heppenheim bergstrasse

HEPPENHEIM

STARKENBURG CASTLE

HEPPENHEIM
(Bergstraße)

Hambacher Tal

Kapellenweg

Starkenburgweg

Starkenburgweg

Kirschenpfad

Kanonenweg

Starkenburgweg

Helenenruhweg

Straße

Ruine Starkenburg **Stern-warte**

Fürth
Kirschhausen
Sonderbach
Mittershausen

295

Darmstädter

Bensheimer Weg

Schlossberg

Heilig-Geist Kirche

Drosselbergweg

Lehrstraße

5-Minuten-Pfad

P Kleiner
Friedrichstraße Markt

Eisenpfad

Fischweiher

460

Hermann-Löns-Weg

Kleine Amtsgasse Bach

Graben

P
WC

Marktstr.

Siegfriedstraße

Lindenfelser Weg

WC
WC

Wilhelmstraße

i

Parkhof

Kelloreigasse

Kirche St. Peter (Dom der Bergstraße)

N

Maiberg

Ludw

Werlestraße

Merianstr.

Freilichtbühne

Starkenburg Castle and its history

Starkenburg Castle has an eventful and turbulent past. The castle was reconstructed and redesigned several times. The history of the castle's origin is also closely linked to the history of Lorsch Abbey, which is located approx. 5 kilometres away from Heppenheim.

764, the Frankish Count Cancor and his mother Williswinda founded a proprietary church (Eigenkirche) and monastery on their estate, Laurissa. They entrusted its government to Archbishop Chrodegang of Metz. 772, Lorsch Abbey became an Imperial Abbey. It was very much favoured by Charlemagne. He donated the so-called "Mark Heppenheim" – march Heppenheim (settlement, church) to the monastery in 773. From the time between the 9th and 10th century, the monastery's influence was at its peak and for this reason, Emperor Henry II gave another wide-ranging territory, the so-called "Forstbann Odenwald", to the monastery as a gift. 1065, at the age of 15, King Henry IV was declared to be of legal age. He officially transferred the monastery's possession to one of his tutors, Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen-Hamburg. However, the abbot of the monastery, the monks and all subjects resisted King Henry's decision. They were standing up for the Imperial Abbey's autonomy. Due to Abbot Udalrich's initiative, a stronghold was swiftly built on top of the so-called Schlossberg mountain in Heppenheim. This stronghold was named "Burcheldon" (castle mountain). It resembled a Roman fort, which consisted of simple wooden constructions, towers, earthworks and bulwarks. The Archbishop's defeat against Abbot Udalrich in 1066 resulted in many privileges for Lorsch Abbey, e.g. the coinage prerogative. Starkenburg Castle was not only a castle of refuge – it was also a place, where the treasures of the monastery were kept. 1206, Hugo of Starckimberg became the castle's first knight and for this reason, the castle was given the name Starkenburg (strong castle) in 1229.

Based upon the turmoils of the crusades and the conflict between the last King of the Staufer Dynasty, Frederick II and his sons Henry and Conrad as well as the pope, the downfall of Lorsch Abbey was inexorable. King Frederick entrusted the Archbishop of Mainz with Lorsch Abbey and Starkenburg Castle in 1232. It came to another conflict about the castle 1232–1254. The counts palatine raised a claim for Heppenheim and Starkenburg Castle, which could, at first, be averted. The first "Burggraf" (burgrave), was appointed to function as the Archbishop's representative. He assumed administration of the district authority, referred to as "Oberamt Starkenburg", in 1267. Under the rule of the Electoral Mainz, the castle was reconstructed into a late medieval fort castle. It was designed to be a functional, controlling and administrative body. 1460, it came to the war between the Electorals Mainz and Palatinate. The count of Starkenburg Castle was killed and the Archbishop of Mainz had no other choice but to pledge the castle and Heppenheim to the counts palatine.

During the time of the 30 Year's war, the castle had several owners. It was captured by Spanish troops in 1621; a Spanish cemetery was established up there. 1631, Swedish troops conquered the castle and in 1645, the French did. In the end, the Archbishops of Mainz succeeded in recapturing Heppenheim and the castle. 1675–1689, Archbishop-Elector of Mainz Anselm of Ingelheim pushed the castle's reconstruction. It was designed to be a fortress complex and a place of agricultural production, storage and administration. It was designed imitating the French model, with a north-west bastion, entrenchments and a further bailey, which probably did not have a strict military function. There was a storage area, where stables could be found as well.

