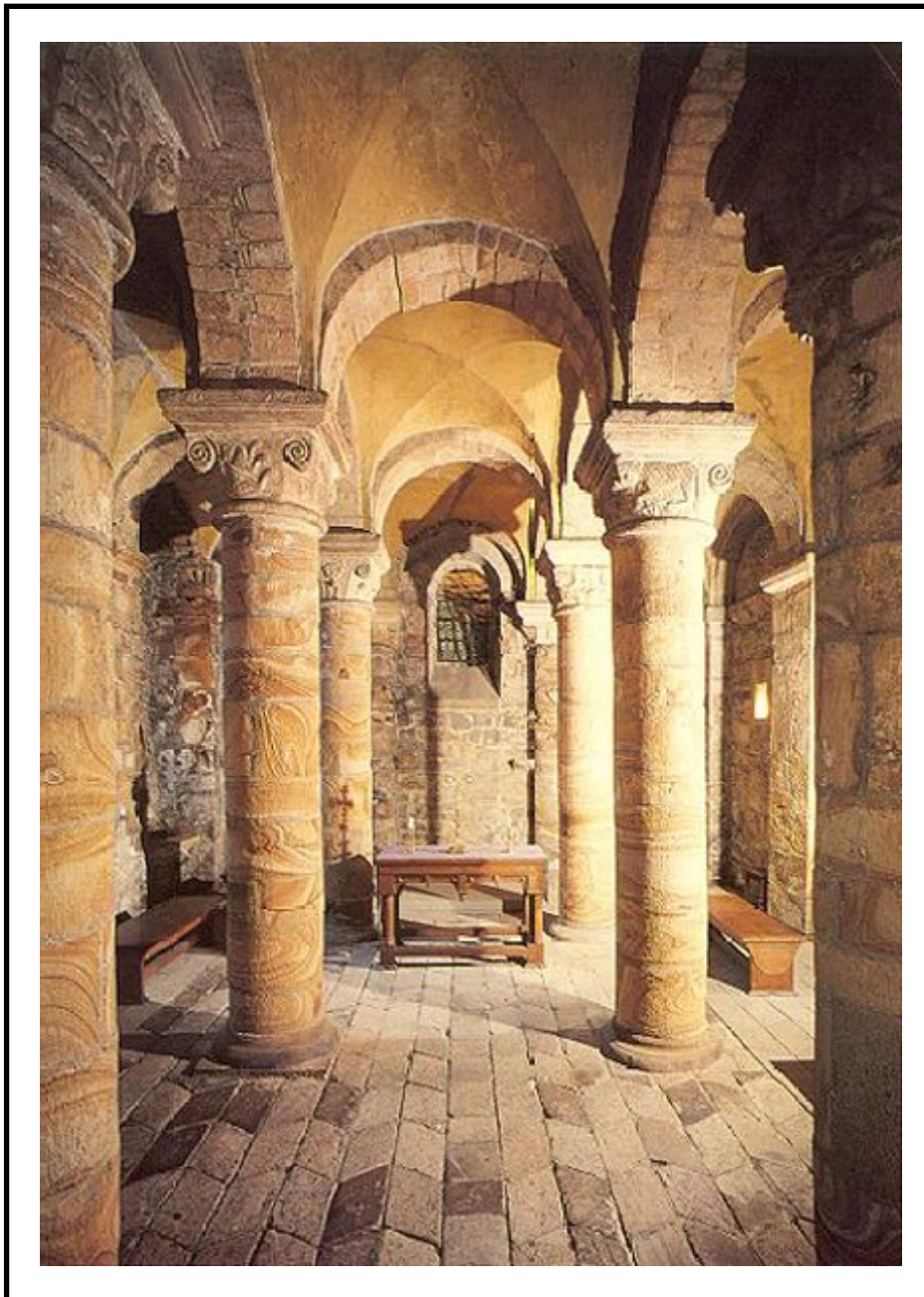


## Norman Architecture in Durham

An Introduction to Romanesque or Norman Architecture.

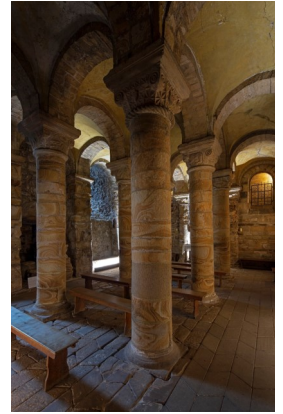
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# Romanesque or Norman Architecture in Durham Castle

## When and Where was Romanesque Architecture Made?

Romanesque buildings, despite what the name suggests, are a style of buildings found after the Roman period. There is ongoing debate amongst historians as to the exact start date, with the earliest suggestions being the 6th century, but most agree on an origin around the 11th century. Buildings in this style are found across Europe, making it the first pan-European style since the Romans.



The Romanesque style quickly became the dominant type of architecture in western Europe at this time. In Britain, it is often known as 'Norman architecture', as it is synonymous with the many building projects that were instigated by William the Conqueror after his invasion. Within England, the Romanesque style is mainly found in religious buildings, including the cathedrals in Durham, Peterborough, Winchester and Norwich. Romanesque features can also be found in official buildings such as the Tower of London and the castles in Norwich, Rochester, Colchester and Durham. There are even a few Norman domestic features which have survived around the areas of Lincolnshire and Rutland.



The word Romanesque originally meant 'from Rome', however, this is somewhat inaccurate term is now shunned by academics. They argue that this style has its roots in other parts of Europe, and just as misleadingly, is from the time just after the Roman Empire - particularly during the Carolingian Empire under Charlemagne and the Byzantine Empire. That being said, the famous semi-circular arches found throughout Romanesque buildings are thought to have been inspired by the ruins of Roman buildings including aqueducts and churches. It could be argued that these semi-circular arches are what Romanesque architecture is metaphorically and literally built on.

