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Al Hazm Castle



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Welcome to Hazam Castle



In the Time of Imam Sultan bin Saif

Al Hazm Castle was built by Imam Sultan Bin Saif, the fifth ruler in the noble Ya'rubah dynasty of Imams who reigned over Oman from 1624 to 1738. He was the grandson of an Imam by the same name who had achieved lasting fame, when, in 1650, he succeeded in ousting the Portuguese from Oman after a century and a half of occupation.

This was the start of a golden era for Oman, now set on

course to become a strong naval power with commercial and political influence stretching south from Oman along the eastern coast of Africa all the way to the outer waters of Zanzibar; and reaching eastward from the Red Sea to the Indian coast of Coromandel.

Brought by Mastery of the Seas

Under the Ya'rubah, mastery of the seas brought a revival of trade and unprecedented wealth. Key projects included restoration and expansion of the falaj irrigation system which resulted in bountiful agricultural production. Through the revival of Islamic scholarship, the Ya'rubah fostered an efflorescence of ideas and learning. It was in these flourishing times that the Ya'rubah built monuments of great strength and beauty, most notably the imposing citadel of Nizwa and their fortified palaces.

Imam Sultan bin Saif was blessed to begin his reign at the height of this era and with elevated status as the latest Imam in an illustrious line. But Sultan bin Saif was to become a powerful leader in his own right, extending Oman's overseas interests and building impressive new monuments, including the graceful castle at Al Hazm which became his capital.

Commanding the Plain

Approaching Al Hazm Castle from the wide plain of the Batinah, one can imagine what a solitary and imposing figure the fortress was on the open landscape of three hundred and fifty years ago. From the parapets of the Castle, the naked eye could survey the coastline for unending miles. Any hostile advance from the sea would soon be sighted, as would an approach overland from any





other direction.

Imam Sultan bin Saif al Ya'rubi therefore achieved a strategic advantage in moving his defensive headquarters to Al Hazm from the more enclosed setting of the fort further inland at Al Rustaq. The year was 1711 and considerable experience in engineering and architectural design had been gained from the earlier construction of Nizwa Fort and Jabrin Castle. This was used to advantage at Al Hazm and is evident in the sophistication of its engineering, in the functional design of the building, and in its decorative features. In particular, Al Hazm Castle represents, for Oman, an advanced use of arch and vault construction. This is a dramatic departure from the straight lines and simple post-and-lintel construction of earlier defensive structures.

Al Hazm was built at a time of transition from rifle power to cannon warfare and was therefore constructed with walls thick and strong enough to withstand the assault of cannon balls. In addition, two cannon towers were positioned diagonally opposite one another on the southeast and northwest corners of the Castle. Each of the towers has two levels with seven firing ports for a total of twenty-eight guns, providing a 360-degree circle of firepower to command control of the entire surrounding plain.

Surviving the Centuries

Following the decline of the Ya'ruba Dynasty, the Castle was only partly occupied from the mid 18th to late 20th Century, but it survived in remarkably good condition. Now, at the height of the Renaissance of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Al Hazm Castle has been restored to its former magnificence and stands as a solid reminder of Oman's proud history and enduring heritage.

A Powerful Stronghold

From the outside, the fortress appears massive, much larger than it actually is. This arises from a combination of factors: the imposing solidity of the façade is interrupted only by a few small windows; the structure is tall; and, its breadth is accentuated by the unusually wide circumference of the two towers, which in style, although not in scale, are reminiscent of the great citadel at Nizwa. A powerful military stronghold in outer appearance, the interior of the Castle is palatial. At the same time, it holds armories, gun powder magazines, and some extremely uninviting dungeons.

The internal defensive features are comprehensive and feature a range of clever devices. Throughout the Castle there are hiding holes for guards - to be used in peacetime as well as in war. When holding a meeting or





entertaining guests, by the use of certain words as cues, the Imam could instantly alert a guard to spring out of his hiding place in order to deal with a real or possible threat. The outer walls are replete with ingeniously devised observation slits. There are many strategic escape routes and an underground tunnel that connects the two towers in secret darkness.

The main door to the castle, a formidable barrier of exceptional thickness and strength, is said to have taken fourteen horses to haul into place. The door is barbed with heavy brass spikes and masks a machicolation or 'murder hole' above the lintel for pouring boiling oil on intruders or dropping missiles on them. There is also a fire grate in the door through which water could be poured to quench a fire lit from below. In the shadow of the door is a deep pit for capturing enemies. The pit is disguised with wooden covers, which are removed when the castle is under threat. This massive door with its deadly functions is backed up by a succession of interior doors, which are offset to make it impossible to use a battering ram or to gain momentum in a running attack.

