



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Orford Castle

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS



View of Orford Castle, with the church and the coast in the background and the castle earthworks in the foreground.

INTRODUCTION

The medieval castle at Orford was a royal castle built overlooking the coast at the mouth of the River Ore in Suffolk. Although its outer defences have disappeared, the remaining keep is one of the few castle interiors that is complete with all its rooms, corridors and service chambers. Orford Castle is a good focal point for those studying Britain 1066 to 1500 and life

inside a castle. It also makes an excellent study for local history and geography taken in the context of the town, the port and the shifting coastline.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Orford Castle was built by King Henry II between 1165 and 1173 with the dual purpose of protecting a vulnerable stretch of coast

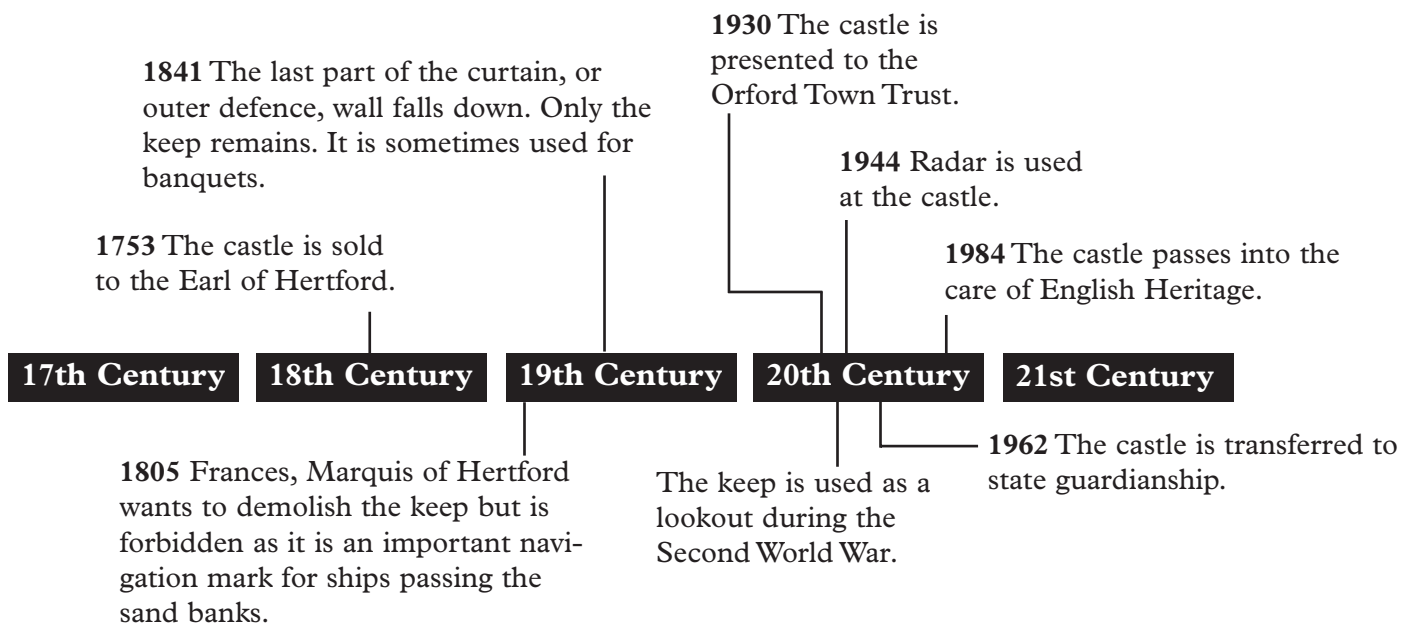
from invasion, and keeping in check the ambitions of one of King Henry's most troublesome barons - Hugh Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, at nearby Framlingham Castle.

Henry spared no expense in building Orford Castle. In fact the only castle on which he spent more was Dover. It is the earliest castle for which the entire building accounts survive. It cost £1,413, a huge sum when the entire royal revenues were less than £10,000 a year.