Starkenburg Castle successfully withstood the French War of the Reunions. 1689, it was successfully defended. 1693, the French eventually gave up their unsuccessful siege of the castle. The small town of Heppenheim, however, was, except for 5 houses, totally destroyed by fire.

Nevertheless, this was the end of Starkenburg Castle: the political situation had changed and maintaining the castle was too expensive. 1765, the Mainz occupying troops were withdrawn and the castle was released to be demolished. 1787, Archbishop Frederick Charles Joseph of Erthal stopped the castle from being demolished any further. The keep had to be torn down 1924, due to its ruinous state. It was rebuilt in a different design in the entrance area. The residential building was also reconstructed, however, in a modern design. Since 1960, some buildings have been serving as a youth hostel and a castle tavern.

2 Main residential building and chapel

The count of the castle is also referred to as burgrave. His residential area was located in the so-called Palas. The main residential building of Starkenburg Castle was located next to the entrance gate and the chapel at the northern wall. It was constructed between 1232 and 1481, when the castle was rebuilt to be a fortress castle. The watch building, castle bakehouse and the barracks, where the troops were housed, were located next to the Palas. In the year 1765, upon withdrawal of the Mainz troops, the castle was released to be demolished. The residential buildings, the castle entrance and parts of the walls of the upper castle courtyard were destroyed. The old keep, the round towers and the original curtain walls remained. Today, a youth hostel can be found where the residential building used to be.

1 Old keep and cistern

The square, powerful keep and the neighbouring cistern used to be the original core of the stronghold and were surrounded by a thick curtain wall. The 28-metre high keep used to be the last refuge and prison. It used to have a one floor, which served as a dungeon and three residential floors. The keep was designed to be round in the inside and square from the outside. It is assumed that, during the early days of the castle (1065 – 1232), when it was under the rule of Lorsch Abbey, it used to be a circular living tower, which was later extended and cased by square walls. The old keep had to be torn down in the year 1924 due to its ruinous state. Only its foundation, which can still be seen in the castle courtyard, has remained as a witness of its former construction. The cistern's inscription proves it to be the "largest solitary building" of the castle. It is 80 metres deep and was hewn in the living rock. There are many myths about a secret tunnel underneath the castle, which is said to end in the cistern. The inner castle courtyard with its originally four round towers was shaped as a trapezium and came into existence when the defence wall was fortified in the 13th century.

9 Cannon tower

Imbedded into the protecting curtain wall of Starkenburg Castle, the so-called cannon tower can be found. This is the place, where the castle's cannonry used to be stored during the time from 1618 – 1765. In 1970, the tower was reconstructed in accordance with historic plans. Since 2009, it has been the tower house for guests of the youth hostel.

3 New keep

A new keep was constructed in 1928. It was constructed in a different design and located west of the former gate. The new keep is part of the youth hostel and a lookout. From Good Friday on until the end of September, the keep is open to the public. It can be visited on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays from 2 pm until 6 pm.

8 Kitchen tower and castle tavern "Burgschänke"

The kitchen tower used to be situated next to the storage area in the lower castle courtyard. Today, the castle tavern "Burgschänke" is located in the tower as well as in the neighbouring building. From the castle tavern's sunny terrace one has a marvellous view. From April through October, the tavern is open from Wednesday until Sunday. From November through March, the tavern is open on weekends and holidays. The public toilet facilities can be found next to the "Burgschänke".

Tour of Heppenheim's Starkenburg Castle

4 Southwest tower

The round tower can be found in the southwest corner of the upper bailey. The "Merianstich" of 1620/45, an etching made by Matthäus Merian, a Swiss-born copperplate engraver, proves that it was roofed by a wooden construction. After maintenance measures, the tower has been open to the public since 2004.

7 Big bailey and lower castle courtyard

Starkenburg Castle was a stronghold. In the 17th century, it became an administrative centre fulfilling a new purpose as an agricultural and storage centre. The big bailey or lower castle courtyard was designed to be a storage area with stables. The castle estate was a vast territory, serving as grazing land, fields and gardens with fruit trees. The family members of the troops did the farming work. The castle estate was surrounded by walls, which also served as entrenchments. The lower castle courtyard is the meeting point for all guests wishing to participate in an exciting guided tour.

