



ENGLISH HERITAGE

# Tintagel Castle

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

## INTRODUCTION

This booklet aims to help teachers to plan a visit to Tintagel Castle as part of a history study at key stages 1 to 4. A visit will allow pupils to identify more readily with the events and consequences of actions in the past whilst developing their knowledge, skills and understanding through historical enquiry and historical interpretation. It will also support a range of National Curriculum subjects such as geography and work in literacy.



*Tintagel Castle, Cornwall.*

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tintagel Castle is most famous for its associations with the legendary King Arthur. Romantic tales of Arthur and his knights were first written about in the twelfth-century. They remained popular throughout later medieval times and still continue to inspire writers today.

By the twelfth-century, Tintagel already had nearly a thousand-year history. It is likely that Tintagel had links with the Roman imperial presence in Britain. The headland was occupied during the Roman period but after the fourth-century, when it may have been known as Durocornovium. A range of imported goods, found during archaeological excavations, suggests that this was already a place of more than local importance.

This status was reinforced in the fifth and sixth-centuries when the headland was fortified as Din Tagell, the 'fortress of the narrow entrance'. The kingdom of Dumnonia stretched from Cornwall to Somerset and Tintagel may have been the base for the

collection of tributes and food. It may also have been used as a royal court, but hard evidence is lacking. Tintagel churchyard contains grave mounds belonging to this period. On the headland itself, Mediterranean tableware has been found, brought from the eastern Roman Empire, and probably used to increase the rulers' authority by suggesting imperial connections. The names of these rulers are unknown.

In 1136 Geoffrey of Monmouth refashioned an old tale of a Dark Age war leader called Arthur, claiming that he had been conceived at Tintagel and had gone on to become the mightiest king in Christendom. This romance caught the imagination of poets all over Europe and tales of Tristan and King Mark, Lancelot and Percival – originally quite separate stories – were used to build up fantastic stories of the knights of Arthur's court.

So powerful were these stories that in 1233 Richard, Earl of

Cornwall, acquired Din Tagell – by then long abandoned and a place of haunting legends. Here he built an antique castle worthy of the legendary hero-king. The castle played no great part in national affairs, being largely the creation of an impressionable young man who soon lost interest in it. By the end of the fifteenth century it was in ruins.

Nevertheless, the story of Arthur and his knights continued to grow. 'King Arthur's Castle' appeared on the first large scale map of Cornwall in 1699 and during the Victorian period tourism took its place in the local economy alongside copper-mining, slate-quarrying and fishing. In 1900, the nearby village of Trevena renamed itself Tintagel. An attempt to build a railway to bring still more tourists failed, although a Terminus Hotel was built. Today, visitors come to Tintagel in search of the same elusive hero-king whose story inspired the Earl of Cornwall to build King Arthur's Castle seven centuries ago.

## DESCRIPTION OF SITE

### Mainland courtyard

This was the outermost part of Earl Richard's castle. The great ditch and rock crag, which protected the landward approach to the fifth-century fortress of Din Tagell, were reinforced with stone walls and towers in the thirteenth-century. It was deliberately done in an old-fashioned castle style to give substance to stories that King Arthur had once lived here.

### Entrance

This has been the main entrance to the castle since the fifth century. It is a narrow, naturally-defended passageway with a gatehouse built by Earl Richard. Visitors would have passed under the stone arch and through large wooden doors.

### Visitor Centre

### The bridge

The narrow neck joining the two parts of the castle is crossed by a modern wooden bridge. The adjoining sandy beach was probably where the trading ships from the eastern Mediterranean landed in the fifth-century with luxury goods for the kings of Dumnonia.

### Island courtyard

This inner part of the castle protected Earl Richard's great hall and a path down to a defended landing place. The courtyard is built on a huge artificial terrace and buried below it are traces of fifth and sixth-century occupation. The immense engineering work needed to build this terrace suggests that Earl Richard may have wanted his great hall to overlie the exact spot where Arthur himself was believed to have lived.

