

The Hart School
History Department
History Around Us Unit
Kenilworth Castle
Revision Booklet



Why was the castle built at Kenilworth?

- ◇ Kenilworth is in the **centre of the country** between important medieval cities such as Oxford, Hereford, Shrewsbury, and Nottingham.
- ◇ It is well connected to the **road system** of the time – it is situated close to the crossing point of the Fosse Way and Watling Street. **Supplies and troops** could easily be brought to and dispatched from the castle.
- ◇ It is close to **Coventry** which was an important Medieval city – it was important in the production of cloth and textiles. It provided a market for the castle to **trade** goods.
- ◇ It is close to the border of **Wales** – until the conquest of Wales in 1282 there were frequent raids in to England by Welsh Kings. The castle is in an important **defensive** position.
- ◇ The Earl of Warwick could be a problem for the King (especially Henry I) – Kenilworth was as close as it was possible to get to the Earl of Warwick's land so the King could **monitor** Warwick's movements.
- ◇ The castle is on a hill surrounded by flat land. This puts it in a strong defensive position to **protect** the surrounding area.

Example Questions

Imagine you are a guide at your site. If you want visitors to understand why your site was important in history, either locally or nationally, which features of the site would you show them and why? Use physical features of the site as well as your knowledge to support your answer. [20]

Choose a period when your site was particularly busy. Explain how a historian might use the physical remains of the site to investigate different activities at the site during that period. Use physical features of the site as well as your knowledge to support your answer. [20]

Explain what it was about the location of your site that led the people who created it to think that it would meet their needs. Use physical features of the site as well as your knowledge to support your answer. [20]

Spelling, punctuation and grammar and the use of specialist terminology [5]

Tackling the Exam

This exam is about your ability to use the knowledge that you have and tailor it to the question that you are asked.

Make sure that you know:

- ◇ Why the castle was built at Kenilworth. (Criteria a, b, i, l)
- ◇ The main people who have owned Kenilworth, what changes they made, and why those changes were important. (Criteria c, d, e, f, g, l, m)
- ◇ The main features of the site and why those features are important. (Criteria h, k, l, m)
- ◇ How typical Kenilworth is compared to other castles from a similar time period (Criteria j, l)
- ◇ The challenges and benefits of studying Kenilworth castle (Criteria n)

Who first created the castle?

The castle was first built by Geoffrey De Clinton (chamberlain and treasurer to Henry I) around 1120.

It is likely that the money to build the castle was provided by Henry I — Kenilworth is close to the lands of the Earl of Warwick, who was a potential rival who Henry needed to monitor closely.

The most prominent building that still stands from Geoffrey De Clinton's time is the bottom two floors of the Great Tower.



The Great Tower was the heart of the castle's defences, as well as a place for administration, entertainment, and a residence.

Significant Owners: John I (reigned 1199-1216)

King John was **not a popular King**—he had attempted to take the throne while his older brother Richard I (Richard the Lionheart) was fighting the Crusades, he lost large areas of England’s land in France in 1204, and he was forced to sign the Magna Carta by the English Barons in 1215.

King John’s developments at Kenilworth **strengthened the castle’s defences** and meant that the castle could be defended by a relatively small garrison.

King John’s losses in France taught him a lot about castle defence—in France he had encountered new siege weapons that he had not faced before, such as trebuchets. Although it did not help him in France, he applied the lessons he learn to his castles in England to make them stronger against similar attacks.

King John spent around £1100 improving Kenilworth’s defences—he **added curtain walls and towers, and thickened existing walls.**

King John **extended the size of the mere** (the artificial lake) by building a dam. This made one side of the castle virtually impossible to attack. Even where the water was not deep, waist-deep mud meant that soldiers and horses could get trapped and die of exposure.

The Exam

This is a 1 hour paper worth 20% of your grade.

There will be a choice of 3 questions on the paper, you must answer 2 of them.

