

Other places of historical Interest



Michael Pierre de Villiers

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Title page: Top to bottom, left to right; Chatsworth, Aston Hall, Coombe Park, Middleton Hall, Astley Castle, Kenilworth Castle.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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2026-07-31

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Not all stately homes or places of historical interest are the preserve of the National Trust. Some are privately owned while a considerable number are in the care of English Heritage. See the Appendix for building grade listing.

Chatsworth (Grade I)



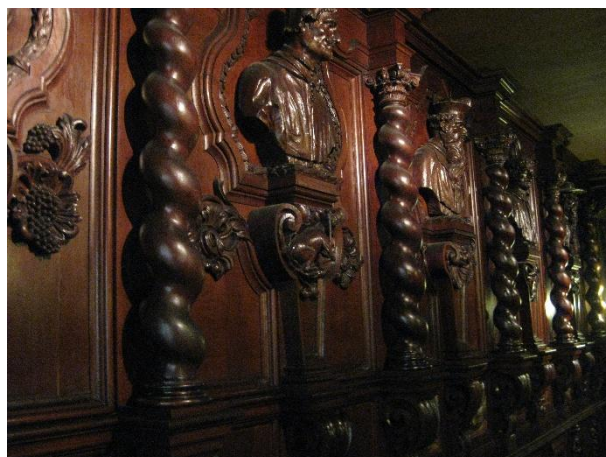
Chatsworth House seen from inside the premises.

Sunday 11th September 2011, we visited Chatsworth in Derbyshire, built around 1549. A beautiful and incredible place. Excuse the unusual superlatives. The so-called house is Grade I listed. Nearly everything else you can see on the estate is Grade II listed. Well worth the visit. Took far too many photographs and still kept 79 after editing. The wonder of a digital camera. Bought the comprehensive “Your guide to Chatsworth”, which they more correctly refer to as a book. Chatsworth is the family home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. It has been in the family for 16 generations handed down from father to son, or the nearest male heir.

The 12th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire pay rent to live in apartments at Chatsworth House and manage the working community estate through the Chatsworth House Trust. The family line started when Bess of Hardwick persuaded her husband Sir William of Cavendish to buy the property. She then set about building Chatsworth, which was enlarged by the 6th Duke. During her time, Mary Queen of Scots was detained there at Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth I's, pleasure.



Sekhmet goddess of war.



An example of wooden carved wall panels in the Oak Room bought by the 6th Duke.

The house is big and not exceptional from outside, but very lavish inside. It is not National Trust owned, so one

is allowed to take photographs inside. So full advantage was taken. It has a huge and varied art collection, accumulated through the generations, some in dedicated galleries. Oil paintings, large and small statues and busts abound throughout the house, plus wooden carved walls. There is a large sculpture collection, including two 3000 years old statues of Sekhmet, the Egyptian goddess of war.



Entrance hall, or Painted Hall with its black and white marble floor and its painted ceiling.



Inside the Chapel and the State Drawing Room.



The State Music Room and the Grand Dining Room.

One can spend hours walking in the 0.4 square kilometre (105 acres) breath-taking garden alone, complete with water and rock features, a grotto, a maze and a blocked entrance to an old coal tunnel. We had a long walk in the garden and found our way to the centre of the maze and out again of course. Thoroughly enjoyed the walk.



The grotto with gaze above it and the view of the grotto pond from the gazebo.

Water features abound fed by an amazing water collection system, in turn fed by water courses and kilometres of underground pipes, some over 400 years old. Rain falling on the moor is collected in higher altitude man-made lakes, the Emperor Lake, Swiss Lake and the Ring Pond. Water from the Emperor Lake is fed by underground pipe to the Emperor Fountain. Descending 122 metres through a pipe 40 centimetres diameter, the pressure creates a fountain up to 90 metres high in the Emperor Pond without the use of a pump. The Emperor Pipe also supplies water for the turbines. These have provided electricity for the house since 1893. Water from the Ring Pond flows down to an aqueduct, then underground to the Cascade Pond, then to the most impressive water feature, the Cascade. It took 2 attempts and 17 years to complete in 1711. Each step in the cascade is different, causing the sound of the waterfalls to change. Water from the Cascade feeds other fountains and goes underground to flush lavatories. Water from the Cascade Pond also goes to the Wellington Rock Strid Pond, the Willow Tree Fountain and a second smaller Ring Pond in the garden. Overflow water from these systems is fed to the River Derwent, except the lavatory water of course.



Looking uphill along the Cascade to the Cascade Temple. On the right, the Willow Tree Fountain.

By opening a sluice, water pressure forces water from brass pipes made to look like branches and leaves, the shower resembling a willow. The present fountain was commissioned by the 6th Duke in the early 19th century to replace a dilapidated original.