The keep is also unique in its shape - a circular tower with three rectangular turrets. The architect was Henry's engineer, Alnodus, who designed the most up-to-date features that money could buy. The castle was part of a grander plan that included enlarging the town, building a new church and improving the port by draining the marshes. The coastline was on the move even then, but the great shingle spit called Orford Ness ended at a point roughly opposite the town so that it sheltered the harbour, rather than blocking it as it did later.

Orford remained an important royal castle for 200 years, run on behalf of the king by a constable, the keeper of the castle, who often acted as the local law officer. The castle combined the functions of a centre of local government and a garrison that could be called to action whenever trouble occurred. Its importance declined with the town as the harbour slowly silted up and trade dwindled.

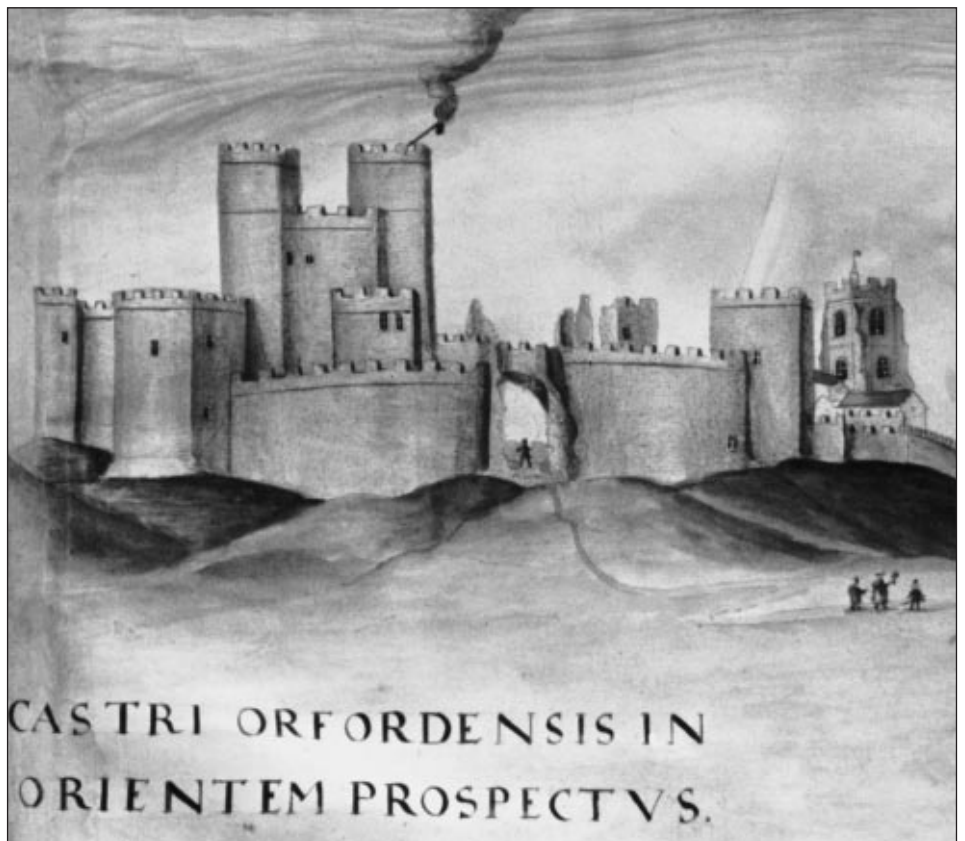
EDUCATION



Orford

In the twelfth century Orford was situated on an open coast at the mouth of the River Ore. The site of the harbour is now occupied by the Town Marsh carpark, but in medieval times ships could lie in a sheltered anchorage quite close to the town. The castle was supplied by sea, an important advantage in an age when land transport was difficult and slow. Over the centuries, coastal erosion has formed Orford Ness, the shingle spit that gradually blocked the harbour entrance and diverted the river mouth southwards.

