

Warwick Castle



Michael Pierre de Villiers

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Title page: The stables and Warwick seen from Guy's Tower, longbow maker and wheelwright, suit of armour in the Great Hall, the receiver general and the old mill wheel.

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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INTRODUCTION

Warwick Castle is Grade I listed, while the mill is Grade II listed, the stables (at the entrance) and a portion of the boundary wall (next to Mill Street), are Grade II* listed.

Warwick Castle was visited on two occasions, on the 5th February 2006 and the 8th July 2025. It is about 20 kilometres from where we live. Going in the middle of winter for the first visit by my wife and I avoided the summer tourist crowds. A good thing. The second in July 2025, with my niece and her son from Australia was beset by tourists and a school group. Not so good thing. We spent about 4 hours there during the first visit, less the second time round.

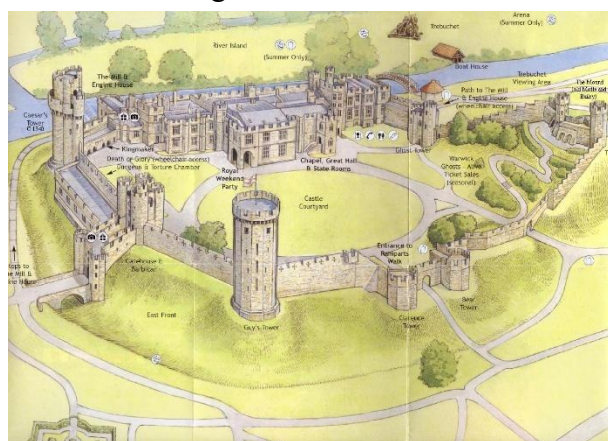
The castle, already a big and tall building, is situated on high ground next to a curve in the River Avon, giving excellent all-round view and a good defensive position, as well as being a prominent landmark. From the top of the towers, one gets an almost vertical view of the town below and people in the grounds of the castle look very small indeed. The castle is about 700 years old, however, there has always been a fortification there, so the site is much older than the present castle.

One can also visit the carefully restored mill house and later engine house that is now used to generate electricity for the castle. An information board says that for nearly 600 years the mill used the power of the river, dropping from a weir, to grind grain. About 100 years ago this hydro power was harnessed to generate electricity.

Inside the castle they have set up rooms with all the furniture, period decor and used wax mannequins with period dress. The castle is owned by the same company that owns the famous Madame Tussauds. It is hard to believe the mannequins are wax.

The following descriptions of the various features and attractions are in the order of the tour of the castle. The photographs are a selection from the two visits. Hence the varied photograph sizes at times due to the use of different cameras.

The bird's eye view of the castle environment, from a 2006 visitor guide brochure courtesy of Warwick Castle, given to one when one enters is shown left so that the reader is better able to



follow the tour sequence. There was no copyright statement on the brochure, so hopefully its use does not infringe copyright.

One enters the castle grounds at what was the stables building. Passing to the left outside the castle wall, the tour starts with the mill and engine house located at the river's edge behind the castle building. Next a walk along the wall and towers. Then to the motte and keep before going inside the castle building.

THE MILL AND ENGINE HOUSE

For centuries, the mill used the power of water falling over the weir to drive the wheel to grind grain. In much later centuries, the power of the water was used to drive generators to provide electricity to the castle.

According to two notice boards, one dating from 2006 and the newest in 2025, during 1088 to 1119, the mill was about 90 metres downstream. It was moved to its present site in 1398. 1642, it provided ground corn for approximately 360 defenders of the castle during the English Civil War 1642 to 1651. An engine house was installed in 1644 to pump water to the castle for domestic use. The mill was extensively rebuilt in 1767 with a new waterwheel installed in 1840. Water ceased to be pumped to the castle in 1849 because it was discovered that the town sewers emptied into the river near the inlet. The mill and all the machinery, except the waterwheel, was destroyed in 1880. In 1894 generators were installed to provide electricity to the castle, being replaced by mains electricity in 1940. Although the generators were still functional until dismantled in 1954. The engine house was restored to how it was when the building was used to generate electricity and open to the public in 2002.



The restored engine house seen from Caesar's Tower in 2006 and the generators in 2025.

