

SELF-LED ACTIVITY

PICKERING CASTLE

ACTIVITY TRAIL



KS2

KS3

Recommended for

KS2–3 (History, Geography)

Learning objectives

- To understand why castles were important buildings in Norman England.
- To discover the roles of different people living and working at Pickering Castle during the Norman and medieval periods.
- To consider how the use of Pickering Castle changed over time.

Time to complete

20 minutes – Pre-visit Activity

45–60 minutes – On-site Trail



An illustration of a Norman soldier.

PRIOR LEARNING

Before your visit to Pickering Castle, students should be familiar with the events of the Norman Conquest, including the Harrying of the North. You could discuss key defensive features of castles and how they may have helped resist and prevent enemy attack. This includes curtain walls, keeps, moats, drawbridges and gatehouses.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

Use a map of the local landscape to explore the strategic importance of Pickering Castle to the Normans and medieval people who built and adapted the site over time. Examine different castle types and use satellite imagery to decide which elements are present at Pickering before your visit.

AT THE CASTLE

The activity trail can be used by students individually or in pairs. Teachers can also use the trail and map as a guide when leading their groups around Pickering Castle.

If students are exploring themselves, they will need a copy of the trail (pages 6–12). Students will also need a pencil and something to lean on (a clipboard or notebook would work well).

MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Students could use their understanding of Pickering Castle's features and our 'Mini Guide to Medieval Castles' on the English Heritage YouTube channel to develop a plan or model of their own castle.

TEACHERS' ANSWER SHEET

PICKERING CASTLE ACTIVITY TRAIL

PRE-VISIT

BUILDING THE CASTLE

A) Look at the map below and write three reasons why Pickering was a good place for William the Conqueror to build a castle.

Pickering is on the southern edge of the North York Moors. It's on a rounded limestone cliff which used to overlook the meeting point of two historic highways through the north of England. The Normans chose this position carefully to make sure that the castle was as effective a fortification as possible.

- The Normans wanted to control and impress local people.
- Building on high ground gives good visibility across the landscape.
- This location overlooked important transport and communication routes.
- Being near the woods provided a source of food, fuel and timber. Controlling rights to access woodland resources could also be very lucrative – you could charge farmers to collect firewood, for example, or charge them to graze their pigs.

Following the Norman Conquest, William the Conqueror built castles to impose his authority in England. He faced rebellions in the north of England in and around York so he started a violent campaign to impose Norman authority. This is known today as the 'Harrying of the North'.

The Harrying of the North – (1069–70) – an extremely harsh campaign to subdue the north of England ordered by William the Conqueror. Villages and farmland were destroyed, and many people were killed. Others starved after their animals were killed, crops were burnt, and the land was salted to prevent crops from growing. 75 per cent of the population perished.

B) Castles like Pickering were adapted and changed over time. Match these castle types to their definitions and tick which type of castle you can see at Pickering (HINT: Use a satellite image to help you – there may be more than one!):

Motte and Bailey – a tower on an earthen mound connected to a walled enclosure.

Shell Keep – a stone wall built around timber structures to protect them from attack.

Concentric – a castle with an outer wall around the curtain wall.

The early castle at Pickering was a Norman motte and bailey structure. The castle was later rebuilt in stone and a shell keep was added.

continued overleaf ...

AT THE CASTLE

ACTIVITY 1: ENTERING THE CASTLE

AT THE GATEHOUSE

A) Study the gatehouse and look for evidence of the double doors that kept attackers out. (HINT: Look for grooves in the walls.)

This is where a portcullis (a strong heavy grate that can be lowered up and down) was used to protect the castle.

B) Write down another defensive feature that you can see at Pickering.

High ground, high walls, ramparts, towers with lookout positions, earthworks

ACTIVITY 2: GOING ON A ROYAL HUNT

AT THE STABLES

A) Label this image of a falcon with characteristics that make it a good hunter.

(HINT: Consider how falcons chase and attack their prey.)

A falcon's prey can include birds like ducks and pigeons as well as bats. Falcons sometimes steal food like fish and rodents from other birds of prey.

- Sharp talons – to attack prey
- Sharp beak – a notched beak with a 'tomial tooth' in the upper beak to attack prey
- Long pointed wings and tails - for swift flight
- Large eyes – large lens to spot prey from a long distance

ACTIVITY 3: CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN THE MILL TOWER?

AT THE MILL TOWER

A) Look at the tower and its surroundings.