The estate includes the park, enclosed by 15 kilometres (9 miles) of stone wall and deer fence. It covers 1.6 square kilometres (400 acres). Included are the villages of Edensor (pronounced Enza), Beeley and Calton Lees. In the 1762, the 4th Duke of Devonshire demolished part of Edensor that could be seen from the house that intruded on his view of the parkland leaving only Park Cottage. Then, in the 1880s, the 6th Duke, who improved Chatsworth, demolished the rest of the village and rebuilt Edensor nearby using different architectural styles including houses designed like a Swiss chalet, a small crenelated castle and mock Tudor. Fifty of the buildings are Grade II listed of which a few are Grade II* listed. The Church of St. Peter being Grade I listed.



Edensor's Swiss Chalet Grade II listed and crenelated, plus Tower Gatehouse Grade II*.

Aston Hall (Grade I)

Wednesday January 9th 2013, we went to Aston Hall and Park in northern Birmingham. Aston Hall is Grade I listed. It was a cold, but sunny day. Took the bus to Birmingham International Station, train to Birmingham New Street then train to Aston or Witton Station. We chose further Witton Station. It is slightly closer to Aston Hall.

One walks past the nearby Aston Villa Football Club stadium to get to Grade I listed Aston Hall. The Hall is an impressive brick building. For some reason, we decided not to go inside, even though we were invited to join a guided tour that was about to depart.

A convenient notice board informed us that the three-hundred-acre Aston Park was established



Aston Hall with short wings.

in 1620 by Sir Thomas Holte, consisting of wood, scrub, pasture and farm land with orchards, gardens and fishponds. With the hall built it was occupied in 1631, but not fully completed until 1635. The hall was built in what is known as the Jacobean prodigy house style. Jacobean being associated with the period of the reign of King James I of England and the second phase of England Renaissance architecture following the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Prodigy house means it was a large and showy English country house, or awesome and ambitious heap. Around 1850 portions of

the estate were sold for housing development. In 1864 Birmingham Corporation purchased Aston Hall and 43 acres of the park. To date, the hall and gardens are maintained by the Birmingham City Council. Toward the end of the century the Aston Villa Football Club obtained part of the remaining park.

The very nearly north/south hall, facing to the east, has two stubby wings. So far so good. What makes it unusual is that each wing has a wall projecting further east. At the eastern end of each of the walls is a matching design three story structure. Both of them, known as Falconers Lodges are Grade I listed. Furthermore, aligned to the north of the northern lodge is connected to a line of buildings at the end of which is a stable range, also Grade I listed. The plan of the buildings becomes clear in the composite photograph below. The hall is in the recessed middle with lodges at each end. The stable range is beyond the white van at the extreme right of the photograph. The black and white sign, next to the lodge on the right, indicates the direction to the entry to the hall and the stables.



Coombe Park and Garden (Grade I and II*)

Wednesday 30th January 2013, we went to Coombe Park and Garden, to the west of Coventry on the road to Rugby. Coombe Abbey is now the Coombe Abbey Hotel, with a large park available for public walks.

It was a sunny and mild day for the time of the year, around 10°C, although windy from the south-west at about 35-45kph gusting 65kph. We travelled by bus, having first checked routes and times on the Internet. From home to Coventry then a Coventry to Rugby bus.

We expected an interesting and amusing trip there. Apparently, there is no bus stop where the bus passes the entrance to Coombe Park. One asks the driver to stop there when boarding, hoping the driver knows the spot. When returning, one stands by the roadside and waves to the driver to stop.



The “bus stop” and walk to the abbey.

We set off with packed lunch in backpacks. The driver to Rugby was not fazed by our request. Nevertheless, we sat at the front of the bus while I tracked our progress by map. Sure enough, all went according to plan. Same returning. We stood there wondering if the driver would stop, because it was a long walk from the park to the edge of Coventry where there was a Coventry bus route. Once again all was well. No one on the bus looked the least surprised by the stop, or even paid any interest. It is 600 metres walk from the road entrance along a straight tree lined avenue to the Coombe Abbey building.



The west range faces an ornamental small lake. Part of the north range can be seen on the left.

The site is near the Fosse Way, a Roman road from Exeter to Lincoln. During Medieval times, Cistercian monks began development of Coombe until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539, when it was appropriated by King Henry VIII, then granted to Lord Craven, then bought by a builder named John Grey. Many changes to the building were made along the way.

The daughter of King James I, Princess Elizabeth aged 7, came to Coombe Abbey in 1603 to be educated. She is not to be confused with Queen Elizabeth I who reigned before King James I. Two years later the Guy Fawkes Gunpowder Plot planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament, thereby getting rid of James I, kidnap Elizabeth from Coombe Abby to be queen



A sample of some of trees in the park.

The Grade I listed main building is in an U shape with ranges west, north and east of a courtyard. The present mansion incorporates building elements from the 12th century through the 15th to 19th centuries with roof rebuild in the 20th.