THE CASTLE RAMPARTS AND TOWERS



2006, Guy and Caesar towers seen from outside the wall.

Starting from smaller Clarence Tower, across the courtyard from the castle building, the rampart was walked to Guy's Tower, then the Gatehouse and finally Caesar's Tower. Each time climbing the stairs to the top of each tower. Great physical exercise.

Guy' and Caesar's towers date from the 1330-1360. Guy's Tower, built on higher ground and 29 metres high,



Clarence Tower and Bear Tower (background), built in the 1480s, seen from Guy's Tower in 2006. Right, the Gatehouse and Barbican with Caesar's Tower in the background in 2006. Caesar's Tower appears to be taller than Caesar's 40 metres tall tower. Guy's Tower was used to host guests of the earl. Higher status guests were lodged higher in the tower. One assumes they were able to climb the stairs. Caesar's Tower of 14th century Anglo-French architecture, is one of only two Quatrefoil towers in England.

PILLORY AND STOCKS

Near the exit from Caesar's Tower and the dungeon entrance is an example of a medieval pillory. This was a usually wooden framework with holes for securing the head and hands of an offended in a standing position as a means of punishment and public humiliation. The example is not entirely accurate because an adult cannot stand and the holes are too big. It is there more for education and amusement. More realistic is the example of a medieval stocks that was in place in 2006. This has the same use as a pillory except it restrains only the feet in a sitting position. Again the holes are too big. Apparently, the last recorded use was in 1872.



A somewhat inaccurate example of a pillory seen in 2025 and stocks 2006. A two-seater.

THE MOTTE AND KEEP

After exiting Caesar's Tower and walking across the central courtyard toward Bear Tower, there is a path that winds its way to the keep at the top of the mound that is the motte. The motte and the keep with a bailey was the original fortress. A bailey was a larger area that was an extended defensive area surrounded by a wall, sometimes with an external ditch, or water filled moat. The aim being to make life as difficult as possible for attackers. Livestock and

anything else of value could be brought within the bailey. The keep on the motte was the last form of defence. Nothing remains of the bailey. Conqueror's Fortress

The original defensive structure was on the site was an approximately 1.5 kilometres circumference burr (wall) built in 914. The motte with a keep/fort is the oldest surviving part of the castle. It was built in 1068 by William the Conqueror as one of numerous bailey forts constructed to consolidate his control of England. The stone keep replaced the wooden keep during the 12th century. In the 17th century, no longer of strategic value, a stone observation platform was added as a view site for guests and residents of the castle.

WARWICK CASTLE

a notice board states that Warwick Castle was granted to Sir Fulke Greville by King James I in 1604. The castle was dilapidated, costing Sir Fulke £20 000 (about £8 million today) to "restore the castle including the Great Hall and staterooms."



The motte and keep on the right incorporated with the newer wall. Parts of the path leading to the keep can be seen. Photographed in 2025. On the right, the castle building as it appeared in 2025 with a false front on the far right due to major renovation. Below, for comparison, a composite photograph of it in 2006 with the Gatehouse and Caesar's Tower on the left.



The Great Hall

Another notice board in the hall informs one that the foundations of the Great Hall date back to the 14th century, although since much changed. A fire swept through the castle in 1871. The Great Hall and the private apartments to the east (on the left in the above photograph) "were gutted, only the outer only the thick outer walls survived." The castle collection was saved by

servants who retrieved what they could from the fire. The present Great Hall (rebuilt in mock medieval style in 1875) and the apartments were rebuilt during the 1870s.

Information about the contents on display in the hall are courtesy of notice boards.



Dominating the hall are two knights and horses in armour. Life knights and horses were not permitted for health and safety reasons.



Between the two horses is the Kenilworth Buffet seen in the two photographs on the left.

It was carved by local craftsmen (at Cookes & Sons) in 1851 from a single oak tree felled in the grounds of Kenilworth Castle. The central panel shows Queen Elizabeth I's visit to Kenilworth Castle in 1575. The

below left door shows her meeting the Earl of Leicester Robert Dudley's first wife, Amy Robsart. The below right door depicts the Queen with Robert Dudley. The four figures, on either side of the doors from left to right, depict Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, William Shakespeare and Sir Francis Drake.



Arms and Armour. Most of the collection was collected by George Greville, 4th Earl of Warwick, in the 19th century.

