

Burg Kronberg



**Welcome to
Burg Kronberg im Taunus!**

History of Kronberg Castle

The history of Kronberg castle and its grounds begins at the end of the 12th century, when the Holy Roman Emperor ordered the knights of Eschborn to build a castle on a rocky outcrop on the southern slopes of the Taunus. The first documentary reference to the knights as the Lords of Kronberg was in 1230.

A visitor to this castle complex, which with its 18,000m² is one of the most extensive in Germany, will get a clear idea of what life used to be like at the castle. It was an economic entity with lords and their underlings and cattle, and stables, barns, a blacksmith and a bakery and a manure heap. The harvest was stored in the attic of the middle castle. At the beginning of the 19th century the economic conditions changed. Castles were now something to admire and visit. They were no longer lived in by the families who had built them.



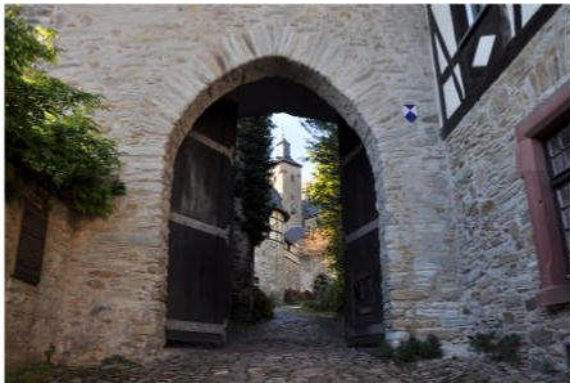
Kronberg castle comprises three castles from three eras: The Romanesque upper castle with its keep is the oldest part of the castle (circa 1170-1200). The lower castle, which has now almost disappeared from view, was built at the start of the 14th century. The middle castle has two buildings at right angles to each other and was built in the 14th and 15th century and marks the transition from a defensive to a residential castle.

There have been many alterations, renovations and extensions to the castle over the centuries. However, the ground plan of the castle has remained largely unchanged since the Middle Ages. This fortunate circumstance is explained by the fact that, after the last Lord of Kronberg died in 1704, the castle continued to be used. Among other things it was used as living accommodation and workshops, for storage, as council offices, as a prison and above all as a school and even as a painter's studio.

In 1891 Kaiser Wilhelm II gave the castle as a Christmas present to his mother, the Empress Victoria of Germany, "Kaiserin Friedrich" (the oldest daughter of Queen Victoria of Great Britain). She had the castle restored under the management of the architect Louis Jacobi and planned to open a museum. Her plan was to restore the castle to the way it would have looked when the last of the Lords of Kronberg lived here. Unfortunately, Empress Victoria died already in 1901. Her youngest daughter Margarethe, together with her husband Landgraf Friedrich Karl von Hessen, completed the work, and the first museum was opened to the public in 1912. The Kronberg Castle Foundation (Stiftung Burg Kronberg im Taunus) owns the castle since 1994.

The Lower Castle

Visitors enter the castle grounds through the impressive gate house which was built in 1478. There was originally another gate which protected this entrance.

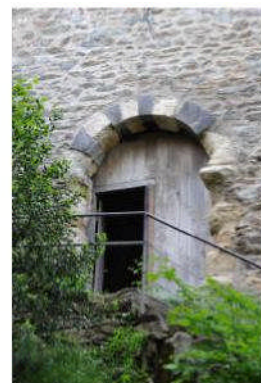


The lower castle was built in the early 14th century and today all that remains are the gate house, the chapel and the underground vaults, which it is no longer possible to visit.

The main altar of the chapel was consecrated in 1342. The chapel served as the place of worship for Kronberg's Catholic population from the 17th to 19th century. During the Second World War the chapel was badly damaged by a firebomb. The roof of the nave has never been rebuilt. It is now the private burial place of the family of the Landgrave of Hessen (not open to the public).

The Upper Castle

The oldest part of the castle, the Romanesque upper castle, is accessible through the gate tower, also called the chapel tower because of the chapel which used to be above the doorway. The castle walls of the upper castle enclose 750m² and date back to the 12th and 13th centuries. At that time the courtyard would have been densely packed with stables, living quarters and battlements, all built very closely together. These buildings have disappeared over the centuries.



There is historical evidence suggesting that the oldest part of the castle which is visible today, however, is the pentagonal tower, built in about 1175. At first it would have been used as living quarters. The keep is the most striking part of the castle grounds. It was built in about 1200. Beneath the entrance is the dungeon. In 1500 the keep was extended to the height of about 44 metres and the walls in the lower part were strengthened, making them more than 3 metres thick.

This meant that it could better withstand an assault involving firearms which were just being developed at this point in history. Two cannon balls are cemented into the wall facing the valley. As in many castle and city walls of the time the cannon balls were cemented into the wall to ward off evil spirits.

There is a narrow staircase up the tower, open to the public. A tower watchman lived in the upper part of the tower with his family until 1839. On a clear day one has an unparalleled view of the Rhine Main plateau from the Wetterau region to the Spessart and Odenwald mountains and further over the hills of Rhine Hessen.