### Walled garden

This small thirteenth-century walled garden can only have been used in summer time. Even then, tubs of plants must have been brought from more sheltered places on the mainland to create the flowery arbours thought appropriate to courtly life. Here the countess and her ladies may have listened to tales of Lancelot and Guinevere or of Tristan and Yseult.

## TIMELINE

**AD 43** Romans invade Britain.

**4th century** Cornish farming and fishing village is established at Tintagel.

**410** Roman administration begins to break down. The local authorities are told not to rely on the Roman army for defence.

**5th century** Tintagel is fortified by the kings of Dumnonia as a stronghold. Known as Din Tagell, the stronghold has royal connections and is an important trading port.

**9th century** Din Tagell is deserted.

**1100** Chapel built within the deserted stronghold.

**1136** Geoffrey of Monmouth writes his 'History of the Kings of Britain', claiming that the legendary King Arthur had been conceived at Din Tagell.

**1233** Earl Richard acquires the ancient fortress of Din Tagell and begins to build the castle of Tintagel.

**1272** Earl Richard dies. His son has no interest in Tintagel.

**1330** Roof of the great hall is dismantled and put into store.

**1350's** New house for the Constable of Tintagel is built in the ruins of the great hall.

**1500** The castle is in ruin.

### Chapel

This small chapel is dedicated to Saint Juliot. It was built at the end of the eleventh-century and refurbished in the thirteenth-century. Its purpose is a mystery, since Tintagel was deserted at the time when it was built and there was already a small church and graveyard on the mainland, close to where the present parish church stands.

### Well

This is the only source of fresh water on the island. Today it is used for emergency fire fighting on the island.

### Dark Age houses

On the sheltered eastern slopes of the headland are four groups of low ruined buildings. These date from the fifth and sixth-centuries and must have been part of the king of Dumnonia's stronghold of Din Tagell. Many more lie under the grass, waiting to be investigated. Their precise use is not clear: some may have been houses, others will have been workshops or storerooms.

### Tunnel

This strange rock-tunnel was probably also part of the Earl Richard's castle. Its purpose is unknown. One suggestion is that it may have served as the castle's cool-store for perishable foods.

**1588** Sir Richard Grenville places guns at Tintagel against possible Spanish attack.

**1699** Tintagel appears as 'King Arthur's Castle' on the first large-scale map of Cornwall.

**1804** Sir Walter Scott's novel 'Sir Tristram' re-awakens public interest in the stories of King Arthur and his Knights.

**1855** First excavation at Tintagel uncovers the medieval chapel.

**1859-1869** Lord Alfred Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King' results in a huge upsurge of interest in tales of the Round Table. Visitors begin to come to Tintagel in large numbers.

**1899** Attempts to build a railway to Tintagel are abandoned – the Terminus Hotel having already been built.

**1900** The village of Trevena re-names itself Tintagel.

**1929** Tintagel Castle is taken into state care.

**1930's** Programme of excavation and repair.

**1998** Renewed excavations uncover a 1,500 year-old piece of slate with the Latin inscription: 'Artogonou, father of a descendent of Coll, has had [this] made'.

## EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

### Tintagel Castle - strong or weak?

**TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:** The aim of this activity is to ask your pupils to assess the medieval defences of the castle by using detailed observation and questioning. Read the task to your pupils in school or before you arrive at the castle entrance. Tell pupils they are to be in a position to report back to their teacher. If you have a large group of pupils, it is advisable to divide them into smaller groups, each accompanied by an adult who can record their group's ideas. Each group should visit the eight locations shown on the plan below and use their 'spy-eyes' to identify the castle's strong and weak defences. Use the photographs to guide your pupils to the main defensive features. Then use questions and answers to help them identify the feature and to assess whether it was a strong defence or a weak one. When you have completed all eight locations, ask your pupils if they would recommend that their master attack the castle, and give reasons.



