

WALMER CASTLE AND GARDENS, KENT

Hazard Information Sheets for educational groups

It is the responsibility of teachers and group leaders to complete a risk assessment prior to any site visit being made. This is a requirement of most local education authorities. The following information is intended as a preparatory tool and does not replace a teacher's or group leader's own risk assessment. Please be aware that conditions at historic sites may change rapidly, and that you will need to remain alert at all times during your visit.

All the trees on our sites are inspected annually. However, storm damage can sometimes affect the stability of apparently healthy trees and branches. Group leaders should be particularly aware of this when undertaking their own risk assessments prior to a visit.

There is a small coach park located across the road from the site entrance. This road is in constant use by fast moving traffic. There is a grass car park located within the grounds. Visitors must cross a gravel road to enter the castle and this is in constant vehicular use. Visitors enter the site over a wooden bridge and through the gate house. The bridge can become slippery in wet weather. Please note that the buildings to the right of the entrance contain private residences. A narrow passage leads into the gift shop/ticket office. The area surrounding the till point is narrow and can become congested. As visitors leave the shop, there is a wooden staircase with a wooden handrail leading down to a gun powder room. There are several rooms arranged in a circle around the central gun powder room. The floors are uneven throughout and there are steps between levels and particularly in doorways. A 'no entry' sign blocks a doorway leading to a spiral staircase. Visitors ascend to ground level via the same staircase.

As visitors approach the main house entrance, they must pass the Tea Rooms. There are tables and chairs situated outside for Tea Room customer use only. A ramp leads into the house and this can become slippery in wet weather. Ladies' toilets are located opposite, in a small courtyard.

The house contains many valuable and fragile items and care should be taken when moving around. Many items are housed in glass cases. There are roped-off areas in many of the rooms and these are protected by motion-sensitive alarms. There are fire extinguishers in every room.

A carpeted staircase leads to the first floor. There are steps between levels. Glass doors lead out onto the North and East bastions. There are 8 cannon situated on the bastions and these present a climbing hazard. There are warning signs in place. The bastion walls are low and the drop on the other side is sheer. A stone staircase leads down to the Tea Room area. These steps may become slippery in wet weather.

The gardens can only be accessed via the house. A small flight of carpeted steps leads down and out onto a wooden bridge. There are mens' toilets located at the bottom of these steps. The wooden bridge crosses the dry moat and this can become slippery in wet weather. There is a low rail on either side.

There is no formal route around the gardens. Standing at the end of the wooden bridge, the Queen Mother's Garden is located to the left of the visitor. There is a metal gate in place with a sign saying 'Danger Deep Water!' There is a large unfenced pond in the centre of the garden. There are no further warning signs and no life preserves in place. A stone gazebo at the northern end of the Queen Mother's

Garden has stone pillars decorated with low level stone ledges. There is a further gate in the south west corner of the garden, with a deep water hazard warning sign attached.

From the end of the wooden bridge, the kitchen garden is located on the right. There are glasshouses built against the garden wall and visitors may walk through them. There are some low level glass-topped cold frames. A double gate leads to the garden compound where items of machinery are stored. For access reasons, these are gates are generally left unlocked during the day.

In wet weather, the garden's gravel paths can become flooded and pallets are occasionally laid down to provide a dry walkway. The outer side of the path is edged by a low hedge and the drop into the dry moat below is sheer.

The gardens contain many wooded areas and there are numerous trees presenting climbing hazards. The woodland walk runs around the garden perimeter. The paths can become flooded and muddy in wet weather. There is an area known as The Glen located at the very bottom of the garden. This is a chalk quarry with woodland walks. Although not currently open, please note that The Glen has very steep sides.