A World Class Cannon Collection

In 200... Al Hazm, with its impressive gun floors, was selected to serve as a showcase for Oman's remarkable cannon collection. The Castle already contained a number of cannon and the search for more took place in country. Along with several Omani cannon, sufficient Portuguese and Spanish cannon were found from the period 1550 to 1625 to fill one tower at Al Hazm, as well as enough British cannon from 1625 to 1850 to fill the second tower.

One of the most important finds was a rare breech-loading cannon discovered at the back of Nizwa Castle. This early breech-loader dates from 1550 to 1610 and appears to be of Portuguese-Indian origin. Artillery from no fewer than ten nations is currently to be found in the museum. Those nations are: Oman, Sweden, France, Germany, the Netherlands, India, Britain, Spain, and Portugal.

Al Hazm, with its world class collection of artillery, mounted on historically correct reproductions of their original carriages and housed in an authentic historical monument is seen as an important resource for research and study in an area of significance in World Heritage.

The Expression of Grandeur

While Al Hazm Castle is important for its significance in military history, it is also notable for the beauty and elegance of its vaulted architecture and decorative features. The impression of regal grandeur is evident as soon as the visitor catches sight of the burnished teak and gleaming brass of the main entrance portal. In spite of their defensive function, the door's brass spikes are beautifully fluted to complement the delicate carving in foliate patterns and graceful arabesques which covers much of the surface of the door. So intricate is the carving





that it gives the impression of lace frozen in wood. This sense of richness is carried through the Castle in the architectonic flow of multiple arches and vaulted ceilings. Halls, stairways, and important rooms are distinguished by aesthetically curved surfaces.

At Al Hazm, a lofty sense of space is created not only by the soaring arch and vault construction, but also by the Castle's distinctive white-on-white plaster decoration. Fine plasterwork embellishes walls, ceilings and columns, even in the main firing platform of each tower. Here we find a grand central pillar decorated with floral motifs in plaster bas relief, set within shallow scalloped arches and bordered with stylized cording, scrolled leaf arabesques and elegant geometric patterns.

A Glimpse of Domestic Life

The roof of the castle has a water trough for the vegetable gardens that once flourished there. Garlic, onions, watermelons and other delicacies were grown in times of peace. In the event of a siege, the gardens could provide fresh fruits and vegetables which normally were provided from local farms. The Castle had sophisticated water systems with a falaj (channel which conducts water from