This map shows the river mouth already silting up. Treacherous underwater sandbanks began making Orford a dangerous place for shipping as early as 1500. The creek up Quay Street has receded and features of the town such as the castle and the church can be clearly seen. At school ask pupils to compare this map with a modern OS map of Orford. They can look at the way in which the two maps are presented as well as spotting changes in the town and the coastline. On site they can prepare their own map of key features using the view from the top of the castle.



The castle from the southwest, from John Norden's survey of the Manor of Sudbourne 1600-02.

The castle

This picture is our only real clue as to how the castle looked when it was complete. Ask pupils to list the evidence they can find in this picture for the castle's appearance. On site pupils can use the low fighting platform, above the entrance and easily seen in this

picture, to work out where the artist was standing. They can then look at the earthworks to see if they can find the position of the curtain wall and the entrance. Ask pupils how useful this picture is as a source of historical evidence and what its shortcomings might be.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CASTLE

The original castle consisted of a keep (the only surviving part) surrounded by a ditch which in turn was encircled by a curtain wall. There was a defended gateway and an outer ring of earthworks.

The keep

A floor plan reveals that Alnodus's design for the keep consisted of a circular central tower, buttressed by three rectangular turrets. The entrance is via a stair into a fore-building attached to one of the turrets. The keep is 27 metres high to the original summit of the battlements and the walls of the central tower are about three metres thick. It is splayed at its base to protect the foundations and to enable missiles from above to be deflected into the path of attackers. Inside, the keep is divided into a basement and two main storeys. There are also half levels with smaller rooms in the turrets. The wide spiral staircase occupies the whole of one turret. As well as defensive features, there are several concessions to comfort including large windows, fireplaces, cupboards, kitchens, latrines and a system for catching rainwater.

Lower hall level

The **entrance** at first floor level protected the castle from frontal attack and made the use of a battering ram almost impossible. Immediately inside the entrance are signs of a groove where the portcullis (iron or wooden grating) dropped down. Two sets of double doors lead into the lower hall. There are deep drawbar holes to secure the doors and Y-shaped grooves for the hinges. Under the entrance **lobby** (but not available to view) is a **cell** or dungeon with its own latrine. A leaded wooden shutter on the outside shows where it is and can be seen from the path approaching the keep.

The circular **lower hall** was

probably a public area and may have been used as a council room or a court room. There is stone seating all around it with recesses to the windows. The grand fireplace has tiles on edge as a heat-resistant fireback. The small **chamber** off the window recess may have been an office or a storage room.

A small spiral staircase ascends to the **Constable's chamber**. In the passageway there is a triangular shaped urinal in the wall. The room has the original mortar made from local sand with seashells in it. The flue from the big fire downstairs warmed the room.

The **kitchen** served the hall. There is a sink with drainage to the outside and a fireplace with a flue for cooking. The passage leads to a **double latrine**. This used to have partitions making it two cubicles. Drainage was to the ditch outside.

Upper part of lower hall

The **chapel** is the most decorated room in the castle with pillars of fine stone, from Caen in France, and the remains of decorated plasterwork. The Norman altar would also have been faced with stone. There is a 'piscina' for washing the holy vessels, and an 'aumbrey' or cupboard for holding the chalice. There are also the rusted remains of hinges and bolt holes by the doorway. The listening hole enabled additional people to listen to the service from the corridor. This room is over the entrance lobby and the portcullis was raised here through a slot in the floor

Upper hall level

The **upper hall** was the grandest room, and it would have been used for entertaining important guests or even the king himself. Notice the drawbar holes for securing the door into the hall. The stairs on the left, as you enter, lead out onto a **fighting platform** above the chapel. There are thirteen stone

corbels around the room. Each one would have held timbers that supported an original conical roof. It is possible that a gallery ran round the top. The fireplace shows signs of alteration and may once have had a stone hood above it.

The **kitchen** off the hall has a fireplace and a floor drain but no sink. It may have been used for serving and keeping food warm rather than cooking.

The sleeping **chamber** would have been for the most important guest. It was warmed by the chimney.