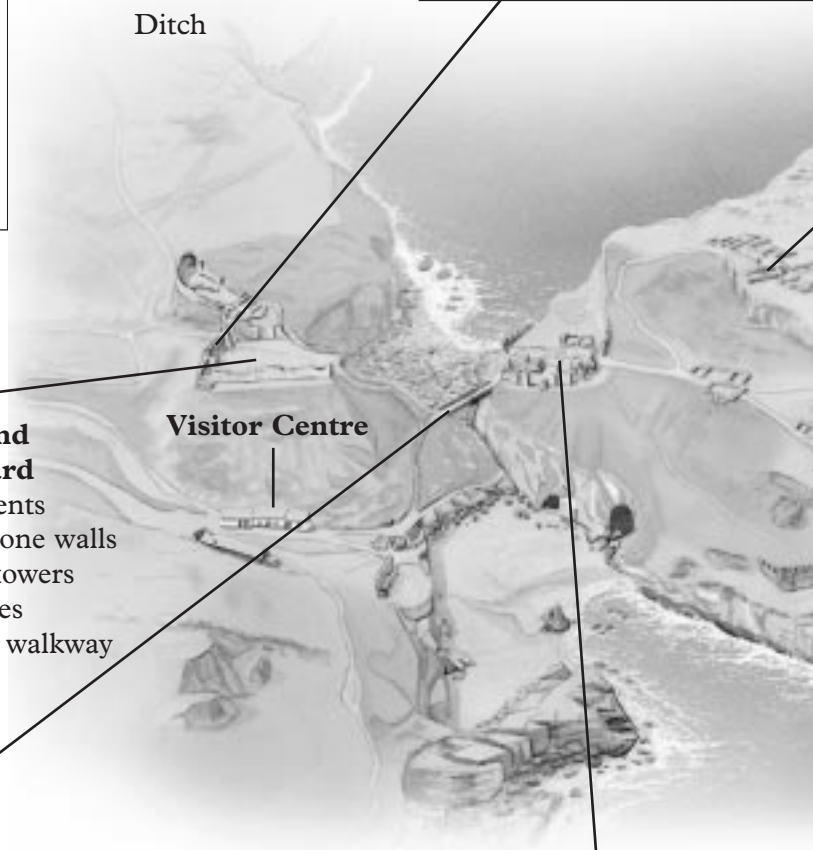
**Entrance**  
Narrow passageway  
High thick stone walls  
Cliff and crags  
Gatehouse  
Drawbar slots for wooden door  
Ditch