B) Discuss what may have made it a good place to keep prisoners. (HINT: Think about the tower's location and features.)

The Mill Tower is located at the far edge of the castle's curtain wall, away from the other towers and the keep. If prisoners were kept here, it was probably only for a short time before they were brought before the local court or the sheriff. There are few windows in the Mill Tower and no visible fireplaces on the ground floor.

continued overleaf ...

ACTIVITY 4: DESIGNING THE DIATE HILL TOWER

AT THE DIATE HILL TOWER

- A) Examine the outside and inside of the Diate Hill Tower.
- B) Record any features that you see and compare these with the Mill Tower. Which may have been the more comfortable building?

(HINT: Consider decoration, sunlight, smell, temperature, toilet facilities.)

The outside of the Diate Hill Tower is more decorative than other towers at the castle. Inside, you can see a fireplace on an upper floor and a garderobe (toilet) with an exterior chute for waste. This suggests that this was a more comfortable building than the Mill Tower.

Nightsoilman or gong farmer – someone who dug out and collected human waste from cesspits and garderobes. Often, they sold the waste to farmers as fertiliser.

ACTIVITY 5: FEEDING THE CASTLE

IN THE KITCHENS

- A) Decide which of these menus was for the king and his nobles and which was for other people living at the castle in the Norman period.
- B) Discuss whether you regularly eat anything on these menus. Does anything surprise you about what people were eating at this time?

A = Poorer people like servants at the castle ate much less meat than the nobles they served. Poor people ate animal proteins (meat, but also cheese, butter, fowl (birds), sea-bird eggs and shellfish) infrequently. Both poor and rich people ate pottage which was a thick soup with scraps of meat in.

B = The king and his nobles ate a lot of meat like venison (deer) which could be hunted on their estates. Well-off people in the Norman period also ate lots of pork. Spices were expensive and so only very wealthy people could afford to flavour their food with ingredients like nutmeg, cardamom, ginger and pepper. Producing white flour to make white bread took more milling and so cost more.

ACTIVITY 6: FEASTING IN THE NEW HALL

IN THE NEW HALL

- A) Take on the roles of the king, his nobles, steward and servants.
- B) Arrange yourselves in order of importance in the New Hall and mime your roles.

(HINT: Everyone in the hall bows to the king and his family. Servers process in with food piled on large platters.)

Group leaders could assign the roles of:

- The king and his family
- Noblemen and their families – high-ranking nobles like earls and lesser nobles like knights and the local gentry

continued overleaf ...

- The king's steward – responsible for looking after the estate around the castle and the king's household
- Servants – including pages (young boys training to be knights) waiting on the seated guests and servers taking food from the kitchens into the hall.

ACTIVITY 7: CHARTING CHANGE IN THE CHAPEL

AT THE CHAPEL

In the 1290s, 2 shillings could pay a labourer's wages for 10 days. In 1298, the king was paid £2 for dog licences in Pickering forest.

A) Calculate how many days' work this could pay for. (HINT: There were 20 shillings in a pound.)

$2 \div 10 = 0.2$ shillings/per day	OR	$2 \times 20 = 40$ shillings
$20 \times 2 = 40$ shillings		$40 \div 2 = 20$
$40 \div 0.2 = 200$ days		$20 \times 10 = 200$ days

ACTIVITY 8: A VIEW FROM THE KEEP

AT THE KEEP

A) Discuss possible reasons why the keep at Pickering was first built in wood and later rebuilt in stone. (HINT: Consider the properties of these materials and how they can be affected by their environment.)

Answers can include:

- Wooden castles were cheaper and quicker to build so lots of them could be built across England in a short period of time.
- Wood can rot over time, weakening the strength of a wooden castle.
- Wooden castles can be more easily attacked by fire. The outside walls of wooden buildings were often rendered with a daub-like material which gave some protection from fire.
- Woodland in England was significantly reduced during the first century of Norman occupation when lots of timber castles were built. It takes a long time for oak trees to mature to a size that could be used to build castles which might be why fewer timber castles were built after this. By the 14th century, wood was being imported from Scandinavia and the Baltics.
- By the 12th century, a third of England fell under forest laws and was protected for the king's use.
- Stone castles are more difficult to destroy.
- Stone castle designs became more and more impressive over time, showing off a lord's power and wealth. Some of the oldest castles in England today (like the Tower of London) were built during the Norman period as a show of strength.