Upper part of upper hall

The passageway through the wall runs to the **cistern** room where rain water was collected from drainage channels cut into the roof. This meant that there was an alternative source of fresh water to the well. In the passageway are the drainage channels for the gallery.

On the opposite side of the upper hall is a **chamber** that can only be reached by use of a ladder. Originally, it was on the outside of the conical roof of the hall and may have been accessed via a catwalk or wooden stairs from the hall.

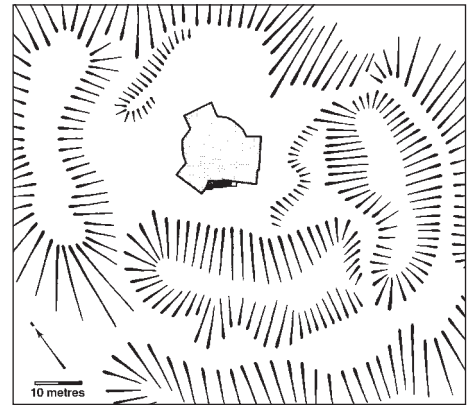
Roof level

The **bake oven** has its original medieval tiles on edge for heat resistance. It was fuelled by bundles of wood in the fire hole and this heated the bread oven. As well as supplying the castle with bread, it would have kept the sentries warm.

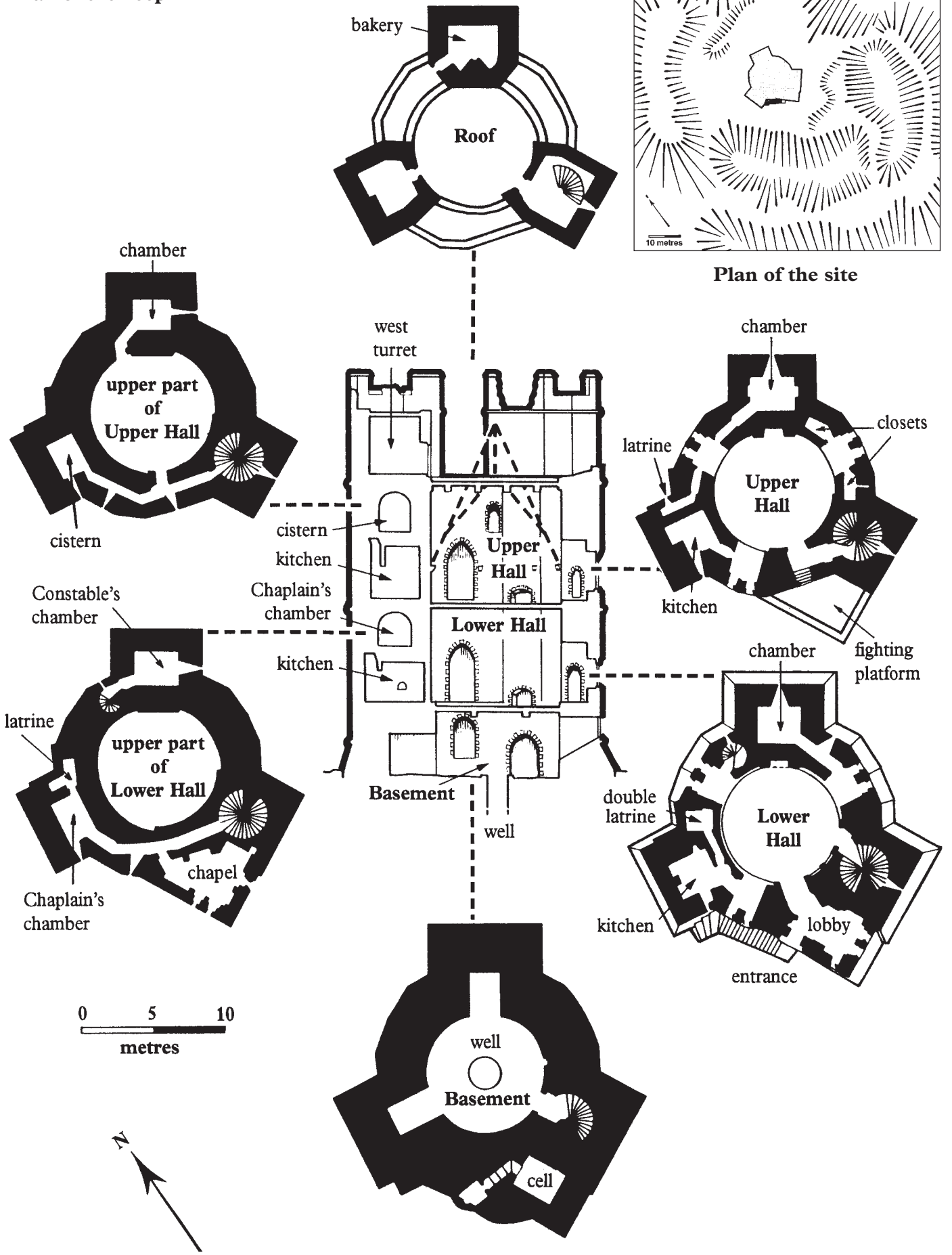
Basement level

This was used for storing the castle supplies (grain, salt, wood, weapons) which arrived by sea and had to be carted up from the harbour. There is a sink and a fireplace so the room could have doubled as a kitchen or scullery. The **well** is about 13 metres deep.

Plan of the keep



Plan of the site



EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

Preparation

A planning visit to the castle is free and will help you make good educational use of the site. Please be aware that only 30 pupils are allowed in the keep at one time and bigger groups will need activities around the site or in the town. Also the maze of rooms and corridors mean that you should think carefully about how pupils will be supervised.

Classroom preparation might concentrate on some of the following themes:

- the geography of the area and the way that coastal erosion affected the growth and decline of the port
- the idea of feudalism and the medieval struggle for power between local barons and the king
- the many functions of a castle, as a military stronghold, a grand residence and an administrative centre for the area
- the castle as a community of people including the constable, men-at-arms, domestic staff, a chaplain and important guests.

Defending the keep

It is 1172 and the castle is under threat from the Bigods at Framlingham. You are the constable and you have been asked to make a survey of the castle's defences for King Henry II.