Occupation of the site of the Abby dates from the bronze or early iron age. There is a burial mound beneath trees near the visitor's centre dating from this time. It is protected as an Ancient Scheduled Monument. Because they usually occur in groups there are likely to be others undiscovered underground in the park. There is also evidence of a Roman settlement. Roman relics were found when clay pits were dug two hundred years ago.

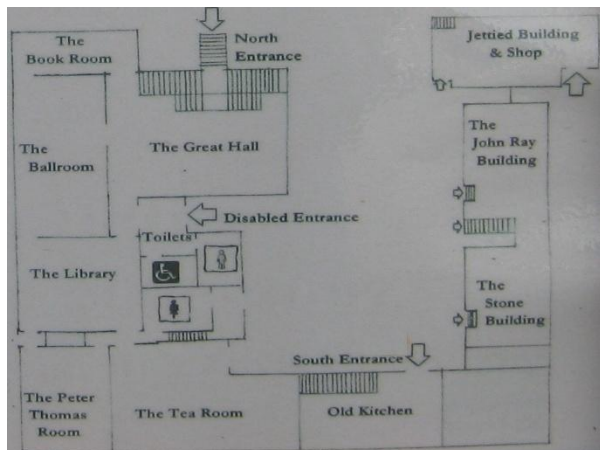
and restore the Catholic faith. It was not to be. As we know they were caught. In the 1960s the Coventry City Council bought the house and some of the land. The Abbey became the private Coombe Abbey Hotel and the surrounding ground a public park.

In spite of the wind, it was an enjoyable day and an easy walk through the park, across a river (with lots of water birds, mainly ducks, gulls with a few mute swans) and through the wooded area with a variety of interesting trees.

Middleton Hall (Grade II*)

Mid-September 2015 the 16th, another Wednesday, on a whim with little knowledge of our destination, we went to Middleton Hall, a drive of about 25 minutes north from home. We were pleasantly surprised. Another fascinating place. Consisting of a Tudor barn complex and Middleton Hall that is a composite of 6th century jettied building and an 18th century building. Together Grade II* listed.

There are numerous strategically placed notice boards from which, with a few exceptions, the following information was obtained.



The floor plan of Middleton Hall from a noticeboard. On the right, the jettied building with the newer Georgian Hall on the right. In-between in the background the white John Ray building can be seen within the courtyard.

The Middleton Hall buildings are in the form of a rough square with internal courtyard. The main entrance is to the north with the late 18th century Grade II* listed Georgian hall on the west. The from the southern to eastern parts of the buildings vary in age. The kitchen on the south-eastern side dates from circa 1620. The Stone Building on the eastern side is the oldest, dating from 1285. North of this building is the John Ray building. This is where he lived and worked. In his time, this building was different. Constructed in 1647, it was a gable roofed box timber-frame structure with a lower ceiling and was divided into smaller rooms. Considerable renovation changes were made in 1725. On the north-eastern corner is the 16th century timber frame and plaster jettied building.

The jettied building was close to collapse before restoration started. A modern brick wall had to be added to the west side. The brick wall can be seen in the photograph above right. It now has period furniture, including a spinning wheel, a commode toilet and a tableau consisting of period dressed male mannequin with a female mannequin seated in front of a wooden rocking cot.



The 16th century jettied building and an interior room display.

In the old kitchen the fireplace originally had a smoke jack, that is, a fan that is turned by the heat rising from the fire, which then turns a spit for roasting meat. The Stone Building, is the

oldest on the site. It is a “rare and important structure, particularly for its ‘Barrel Vaulted’ roof.” An interesting feature of the original building, was the outside entrance stairs to the ceiling-less upstairs hall where the family lived. The kitchen and servants’ accommodation were on the ground floor. The hall was later divided into two with the inner walls wood panelled. A ceiling was added and an attic room added. This necessitated two additional outside staircases. One to the new divided part of the building and one to the attic room. The stone staircases are no longer evident, maybe having been appropriated for other use.

The Georgian Hall has been sumptuously restored with period furniture, decorations, etc. It is available for wedding, family celebrations, funeral receptions, meetings and film hire.



The Georgian Hall entrance and an example of one of the meeting/dining rooms.

In the mid-17th century, the older part of Middleton Hall was home to Francis Willughby, mathematician and naturalist and the only son of an affluent country family. Francis was a student of John Ray, mathematician and naturalist. Francis became John’s patron and they became lifelong friends and colleagues. Together, it was intended they would ambitiously catalogue and order nature. Francis was to catalogue animals and John plants.