## How do I identify Romanesque Architecture?

Romanesque architecture is characterised by thick walls, thick columns, barrel vaults and semi-circular arches found in windows, doors and arcades.

### Thick walls and Columns

Romanesque architecture is characterised as possessing solid proportions, the reason for this being both practical and stylistic. The thick walls and the small windows prevented these, frequently massive, buildings from becoming structurally unstable. The bottom floor of Norman buildings is often made from a series of arches supported by columns or piers (upright supports). The next level, if present, would contain smaller arches, frequently occurring in pairs with a column between the two.

These arches would reduce in size with each level - as the mass of the building lowers, there is less need for support. Over time, the skills of architects and stone masons improved, leading to less bulky construction techniques. Fantastic examples of these columns and thick walls can be found in the Romanesque masterpiece of Durham Cathedral.



## Semi-circular Arches

These arches, also known as Roman arches, are strong and relatively simple to manufacture. A temporary wooden arch keeps a series of voussoirs (wedge shaped blocks) in place, filling the space between two columns. Once a keystone is placed in the centre of the arch, the temporary wooden support is removed. In many cases mortar was not used, but instead, masons relied on the precision shaping and balancing of the stones to equally distribute the load.

During the Romanesque period, these arches were decorated simply, using geometric shapes, including diapers (repeated patterns of squares or lozenges), chevrons and circles. The circles would echo the half-circle shape of these arches. Decoration on archways, and generally in Norman architecture, was usually symmetrical.



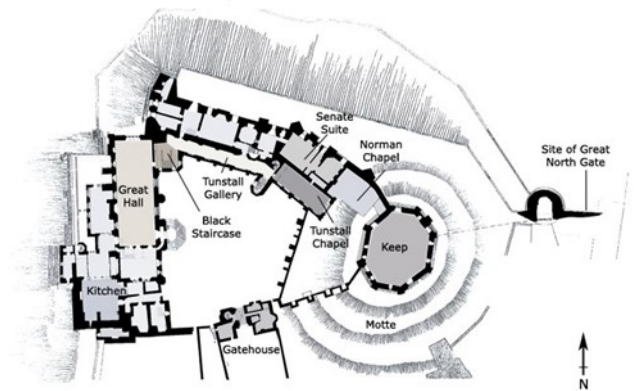
## Vaulted Ceilings

Vaulted ceilings had first been used in Roman times, but experienced a resurgence in the Romanesque period. A series of arches are built side by side resulting in a tunnel with a semi-circular roof. This is known as a barrel vault. When two barrel vaults intersect at right angles they form a groin or cross vault. Cross vaults do not need massive supporting walls to divide a space and require columns only where they support the vault. As the technology developed, windows could be inserted high up under the arches of the vaults, which led to the soaring clerestories of later cathedrals.

Early Romanesque ceilings and roofs were often made of wood. As time passed, architects developed the skills needed to span the two sides of a building using stone, without creating excessive outward stress on the side walls. This development led to stone vaults later in the Romanesque period, which was then superseded by rib vaulting in the Gothic period.

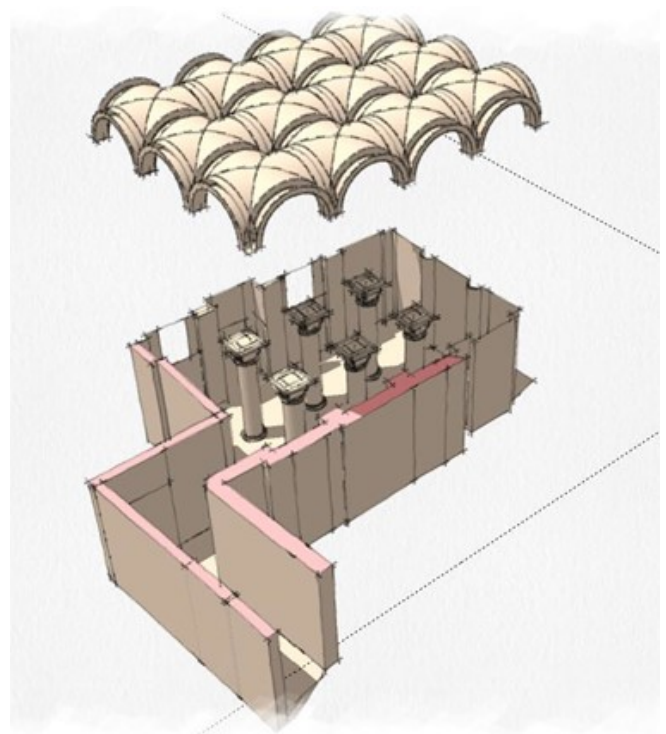
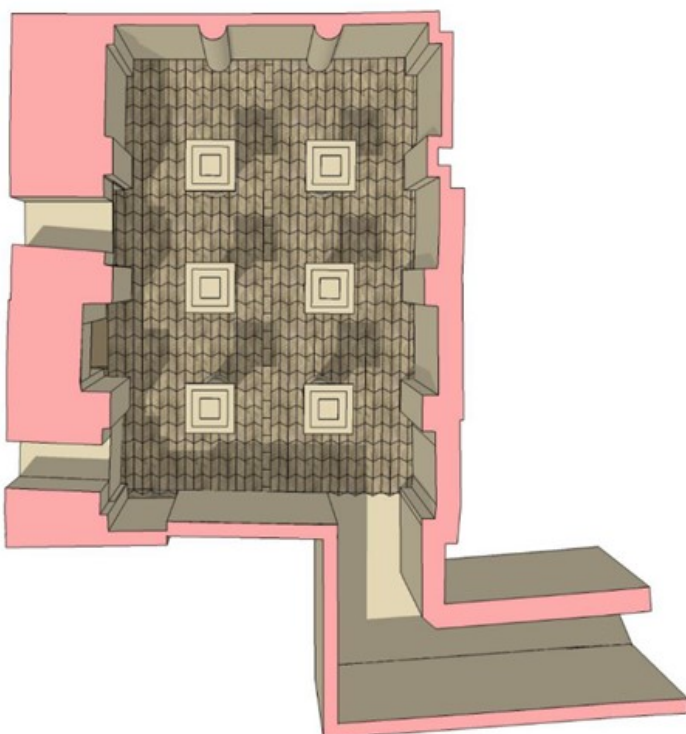
## Durham Castle's Norman Features