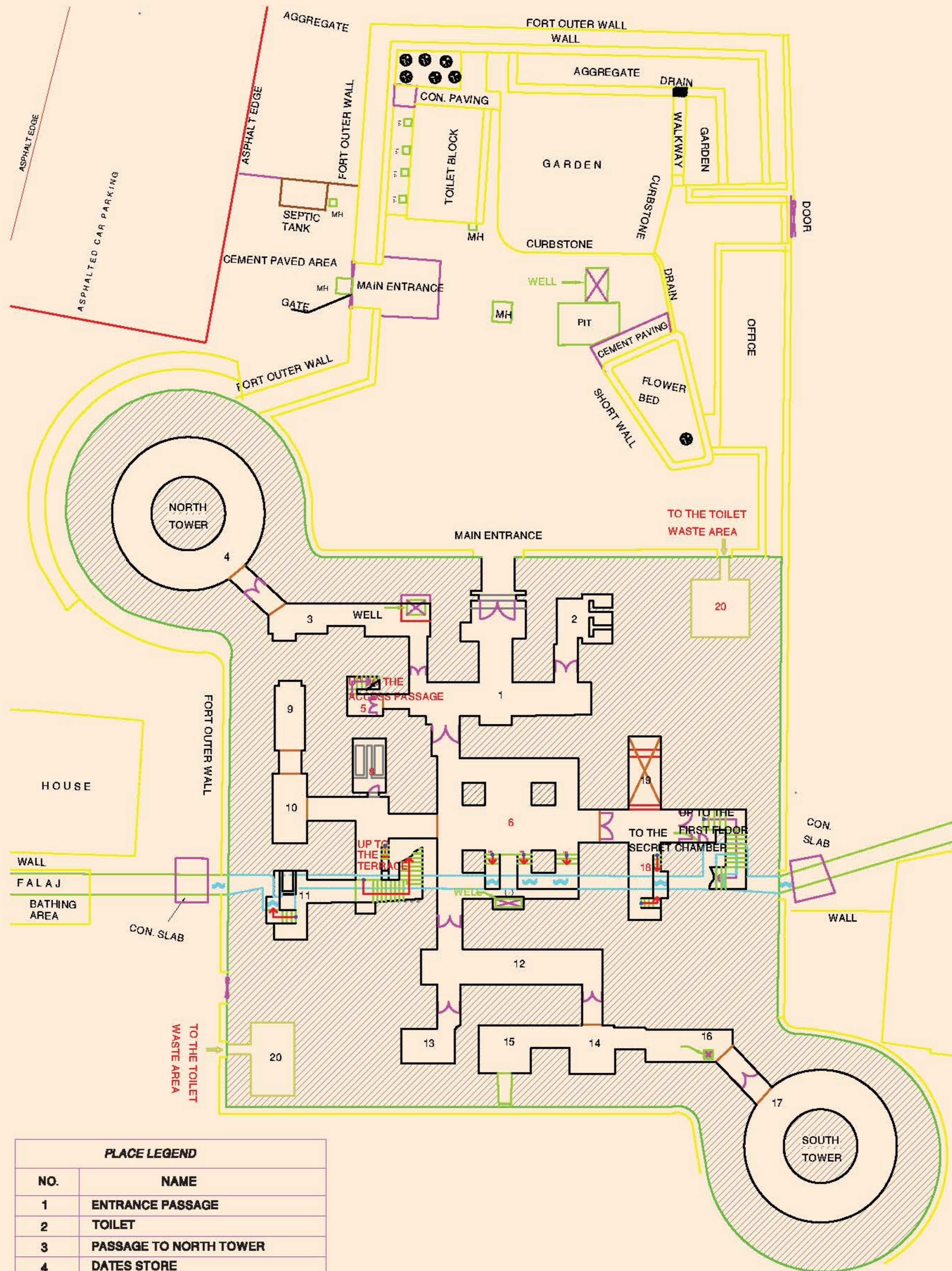
mountain or underground reservoirs) and two interior wells, ensuring plenty of water for domestic needs. The falaj flowed on through the Castle into the Imam's spacious bathing room.

The Imam's children were taught in a schoolroom situated on a vaulted platform above the Imam's and soldiers' mosques. It is here that the Imam's children learned to read and write the Arabic language through the study of the Holy Qur'an. They were also schooled in other subjects such as mathematics and geography. In a nearby wall there were spy holes to survey the stairs leading to the schoolroom. Though children may have been tempted to play spy games during lessons; in fact, as many as seven real assailants making their way up the stairs are known to have been killed by musketeers firing through the spy holes.