ACTIVITY TRAIL

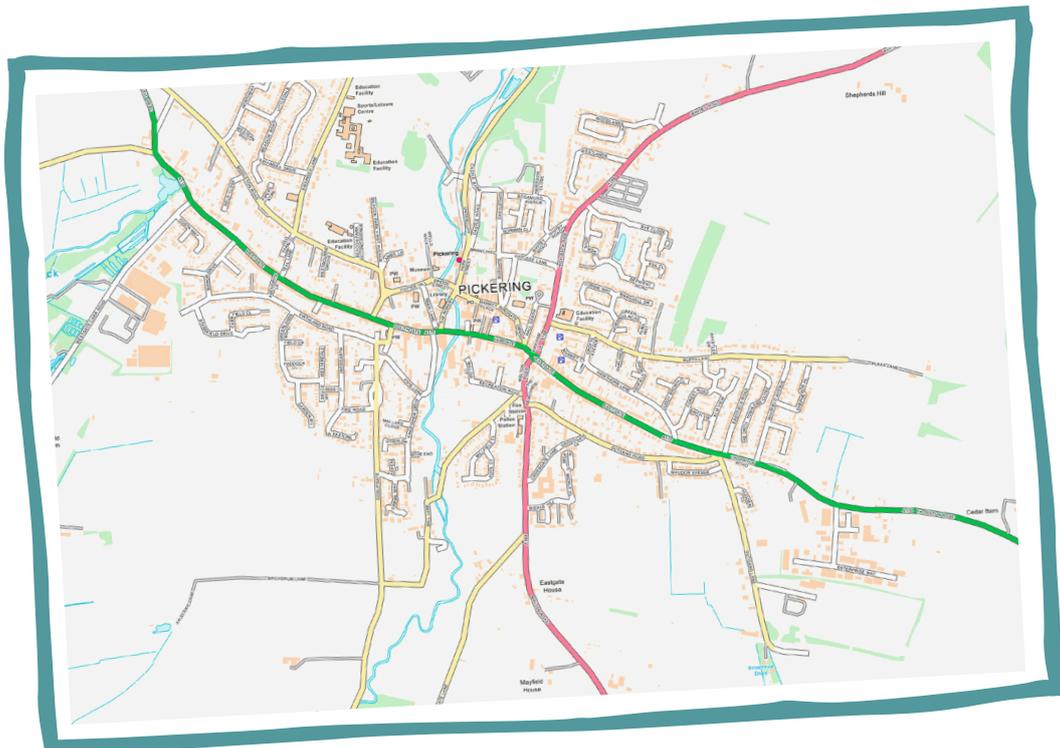
DISCOVER PICKERING
CASTLE

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: BUILDING A CASTLE

When William the Conqueror became king in 1066, he built castles in strategic places to impose his rule in England.

A Look at the modern map below and **write** three reasons why Pickering was a good place for William the Conqueror to build a castle.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



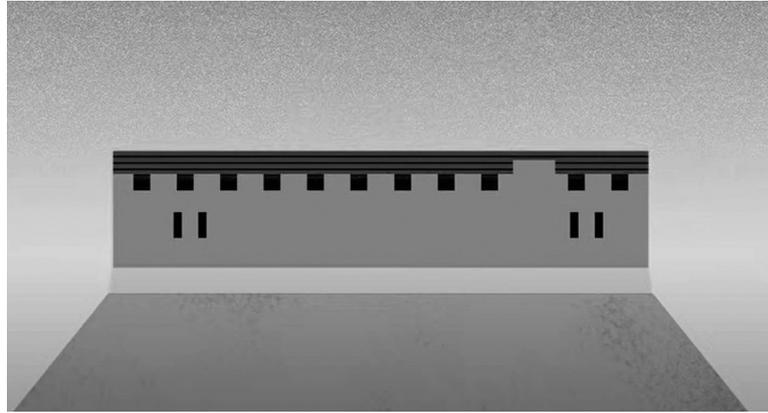
B Castles like Pickering were adapted and changed over time.

Draw a line between each castle type and its definition, then **tick** the castle type you can see at Pickering.