Sadly, Francis died aged 37 from pleurisy. However, in his will, he left John £60 a year. Enough to live on and carry on the work, becoming “the first great English Naturalist”. John’s tribute to Francis was to complete Francis’s work on birds and publish the first scientific book on the subject, Willughby’s Ornithology. Other important books he wrote were; Catalogue of English Plants (also in written in Latin), A Complete Collection of English Proverbs, Observations in the Low Countries and A Collection of English Words not Generally Used. To quote from a notice board “Ray went on to lay the foundations of taxonomy; the science of the classification of species, which endure to this day. He was the first to give a precise definition of the term ‘Species’ and to group them into families and the first to call the study of plants Botany”.

A short distance away, to the north-east outside the remains of a medieval moat is a Tudor (circa 1485 to 1603) barn complex now housing craft shops and a small tearoom. The hall was allowed to fall into disrepair over the years. Since 1980 it has been restored by the Middleton Hall Trust.

“The floor plan of the Tudor Barn reveals it to have been a longhouse and the ground floor footprint of it has changed little since its original construction.” Construction began around 1220 using red sandstone. In 1604, using the original foundations, the building was converted to a two storey Tudor Barn. In 1716 some Georgian renovation was made. More recently, in 2021, authentic restoration was made to safeguard its continued existence,



The Tudor Barn front and in the courtyard.

We had tea and scones in the barn complex, then returned home.

Reading Museum and the copy of the Bayeux Tapestry

Later the same month, September Wednesday 23rd 2015. I went by train to Reading to attend a Royal Meteorological Society Weather Editorial Board meeting. The meeting ended early, so I went to the Reading Museum before heading home. I previously visited the museum when I visited the UK Met Office at Shinfield Park training establishment in June 1994. During the weekend break I travelled to town to do some sightseeing and I visited the museum. It was there that I was surprised to see the famous Bayeux Tapestry. However, it is copy of the original. Eight randomly chosen photographs were taken to commemorate my more recent visit, two of which are shown below.



The Normans disembarcing and at the Battle of Hastings.

It is an amazing seventy metres of 11th century embroidery that tells the story of events from prior to the Norman invasion to the conquest of England at the battle of Hastings. Late in the 19th century, a group of talented Victorian embroiderers, the Leek Embroidery Society, recreated the entire tapestry, reproducing every single detail, stitch-by-stitch. Well not entirely. Typical of Victorian prudery, a naked figure in the original tapestry in the border below the panel where a clergyman is touching, possibly striking the face of a woman (Ælfgyva), is shown wearing a brief garment. The original clearly shows his genitalia. It is still disputed why the clergyman and Ælfgyva segment was included. Did this depict an illicit affair? The man could be stroking Ælfgyva's face. Meanwhile, further evidence, the naked male figure in the border below has left arm outstretched and gesturing up Ælfgyva's skirt.

There is growing belief that the tapestry does not simply depict a Norman victory and was not created in Normandy. Rather that it was created in England, about 10 years after the battle. That it is full of ingenious hidden meaning that contradicts the glorified and righteous Norman propaganda and subtly recording the English version. The copied tapestry is now housed in a specially designed gallery in the Reading Museum.

It was well worth seeing again, this time with more knowledge about the symbolism and subtle messages having read two books on the tapestry. The original tapestry was patched by later generations. Some of the embroidery (especially in the final scene) has been reworked. The tapestry appears to have remained close to its original appearance and compares closely with a careful drawing made in 1730.

By the way, the Bayeux Tapestry is, strictly speaking, not a tapestry. The images are stitched on to the fabric, that is, embroidered, not woven as in a true tapestry.

Lunt Roman Fort

On the south-eastern edge of Coventry, near Baginton Village, are the remains of an ancient Roman fort dating from circa 60 AD. Named the Lunt Roman Fort, it is fully excavated and partially reconstructed. We tried to visit it some time back while visiting the Midland Air Museum nearby. I also made two solo attempts. Each time it was closed. October the 1st 2015, I made another attempt. This time travelling by bus. When I arrived at the entrance, there was



Lunt Fort gateway.



The gyryus.

the usual closed sign. However, I could see a school group in the distance with a guide. The gate was not locked so, camera and 5th Edition Roman Britain Ordnance Survey Historical Map in hand, I went in and walked through the reconstructed wooden gateway. Apparently, the gateway was built, under supervision of an archaeologist, using the same tools and techniques that the military engineers would have used. Six post-holes and a gap in the defensive ditch were the only clues to location of a gate. The gate was reconstructed from examples carved on Trajan's Column in Rome. I wondered how much is accurate and how much fanciful.

I then strolled to the right to the gyryus, which was possibly used to train horses. Evidence of a wooden post in the centre suggests that it was used for weapon practice. Naturally taking photographs while I walked.

