

Frankenstein Castle



History Society Eberstadt/Frankenstein



How old is the castle ?

Frankenstein's Castle is the northernmost castle on the Mountainstreet (Bergstrasse) and was built around 1230.

The first documentary evidence of the castle from 1252 states in Latin: "*Super castro in frangenstein*", which means the castle on top of the Frankenstein. This document shows the names of Konrad Reiz von Breuberg and his wife Elisabeth (born von Weiterstadt), the founders not only of the castle but also of the family Frankenstein which still exists today.

The oldest part of the castle is the southern inner tower which dates from the 13th century, but there is little left from that time: only the foundation walls and subterranean vaults submerged long ago. The ruins seen today date from later times.



Plan of the castle at 1550 (Drawing by Michael Müller)

After 1400 the castle was extended towards the north (see plan on the left). At that time the gate-tower, which can still be seen today, the residential buildings and the working quarters were built. The original documentation of the inauguration of the chapel in 1474 is still in existence.

In 1483, after a devastating fire, a great part of the core-castle had to be rebuilt. Interestingly, the fire was extinguished with 14,000 litres of wine, after the water had run out.

The last part of the castle was built outside the ward towards the present-day carpark. The massive tower served a further defence purpose: as the grounds were not as steep as on the other sides, additional protection was necessary.



Frankenstein Castle 1550



The western side of the castle 1550

A tour round the Castle

Built around 1400, the gate-tower stands on your right as you enter the castle by today's western gate. Although the former moat in front of the gate is filled in, slits for the drawbridge chains are still visible on both sides of the gate.

Above the gate, the coat of arms with an axe can be seen. The upper part of the gate-tower with its pointed roof can clearly be recognized as newly rebuilt. The weathered sandstone round the windows especially marks the difference between the remaining masonry of the Middle Ages and the later restoration. The tower has always been open on the rear side. If ever enemies had been successful in capturing it, they could have been attacked from the core-castle.



Coat of arms

A ramp, passing the former ward with its gardens, leads to the oldest part of the castle, the central castle (Kernburg). There are only the ruins of the western side, which points towards Eberstadt, left today. In the past similar buildings existed on the eastern side pointing towards Nieder-Beerbach, but today only the foundation walls remain, although filled in.

At the end of the ramp there once stood a strongly fortified gate-house, serving as access to the core castle with a front-mounted drawbridge, of which nothing remains today. If you imagine all these buildings, you can appreciate how narrow the inner courtyard was.

There was no keep, so no large central tower, in this oldest part of the castle, as there was simply no room for one. The southern tower over-looking the ruins today was a residential tower, to which the other buildings were attached. The massively -built former manor house (Palas) with its prominent tower of stairs is still easily recognizable. Beneath the Palas there are vaults. Although these are now filled in, the entrance to the vaults is still visible.

On the right of the Palas is the well-preserved kitchen building with a cross-vaulted ceiling inside. Next to it are the ruins of the former women's residence. In the back courtyard of the castle was the well house. The medieval well, actually a cistern (rainwater collector), is well preserved, but today is covered up.



*Inscription at the tower:
anno domini 1528
zu got stet mein treu*

Halfway up the residential tower, on its south-eastern corner, there is a stone slab with the inscription “*Anno domini 1528. Zu got stet mein treu*“ which means “1528 AD. To God I remain faithful“. Philipp IV of Frankenstein wanted to express his loyalty to the Catholic faith after the Landgrave of Hessen had introduced the Reformation two years earlier and urged the knights to follow his example. The Frankensteins refused to do this for a long time, but in the end, they had to give in.

The year 1527, written in the frieze of the left window, refers to the end of the reconstruction of the castle after the fire mentioned above.

The gravestones in the chapel

Until 1851, the gravestones were located in the churches of Eberstadt and Nieder-Beerbach. Nobody has ever been buried in the chapel. The gravestone on the left in the chapel depicts **Hans IV** (who died in 1558) and his wife **Irmela** von Cleen (who died in 1533). When they married in 1508 Hans was 16 years old and Irmela only 14. They went on to have 13 children during their 25-year marriage.



