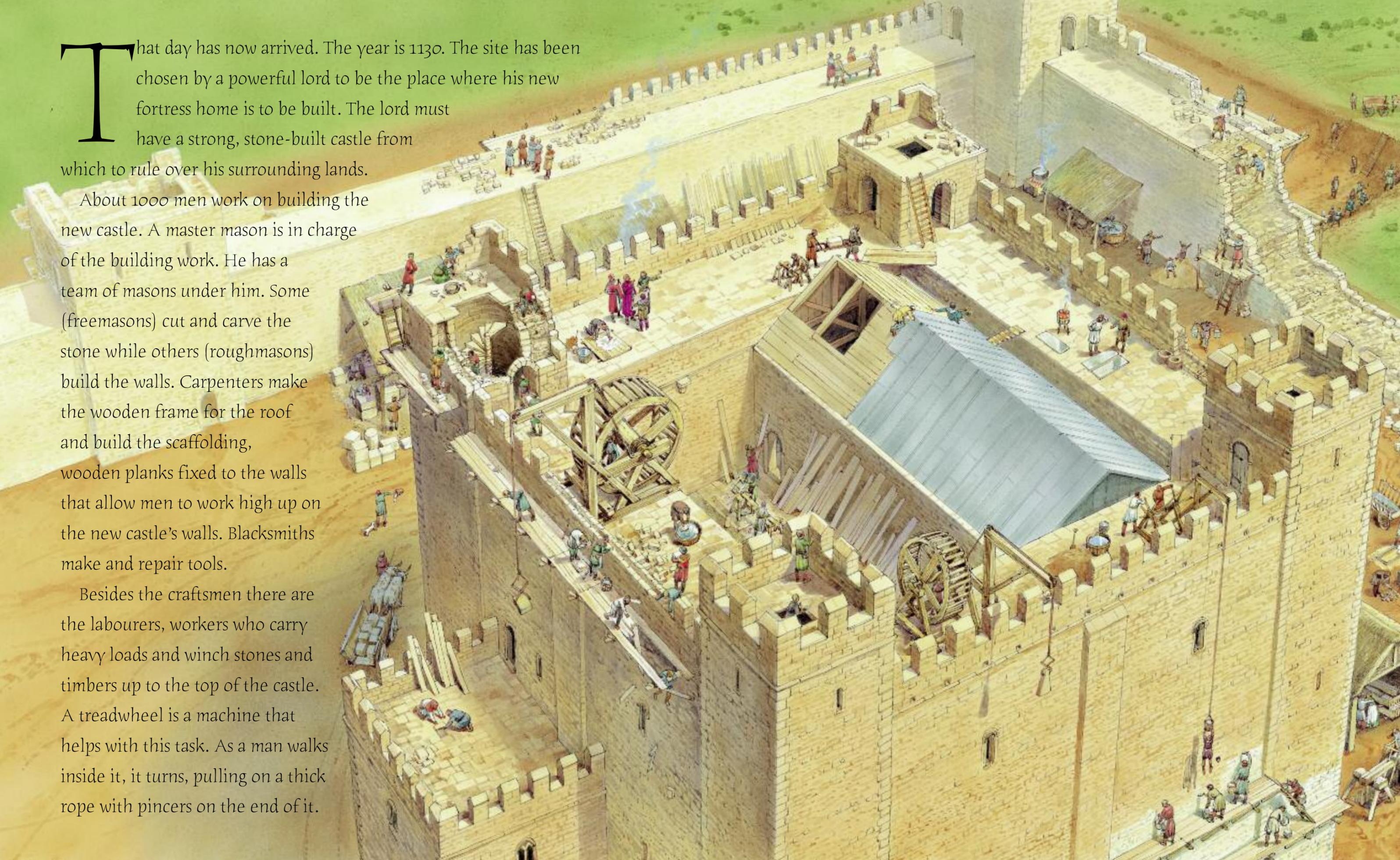
At the base of the motte is a courtyard, or bailey, where there is a hall, chapel, stables and other buildings. The bailey is also ringed by a palisade and a ditch. All the buildings are made of wood. They would easily be destroyed by fire, so the Normans plan to replace the fort with a stone castle one day.