Paedophilia was becoming big news at the time, so I was careful not to take photographs in the direction of the school children off to the south-west of the fort. The reconstructed gyryus is a circular dip in the ground, dug to a depth of about 0.8 metre surrounded by a

wooden stockade with a wooded entrance funnel. Situated, unusually, within the fort, meant that the usual rectangular Roman fort shape was disrupted, resulting in a bulge along the eastern perimeter. This makes the fort unique among known Roman forts anywhere in the Roman Empire. Near the gyrus are the foundation remains of what is thought to be a wash-house or hospital. Not far off there is evidence of a workshop, such as used by a blacksmith as well as making and repairing weapons and armour.



The granary and foundation remains.

By now the school group had entered the reconstructed modern interpretation of a Roman granary and I went on to the remaining foundations of barrack blocks where a volunteer was clearing debris.

We greeted each other and she politely said that they were closed. I said thank you and that I will leave. Just then a guide came to me from the granary. After greeting and again pointing out they were closed, he saw my 5th Edition Roman Britain Ordnance Survey Historical Map and hearing my South African accent, assumed I was a tourist from

afar. He allowed me to take a few more photographs before leaving me and I headed to the exit. Just then another guide dressed as a Roman Legionary came rushing up to me saying can I not see they were closed. I said the sign looked like it had been there for ages so I ignored it. He said he put it up last week. I hastily departed.

Astley Castle (Grade II*)

Mid-October Saturday 16th 2016, we went to 16th century Astley Castle about 15 minutes' drive north of where we live. It was, a moated and fortified manor house. Officially called a castle. Grade II listed since 1952 and a Scheduled Ancient Monument since 1994. We went to the location primarily because it looked like a good walking area.

When we arrived, we found a small village of about 10 houses. Driving past them we came to a small cud-de-sac grass parking area. Leaving the car, we walked a short distance in a field passing a large derelict but still sound stone Gothic stable building and came to a large and



The stable building.

impressive if out of place large Gothic church considering the now small community, before arriving at the so-called castle.

Thankfully, the Landmark Trust has appropriately placed very informative notice boards. In fact, there are, in total, 6 information boards relating to the area.

The Church of St Mary the Virgin, with a college for training priests, dating from the mid-14th century (still in use apparently), is historically linked with Astley Castle. Its present appearance being the result of



The St. Mary the Virgin Church. The tower has obviously been built with different material.

interventions by past owners of the castle. Late in the 16th century during the reformation, the lead roof was stripped, the building plundered for building materials and the college terminated. In 1600 the new owner restored the church and made new additions to the building, which are clearly visible by the use of different stone and the more Gothic appearance.

Nearby is a man-made lake, referred to as early as 1501. Probably made as a fish pond providing food for the castle and the church college. Fish were vital food in accordance with the strict dietary guidelines of the catholic church and its regime of fasting days.

Viewing of the castle is from a distance, because it is private property. It is a curious ruin, or hybrid ruin. Part of it is a ruin, part of it is modern structure. Most curious, until we found the Landmark Trust information board.

The one detailing the castle explained that the rectangular, almost square, crenelated ruin was an architectural award-winning restoration that used the existing ruin and modern building materials to produce a building that reopened as a holiday let in 2012. Restoration started around 2009. Not all of the original castle is used for habitation. So, it is still part rendered safe ruin, part house. The new accommodation uses the first-floor space as one large open plan room for living, cooking and dining. Meanwhile, all the bedrooms are on the ground floor.

Wherever possible, original manor house window openings have been used so that there is the same appearance as before. The mostly unused east wall has a variety of different style windows with alterations made in the 17th and 19th centuries. Most notably central Gothic curved windows and mid-19th century in the photograph below right. The original defensive wall around the castle was restored using traditional lime and mortar and re-pointing techniques. Never seen anything like it before.



Views of the unusual, innovative and interesting restoration of the castle.
The castle originally belonged to the de Astley family, naturally. Later, in the earlier part of

the 16th century it belonged to Lord Grey (Duke of Suffolk), father of the misused and abused 16 year old Lady Jane Grey and her reign of nine days on the throne before execution for treason.

King Edward VI became king at the age of 9 after the death of his father King Henry VIII. He was sickly and died aged 16 after six years on the throne. The regency was controlled by John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland. He was aware that Henry VIII's daughter catholic Mary would succeed to the throne, failing that, Elizabeth his protestant daughter. Either way leaving him fearing for his future. Lady Jane had a claim to the throne through her maternal grandmother, who was King Henry VIII's sister. With support from Lord Grey (Duke of Suffolk) and against Jane's wish, Northumberland had Jane married to his son Lord Guildford Dudley in May 1554. Edward VI died of tuberculosis July 1553. The Duke of Northumberland placed Jane on the throne. She lasts 9 days before overthrown by Mary who becomes queen. John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland is executed. Jane and husband Guildford Dudley the same result after a few months, admittedly Mary was inclined to spare them. Lord Grey (Duke of Suffolk) was pardoned; however, he too lost his head when involved in a later rebellion against Queen Mary. One may say he did not quit when he was ahead.