Hans and Irmela of Frankenstein

Above their heads are the coats of arms of their parents. For Hans, on the left is his father's coat of arms of Frankenstein and on the right his mother's of Kronberg in the Taunus. For Irmela, the coat of arms of Cleen (shamrocks) and her mother's of Mespelbrunn (three rings) can be seen. As Irmela was the only heir of the Cleen family, the Frankenstein family was able to double their holding of property by this marriage. The rich properties in Ockstadt in the region of Wetterau (today a part of Friedberg) and especially in Sachsenhausen were added to their properties in the South of Hessen. Many of these are owned by the family to this day.

The gravestone on the opposite side shows **Ludwig** (who died in 1606) and **Katharina** von Rodenstein, who were also buried in Eberstadt. Ludwig was the grandson of Hans and Irmela.



*Ludwig and Katharina
of Frankenstein*



*Philipp Ludwig
of Frankenstein*

As Ludwig and Katharina had no children, the family branch of the Bergstrasse died out. Their cousins in Sachsenhausen were their heirs. In his will, Ludwig urged his heirs never to leave Castle Frankenstein to the House of Hessen. Nevertheless, this is exactly what happened in 1662.

The large statue on the right of the entrance is of **Philipp Ludwig**, the last member of the younger family line. He died in an accident in 1602 at the age of only 21, while driving a carriage down the hill. The splendid gravestone unfortunately looks a little disfigured, because it has been painted with oil paint several times over the years. And the right side of the stone was once torn down. Instead of replacing it with the original bright white alabaster, cheap sandstone was used.

Philipp Ludwig is depicted with decorated armour, the finest lace collar and sword (which is missing today). The upper panel shows the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Above on the left is God the Father and in the middle is the dove as the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The buildings in the background are supposed to show Jerusalem, but they closely resemble Castle Frankenstein, because the sculptor knew the castle well.

The Frankenstein Family

The progenitors were Konrad Reiz von Breuberg and Elisabeth von Weiterstadt, who were first recorded in 1252. Their sons named themselves after the castle “Herren von und zu Frankenstein“, which literally translated means “Lords of and to Frankenstein“. After having sold the castle, the family moved to Mittelfranken, where their descendants still live today. The Lords of Frankenstein were the authorities in their country with seven villages. They appointed the local administration and the reverends, were lords of the court – admittedly only for minor jurisdiction – and they controlled the economic administration of the communities and churches. Their subjects had to serve them and pay taxes. Paying tax today is different from what it meant at that time, when taxes were paid as labour services in the Frankenstein’s fields, vineyards and estates. In return, the Frankensteins were responsible for the protection of their subjects and had to ensure their security, their jurisdiction and that they obeyed the law. This they did for 400 years. In 1402 they were able to significantly improve their aristocratic position, because the castle was placed directly under the protection of the German Empire (Reich) and the Emperor (the Kaiser).



Why did the castle fall into ruins?

The castle was in good condition when the Frankensteins sold their castle to Hessen in 1662. The new owner turned it into an old people's home for retired soldiers, but did not invest much money into the maintenance of the buildings. Necessary repairs were not carried out, rain penetrated through the damaged roofs, the timberwork rotted, and one day everything collapsed. Brushwood and trees overgrew everything and the castle fell into ruins.



Frankenstein 1775

During its long history, the castle has never had to endure sieges or any military conflicts: simply being exposed to the elements led to its destruction.

In the outer bailey some buildings survived, as they continued to be used. The residence of the younger line of the family, as well as the central stables, remained until 1965. They were used as the forest warden's home and a restaurant, but these buildings were demolished in favour of the new restaurant that exists today. The chapel, of which even the exact day of the official opening on 13th July 1474 is found in official written records, has been preserved to this day.

What about the monster?



Picture: Axel Deppert

“Frankenstein’s Monster“ is an invention of the English writer Mary Shelley. Her novel was the material for many films, where a scientist named Frankenstein creates an artificial man by using parts of bodies. But this has absolutely nothing to do with the original Castle Frankenstein. Firstly, the novel takes place in a different region and secondly, there is no castle mentioned at all. Establishing a connection with the Castle Frankenstein is nothing more than a clever business idea.

Geschichtsverein Eberstadt/Frankenstein

(History Society Eberstadt/Frankenstein)

64297 Darmstadt, Frankensteiner Straße 7

email: eberst.frankenstein@email.de

www.eberstadt-frankenstein.de



Coat of arms of Frankenstein Family

Author: Erich Kraft. Pictures: Michael Müller. Translation: Sieglinde Moebus
© Geschichtsverein Eberstadt/Frankenstein 2018