Following the Norman Conquest in 1066, building work on Durham Castle began around 1072. The Castle itself conforms to the typical layout of a classic Norman castle. A motte or mound of earth is created, and a keep placed upon it. Then, an inner and outer bailey (a courtyard surrounded by a wooden wall) was constructed. Despite several rebuilds, modifications and extensions over the centuries, Durham Castle still retains some incredible original Norman features.



## The Norman Chapel

The Norman Chapel is one of the most important spaces in Durham Castle. It was constructed around 1080 by Bishop St Calais (1081-96). The chapel is divided into three rows of columns and then into twelve typically Norman cross vaults. The broad Norman style columns appear to be made of solid carved stone, unlike those in Durham Cathedral, which it is hypothesised, are hollow and have been filled with rubble.



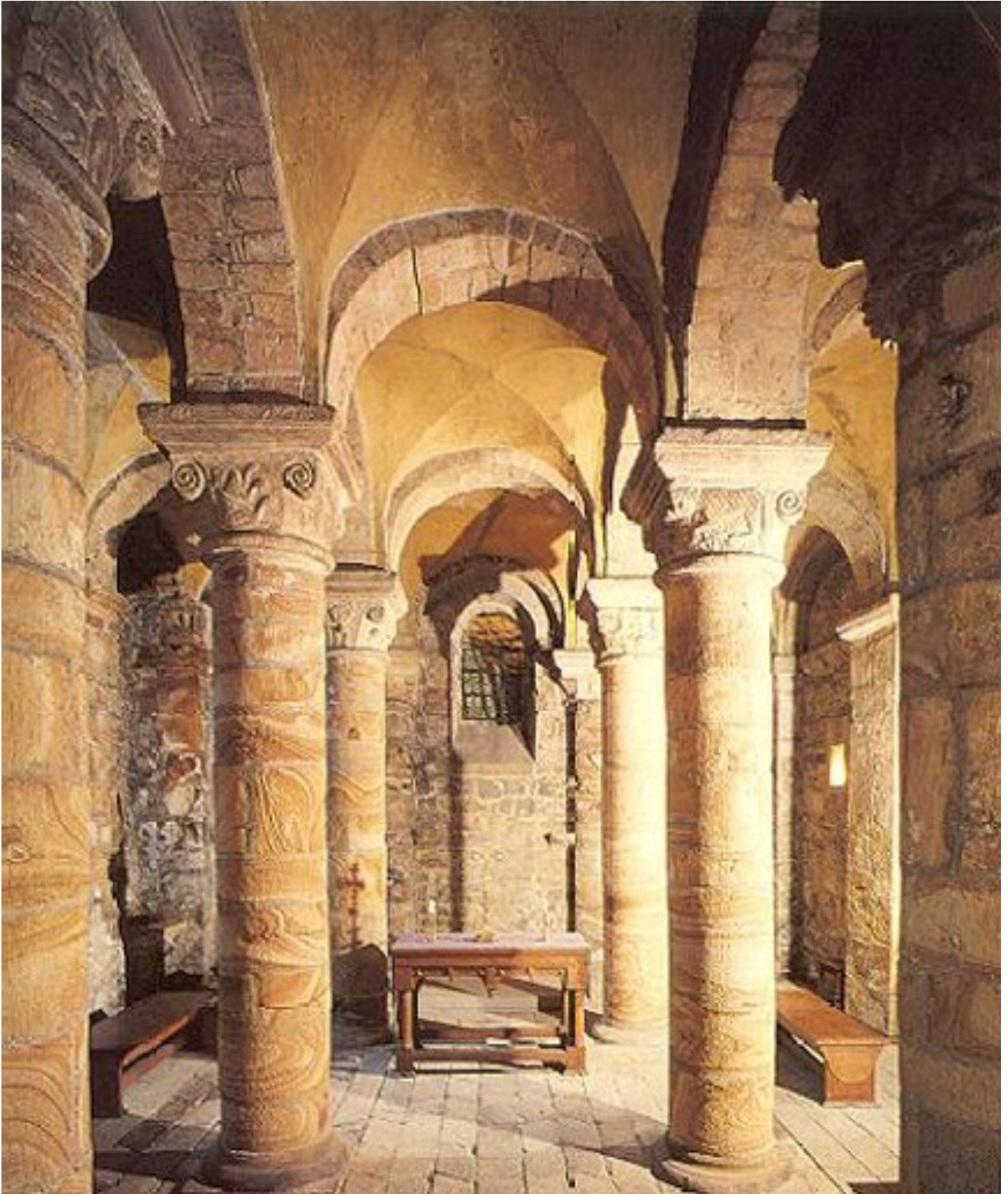
The elevated windows reveal the incredible thickness of the castle wall, a stark reminder that this castle was a primarily a building of war in the Norman period. The entire structure is made of local sandstone, including the original herringbone floor, part of which has been restored.