**Mainland courtyard**  
Battlements  
Thick stone walls  
Square towers  
Buttresses  
Steps to walkway



**Bridge**  
Narrow strip of land  
Cliffs  
Location above beaches



**Island courtyard**  
Battlements  
Thick stone walls  
Island location  
Level terrace  
Great hall  
Arched entrances



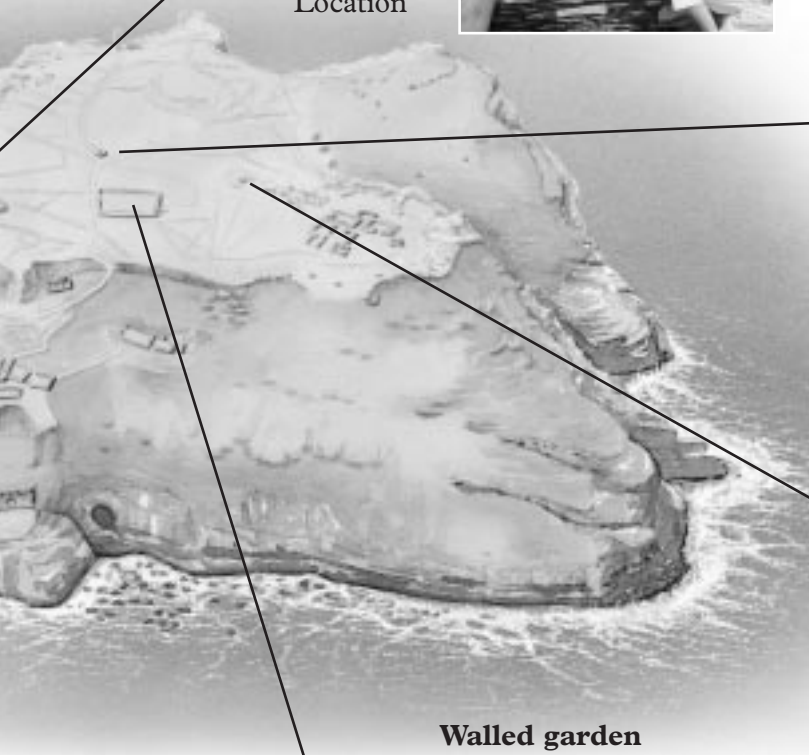
**Chapel**  
Location



**PUPIL TASK:** You are a spy working for an enemy of Earl Richard of Cornwall. You have been asked to assess the defences of Earl Richard's castle at Tintagel. You are expected to recommend to your master whether he should attack the castle. To gain entrance you disguise yourself as a servant of one of Earl Richard's guests.

Once inside, walk around the castle and use your 'spy-eyes' to find where the castle is strongly defended and where it is weak. Allocate a score to each feature from 5 = strong to 1 = weak.

Do you recommend that your master should attack Tintagel Castle?



**Walled garden**  
Walls surrounding garden  
Mainly recreational use  
Paths and Entrance



**Well**  
Supply of fresh water  
Surrounded by salty water



**Tunnel**  
Cool larder for storing food  
Arched ceiling  
Tool marks

**FOLLOW UP:** Compile a report on the castle's defences and present them to their peers; write a diary of their adventure as a spy disguised as a servant; or write a poem entitled 'Steps to nowhere' based on the steps in the mainland courtyard. Use the on-site activity:

I see, I hear, I feel from page 7 to help them do this.

## TINTAGEL STORIES

The romantic mystery of Tintagel Castle has inspired stories for centuries. Stories about magic, love and tragedy. Two such stories are those of the legend of King Arthur and the love story of Tristan and Yseult (versions of both stories can be found on this page). A visit to Tintagel can be used as an inspiration for work in literacy and English.

### PREPARATION

Before making your visit to Tintagel Castle, read one or both the stories to your pupils. Discuss what a legend is. Explain that it is usually based on a few facts that have been expanded and turned into stories, being retold over hundreds of years. This often romanticises what happens in the story and appeals to people who want to be like the hero or heroine in the legend. The young Earl Richard of Cornwall liked the image of King Arthur as ruler of the Knights of the Round Table, attracting the most chivalrous men in the world to his court. As a consequence, it is thought that he built his castle at Tintagel, the place where legend stated that Arthur was conceived and held court.

Explain to your group that they are going to visit Tintagel Castle and then create their own story about Earl Richard of Cornwall and his castle. Use the two artist's impressions of the mainland courtyard and the great hall on the page opposite to discuss some initial ideas about the structure of the stories. For example, in the first drawing what is happening to make everyone agitated? In the second drawing who is the person having an audience with Earl Richard and what have they brought with them?

### THE VISIT

When you arrive at the castle it is advisable to divide your group into smaller groups, each accompanied by an adult who can record their

### Tristan and Yseult

King Mark of Cornwall was betrothed in marriage to the beautiful Princess Yseult. He sent his nephew, Tristan to Ireland to bring her back to Cornwall. To ensure that her daughter loved King Mark, Yseult's mother made a magic love potion. On the voyage home, Tristan and Yseult drank the potion by mistake thinking it was wine. They immediately fell in love. Yseult married King Mark but kept her love for Tristan secret. Eventually her husband found out and banished Tristan from his kingdom. Tristan became a Knight of the Round Table and had many adventures. Whilst in Brittany he married another woman.