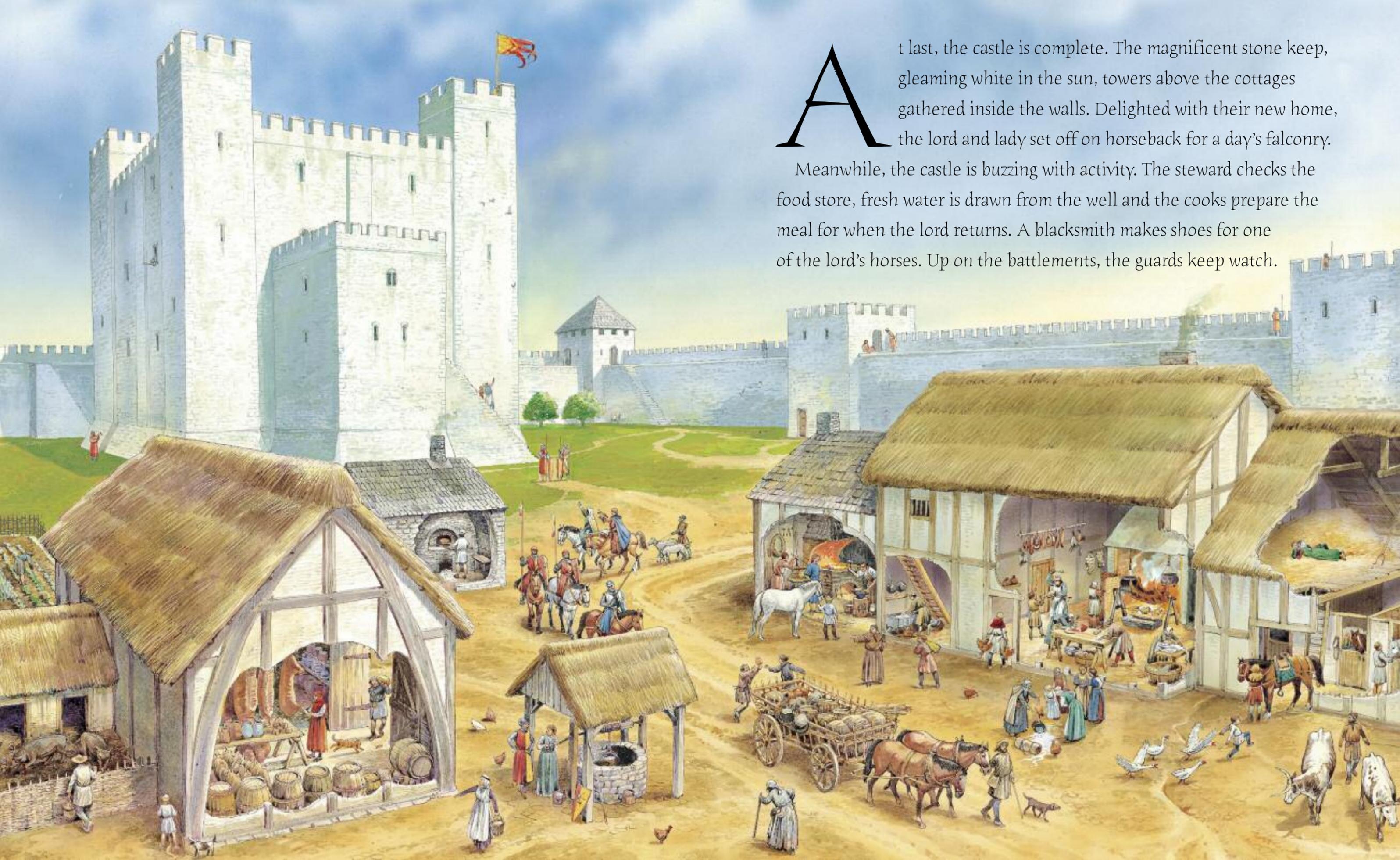


That day has now arrived. The year is 1130. The site has been chosen by a powerful lord to be the place where his new fortress home is to be built. The lord must have a strong, stone-built castle from which to rule over his surrounding lands.

About 1000 men work on building the new castle. A master mason is in charge of the building work. He has a team of masons under him. Some (freemasons) cut and carve the stone while others (roughmasons) build the walls. Carpenters make the wooden frame for the roof and build the scaffolding, wooden planks fixed to the walls that allow men to work high up on the new castle's walls. Blacksmiths make and repair tools.

Besides the craftsmen there are the labourers, workers who carry heavy loads and winch stones and timbers up to the top of the castle. A treadwheel is a machine that helps with this task. As a man walks inside it, it turns, pulling on a thick rope with pincers on the end of it.