Before visiting the site ask pupils to research possible means of attack such as:

- besieging - starving the defenders into surrender
- scaling the walls - with ladders, ropes or siege tower (level ground needed for this)
- damaging walls and towers by battering - with a ram or bore, mining into the foundations or

MEANS OF ATTACK	DEFENCES IN PLACE	FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS
Besieging - trying to starve us	Good water supply from well and cistern, large, secure foodstores in the basement	Order extra food supplies and candles

launching stone missiles using a mangonel or trebuchet (catapult-like device)

■ surprise!

and to record them on a chart such as the one shown.

At the castle work outside to make a survey of defences including the earthworks (ditches), the position of the curtain wall and the keep itself. Remember that the keep was the last line of defence in a castle. You could take copies of Norden's picture of the castle and the plan of the earthworks both in this booklet to use as supplementary evidence. Record findings on the chart.

Pupils should look at:

- the walls - height, thickness (three metres), walls splay out at the base
- the shape of the keep - battlements, square turrets, polygonal tower (means fewer blind spots and so less need for defenders to lean out, weight of walls is distributed more evenly, less vulnerable to undermining or battering, missiles tend to bounce off)
- entrance to the keep - approach, position on first floor, fighting platform above
- windows - size, shape and position
- earthworks - moat, three concentric rings of ditches and ramparts.

You could extend the survey inside the keep to look at:

- the entrance - there is a lobby then a second entrance to allow a porter to question visitors then prevent entry if necessary, there

are sockets in the sides of the arches for long wooden bars to bolt the inner doors shut, a portcullis could be dropped through a slot in the chapel

- staircase - spirals clockwise making it difficult for ascending attackers to wield their swords
- storage of essential supplies in basement (well and food stores), cistern
- battlements - shutters that could swing out would have hung in the gaps (crenels), possibilities for lookout.

