

Deepening Understanding

YR2 Information Text

Castles by Beth Gascoigne-Owens



Castles

Castles are important buildings which are usually the home of a member of the royal family or someone important to them. Many castles in the UK are now not lived in but are an important part of history. Some owners of these castles allow visitors. They use the money from entrance fees to look after the castle and make any repairs that are needed which are often very expensive. Many castles in our country are protected by English Heritage which is an organisation that protects over 400 important monuments and buildings and stops them being destroyed or lost.

Why they were built

Many castles were built to protect the land belonging to a rich landowner. Castles were first built after England was invaded in the year 1066 and William the Conqueror became the new king. His kingdom was divided up and his loyal Lords then looked after



their own area of the country. Castles were often built on a hill so soldiers could see enemies from a further distance. This gave them longer to prepare for attack. Castles were built with thick, strong walls to make it extremely difficult for enemies to get into.

How did castles provide protection?

Castles were often built with a circular moat (like a huge ditch) around the outside of them. They were sometimes filled with water which made it hard for enemies to cross.

There was often a drawbridge so people who were welcome to the castle could get across the moat. This was a bridge that could be raised and lowered when needed. The drawbridge was raised to prevent an enemy from entering the castle.

Sometimes rivals would try to set fire to castle doors or would try to use a battering ram to bash it down. A portcullis was often used to stop this happening. It was a metal barrier to protect the entrance to the castle.

Gate towers were often built to protect the fortress gates. These were tall towers that archers (people who fired arrows) could use to shoot arrows from if enemies tried to attack. Sometimes, stones or boiling oil would be poured down to stop enemies getting close to the castle. Ouch!

In the heart of the castle was the castle keep. It was usually built taller than the castle so that the people inside could easily see out. The keep was often painted white with lime to make it bright to any attackers (rather like the sun hurting your eyes).



The First Castles

The first castles were made out of wood and mud. A wooden keep would be built upon a mound of earth surrounded by a protective wooden fence. These were called 'motte' (the mound) and 'bailey' (an inner courtyard) castles. Stone replaced wood as it was stronger when later castles were built. Eventually, concentric castles were designed (a castle surrounded by two rings of wall) to provide even more protection.

Famous Castles

Warwick Castle, built by William the Conqueror in 1068, is now a famous tourist attraction. If you visit you can explore one of the oldest castles in the country, watch birds of prey fly and really imagine life as it was 1000 years ago!

A number of castles are still lived in such as Alnwick Castle in Northumberland. Interestingly, Alnwick Castle has been used during the filming of several films, including Harry Potter.

Windsor Castle is the largest castle in the world which still has people living it. It is 900 years old and it belongs to the royal family. Today, the Queen often spends time at the castle and many people say it is her favourite place to spend private weekends. In 2018, Prince Harry got married at Windsor Castle.

From this text, you will have realised that castles are a learning journey around fascinating and dangerous parts of history! What is certain is no two castles are ever the same or tell the same tale.