A

t last, the castle is complete. The magnificent stone keep, gleaming white in the sun, towers above the cottages gathered inside the walls. Delighted with their new home, the lord and lady set off on horseback for a day's falconry.

Meanwhile, the castle is buzzing with activity. The steward checks the food store, fresh water is drawn from the well and the cooks prepare the meal for when the lord returns. A blacksmith makes shoes for one of the lord's horses. Up on the battlements, the guards keep watch.



We are in the great hall. A grand banquet is in full swing in honour of the lord's guest, a neighbouring baron. The two men have made an alliance, an agreement to help defend each other's lands in the event of war. It is time to celebrate!

The servants bring in the dishes. The first to be served are the lord and lady and their guests. They sit at the top table, which is covered with a linen tablecloth. They eat off gold and silver plates and drink from individual cups. The meat is carved at the lord's table and the best pieces are served to him and his honoured guests.

The other diners sit at trestle tables. Their food is served up on dishes called messes. Each mess is shared between three or four people. They eat not from plates but from trenchers, slices of stale bread that soak up the gravy (afterwards they will be given to the poor to eat). They share their drinks from jugs. Table manners are important—although not everyone cares about them!

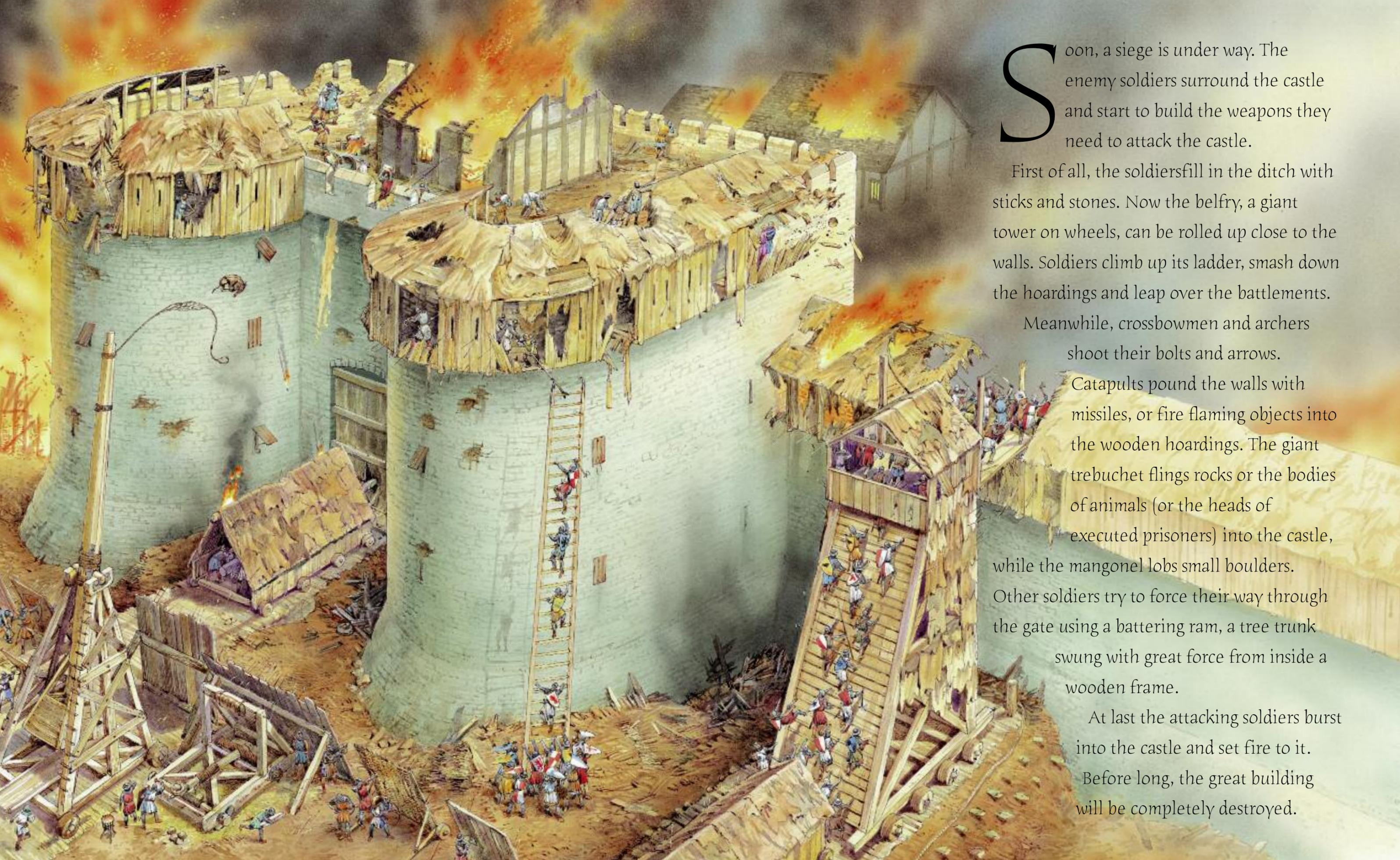
The guards are in a hurry to prepare the castle's defences. Another baron has found out that two of his rivals have formed an alliance. News has come that he means to destroy the castle.