(HINT: Use a satellite image to help you – there may be more than one!):

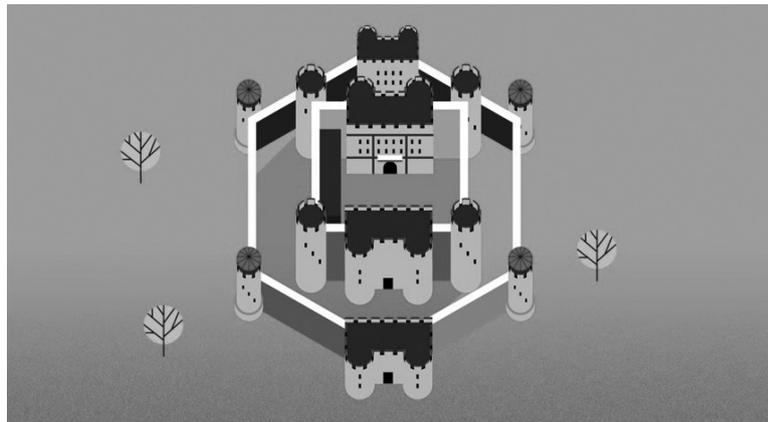
Motte and Bailey

a stone wall built around timber structures to protect them from attack



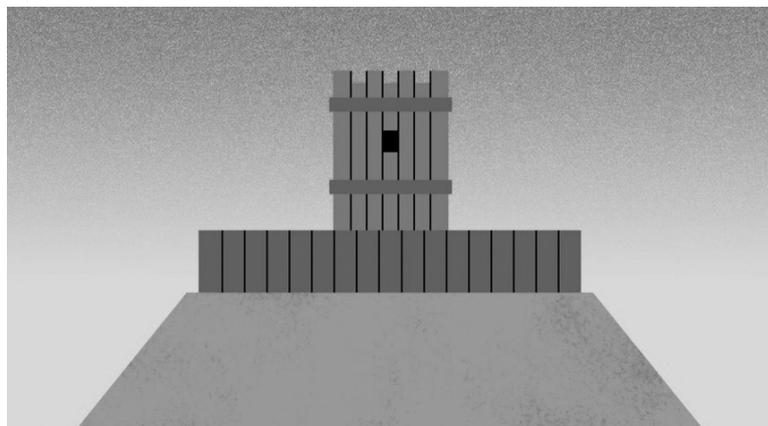
Shell Keep

a castle with an outer wall around the curtain wall



Concentric

a tower on an earthen mound connected to a walled enclosure



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Pickering Castle!

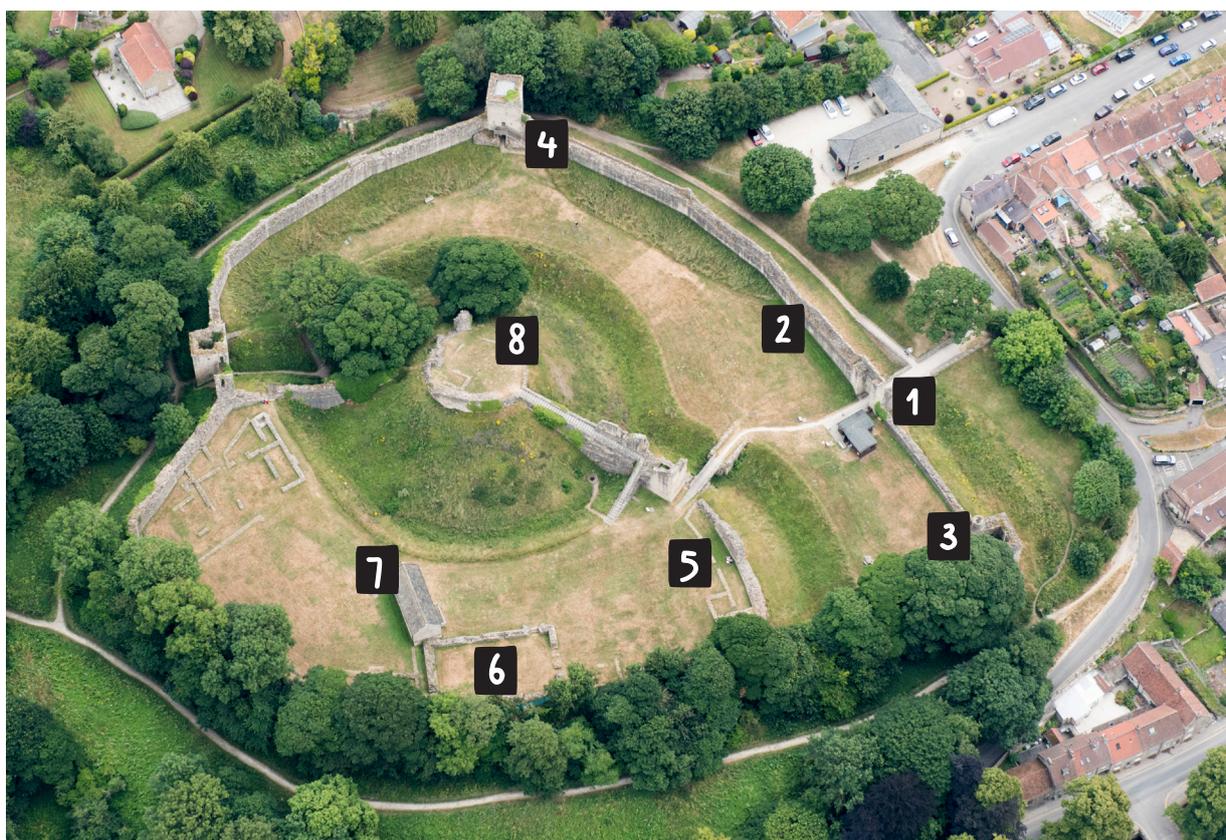
William the Conqueror (r.1066–87) built the first castle here in around 1069–70.