The Silence of the Centuries

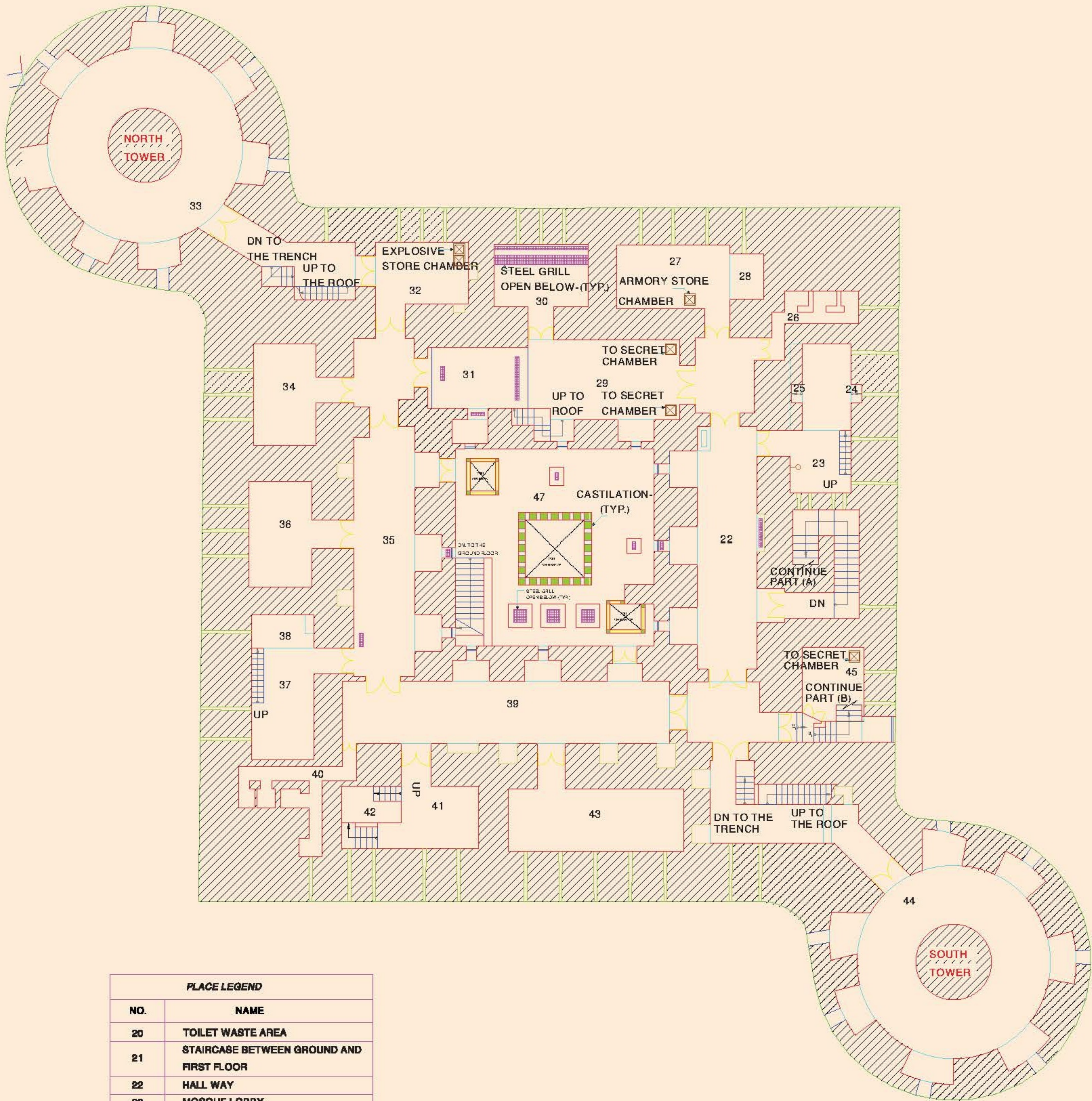
The Castle contains the burial chamber of the Castle's founder, Imam Sultan bin Saif bin Sultan Al Y'arubi, who died in 1718, and that of his son, Saif bin Sultan bin Saif, who was elected Imam a decade later, and died in 1742. Their white marble headstones sit side-by-side in the silence of the centuries.