The castle has impressive defences. A deep ditch and a high wall several metres thick run all round it. The castle gateway is especially strong. A drawbridge that crosses the ditch could be quickly raised up to block the entrance. Behind it are heavy gates and two portcullises, heavy gratings that slide down grooves in the walls. Defenders could shoot arrows or drop stones down through "murder holes" on to the heads of attackers.

The castle's defenders build wooden hoardings around the battlements. From these, men could drop missiles on attackers standing close to the walls. Workers stretch damp hides over the hoardings to protect them from fire.

Preparations are nearly complete. Will the castle be strong enough to withstand enemy attack?





Soon, a siege is under way. The enemy soldiers surround the castle and start to build the weapons they need to attack the castle.

First of all, the soldiers fill in the ditch with sticks and stones. Now the belfry, a giant tower on wheels, can be rolled up close to the walls. Soldiers climb up its ladder, smash down the hoardings and leap over the battlements.

Meanwhile, crossbowmen and archers shoot their bolts and arrows.

Catapults pound the walls with missiles, or fire flaming objects into the wooden hoardings. The giant trebuchet flings rocks or the bodies of animals (or the heads of executed prisoners) into the castle, while the mangonel lobs small boulders. Other soldiers try to force their way through the gate using a battering ram, a tree trunk swung with great force from inside a wooden frame.

At last the attacking soldiers burst into the castle and set fire to it.

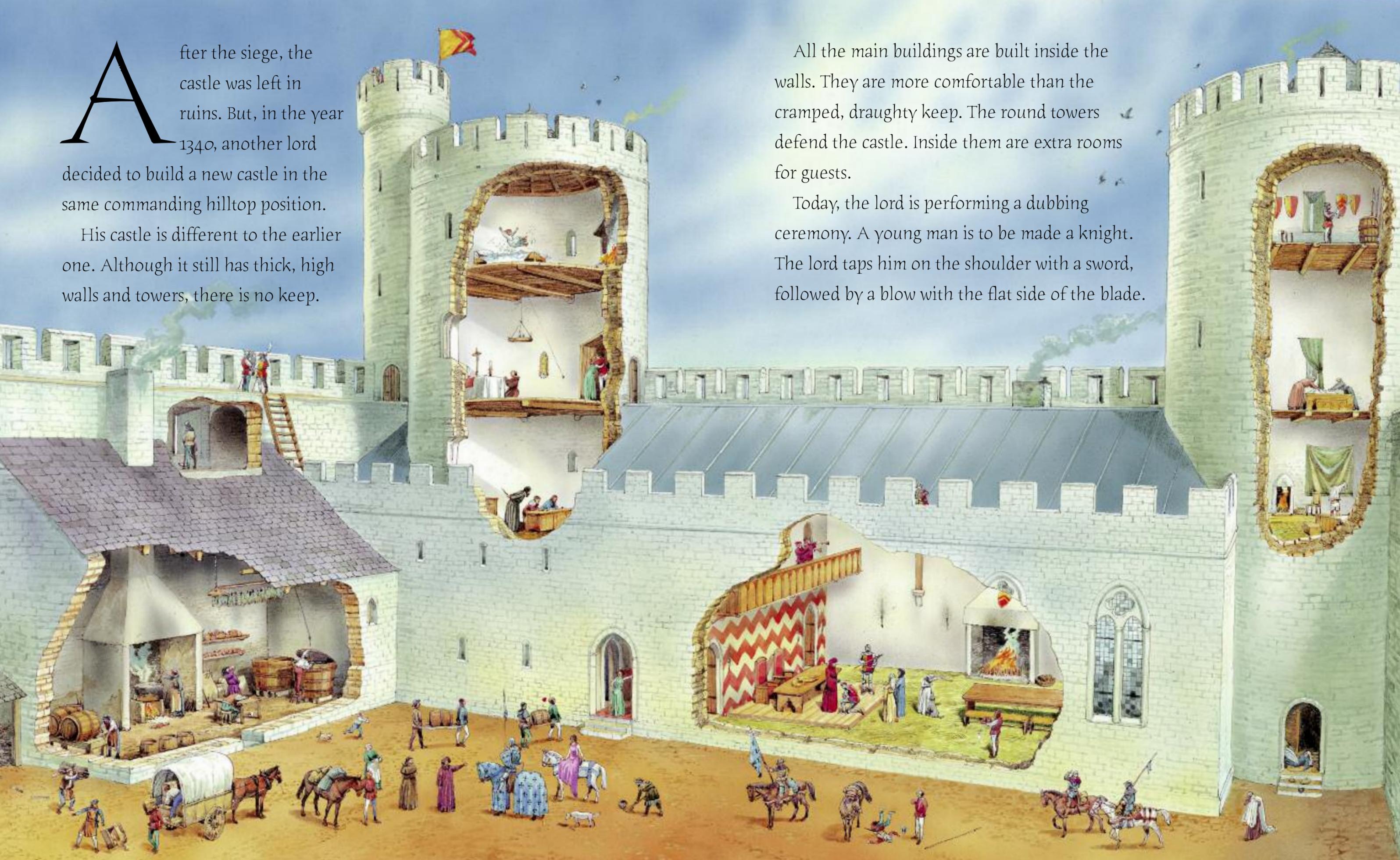
Before long, the great building will be completely destroyed.