Pickering Castle was a show of power and authority in the north of England. It protected Norman lands nearby and acted as a royal hunting lodge.

As you explore the castle, think about:

- Why castles were important in Norman and medieval England
- The roles of different people living in a castle
- What life was like for the people living and working at Pickering Castle in the past.

Use this map to help you explore the castle during your visit.



KEY

- | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 GATEHOUSE | 3 MILL TOWER | 5 KITCHENS | 7 CHAPEL |
| 2 STABLES | 4 DIATE HILL TOWER | 6 NEW HALL | 8 KEEP |

ACTIVITY 1: ENTERING THE CASTLE

Halt! Who goes there? We have archers along the castle walls ready to fire down on attackers!



A Study the gatehouse and look for evidence of the double doors that kept attackers out.

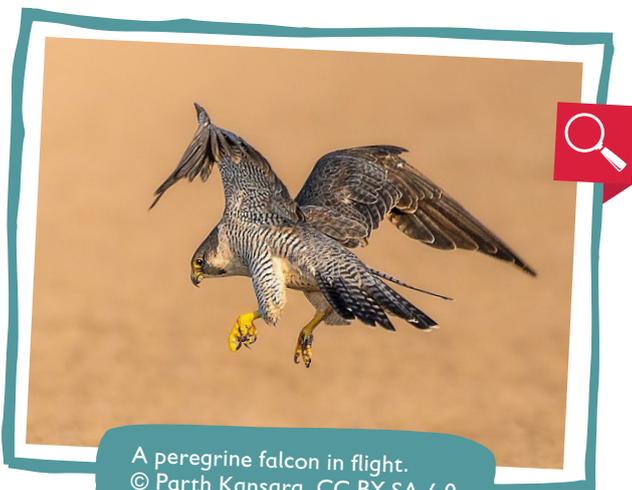
(HINT: Look for grooves in the walls.)

B Write down another defensive feature that you can see at Pickering.

Edward II started building this gatehouse after the castle was threatened by a Scottish army in 1322. The double doors here helped stop attackers getting into the castle through the gatehouse.

ACTIVITY 2: GOING ON A ROYAL HUNT

Most kings of England between 1100 and 1400 visited Pickering and hunted on horseback for sport. William the Conqueror introduced forest laws forbidding the hunting of animals like deer and boar without his permission. Edward II (r.1307–27) had a stud farm here where he bred horses.



A peregrine falcon in flight.
© Parth Kansara, CC BY SA 4.0

Rich Norman women didn't hunt on horseback, but they did hunt with birds of prey, like falcons. Training these birds took a long time and was very expensive.

A Label this image of a falcon with characteristics that make it a good hunter.

(HINT: Consider how falcons chase and attack their prey.)

ACTIVITY 3: CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN THE MILL TOWER?

Pickering Castle was a centre of law and order in the local area. It's possible that lawbreakers were held on the ground floor of the Mill Tower. The gaoler may have lived in an upstairs room with a fireplace.

Wood was used in castle building, heating and cooking. If you stole wood from the royal forests, you were stealing from the king and could be imprisoned as punishment.