One day he was mortally wounded and he sent for his first love. If she agreed to come to him, he asked that her ship hoist a white sail, and if she declined, to hoist a black sail. As the ship approached, Tristan's jealous wife lied to him and told him it had a black sail. Tristan was so overcome with disappointment that he died before Yseult arrived. Seeing her dead lover, Yseult lay down beside him and died of a broken heart.

### The Legend of King Arthur

Legend states that Arthur, the son of King Uther of Pendragon, was born at Tintagel Castle. Just after his birth, Arthur's father was killed by his enemies. Merlin, a magician who swore to protect the baby, smuggled Arthur into Wales. He asked Sir Ector, a trusted knight, to become Arthur's foster father and bring him up with his own son, Kay. When Arthur was fifteen all the knights had to go to London to choose a new king. Sir Ector took his two sons with him. While the knights were in church a mysterious stone appeared outside. Embedded in the stone was a sword. There was an inscription on the stone. It said 'Who so pulleth out this sword of this stone is the rightful king of all England.'

All the knights tried to remove the sword, but failed. What they did not know was that Merlin had used magic to create the stone, to ensure that the true heir became king.

For over a year knights tried to remove the sword. No one succeeded. At the end of the year a special tournament was held. It was Sir Kay's first tournament and he had forgotten his sword. He asked Arthur to fetch it from their lodgings. Arthur could not find the sword but remembered he had seen a spare one – the sword in the stone. He pulled the sword from the stone – not realising what he had done. When the knights realised what Arthur had done they made the sixteen-year old boy, King of England. Arthur held his court at Camelot and ruled for many splendid years. His Knights of the Round Table had numerous epic adventures. Arthur was mortally wounded in a battle against his son, Mordred, and was taken to Avalon. Some say he died there, others claim he is sleeping until he is needed to rule England again.

ideas. The aim of the visit is to ask your pupils to use their senses to experience the atmosphere and collect words and phrases to use back in school when they write

their stories. This can be done using a number of different techniques. The two artist's impressions can be found on the interpretation panels in the

mainland courtyard and the inland courtyard on site. Otherwise, provide each of your adults with copies of the two drawings to take with them as they go round the site.

Various techniques can be used to collect words to describe a place. Ask your pupils to see how the site makes them feel by suggesting five words under each of the headings: I see, I hear and I feel. To set the activity in a historical period ask them to think up the appropriate historical equivalent to their answers - 'What would you have seen then?'

Alternatively, during your preliminary visit to the site, take pictures of key locations that could feature in the story. Give each of your adults one or more of the images mounted on paper. Ask each group to go to the locations and come up with words that describe the colours, textures, patterns and shapes they can see. The adults can note the ideas on the image sheet.

Your pupils can be asked to collect five emotive words about those parts of the castle that they find attractive and five emotive words describing parts they find unattractive. For example words such as intriguing, tranquil and calming, or mysterious, remote and haunting. Back in school, go through the words deciding which are the most powerful and why. Ask your pupils to include some of the words in their stories.

Pupils could be asked to concentrate on the natural environment of Tintagel Castle and provide words that describe the physical location. They can be guided to different themes – coastal features (rocky, crags, stacks, inlet, sea, cave, waves, sand), wildlife (birds, flowers, grasses) and the weather (sky, sunny, bright, dull, rain, windy).



*Reconstruction drawing of the gateway and Mainland Courtyard of the Medieval castle.*



*Reconstruction drawing of the Island Courtyard of Earl Richard's castle.*

### **FOLLOW UP**

Back in school the words and experiences collected during the visit can be used to create a big storybook, creative writing or poetry. This could be extended into role play and drama which can be showcased during an assembly. Other ideas can include:

- writing postcards from Tintagel Castle as if from a modern day visitor and from a medieval visitor
- using circle time to discuss the Round Table and the role of the Knights. What would we want to change about the world today?
- constructing 3D sets and props to illustrate the stories.