The chapel also features unusually richly carved capitals with a wider variety of motifs, including leaf decoration, portraits and figures of men, St Eustace, a stag, a horse, a snake, lions, a mermaid and a Tau cross. Several of the carvings are set on a background of chip-carved stars. Scholar Rita Wood suggests that the capitals establish a liturgical use for each bay and indicate who might occupy it (bishop, clergy, laymen and women).



As cross vaults are often used to support an upper floor, this has led to the chapel being sometimes mistaken for an undercroft, (the space under a church) rather than a chapel itself. The identity of the building is further muddled by the lack of a chancel (a separate space used by the clergy and choir), the absence of which has only added to the ongoing debate as to the use of the room with some arguing that it was once a crypt or a ceremonial hall.



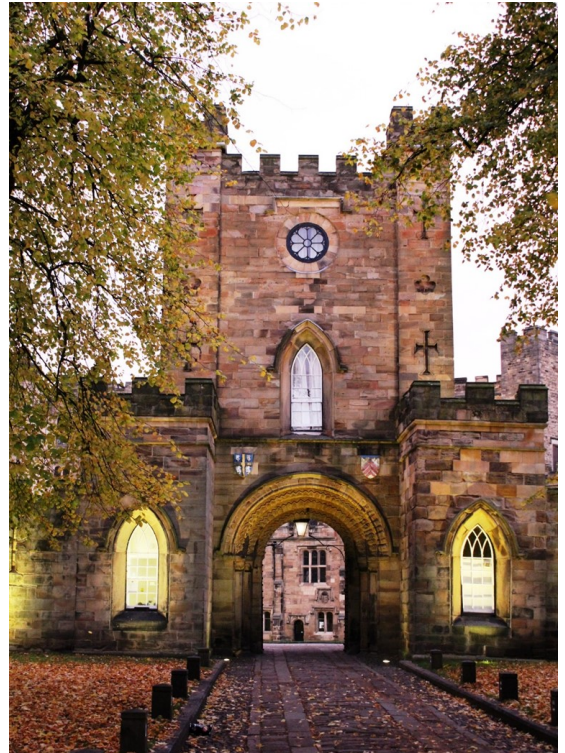




## Gatehouse

The entrance to Durham Castle is made through a Romanesque arch. Built by Bishop Flambard (1099-1128), it replaced an earlier gatehouse and its current position was probably chosen by Flambard to facilitate a processional route to Durham Cathedral.

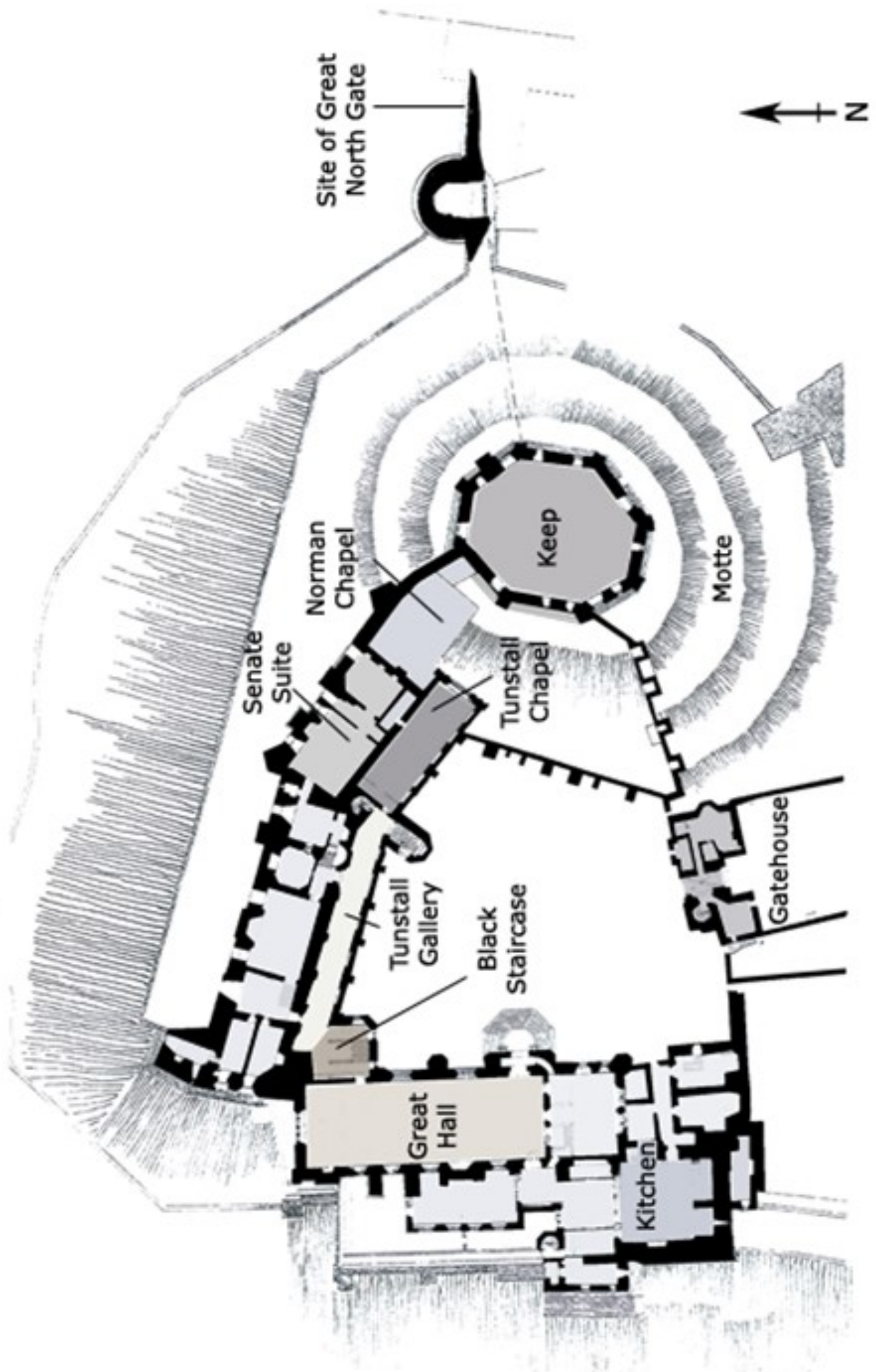
Although the Gatehouse itself has been substantially altered during later periods, the arch is an original feature that has been adapted and changed (raised and widened). It features shallow chevron decorations whilst the soffit of the inner arch is decorated with a sunken star design and is supported on scalloped capitals.