Astley Castle was a Parliamentary stronghold during the English Civil War. In 1978, it was badly damaged by fire while in use as a hotel, remaining derelict until recent restoration.

Where we parked the car is what is known as Dark Lane. It is now a deeply curved sandy



Dark Lane.

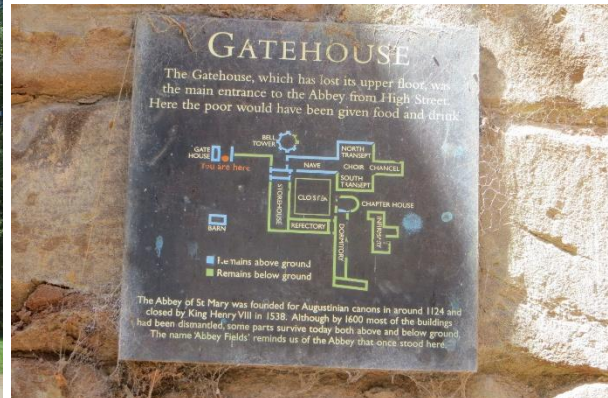
disused holloway, disused except by walkers. A holloway is a passage formed by the passage over many years of people and vehicles, such as carts and horses, on unmade tracks. This gradually creates a depression along the roadway, into which rainwater drains. Where the passage slopes an intermittent river increases the rate of erosion. After centuries, the surface lowers to well below the original ground level creating the holloway. The section seen was probably a main route from the village to the church and castle. There is a similar feature nearby to the north of where we live that is now a bridal path.

All in all, an unexpectedly interesting walk and day out.

Kenilworth Castle (Grade I) and Abbey of Saint Mary

We visited the castle ruins on two occasions, 11th April 2012 and 9th July 2023. On both occasions we backpacked and bussed it to Kenilworth. Although it is only about 15 kilometres (~8 miles) to the south-south-east of us, we still opted for the longer bus trip and make it a day of it, walking included. Once at Kenilworth, it was a rather easy walk, first to the local 12th century Abbey of Saint Mary ruin then a walks around the ruined Kenilworth Castle perimeter. En route between the abbey and castle we had a pleasant picnic lunch next to a small lake on one occasion and at the abbey the second time.

The abbey and nearby castle were built around the same time, (approximately 1122) by Godfrey de Clinton after being granted the land by King Henry I. Geoffrey de Clinton was Henry I's Chamberlain, according to a suitably placed notice board. Additions were made to the castle early in the 13th century and periodically into the 16th century.



The barn, after roof restoration and abbey plan.

The Augustinian abbey was dissolved in April 1538 during King Henry VIII's reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries. By around 1700, very little remained of the abbey. The gatehouse fared little better while the ancient barn was still in reasonable condition. A notice board shows the abbey as it might have appeared in 1200.



The abbey gatehouse remains, front and back.

Now to Kenilworth Castle and the ruins thereof. More recently, Tuesday 28th July 2026, I visited the ruined castle during a period of hot and dry weather and drought. This time paying to be allowed entry.

Most of the information that follows was obtained from numerous notice boards placed around the castle grounds and inside the Leicester's Gatehouse by English Heritage who now own and manage the site. These were photographed then transcribed. Other sources are listed in the bibliography.

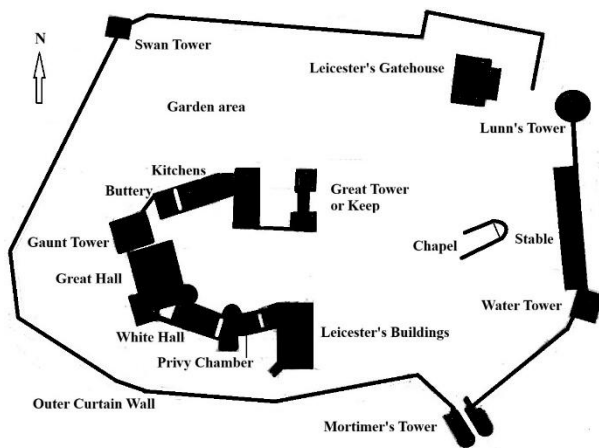
Kenilworth Castle fared somewhat better, being in the hands of kings and chosen favourites, until the Civil War of 1642-1651. As already mentioned, Kenilworth Castle was built in 1120 by Geoffrey de Clinton, Chamberlain and Treasurer to King Henry I. After Godfrey de Clinton, the castle passed through a bewildering succession of kings, such as Henry II, King John, Henry III, John of Gaunt (not a king but who made renovations and additional construction), his son who became Henry IV through to Henry VIII. Then the earl of Leicester (Sir Robert Dudley, Queen Elizabeth I's favourite) from whom it was sequestered by the Crown by James I, then

Henry Prince of Wales to Charles I.