After the siege, the castle was left in ruins. But, in the year 1340, another lord decided to build a new castle in the same commanding hilltop position.

His castle is different to the earlier one. Although it still has thick, high walls and towers, there is no keep.

All the main buildings are built inside the walls. They are more comfortable than the cramped, draughty keep. The round towers defend the castle. Inside them are extra rooms for guests.

Today, the lord is performing a dubbing ceremony. A young man is to be made a knight. The lord taps him on the shoulder with a sword, followed by a blow with the flat side of the blade.



Since being rebuilt, the castle suffered no further attacks. Two hundred and fifty years later, the castle is still a noble residence, but it no longer needs its strong defences. The family who now live there can enjoy their home in peace.

The arrow slits have been replaced by glass windows that let in more light. To the tops of the towers, no longer required as look-out positions, tall, pointed roofs have been added.



Hundreds of years later, the castle has fallen to ruin. The noble family that once lived there has moved away. Nobody has come to live in it since. The gardens have become overgrown.

Tiles have fallen from the roofs.

The weather has damaged the insides of the castle beyond repair. The gleaming white limewash has flaked off the walls.

Shrubs start to grow inside rooms left open to the skies.

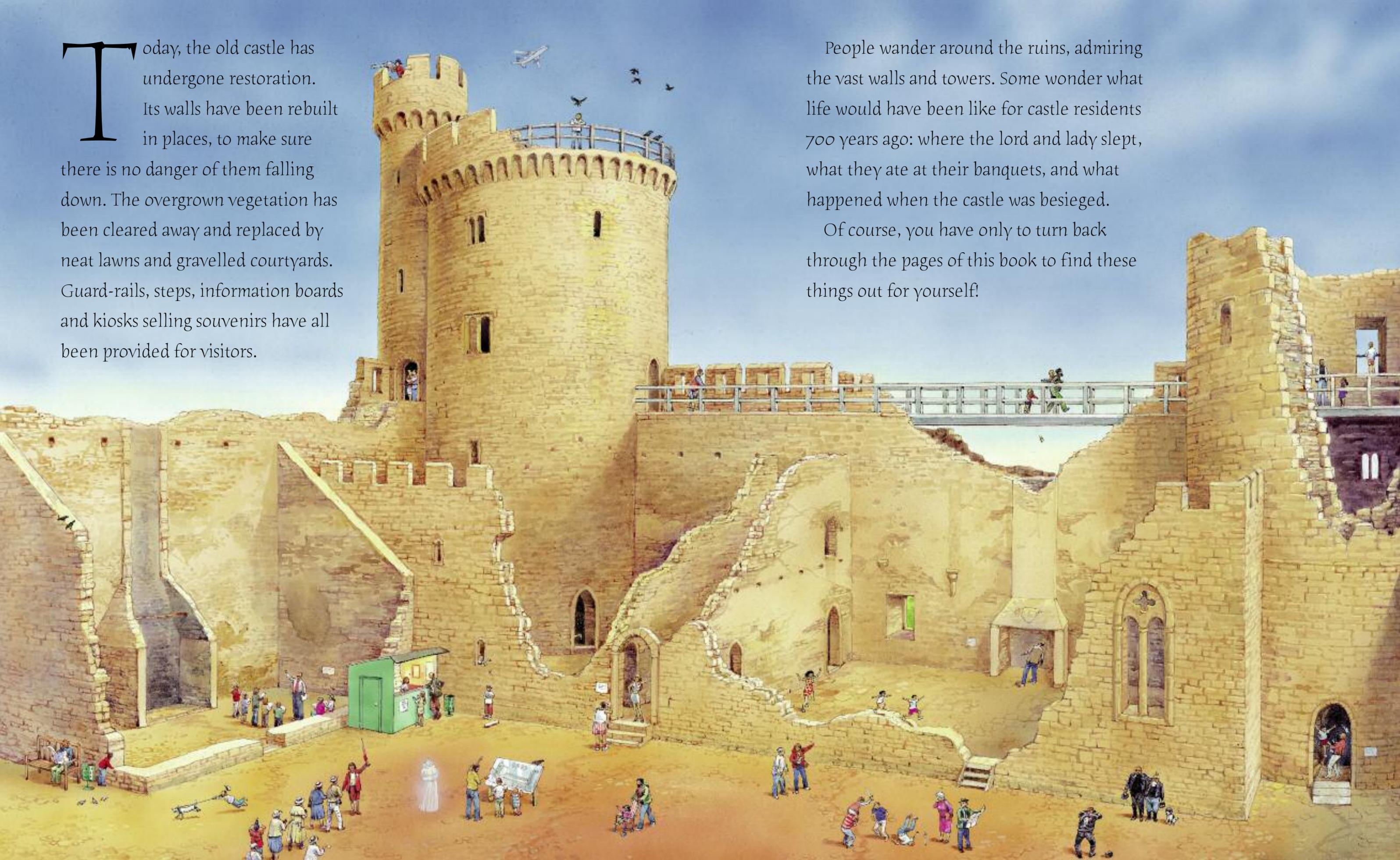
Soon, people from nearby villages visit the castle. They start to chip away at the walls and take away stone, tiles and timber – useful for building or repairing their own homes. Also visiting the castle are others curious to discover how people lived so many hundreds of years ago. Some find the ruins so fascinating that they decide to paint pictures of them.