Starkenburg Castle according to a map by Kraus dated 1724

Moat
Cannony
2
Cistern
Core of the Castle
3
1
Gateway III
Gateway II
6
4
8
7
5
Bridge
Ruinous Entrenchment
Moat
Gateway I
Little Bailey
Spanish Cemetery
Walking Trail

5 Snail-shell tower

The so-called "Schneckenturm" – snail-shell tower is a round tower, which is also open to the public. This tower is located in the lower castle courtyard. The Schneckenturm's name is based on the fact that in the inside of the tower a narrow spiral staircase can be found.
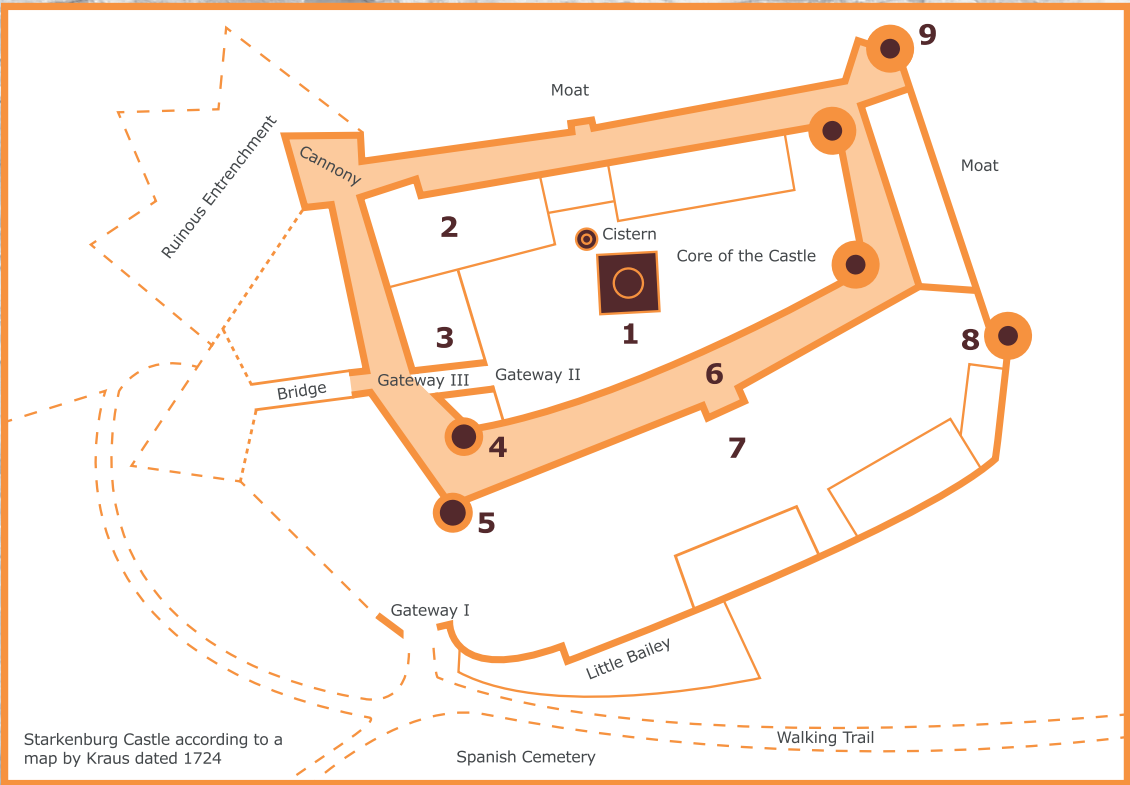
6 Upper Bailay

As still can be seen today, a narrow bailey used to surround the core of the castle. In former times, a triangular bastion as gun emplacement was located in the northwest corner of the bailey. Between the bastion and a round tower, which was situated in the southwest corner of the bailey, used to be the drawbridge. The walls of the bailey were constructed to be walked on and it was possible that two people could easily pass each other. The walls were most likely covered by a roof and a wooden construction. Two sides of the castle were protected by a moat.

Public tours of Starkenburg Castle

1st Sunday of every month (May–Sept), 2 pm, no reservations required; tours for groups upon arrangement

Opening hours

Restaurant "Burgschänke": Nov–Mar: Sat, Sun from midday on; Apr–Oct: Wed–Fri from 2 pm on, Sat, Sun, holidays from midday on. Lookout tower: from Good Friday on through Sept: Sat, Sun, holidays 2–6 pm

Booking and information

Tourist-Information Heppenheim
Großer Markt 9, D–64646 Heppenheim
Phone +49 6252 13 11 71 /-72
Fax   +49 6252 13 11 73
tourismus@stadt.heppenheim.de / www.heppenheim.de