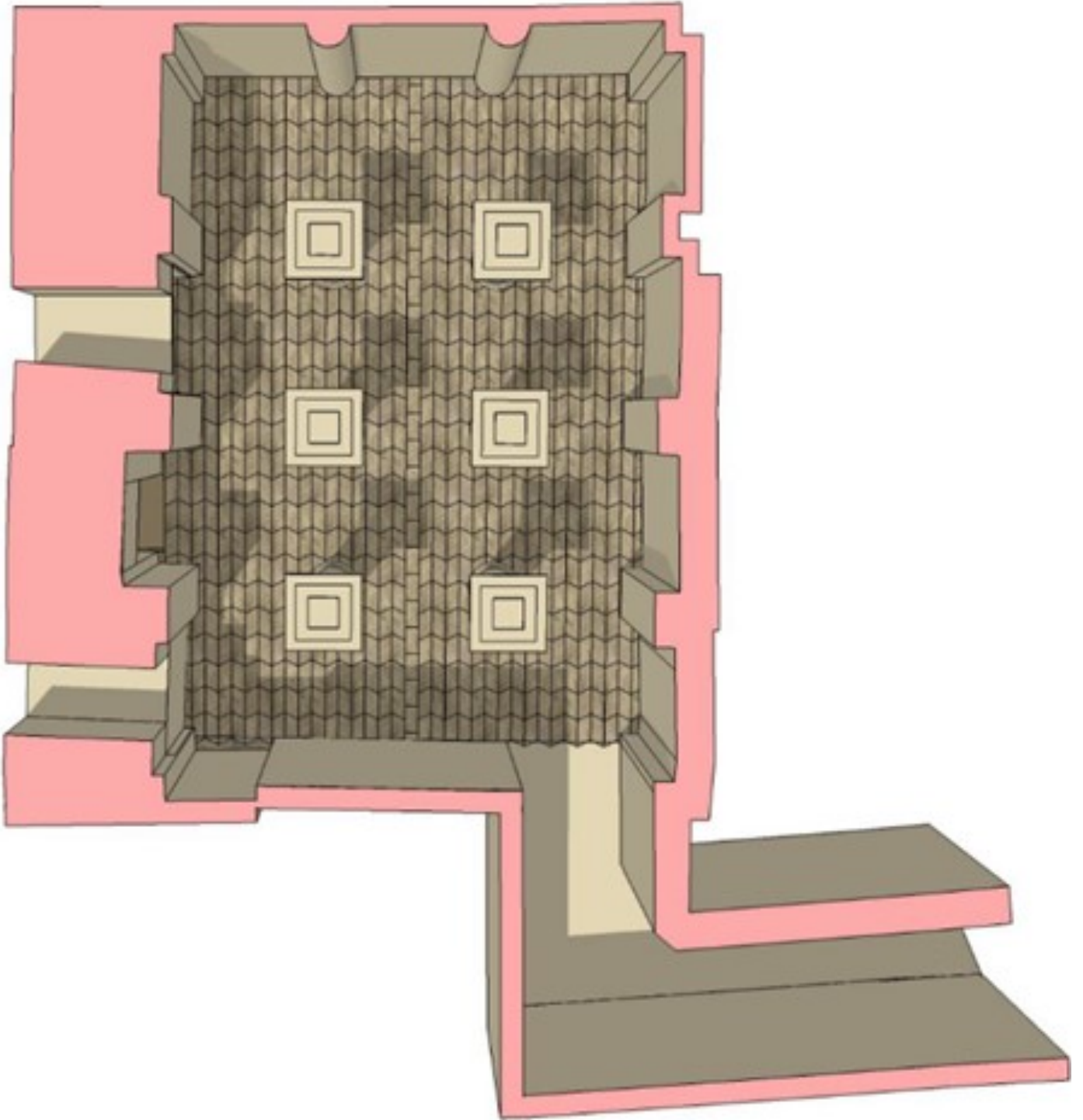
## The Castle as part of the World Heritage Site.

Durham Castle holds some fantastic examples of Norman architecture within its walls. The Norman Chapel is one of the most significant expressions of Norman architecture in the country and the Norman Arch is the finest example in the country. However, it is when it is paired with Durham Cathedral that its wider significance becomes apparent. The comparison in size of the groin vaults in the castle versus the extremely early rib vaults in the cathedral show buildings which were pushing the boundaries of Norman architecture at the time. This is part of the reason that it became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Norman buildings which dominate Durham's landscape still have massive economic, social and political consequences for us nearly 1000 years after they were constructed.