Unlike other papers, there are no set question stems. Instead, questions will be made up of two or more of these criteria:

A	The reasons for the location of the site in its surrounding
B	When and why people first created the site
C	The ways in which the site has changed over time
D	How the site has been used throughout its history
E	The diversity of activities and people associated with the site
F	The reasons for changes to the site and how it has been used
G	Significant times in the site’s past
H	The significance of specific features in the physical remains
I	The importance of the site locally or nationally
J	The typicality of the site compared with similar sites
K	What the site reveals about everyday life, values and attitudes
L	How the physical remains can prompt questions and how historians frame these questions
M	How the physical remains can inform artistic reconstructions and other interpretations of the site
N	The challenges and benefits of studying the historic environment

Challenges

- ◇ Kenilworth is now a ruin—we do not know exactly how it looked when it was complete.
- ◇ The castle has changed dramatically over the course of its history—we do not always know which parts of the castle belong to which bits of its history.
- ◇ How people have interpreted features of the site may be effected by their own opinions and biases.
- ◇ There are very few drawings or schematics of Kenilworth before the 1600s.
- ◇ Artists who reconstructed the site were often working from incomplete data or ‘romanticising’ the ruins. This is especially the case during the Victorian era.
- ◇ Any reconstruction has an element of artistic licence to fill in missing details—we do not know how accurate some of the reconstructions are.

King John was excommunicated by the Pope in 1209. The Pope had banned the use of crossbows because of their devastating power and the lack of skill needed to use them (they could be used by anyone with very little training.) As he had been excommunicated anyway, John added **fishtail arrow loops** to the Great Tower during his alterations in 1210.



Fishtail arrow loops give space for the crossbow while providing protection for the archer.

In 1266, Kenilworth was sieged by King Henry III after the supporters of Simon De Montfort retreated to the castle. The siege lasted for 179 days and only ended when disease broke out inside the castle. **Kenilworth’s fortifications were so strong that Henry III’s son, Edward I, used many of the building techniques when building his castles in Wales and Scotland.**

Significant Owners: John of Gaunt

John of Gaunt took ownership of Kenilworth in 1359.

At this time England was still not a peaceful or secure place—the King was a boy, France and Scotland were enemies of England. Castles were still vital for defence, but could also be used to **reflect the owner's wealth**.

Gaunt was an **important man**: he was a prince, the uncle of King Richard II (who became king aged 10) and effectively ran the country during the King's childhood. Gaunt was also King of Castile and León in Spain through his marriage.

In 1370, Gaunt began an extensive building programme to reflect his **power and status**.

Gaunt added the Great Hall, reception rooms, state rooms (bedroom suites for important visitors) and service spaces. This tells us that the castle was of major national significance at this time as there must have been important visitors.

Little was done to alter John of Gaunt's work for the next 200 years.

Gaunt used Kenilworth to remind people of his **power and status**—lavish banquets were held in the Great Hall, but records also suggest that a favourite 'entertainment' was the torture of prisoners.

The Benefits and Challenges of Studying Kenilworth

Benefits

- ◇ Much of the site is still intact—we can go and visit the remains, it brings history to life.
- ◇ As it was in royal hands for much of its history, Kenilworth has excellently preserved records and archives—there is a good record of what changes were made, when they were made, how much they cost, etc.
- ◇ Kenilworth appears in other historical records—it helps us to understand the wider local and national importance of the castle.
- ◇ Kenilworth has been a significant feature on the landscape for hundreds of years—paintings, writing, reconstructions have been made that help us to visualise what the castle looked like before it was ruined.

Using Kenilworth for historical enquiry

An historical enquiry is the process of asking questions to find out about the past, a bit like a detective asking questions to find out about a crime.

Enquiry questions will usually begin with 'why' or 'how'

Enquiry questions should allow a researcher to find out more about a topic, so they should be 'open ended' i.e you shouldn't be able to answer them with 'yes' or 'no.'

An exam question might ask you to suggest an area of research on Kenilworth and explain why this would be an interesting enquiry.

Don't set up an enquiry question that you don't know the answer to because you are going to have to use your knowledge to explain why the question you have posed would be an interesting area for enquiry.

Examples:

Why did Robert Dudley 'brand' so much of Kenilworth with his personal seal?

Why are the fishtail arrowslits so significant?

How typical is Kenilworth castle of other castles built in the Medieval period?

Significant Owners: Robert Dudley

Dudley acquired the castle in 1563.

Dudley was Elizabeth I's favourite—he seems to be the only man that she ever seriously considered marrying. He turned the castle into a **luxurious palace** to show his status and attempt to win Elizabeth's hand in marriage.

Dudley made changes to Kenilworth in an attempt to **impress Elizabeth** and her court. Elizabeth stayed at Kenilworth 4 times. After each visit, Dudley made more changes to make the castle more to Elizabeth's liking—this was all part of his attempt to marry her.

Dudley's main change to Kenilworth was the addition of Leicester's Building (Dudley was the Earl of Leicester.)