Back at school ask pupils to write up their findings as a report for King Henry.

Living in the Keep

The keep was not only the last line of defence it was also a home. Before you visit ask pupils to draw up a list of the various needs of people living in the castle. This could include:

- water supply
- stores for food (cool and secure), fuel (secure and away from risk of fire), weapons
- cooking (need drains)
- toilets (need drains)
- living and eating areas
- sleeping areas
- worship
- light
- heat.

Once inside the keep ask pupils to look for evidence of places where these needs could be met. They should be able to find clues such as:

- stone bench
- fireplaces


- windows (look at shape, size and decoration)
- stone basins and drains
- toilets (holes in the wall)
- door recesses
- decorative stonework
- decorative plaster
- well
- cistern (room to catch and store rainwater)
- altar
- piscina (sink) and aumbrey (cupboard)
- oven.

These clues could be recorded on a chart like the one shown.

Alternatively give pupils a copy of the floor plans for the keep with the names of the rooms blanked out. Prepare clue cards for each room such as:

CONSTABLE'S CHAMBER


close to main meeting area
close to fireplace for warmth
own urinal



or

CISTERN

close to roof to catch rainwater
lined with stone to prevent leaking



You can use the site description on pages 4 and 5 for this. It is an opportunity to introduce pupils to relevant vocabulary such as latrine and piscina. Ask pupils to work out which room is which by visiting each room, looking for clues, and then labelling the rooms on their plan. They can also use different colours to show public and private rooms.

For both of these activities divide the class into three groups to work in different parts of the keep such as the basement and lower hall, the

NEEDS	ROOM	CLUES
Cooking	Kitchen	Stone sink, fireplace
Worship	Chapel	Altar, piscina, aumbrey, decorative stone and plasterwork

upper part of the lower hall and roof, the upper hall and the upper part of the upper hall which will ensure that each group has a comparable amount to look at. Groups can then either swap over or report back to the rest of the class.

Once pupils have collected this information you can use this to discuss the design of the keep. You could ask the following questions:

Q: In which turret are most of the chambers? Why?

A: In the north turret apart from the chaplain's which is next to the chapel. This turret has the main fireplace going right through it so rooms next to it will be warmer.

Q: In which turret is the kitchen and most of the toilets? Why?

A: In the west turret apart from the constable's urinal which is outside his chamber. The drainage system is in this turret. Look outside at the base of the turret for the drainage chutes.

Q: What is the other turret used for?

A: It contains the spiral staircase that runs from the basement to the roof.

Q: Why was the basement used for storage?

A: It is cool and secure.

Pupils may have further observations to add or ideas for improving the design.

Creative Writing

Prior to the visit ask pupils to research the different people who may have lived and worked in a castle and their roles. On site use the Clue Card activity above to help pupils familiarise themselves with the layout of the keep.

Gather your class in the lower hall and sit them on the stone bench. Talk about the function of the lower hall as the public living and dining area or meeting room where the king could receive guests. Remind pupils that when the castle was occupied it would have been furnished, with colourful hangings on the walls and fires in the fireplaces. It would have been busy with servants preparing food and soldiers keeping guard. Ask pupils to imagine that they are in the room for a meeting or a feast. Brainstorm ideas under the headings - I hear, I smell, I see, I feel. Now ask pupils to imagine that they are a particular character such as the king, a servant, a messenger, an important guest and repeat the exercise.

Give pupils cards with the name of a room and a role such as the:

- chapel - chaplain praying
- roof - soldier on lookout
- kitchen - servant cooking.

Get them to go to that place and collect ideas under the four headings. They could also think about overheard conversations from other rooms or down passageways. These can then be extended into sentences in the following way:

Down the passage / through the window
I can see.....

In the distance I can hear.....

Neraby I can smell.....

When I..... I feel.....

and arranged to form a poem.

