ENGLISH HERITAGE
EDUCATION

SELF-LED ACTIVITY
WHY BUILD A CASTLE HERE?

KS2 **KS3**

Recommended for

KS2 & KS3 (History, Geography)

Learning objectives

- Investigate the physical geography of the area around Richmond Castle.

- Use vocabulary to describe key physical features of the landscape around Richmond Castle.

- Understand the strategic significance of the castle's position.

Time to complete

Approx. 30 minutes

An aerial view of Richmond Castle.

SUMMARY

This activity will help students understand the geographical and strategic location of Richmond Castle and why the Normans built a castle in this area.

Begin by watching **this short video** (1 min 54 secs) on types of castles:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXXDThkJ3Ew
This video (1 min 49 secs) explains how castles were attacked:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNeNPk4D_Ng

In summary, students should record these key considerations for the Normans when building castles:

- Built on high ground, so everyone in the area can see the castle, which will send a clear message that the Normans rule this area of England

- Built on high ground, with a clear view of the landscape, to watch out for enemies approaching

- Makes use of any natural defensive features in the landscape that will be a barrier to enemies attacking the castle, i.e. cliff edges or a river

- Close to a water source

- Near to land that can be used for farming and growing crops.

Using the OS map of the area and looking at the aerial photograph on p.48 (Source 7), students should label the geographical features of the landscape around Richmond Castle i.e. river, cliffs, high ground. They should complete the questions to demonstrate their understanding of why the Normans chose this area to build a castle.

When looking at the modern map, students should be reminded to distinguish modern features from what existed in the 11th century. For example, though the geographical physical features are the same (hills, river, land for farming) there would not have been main 'A' roads.

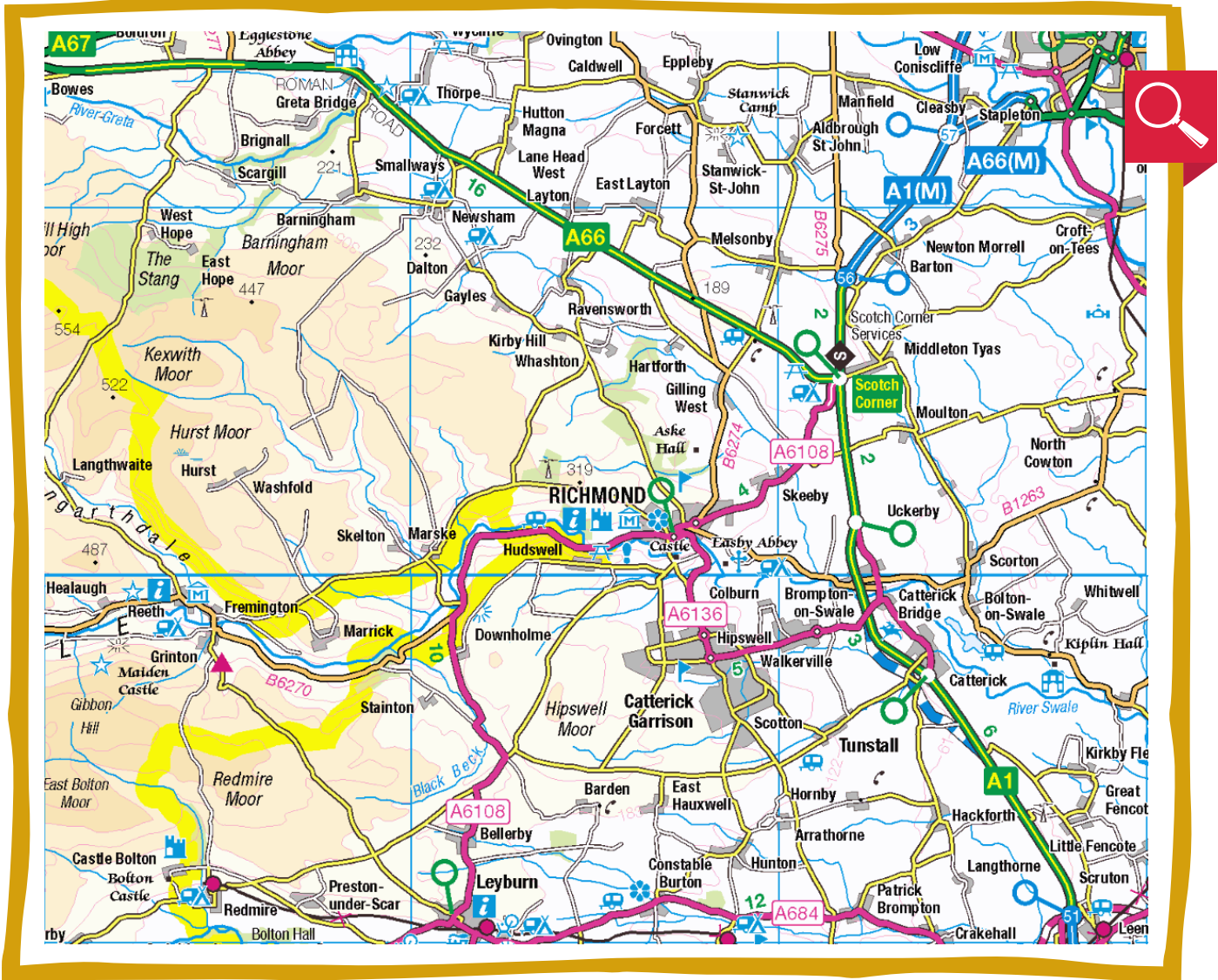Richmond Castle is built on a ridge overlooking the river Swale.

KEY FEATURES

- Richmond Castle is one of four of the best-surviving castles (along with Tickhill, Pontefract and Skipsea) that were built in the 11th century by the Normans to demonstrate their command of the north of England.

- Richmond Castle is built high on a ridge overlooking a crossing point on the Swale. River crossings were key places to control. Whoever managed the crossing could control who moved through the landscape and collect tolls from the people crossing.

- The river is also an important source of fish and powered mills for turning wheat into flour, to make bread.

- The ground that the castle is built on is high up so that the Normans could show their dominance. The castle could also be seen from miles around, a clear symbol in the landscape of Norman strength and power.

- The site is protected on two sides by steep slopes.

MORE LEARNING IDEAS

At the castle, the students can explore the site to collect descriptive and sensory information and/or photos with which to supplement their maps and reinforce their learning, i.e. 'How far can you see from the platform above the Cell Block?', 'What can you hear on the castle walk?', 'How would you feel as a visitor approaching Richmond?' For example, *'If I was attacking I could not climb this steep cliff.'*

WHY BUILD A CASTLE HERE?

1 **Label** the physical features of the landscape around the castle.

2 **Explain** why the Normans chose this location to build a castle in the 11th century:

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An aerial view of Richmond Castle as it looks today.