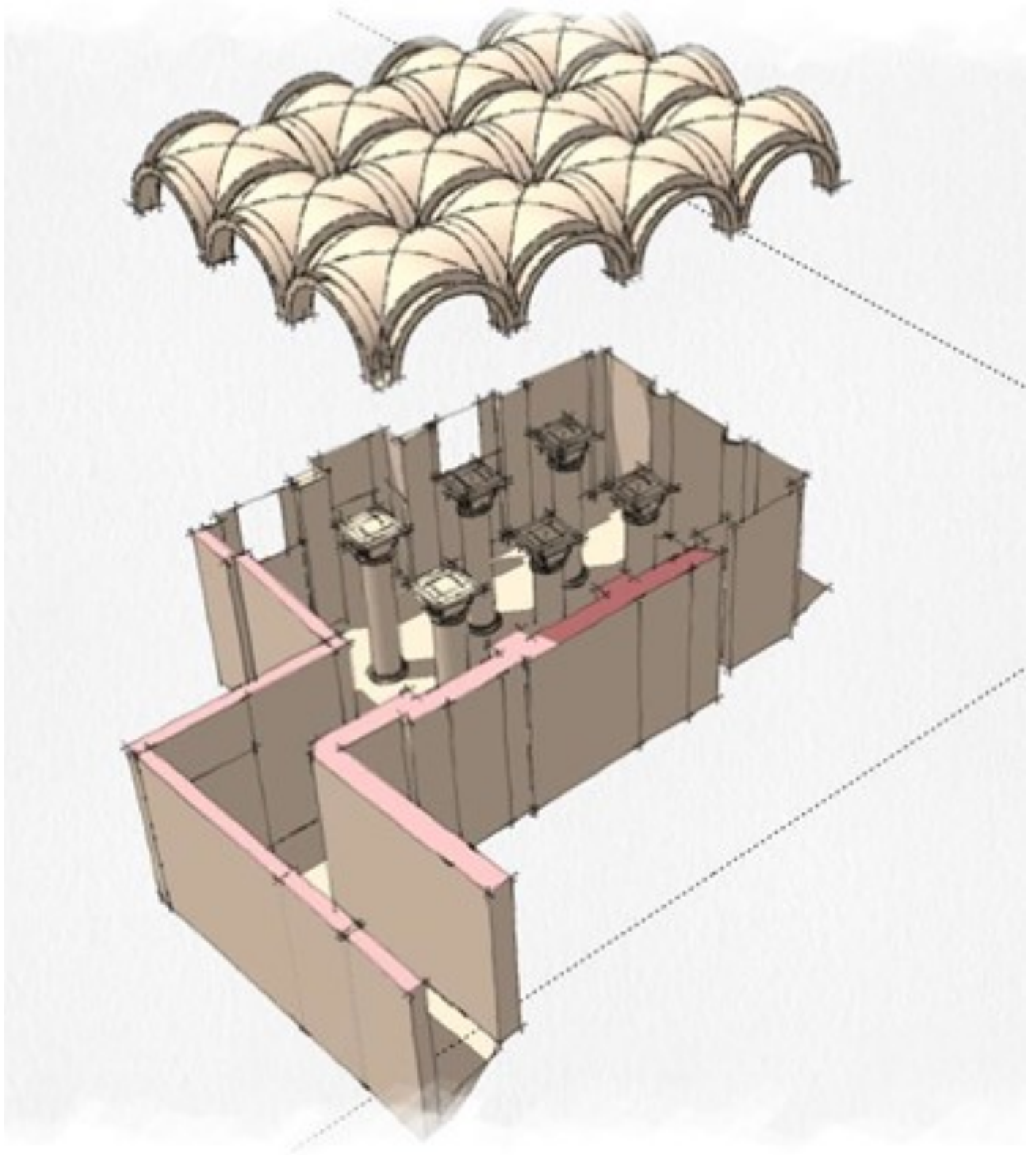




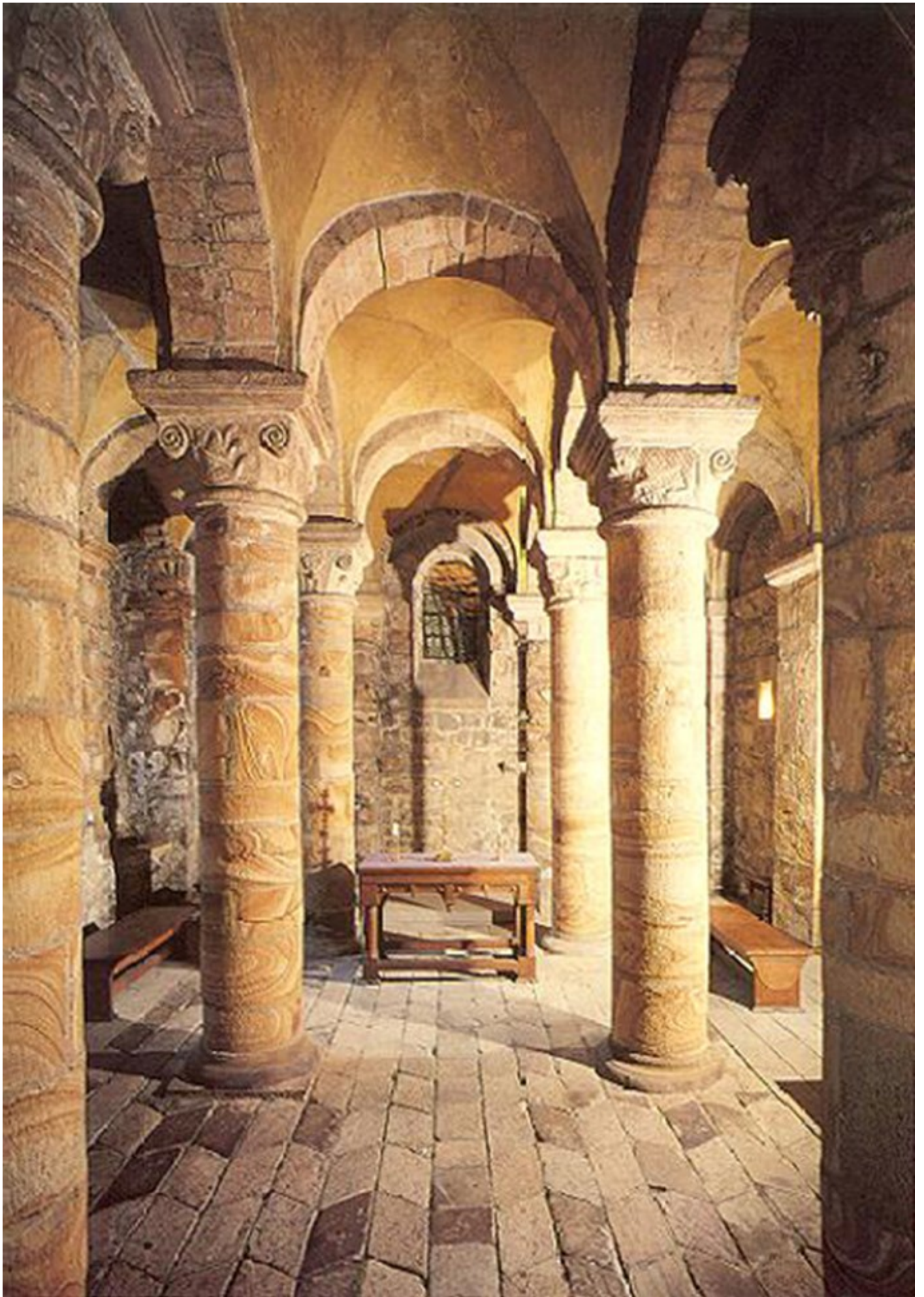
Durham Castle Plan



**Norman Chapel Plan**



**Norman Chapel 3D Model**



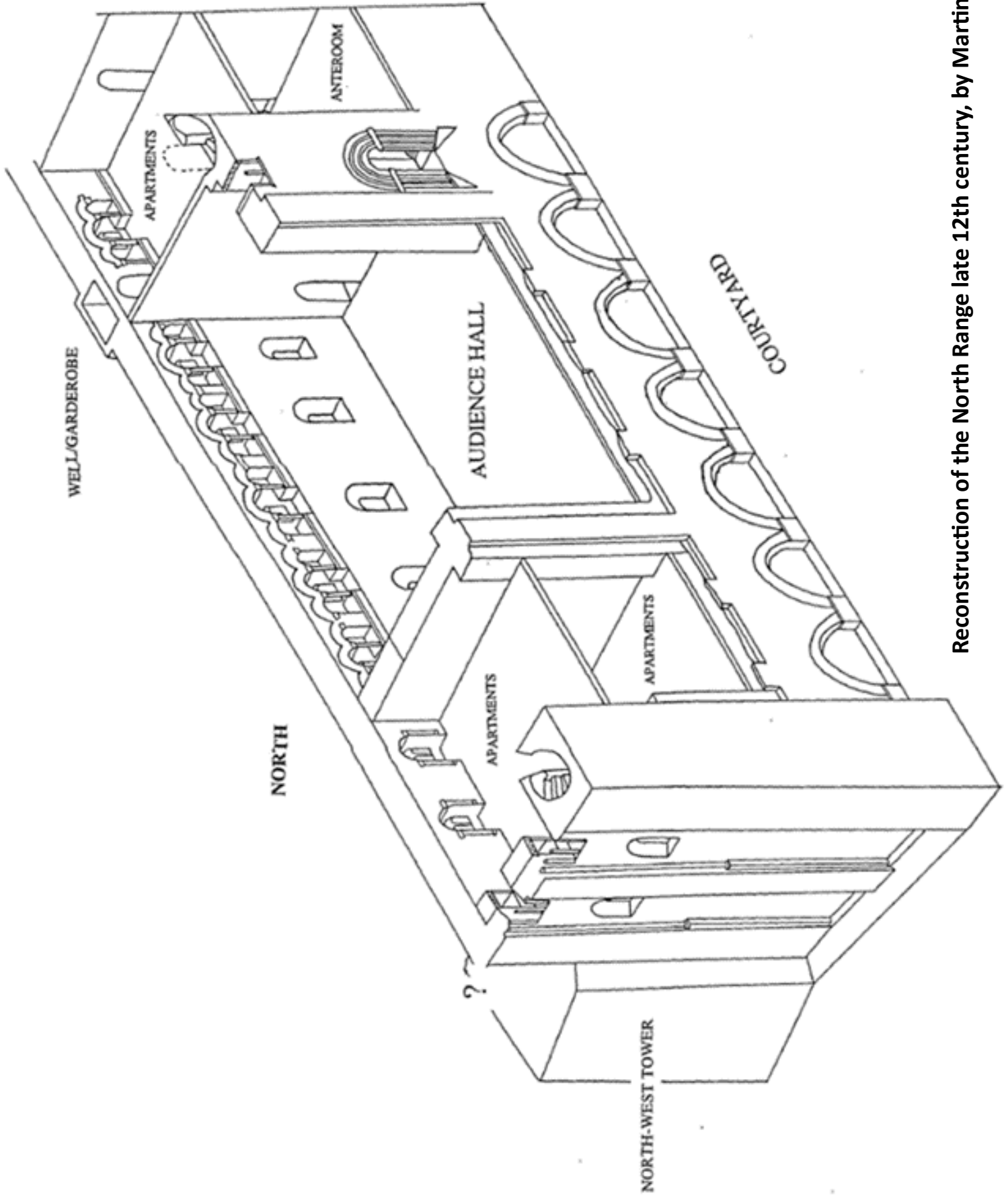
Norman Chapel



**Norman Chapel**



**Detail of Capital found in Norman Chapel**



Reconstruction of the North Range late 12th century, by Martin Leyland