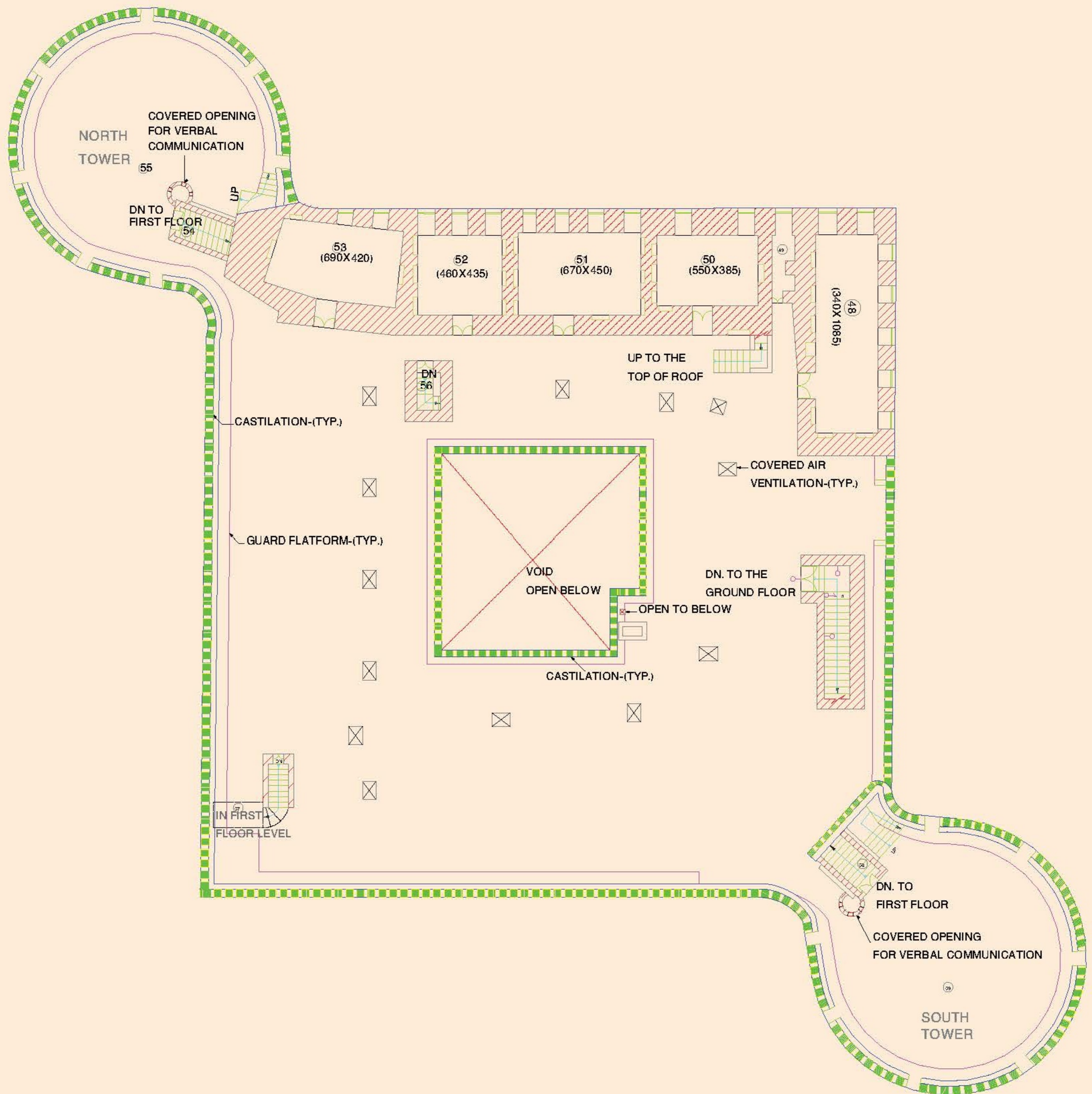
PLACE LEGEND	
NO.	NAME
1	ENTRANCE PASSAGE
2	TOILET
3	PASSAGE TO NORTH TOWER
4	DATES STORE
5	TO THE ACCESS PASSAGE
6	CENTER AREA
7	COOKING AREA
8	GRAVES ROOM
9	SOLDIERS ROOM
10	SOLDIERS ROOM
11	WASHING AREA
12	HALL WAY
13	PRISON TOOLS STORE
14	SOLDIERS ROOM
15	SOLDIERS ROOM
16	PASSAGE TO SOUTH TOWER
17	PRISON AREA
18	WASHING AREA
19	WATER RESERVOIR AREA FOR FIRE
20	TOILET WASTE AREA

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



PLACE LEGEND	
NO.	NAME
20	TOILET WASTE AREA
21	STAIRCASE BETWEEN GROUND AND FIRST FLOOR
22	HALL WAY
23	MOSQUE LOBBY
24	CHAMBER TO THE PRAYER ROOM
25	CHAMBER TO THE GHOST MOSQUE & PRISON
26	TOILET
27	ARMORY ROOM
28	GUARD AREA
29	HALL WAY
30	GATE GUARD ROOM
31	SOLDIERS REST AREA
32	CANON EQUIPMENT
33	CANON TOWER
34	GUEST ROOM
35	HALL WAY
36	IMAM CHILDREN'S BED ROOM
37	IMAM'S BED ROOM
38	IMAM'S BED
39	HALL WAY
40	TOILET
41	LADIES PRISON GUARD ROOM
42	GUARD AREA
43	JUSTICE COURT
44	CANON TOWER
45	SOLDIERS ROOM
46	STAIR TO THE ROOF
47	OPEN TERRACE

FIRST FLOOR PLAN



PLACE LEGEND	
NO.	NAME
48	TEACHING ROOM
49	TOILET
50	SOLDIERS ROOM
51	SOLDIERS ROOM
52	SOLDIERS ROOM
53	SOLDIERS ROOM
54	STAIR TO THE FIRST FLOOR
55	THE TOP CANON TOWER
56	STAIR TO THE FIRST FLOOR
57	JAIL ROOM
58	STAIR TO THE FIRST FLOOR
59	THE TOP CANON TOWER
60	TOP OF THE ROOF

ROOF FLOOR PLAN