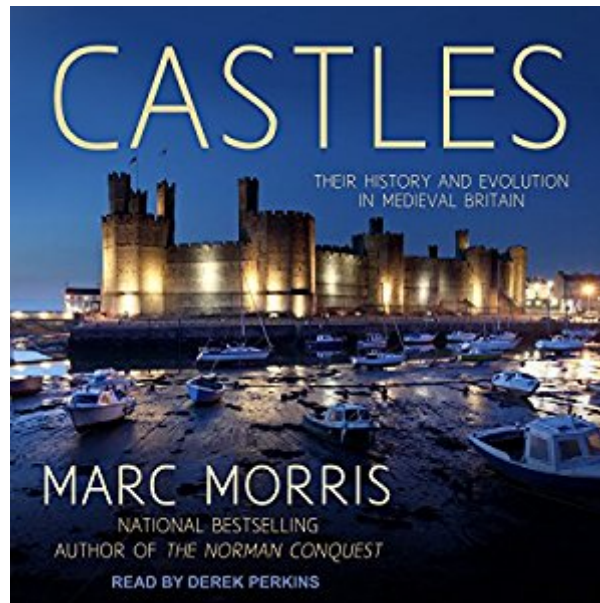


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# Castles: Their History And Evolution In Medieval Britain



## Synopsis

Beginning with their introduction in the 11th century, and ending with their widespread abandonment in the 17th, Marc Morris explores many of the country's most famous castles, as well as some spectacular lesser-known examples. At times this is an epic tale, driven by characters like William the Conqueror, King John, and Edward I, full of sieges and conquest on an awesome scale. But it is also by turns an intimate story of less eminent individuals, whose adventures, struggles, and ambitions were reflected in the fortified residences they constructed. Be it ever so grand or ever so humble, a castle was first and foremost a home. To understand castles - who built them, who lived in them, and why - is to understand the forces that shaped medieval Britain.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 9 hours 18 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: April 4, 2017

Language: English

ASIN: B06XSS9M5G

Best Sellers Rank: #45 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Architecture  
#750 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Europe #1253 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Military

## Customer Reviews

It brings a whole new level of appreciation for castles and the incredible place they hold in our history.

Castles are recognized as seats of power. At once fortresses and homes, they conjure images of medieval knights and fairy tale princesses. But what are they exactly? In *CASTLES: Their History and Evolution in Medieval Britain*, author Marc Morris takes readers on a tour of some of the greatest, most important, most beautiful and most interesting castles in England, Wales and Scotland. While each castle is visually striking, Morris puts his examples into historical context, providing history lessons from a unique vantage point. Seeking to answer the question of how to precisely define castles, he has created a riveting tale of politics and violence, technology and

innovation. Castles are potent symbols, illuminating the strengths and weaknesses, goals and dreams, of their inhabitants, and the ingenuity and skill of their designers and builders. Amidst the swirl of war, religion, technology and nation building, castles in medieval Britain served the purpose of defending and protecting communities as well as a means of cultural and personal expression. Morris's account begins in the ninth century with the "Humble Origins" of castles in Britain. The structures themselves were modeled on those already being built and utilized in the Normandy region of France. And, in fact, many of the great architects of British castles were Normans who were hired to replicate French designs or create new ones for the specific needs of their British patrons. Starting in 1051 with King Edward and moving forward through time, Morris chronicles how Britain was shaped by castles and, in turn, shaped castles to meet its needs. From the early Norman-style defensive structures, castles evolved in times of peace and prosperity into luxurious homes for the aristocratic and royal families of Britain. And, in times of conflict and need, these less defensible castles were called upon to serve as vital war posts, even when they had not really been designed to do so. From the first earthwork motte-and-bailey designs found in England to Raglan Castle, the victim of a late medieval siege, these castles tell us much about the world in which they were built. So much of what we associate with the medieval period in Britain, from the Magna Carta to the Bayeux Tapestry, from THE CANTERBURY TALES to the Hundred Years War, is found in CASTLES as Morris deftly weaves together the many strands of real life and history. For example, while the code of chivalry comes quickly to mind for many of us thinking about the Middle Ages, few know that engineers working for Edward I in 1277 straightened a three-mile stretch of the River Clwyd in order to better situate Rhuddlan Castle on the waterway. And perhaps too few are aware of the treadmill cranes, both amazing and dangerous, that were employed to build these monumental structures. CASTLES is a fascinating examination of castles not only as architecture but in terms of their functions as defensive structures, their livability, and their place in English history. Morris's slim yet detailed book moves us beyond an I-know-it-when-I-see-it impression and toward a real understanding of these buildings, creating a more vivid, rich and accurate view of England, Wales and Scotland in the medieval period. Reviewed by Sarah Rachel Egelman

This is the first book of Marc Morris's I have read, and I look forward to more - I have his "King John" on the way right now - his writing is interesting, engaging, and even a bit cheeky - this is a good introduction to the evolution of castles in Britain, in the context of important events/transitions in

British history from the Norman conquest, to struggles for supremacy over belligerent kingdoms, to the English Civil War, and the important Continental influences on castle structure. Most of my reading to date has been on Plantagenet era - so his explanations of the Norman Conquest in the beginning and the Civil War at the end, made a very good primer for me. Well-illustrated and relevant illustrations as well. The first-hand accounts from chroniclers, official documents, and other sources were very interesting. Just a few things kept me from giving it higher marks: a) I think a map would have been helpful, b) I appreciated the context, but several times in the book the author strayed from focus on the buildings to straight biography, and took awhile getting back, and c) the Suggested Reading at the back is good, but I'm not sure general readers will have easy access to many of the academic references and I don't feel he sufficiently documented many of the first-hand accounts in the book.

Great story-telling and correlating of bits of information so you get a feel for the multi-roles that castles served. To give you a glimpse of the book here's a few of the things discussed in the first chapter: The first castles were built in France and the word "castle" is French. Normandy is the location where the Norsemen (Vikings) settled in France. Around 500 English castles were built between 1066-1100. It was impossible for William the Conqueror to rule England so he set up the hierarchal feudal system.

In his marvelously entertaining and educational CASTLES, medieval historian Marc Morris (The Norman Conquest) charts the evolution of the castle over a period of 600 years--beginning with King Edward the Confessor in 1051 and fading out in the 17th century after the English Civil War. Morris reveals the changing role of castles and some of the dramatic events that have happened within their walls. With an expert's eye for detail and a storyteller's charm for making history personal, Morris explains how these amazing structures were built, rebuilt, extended and adapted to function not only as defensive fortresses but also as luxurious homes. CASTLES was originally published in the U.K. in 2003 (and immediately turned into a six-part documentary for British TV), but this is the first time it has been published in the United States. It is a vital, stirring and energetic overview of medieval British history while also serving as a travel guide to these long-standing and iconic fortresses. Morris is enthusiastic and confident as a tour guide and his writing is wry, well researched, accessible and entertaining. (He calls Bodiam Castle "a pin-up castle" because it's used in so many ads, calendars and movies.) History buffs, armchair travelers and Anglophiles will enjoy the fascinating history behind these massive structures and will delight in this engaging

guide's more than 50 photographs and illustrations. Historian Marc Morris's CASTLES offers an enthusiastic and marvelously entertaining socio-architectural history covering 600 years of British castles.

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