After the Civil War (1642-1651) to avoid the cost of maintenance it was considerably demolished. The principle being we don't want it, so nobody, namely enemies, can have it. The interior fittings were stripped and sold and stone taken for use elsewhere for road building and probably pillaged for buildings, such as houses. The gatehouse, which looks more like a small castle survived. It remains in good condition being converted into a house after the Civil War.

Some interesting castle facts.

During King Henry III's (1216–72) reign, he gave Kenilworth Castle to his sister Eleanor and her husband, Simon de Monfort, 6th Earl of Leicester. He was killed at the Battle of Evesham in 1265. His son, also Simon, inherited against the wishes of King Henry III. The result was an extraordinary long six-month siege until starvation and disease forced him to surrender to the king on 13th December 1266.



A general map of the castle created from various sources. It is not entirely accurate. Referring to the map, the keep is the oldest structure. The Stables, Leicester's Building and Gatehouse are the least old.



The embankment leading to Mortimer's Tower and entrance to the castle. Leicester's Building is on the left and the Keep.

How and why did the earl of Leicester (Robert Dudley) inherit the castle? After the Lady Jane Grey plot, the four remaining Dudley brothers were spared. While Robert Dudley, "the 5th son of John Dudley, Earl of Warwick and Duke of Northumberland" (Mark66001) was a prisoner in the Tower, the young Princess Elizabeth was brought there, also on suspicion of treason. Elizabeth had known Robert Dudley from childhood and apparently smitten with him. The day after Elizabeth inherited the English throne on 11 November 1556, at the age of 25 becoming Elizabeth I, she made Robert Dudley the Master Horse. "This prestigious role put him in charge of the royal stables" and "kept him by her side wherever she travelled" (Leicester Gatehouse exhibition).

More recently, in 1937 "the car manufacturer Sir John Siddeley bought the castle from George Villiers, 6th Earl of Clarendon, and put it in the hands of the Ministry of Works with a substantial sum of money to fund repairs" (Leicester Gatehouse exhibition).

Referring to the map, starting at the now entrance to the castle at the remains of the so-called Mortimer's Tower, one walks along a length of straight and level embankment to reach it. This was built to dam water on the western side and it used as a tiltyard.

Upon entry, one is faced with the Leicester

Building on the left and the Keep, or Great Tower or Caesar's Tower. Seen in the photograph on the previous page.

The **Keep** (or Great Tower or Caesar's Tower) was built in quick time around 1124-30 by Geoffrey de Clinton. No doubt due to the enormous financial resources of King Henry I. When completed it was the primary castle residence. In the late 16th century, Robert Dudley enlarged the window openings. From ground level, there was a stone lined well in the south-east tower down 18 metres. It then extended another 3 metres to red sandstone bedrock of red sandstone with fissures from which came strong spring water. After the Civil War stop the Keep from falling into enemy hands, it was "slighted" (deliberately destroyed) by demolishing the northern side.

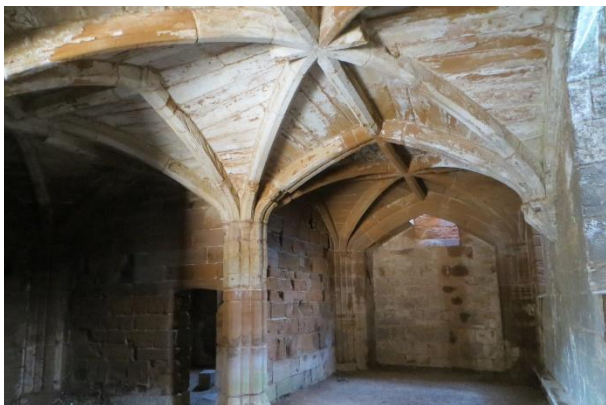


The Keep seen from the Gaunt Tower and the garden showing the demolished side.



The kitchen area next to the Keep.

Next to the keep were the **kitchens**. These were built John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in the 1370s being amongst the biggest in medieval England. They had to provide daily meals for him, his family, large household of advisors, knights, military retainers and servants. The main kitchen, serving the household, was built against the curtain wall. The backs and hearths of three great fireplaces are visible against the wall. Possibly the three different stone formations seen in the photograph, just left of centre. A second kitchen prepared for Gaunt, his family and special guests.



The kitchen area next to the Keep.

Moving on one comes to the **Strong or Gaunt Tower**, because it was built by him in the 1370s. It is the remains of this building that stairs (part original and mostly constructed) enables one to get to the top of the structure with a bird's eye view of the castle's ruins. Unfortunately, no photograph of the tower. There is a photograph of the cellar. These were used for the storage of

foodstuffs. The tower is remarkable because the floor was built on the vaulted stone ceiling of the cellar.