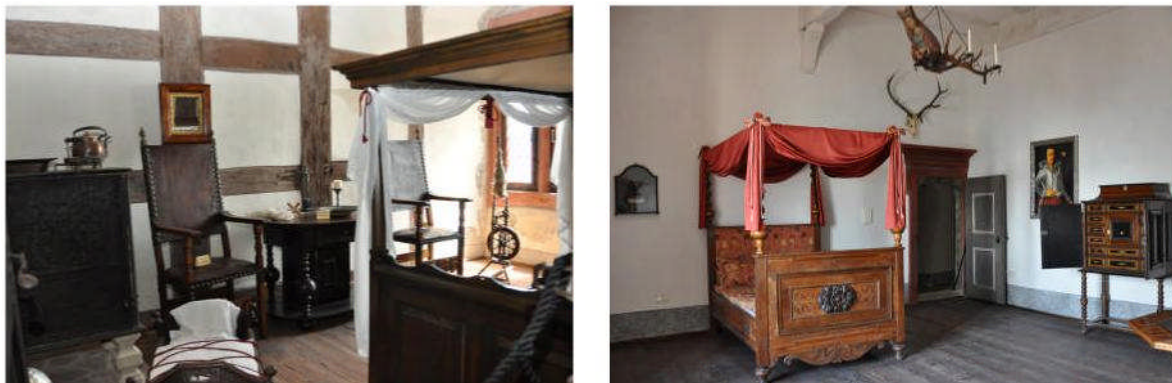
Between the keep and the gate tower the view opens out to the south on to the old town and the middle castle. To the north the view is onto the neighbouring castle at Falkenstein and the keep at Koenigstein castle.

The Middle Castle

The inner courtyard of the Middle castle is framed by the “Grand House” (1320) with its magnificent flag tower and the north wing with its octagonal tower (completed in 1505). Empress Victoria instructed the architect Louis Jacobi to rebuild the battlements on the basis of historical examples of this type of battlement which she had researched. A beautiful hydrangea planted around 1900 climbs up the wall of the courtyard spreading out in all directions.



The north wing houses the newly designed castle museum, which opened in 2008. Various rooms showcase the history of the building and its owners and inhabitants over the centuries.

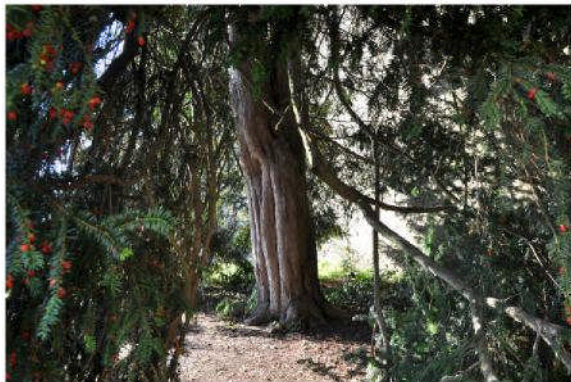




Yew Grove and Gardens

A bailey protected the castle on its vulnerable north side. In the 15th century it was strengthened considerably by the addition of curtain walls and defensive towers. For defensive reasons the whole castle mound area was kept free of plants of any great height until the last of the Lords of Kronberg died. From 1704 onwards the grounds became formal gardens and parks. In time the yew grove grew out of a park left to run wild; it became another unique feature of the castle.

About 200 yew trees can be counted, some of which are over 200 years old. Since 2009, the grove is a specially protected nature reserve. Yew trees have been common in Europe for thousands of years. The pine forests of the Germanic tribes were yew forests. Today the yew tree has almost disappeared as a forest tree. This small grove is, therefore, rare. Walking around the marked circular trail, visitors get to feel the unique atmosphere of a yew forest, devoid of undergrowth: there are great bare patches of earth as no plant can grow beneath a yew tree.



Since time immemorial the wood of the yew tree has been used in carpentry and cabinet making. This is because it is a hard, flexible wood which weathers very well. In the Middle Ages yew was very important for making archers' bows and crossbows. The two most beautiful yew trees have been awarded the special status of a natural monument. They have a diameter of 65cm at a height of 1m.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Princes' garden was changed from a vegetable garden to a formal garden in shades of green (Viridarium). Empress Victoria's archivist said of the Prince's garden: "The garden is so perfectly situated, the view is so extensive, and you rarely find a garden to compare to it." The yew trees are pruned into balls and columns emphasising their decorative qualities.



The Prince's tower with its baroque dome stands on the foundations of an earlier tower. It was only built in 1911/12 at the request of Prince Friedrich Karl von Hessen.

The Teacher's Garden, just below the Princes' Garden, was used by the teachers of the Catholic school in the castle for their own needs since the 18th century. Today the volunteers of the Association of the Friends of the Castle plant varieties of vegetables and fruit which are threatened with extinction.



City Museum at the castle gate

At the entrance to the castle a flight of steps leads up to the City Museum (Museum Stadtgeschichte Kronberg) with a permanent exhibition about the history of the city of Kronberg. The first part of the exhibition shows 'old Kronberg' from the time the castle was founded to the end of the Elector of Mainz's era (1802). The second part is entitled 'getting beyond the walls'. It deals with the period from 1802 under the reign of the House of Nassau and then Prussia until the beginning of the 20th century. It focuses on the development of Kronberg from a town of tradesmen and farmers to a desirable residential area for wealthy Frankfurt families, the arrival of the railway (1874), Empress Victoria and the Kronberg Artists' colony.