Today, the old castle has undergone restoration. Its walls have been rebuilt in places, to make sure there is no danger of them falling down. The overgrown vegetation has been cleared away and replaced by neat lawns and gravelled courtyards. Guard-rails, steps, information boards and kiosks selling souvenirs have all been provided for visitors.

People wander around the ruins, admiring the vast walls and towers. Some wonder what life would have been like for castle residents 700 years ago: where the lord and lady slept, what they ate at their banquets, and what happened when the castle was besieged.

Of course, you have only to turn back through the pages of this book to find these things out for yourself!





A tournament usually took place takes on fields just outside castle walls. The area in which the events were staged was called the lists. Knights set up their tents close by. Each was bedecked with his colours and coat of arms. His squire helped him put on his armour and his helmet.

QUINTAIN

A useful training for the joust was to take part in a game called quintain. The quintain was a post with a spinning arm at the top. At one end was a shield, at the other, a heavy sack of sand. The squire (a young man learning to be a knight) had to aim his lance exactly at the middle of the shield. If he struck it off-centre, the sack of sand would instantly swing round and knock him off his horse.



A TOURNAMENT

A knight was granted land from a noble lord in return for 40 days' military service each year. The rest of the year knights would attend tournaments, fighting mock battles for money. It was also an opportunity to practise fighting skills and show prowess in combat.