Although the design and materials used in Leicester's Building are in keeping with the rest of the castle, the architecture was **innovative**.

Leicester's Building has thin walls and large lantern windows. The techniques used to create these were new and would have been very expensive—further showing Dudley's **wealth** and impressing Elizabeth.

Leicester's Building



The Great Tower

Key Features of the Site



The lantern windows in Leicester's Building

- ◇ Possibly the first example of windows of their type in England.
- ◇ Became part of the High Elizabethan style of 1580s and 1590s
- ◇ Very expensive



Elizabethan garden

- ◇ Created by Dudley for Elizabeth's 'long stay' in 1575.
- ◇ Private garden just for Elizabeth's use—part of his attempt to marry Elizabeth.
- ◇ Contains features designed to remind Elizabeth of Dudley's qualities and suitability as a husband—he is one of the figures holding up the world on the statue in the fountain. The aviary housed rare and exotic birds.
- ◇ Was the model for other gardens that were designed in the following years.

Remember: Kenilworth is a reflection of the time it was built or developed

During Kenilworth's early history, England was an unsettled country – attacks and raids were common and England was often at war e.g Hundred Years War. Kenilworth at this time is mainly a **fortress**. Its significant features are all about **defence**.

In the 14th-15th centuries England was generally a less unruly country, but there was still the threat of invasion or war. John of Gaunt turned Kenilworth in to a **palace** - the Great Hall in particular reflects the growing **wealth and power** of England, but at this time Kenilworth is still needed as a defensive stronghold.

By the time Kenilworth comes to Robert Dudley, England is a united country and attack in the middle of the country is much less likely. Dudley's alterations to Kenilworth show that defence is no longer the main concern – his buildings are about **comfort and showing off** his wealth. He is also making a grab for power – he was trying to **impress Elizabeth** so much that she would marry him.

Unique features of Kenilworth:

Kenilworth is only 5km from the nearest castle – Warwick. This is very unusual as a castle was usually a defensive position of a baron to control the local area on behalf of the King. The fact that Kenilworth is so close to Warwick is a reflection of how powerful the Earl of Warwick was, and Kenilworth's role in keeping an eye on him.

Many of King John's changes were unique, for example:

- the size of the mere; although not as deep as moats on other castles, the size and design of the mere made it practically impossible to attack one side of the castle.

- Fishtail arrow slits. These were only used at Kenilworth because King John had been excommunicated.

The building techniques and styles used to create Leicester's Tower were new to England at the time – Kenilworth is one of the first buildings in the country to have 'lantern' windows. Many buildings had small windows because glass was expensive. Even when buildings (like the Great Hall) had large windows, they had to be set in to thick walls to make sure that the building did not become unstable. The lantern windows in Leicester's Tower use very thin supports to allow a large window to be put in to a thin wall and keep the strength of the wall. This showed the Earl of Leicester's sophistication but also his wealth – he had to employ skilled craftsmen to complete the job, and the glass in the windows would have been incredibly expensive.



The Great Hall

- ◇ Modelled on changes that were made to Windsor Castle in the 1350s—showed off Gaunt's wealth and status.
- ◇ The Great Hall at Kenilworth was the widest roofed space in England apart from Westminster Hall in London.
- ◇ Said to be 'the finest sweep of semi-royal apartments of the later middle ages to survive in Britain.'



The mere

- ◇ Made the castle practically impregnable from one side.
- ◇ Meant the castle could be defended by a small garrison.



King John's fortifications

- ◇ Included towers, buttresses, portcullises, thicker walls etc.
- ◇ Meant that Kenilworth was very difficult to overpower—the siege of 1266 only ended when disease broke out.

How Typical is Kenilworth?

Other castles built at around the same time as Kenilworth include:

Exeter Castle

Chepstow Castle

Goodrich Castle

Bamburgh Castle

If something is **typical** it is representative of, or similar to, other things of the same time.

Typical features of Kenilworth:

The core of Kenilworth is a motte and bailey castle – a keep on a hill (motte) surrounded by flat land (bailey) enclosed by a wooden palisade or stone wall.

The series of inner and outer defensive walls is similar to others of the time period – although height, thickness, material (etc) differs from castle to castle, many castles of the period have a similar set of defensive walls.

As well as being a residence for part of its history, Kenilworth's keep was the last defensive position if the other defences were breached (got through)

Many castles of the time had a keep/great hall for entertaining and showing the power of the owner.



Goodrich Castle



Exeter Castle



Chepstow Castle



Bamburgh Castle