Older pupils could develop the context of the role such as a soldier on standby waiting for attack or the Constable's wife packing up her things for safety. Ask them to walk their route through

the castle collecting ideas under the four headings but also thinking about tasks that they might do or conversations that they might have. These ideas, and supplementary research, can then form the basis of a story or a diary.

Younger children can collect ideas using structured sentences such as:

When I lived in a castle I sat on a hard, stone bench.

Now I am Mary and I lie on a soft, sofa.

When I lived in a castle I drank water from the cistern.

Now I am Mary and I drink Coke.

MAKING A VISIT

Opening hours

See www.english-heritage.org.uk for opening hours or contact Customer Services on 0970 333 1181

Booking procedure

By application form available from: English Heritage Education Bookings 24 Brooklands Avenue Cambridge CB2 2BU Tel: 01223 582732 Fax: 01223 582701. Educational visits are free of charge but must be booked at least two weeks in advance. To make the most of your visit we strongly recommend that teachers make a preliminary planning visit. You will be sent a free entry permit when your booking is confirmed.

Maximum numbers

The maximum party number to the site is 100 with an adult/pupil ratio of at least 1:15. Please note, however, that only 36 pupils can be accommodated inside the keep at one time. Pupils must be supervised at all times.

Facilities

Parking: free parking on site for cars and mini-buses. Coaches can park at the Quay, a 15 minute walk that offers a good opportuni-

ty to look at some of the features of the town. Otherwise, coaches can set down in the village square before parking at the Quay.

Toilets: none on site. Nearest facilities are in the village square or at the Quay carpark.

Picnics: may be eaten in the castle grounds but please note there is no shelter.

Shop: this sells postcards and souvenirs. The Custodian welcomes school parties and all proceeds contribute to the work of English Heritage.

Access: regrettably, wheelchair access to the site is difficult because of uneven ground and steep stairs. Note that the castle is cold in winter and the battlements can be very windy. Make sure all group members are dressed for outdoors.

Safety: the castle is a maze of rooms and stone stairs and the site outside is uneven. Lots of adult supervision is recommended.

Nearby and related sites

Framlingham Castle is a good companion site for studying castles in the area. It has a fine curtain wall with 13 towers and belonged to Henry II's great antagonists, the Bigods.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Books

Copeland T, *A Teacher's Guide to Using Castles*, English Heritage, 1994, ISBN 1-85074-327-4

McAleavy T, *Life in a Medieval Castle*, English Heritage, 1998, ISBN 1-85074-665-6

Tolhurst M, *Framlingham Castle*, English Heritage, 2000, a free eight page guide for teachers.

Videos

History Trail, Mighty Monuments, English Heritage, 1996, 20 minutes. Suitability 11-13 years.

Investigating the evidence of a medieval castle.

Looking at a Castle, English Heritage, 1980, 14 minutes.

Suitability 11-13 years.

Posters, aerial photographs and CD-ROM

Looking at Castles, English Heritage, A pack of six photocopyable A3 posters.

Aerial photographs of Orford are available from the National Monuments Record contact Education Bookings for a leaflet. *Real Castles*, CD-ROM and book, TAG in association with English Heritage, 2000.

ISBN 1-902-804-01-5

English Heritage Education

We aim to help teachers at all levels to use the resource of the historic environment. Each year, we welcome half a million pupils, students and teachers on free educational group visits to over 400 historic sites in our care. We also offer services to help access the National Monuments Record, our public archive. For free copies of our *Free Educational Visits* booklet, our *Resources* catalogue, and *Heritage Learning*, our termly magazine, contact:

English Heritage Education
Freepost 22 (WD214)

London
W1E 7EZ

Tel 0870 333 1181

E-mail:

education@english-heritage.org.uk
www.english-heritage.org.uk/education

Photographs © English Heritage or English Heritage Photo Library except page 1 English Heritage Photographic Library/Skyscan Balloon Photography

Written by Marilyn Tolhurst
Edited and Produced by Hazel Courtley
Designed by Michael J Richardson
Printed by Palladian Press, Colchester
© English Heritage 2000
Revised 2002