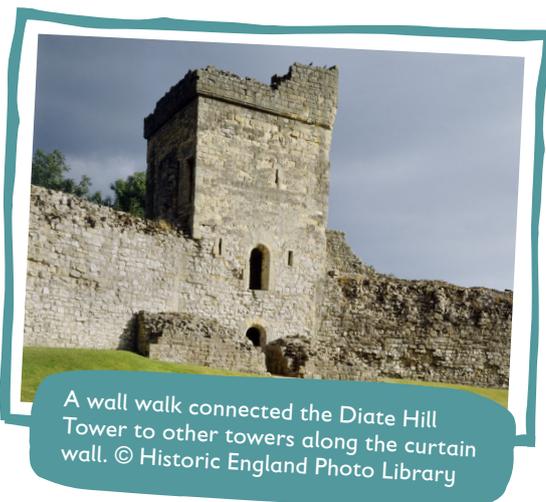
Medieval manacles found at Pickering Castle.

A Look at the tower and its surroundings.

B Discuss what may have made it a good place to keep prisoners.

(HINT: Think about the tower's location and features.)

ACTIVITY 4: DESIGNING THE DIATE HILL TOWER



A wall walk connected the Diate Hill Tower to other towers along the curtain wall. © Historic England Photo Library

Edward II replaced the timber bailey wall with a stone wall and towers during the First War of Scottish Independence (1296–1328).

A Examine the outside and inside of the Diate Hill Tower.

B Discuss any features that you see and compare these with the Mill Tower. Which may have been the more comfortable building?

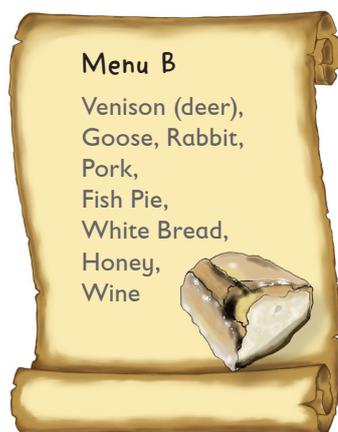
(HINT: Consider decoration, sunlight, smell, temperature, toilet facilities.)

The garderobe (toilet) inside the Diate Hill Tower is on the top floor. It had a long chute where waste could fall to the ground. This was collected by a nightsoilman who could sell waste to farmers as fertiliser.

ACTIVITY 5: FEEDING THE CASTLE

This is where food was prepared in the castle. A person's diet depended on their status – whether they were a noble or a servant.

The king and his nobles eat a lot of expensive meat. In the 13th century, a rabbit is worth more than a workman's daily wage.



A Label which of these menus was for the king and his nobles and which was for other people living at the castle in the Norman period.

B Discuss whether you regularly eat anything on these menus. Does anything surprise you about what people were eating at this time?

ACTIVITY 6: FEASTING IN THE NEW HALL

This hall was built in the 14th century as a place for feasting but it probably replaced an earlier hall. It was later used as a courtroom where people suspected of breaking forest laws were put on trial.

People sit in order of importance. The king sits at one end of the hall, often on a raised platform. The least important people sit furthest away from him.



A Take on the roles of the king, his nobles, steward and servants.

B Arrange yourselves in order of importance in the New Hall and **mime** your roles.

(HINT: Everyone in the hall bows to the king and his family. Servers process in with food piled on large platters.)

ACTIVITY 7: CHARTING CHANGE IN THE CHAPEL



Wall paintings inside Pickering church. There may have been similar artworks inside the castle chapel during the medieval period. © Historic England Archive

Religion was very important to Norman and medieval people. The chapel was first built in 1227 but by the 17th century the building was being used as a courtroom.

Lands around Pickering and local law and order were originally organised in the hall. The king collected rents, fines and taxes from the royal forests.

In the 1290s, 2 shillings could pay a labourer's wages for 10 days. In 1298, the king was paid £2 for dog licences in Pickering forest.

A Calculate how many days' work this could pay for.

(HINT: There were 20 shillings in a pound.)

ACTIVITY 8: A VIEW FROM THE KEEP

The original keep was built on an earth mound called a motte. From here, you could look across the Vale of Pickering towards Malton and keep watch over the road from Scarborough on the east coast to Helmsley and Rydale in the west.

From the top of the keep you can see the foundations of the king's lodgings which were in a ring of buildings inside the keep wall.

A Discuss possible reasons why the keep at Pickering was first built in wood and later rebuilt in stone.

(HINT: Consider the properties of these materials and how they can be affected by their environment.)