The **Great Hall** was the pièce de résistance (centrepiece) of the Castle rebuilt by John of Gaunt between 1373-80. The design reflects the great hall at Windsor Castle built by his father, King Edward III. Its ground floor was also above a stone vaulted cellar. The exceptionally tall windows can be seen in the ruin of the hall. The hall was where members of the household had their daily meals. It had become the fashion for the Lord of the castle and his family and guests to dine in the state apartments. Dining in the hall only on great of occasions.



The remains of the Great Hall and its immense size seen from the top of the Gaunt Tower.



In the distance, seen from the kitchen area, all that remains of Gaunt's state chambers.



Leicester's Building and the Keep on the right.

Getting to the southern part of the ruins, are the **White Hall and Privy Chamber** shown on the map between the Great Hall and Leicester's Building. Built by John of Gaunt in the 1390's, also known as **John of Gaunt's state chambers**.

The Earl of Leicester Robert Dudley's later period two major building contributions to the castle were the Leicester Building and the Gatehouse.

Leicester's Building, of private apartments, was built in the early 1570s by Robert Dudley to impress Queen Elizabeth who visited in 1575, staying for 19 days, her longest visit to any courtier. It was built outside the old inner curtain walls and above the old inner ditch. Apparently, this caused structural problems that resulted in the protruding south-west structure staircase, built as a stabilising buttress. This feature can be seen on the map.

The **Leicester Gatehouse**, as its name implies, was built, in the early 1570s, as a fully functioning house at the entry gate to the castle. Another attempt to impress

Elizabeth I during her 1575 visit. Post Civil War, from about 1650 until the mid-20th century the gatehouse was converted into a domestic residence. Most of the time a succession of gentlemen farmers lived here while the medieval castle decayed about them.



Two views of Leicester's Gatehouse, showing the front entrance on the left while on the right the accommodation extension is evident.



A major part of the conversion was the removal of the original passageway through the building with a new entrance created on the west side, as it is now. A twin gable pitched roof extension was added on the eastern side to accommodate bedrooms, servants' quarters, a kitchen and a large staircase.



The Oak Room's fireplace with overmantel panel and wall panelling



The garden seen from Gaunt's Tower.

An alabaster fireplace, dated 1571, probably from the privy chamber used by Queen Elizabeth I, was brought to the building, as was an ornate wooden overmantel and wall panelling were also moved to the building from elsewhere in the castle. Presently seen in the Oak Room. Another ground floor room has been furnished as a period dining room. This room was originally part of the gatepassage.

The **queen's privy garden** was created by Robert Dudley as another way to impress

Queen Elizabeth I when she visited. It included new features, such as terraces, human form statues, obelisks and an aviary.



The Stables with the Water Tower in the foreground.

The **Stables** were inherited by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, from his father, John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, who built them while he was briefly lord of the castle from 1549 to 1553. Who, as we read earlier, lost his head. Most careless.

A surveyor, in 1563, reported that there were 30 boxes for great horses and 20 for geldings. Although, there are doubts that the stable could contain so many horses. Above, was a loft for the storage of hay and perhaps accommodation for grooms.

The **Water Tower**, so named because it overlooked a pool, was added to the castle by Thomas, the 2nd Earl of Lancaster circa 1303-1322. It was comfortable accommodation having fireplaces and large windows.

As part of neutralising the castle after the Civil War, the outer curtain wall was deliberately destroyed in places, such as in the north-east, with the ruin of **Lunn's Tower** surviving. Lunn's Tower was built by King John for defence in the castle wall. As such it was not built for comfort.



Lunn's Tower and the chapel's foundation remains in the photograph on the right.

The **chapel foundation remains** are those of the collegiate chapel of St. Mary, built by Thomas, the 2nd Earl of Lancaster between 1313 and 1318.

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Appendix

In the United Kingdom (UK) a listed building is one of special architectural or historic interest. A listed building may not be demolished, extended or altered without special permission from the local planning authority in consultation with the relevant central government agency. The building must be man-made and at least approaching its original state.

Keeping this in mind, all buildings built before 1700 are listed and most up to 1840. It becomes much more difficult for more recent buildings to be listed, particularly after 1945. At least 30 years old and have to be exceptional to be listed. Structures such as bridges, monuments, sculptures, war memorials, milestones and mileposts may also be listed. Ancient structures, such as Stonehenge, are usually classified as Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

The listing in descending order of importance is Grade I, Grade II* or Grade II. Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest. Grade II* groups particularly important buildings of more than special interest. While Grade II lists buildings that are of special interest, usually private residential buildings and consist of about 92% of listings. There was a non-statutory Grade III until 1970 (British Listed Buildings). All Grade listings in the text were obtained from British Listing Buildings.

Normally century is used when referring to the age of buildings. For example, 17th century refers to buildings built in the 1600s.