Norman Gallery ready for a wedding



*Drawn by R. W. Dillings*

*Engraved by J. H. Le Gros*

DURHAM CASTLE NORMAN GALLERY.

*Durham. Published by George Andrews, R. W. Dillings & George Winter, March 1, 1844.*

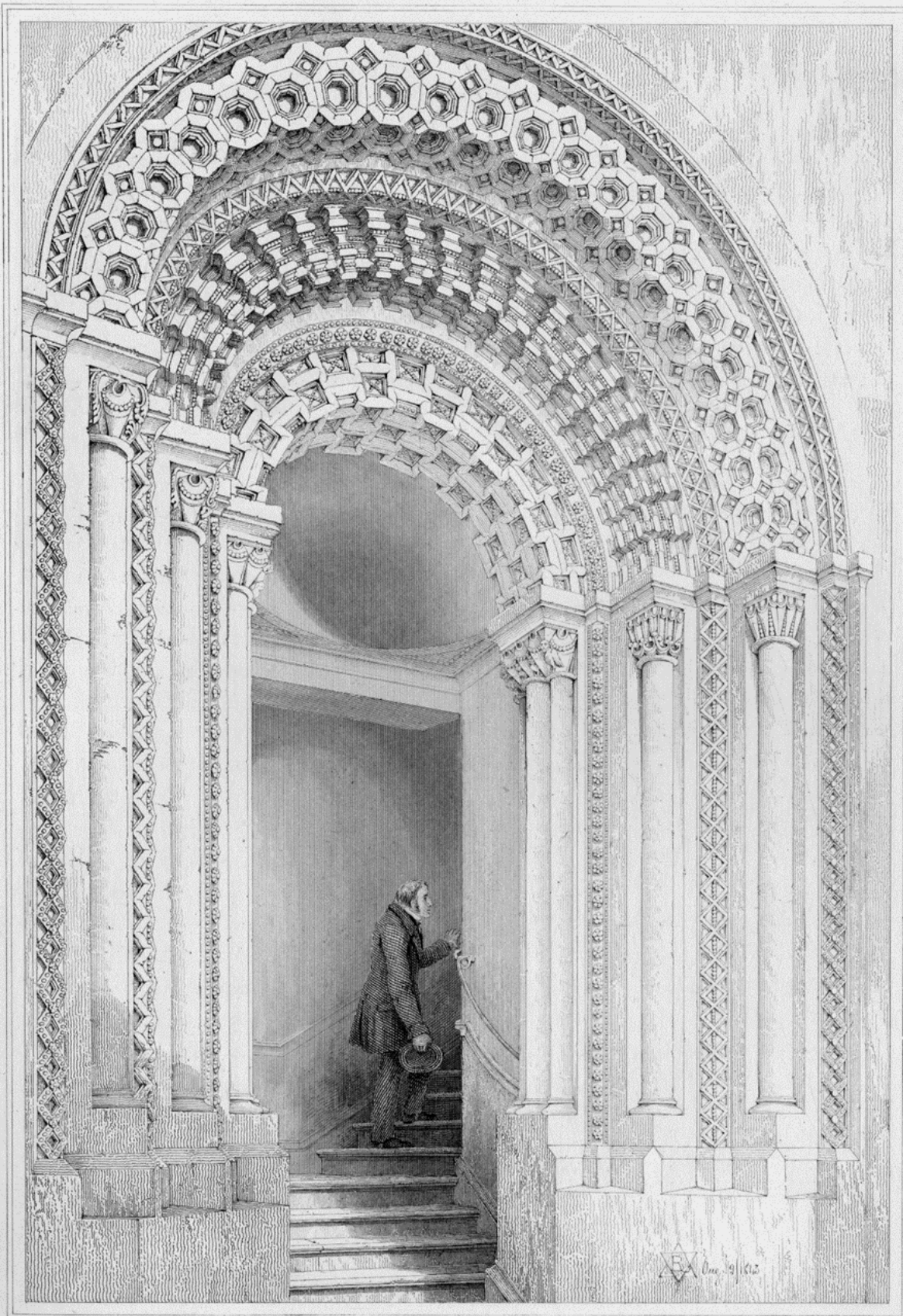
**An interpretation of the Norman Gallery in 1844**



Norman Arch (in the Tunstall Gallery)



Norman Arch (in the Tunstall Gallery)



*Drawn by R.W. Billings.*

*Engraved by G.B. Smith.*

DURHAM CASTLE.

NORMAN DOORWAY.—IN THE LOWER GALLERY.

*Durham, Published by George Andrews, & by R.W. Billings, & George Winter, London, May 1, 1844.*

**Norman Arch (in the Tunstall Gallery)**



Castle Gatehouse

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## **Images**

Durham Castle Collections

Wikipedia