The joust was a popular tournament event. Proceedings began with heralds announcing the knightly deeds of the contestants. Then two knights charged at each other on horseback either side of a barrier called a tilt. The object was to knock the opponent off his horse using a lance, a blunted wooden spear. Points were also scored for striking an opponent's body. If the points were even, the contest continued on foot with swords. The victorious knight could choose either to claim his opponent's horse and armour, or hold his opponent to ransom.

GLOSSARY

Arrow loops Narrow slits in castle walls through which arrows were fired.

Bailey An open area enclosed by the castle walls.

Baron A wealthy nobleman who promised to be loyal to the king. In return, he was given lands.

Battlements The tops of castle walls.



The castle was a home for the lord and his family. The lady took charge of the castle while the lord was away. Noble families were powerful and wealthy in the Middle Ages, owning vast lands.

Belfry A tower used by soldiers laying siege to a castle. As tall as the castle battlements, it was wheeled against the walls during an attack.

Curtain wall The outer wall of a castle.



One way of breaking down a castle's walls was by undermining. Miners dug a tunnel beneath the walls, then set fire to the wooden props. The tunnel collapsed, bringing down the walls above it.

KNIGHTS AND CHIVALRY



Knights were the most important fighting men of the Middle Ages. Skilled in combat and horsemanship, they were also expected to be chivalrous (honourable and brave). The first knights wore chainmail coats, made of thousands of metal rings linked together. By the 1400s, knights had switched to suits of plate armour (left), which were more protective.

Drawbridge A bridge across a moat or ditch that could be lifted up to prevent entry to a castle.

Gatehouse A tower in the castle walls that contained the entrance to the castle.

Hillfort A stronghold built on a hilltop. It was surrounded by ramparts and ditches.

Hoardings Wooden frames built on to the outside of the battlements. They provided extra protection to the guards during sieges.

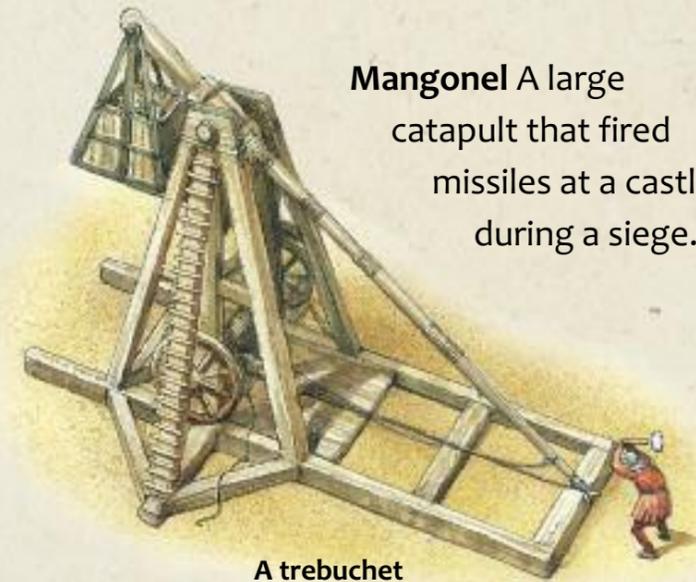


Most castle staircases spiralled upwards in a clockwise direction. This gave the advantage to a defender with a sword in his right hand.

Keep The main stone tower inside the castle walls. It housed the living quarters for the castle's residents.

Knight A fighting man who promised loyalty to a baron. He was expected to be honourable and brave.

Limewash A mixture of lime and water used for painting castle walls.



A trebuchet

Mason A builder in stone.

Motte A steep mound of earth on top of which a tower was built. A motte-and-bailey was an early type of castle.

Murder holes Holes in the floor above the entrance in the gatehouse. They allowed guards to fire arrows or drop missiles on to enemy soldiers below.

Palisades A fence built from wooden stakes used to protect an area or settlement.

Portcullis A heavy wooden grating that could be slid down to close a gateway at the entrance of a castle.



Crossbowman

Ramparts Defensive mounds built around an area or settlement.



Falconer

Siege The surrounding of a castle by an enemy army to prevent supplies from entering it and anyone inside from leaving it.

Trebuchet A giant catapult that hurled large missiles into a castle during a siege. It was powered using heavy weights.

SOLDIERS AND WEAPONS

The troops a lord could call upon to defend his castle included knights, bowmen and footsoldiers. Besides longbows and crossbows, a number of different weapons were used in battle. A glaive was used against mounted soldiers, while a sword was effective in close combat. Maces and axes were best weapons for smashing helmets and body armour.



Glaive Sword Mace Axe