## MAKING A VISIT

### Opening hours

For detailed information on current opening hours contact the regional office or visit our website [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

### How to get there

Ordnance Survey map ref.  
200 SX 048891

On Tintagel Head, 1/2 mile along uneven track from Tintagel. No vehicle access. Groups should be set down in one of the car/coach parks in Tintagel village and proceed on foot direct to the site (1/2 mile) or via the parish church (1 mile).

### Booking Procedure

Educational visits are free if booked at least fourteen days in advance via the Regional Office. When your booking is confirmed you will be sent a permit which you can also use to make a free preparatory visit. Booking forms are available from:

English Heritage  
29 Queen Square  
Bristol BS1 4ND

Tel: 0117 9750 720

Fax: 0117 9750 677

On this site the required adult/pupil ratio is at least 1 to 10. It is essential that you make a preparatory visit.

### Health & safety

Please ensure that you have followed the health and safety requirements of your Local Education Authority before making a visit to the site. It is important that pupils are adequately supervised at all times. Tintagel is an open-air site and there are no restrictions on the way in which teachers use it. However, its dramatic cliff-edge setting means that special care is needed. All the activities suggested in this booklet are designed in such a way that pupils do not need to take any equipment on site with them. It is suggested that the accompanying adults record any answers or ideas. Access to the beach, and to Merlin's Cave, is only accessible with care, but not at high tide.

**Please remember you are responsible for carrying out your own risk assessment.**

**Access:** access to the castle is via at least 100 steps. Surfaces include

grass, gravel, cobbles and flagstones. Many of the surfaces are uneven and include changes in level. The island element of the site is a natural Cornish headland which includes several cliffs.

**Parking:** parking for all vehicles is located in Tintagel village.

**Toilets:** on site.

**Picnic areas:** groups may picnic anywhere on site.

**Shop:** our staff welcome well-supervised educational groups as all proceeds contribute to the continuing work of English Heritage. An adult to pupil ratio of 1:6 in the shop at any one time - thank you.

**Refreshments:** there is an independently-owned café near the English Heritage shop (open April - October only).

**Film Show:** lasting 7 minutes in the visitor centre, maximum 15 persons standing. Please ask staff on arrival for the best time to view the film. Text version available for groups. A small storage area for bags and coats is available. Ask staff on arrival for details and key. Key issued on a first come basis. Appropriate clothing and footwear should be worn.

## USEFUL RESOURCES

Barber, R, *The Arthur Legends*,  
Boydell Press, 1992

ISBN 0-85115-252-X

Collins, F & Hollinshead, E,  
*English and the Historic*

*Environment*, English Heritage,  
1999 ISBN 1-85074-330-4

Copeland, T, A *Teachers Handbook*  
*for Local Studies*, English Heritage,  
1998 ISBN 1-873592-37-X

Copeland, T, *Using Castles*, English  
Heritage, 1993

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English Heritage, *Tintagel Castle*  
(guide book), English Heritage,  
1999

ISBN 1-85074-701-6

English Heritage, *What were castles*  
*for?*, English Heritage & Usborne,  
2002, ISBN 1-7460-5256-1

McAleavy, T, *Life in a medieval*  
*castle*, English Heritage, 1998

ISBN 1-85074-665-6

Thomas, C, *Tintagel: Arthur and*  
*Archaeology*, Batsford, 1993

ISBN 0-7134-6690-1

**Poster Packs:** *Looking at Castles*,  
English Heritage, 1994

ISBN 1-85074-490-4

*Real Castles*, English Heritage,  
2002, ISBN 1-85074-813-6

**Photopacks:** *Seaside Holidays in*  
*the Past*, English Heritage National

Monuments Record, 2001,

ISBN 1-873592-51-5

**CD-ROM:** *Real Castles*, TAG and  
English Heritage, 2000

ISBN 1-902-804-0115

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