The armour in the Great Hall dates from the 16th to 19th centuries. Examples are seen on the left. The child's armour dates from circa 1630. It is speculated that it was armour made for a child portrait of the future King Charles II. A harness of armour for an adult in

the 16th century typically weighed 15 to 25kg. Armour for a horse, known as barding, was used for protection as well as parades and pageants.



An example of a firearm on display is this Flintlock Swivel gun, seen on the left. The gun dates from the late 18th century. It was used on navy ships to fire shrapnel at the deck of an enemy ship to clear it of sailors. This example was captured by the British forces from a sinking French ship the Comte d'Artois in 1781. It was bought by the Warwick Castle Greville family in the 19th century.

APARTMENTS AND ROOMS ON DISPLAY

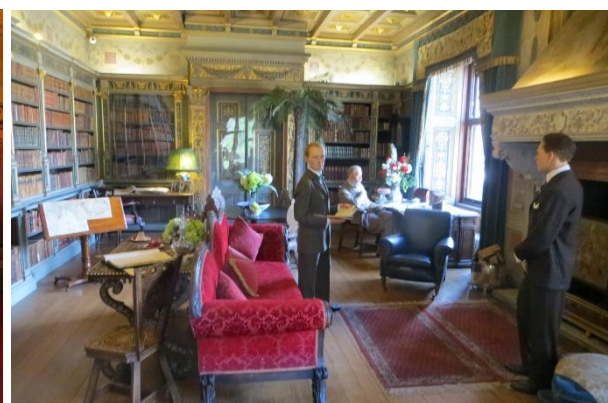
When Warwick Castle was sold to the Tussauds Group in 1978, they began adding their famous wax-figures, starting with wax figures of historic people in the 12 apartment rooms already open to tourists. These were the guests present at a weekend party in 1898 hosted by Frances, Countess of Warwick; the principal guest was the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII and included a young Winston Churchill.

The 1898 Royal Weekend Party



Saturday the 25th June 1898, Francis and Daisy Greville, the 5th Earl and Countess of Warwick have gathered their guests together. They were members of the Prince of Wales Marlborough set of nobles. The group was named after the prince's residence Marlborough House.

A selection of photographs of some of the rooms are shown left and below.



George Duke of York and Charles Spencer Churchill 9th Duke of Marlborough. Right, a young Winston Churchill in the centre.



Lady Victoria Sackville-West Baroness Sackville and Millicent 4th Duchess of Sutherland.
Right, the bedroom of Daisy Greville 5th Countess of York.

The Blue Boudoir



The Blue Boudoir was originally a dressing room attached to the Queen Anne Bedroom. Daisy Greville, Countess of Warwick, changed it to a combined lady's dressing room, bedroom and private sitting room in the 1890s, but used it as a writing room swathed in blue Lyon silk with a view over the river and grounds. It currently houses waxwork figures of King Henry VIII and his six wives. Clockwise from front left:

Katherine of Aragon (married 1509-1533, marriage annulled); Anne Boleyn (married 1533-1536, beheaded); Jane Seymour (married 1536-1537, died); King Henry VIII (ruled 1509-1547); Anne of Cleves (married 1540-1540, annulled); Catherine Howard (1540-1542, beheaded); and Catherine Parr (married 1543-1547, widowed).

BELOW THE APARTMENTS

Here there are historic display scenarios of castle occupations, such as fletchers (arrow makers), longbow and armour makers, cordwainer (cobbler), women of the wardrobe and the receiver general (who pays for weapons, equipment and wages required to go to war).



An arrow maker and women of the wardrobe.

THE TREBUCHET

Back outside, a stroll to the river side area where entertainments are held one can see a working trebuchet. Originally built in 2005 according to notes and drawings from the 13th century, the rebuilt trebuchet was completed in 2023. It weighs 22 tonnes and is 18m (59ft) tall. The catapult takes 20 minutes to wind before it is ready to fire. The trebuchet was the largest and most formidable of siege machines. It was used to hurl large rocks and stones to breach castle walls and cause devastation within the walls, particularly fireballs. Manure, dead animals and rotten corpses were also hurled to spread disease. Charming. Casualties of war, etcetera.



The trebuchet and priming ready to fire.

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