

Explore Edinburgh Castle Life



Group leader tour



Welcome to Edinburgh Castle!

This tour is designed for leaders visiting the castle with a learning group. This tour has nine stops and explores what it was like to live and work in a royal castle.

There is also a **learner version of this trail** which provides learners with challenges and questions to reflect on as they explore.

Each stop includes:



Introduction

Information to read out loud to your group.



Questions for learners

Prompt questions with suggested responses.



Extra facts

Some stops include bonus information or images.

Learner trail answers

A copy of the learner version of the stop.



Challenge: suggested answers for the challenges



Reflect: these questions are for learners to provide their own reflections

Learning outcomes

Learners will be able to:

- describe the purpose of a castle.
- discuss the uses of different parts of the castle and some of the people who lived and worked there.

Learners will have practice:

- spotting evidence on buildings and using it to draw conclusions about life in a castle.

Key skills

- Observing, describing and recording
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Discussion and communication
- Creativity, curiosity, and imagination

Curriculum links

	First level	Second level
Social studies	I can compare aspects of people's daily lives in the past with my own by using historical evidence or the experience of recreating an historical setting. SOC 1-04a	I can compare and contrast a society in the past with my own and contribute to a discussion of the similarities and differences. SOC 2-04a
Literacy and English	When I engage with others, I know when and how to listen, when to talk, how much to say, when to ask questions and how to respond with respect. LIT 1-02a	When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others' contributions and use these to build on thinking. LIT 2-02a

	Early	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Health and wellbeing	I understand that my feelings and reactions can change depending upon what is happening within and around me. This helps me to understand my own behaviour and the way others behave. HWB 0-04a / HWB 1-04a / HWB 2-04a / HWB 3-04a / HWB 4-04a				

Tour stops

Stop 1: Esplanade
Stop 2: Gatehouse
Stop 3: Defences
A: The Lang Stairs

p 4
p 6
p 8
p 10

Stop 4: St Margaret's Chapel
Stop 5: The Fore Well
B: Crown Square
Stop 6: The Palace
Stop 7: The Great Hall

p 12
p 14
p 16
p 18
p 25



not in the learner trail

Stop 1: Esplanade

Introduction

Today this big flat area in front of the castle is called the Esplanade. Hundreds of years ago, when this was a royal castle, it would have been a grassy rocky hillside with a dark purpose: it was often used to execute prisoners.



Though the Esplanade has changed over the years, this is where everyone from kings and queens to prisoners and attacking armies would have had their first close look at Edinburgh Castle.

Questions for learners

What words would you use to describe the castle?

- Impressive
- Intimidating
- Exciting

Why did people build castles?

- To show off wealth and power
- To protect themselves, their family and their treasures

Why do you think they would choose this location to build the castle?

- A good viewpoint to see attackers coming
- Easy for people to see your castle from far away and be impressed or intimidated by you
- The cliffs, which were formed by a volcanic eruption, act as natural protection

Can you spot any evidence that the castle was built to keep people out?

- Location
- Dry ditch
- Drawbridge
- High walls
- Big heavy doors

Explore Edinburgh Castle Life



Learner trail



Stop 1: Esplanade

For hundreds of years, people have stood where you stand waiting to enter Edinburgh Castle: knights planning attacks, queens ready to rule, prisoners fearing their fate - now you.

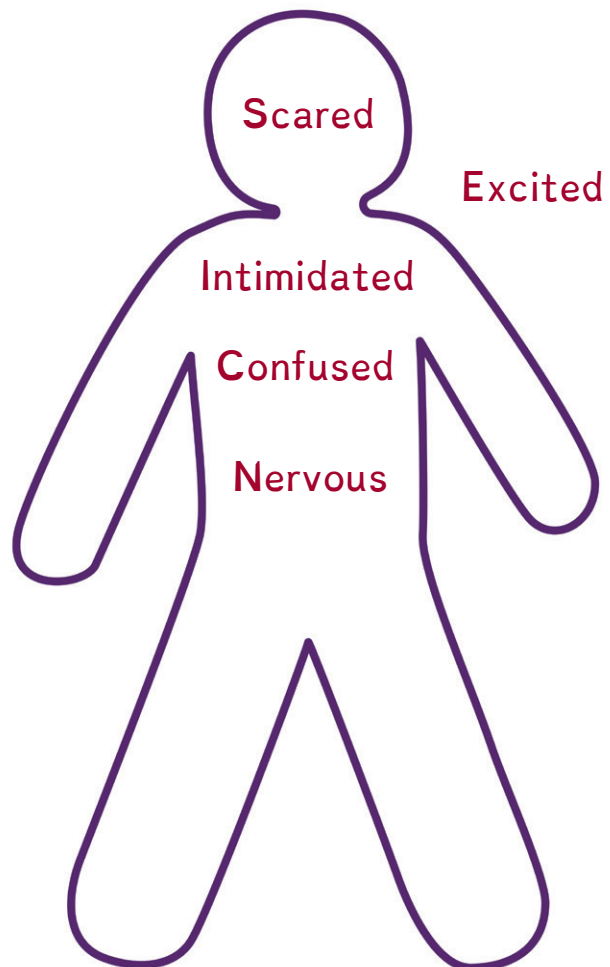


Challenge

All those visitors will have seen, heard, and felt different things. Take a moment to listen and look around you.

In and around the body shape write some words to describe the castle and how it makes you feel.

Think about what you can see, hear, feel, smell and any emotions you have.



Stop 2: Gatehouse



Introduction

A gatehouse is designed to protect the castle's weakest point, its entrance. You might have spotted defensive features like the dry ditch and thick heavy doors. But this gatehouse was mostly designed to look impressive and show off Edinburgh's importance as a royal castle.

Questions for learners

Can you spot any evidence the castle was designed to impress?

- Decorative features on the gatehouse such as turrets, shield, and crowns etc.
- High location so it's visible from all around

What tells you the castle belonged to the Scottish royal family?

- Two crowns
- A shield with the royal Scottish coat of arms, the red lion rampant on a field of yellow
- A latin motto 'Nemo Me Impune Lacessit'



The motto above the entrance 'Nemo Me Impune Lacessit' is in Latin.

It means 'no one hurts me with impunity', which basically means 'if you hit me, I will hit you back harder'.

Why do you think someone would write that motto on the front of their castle?

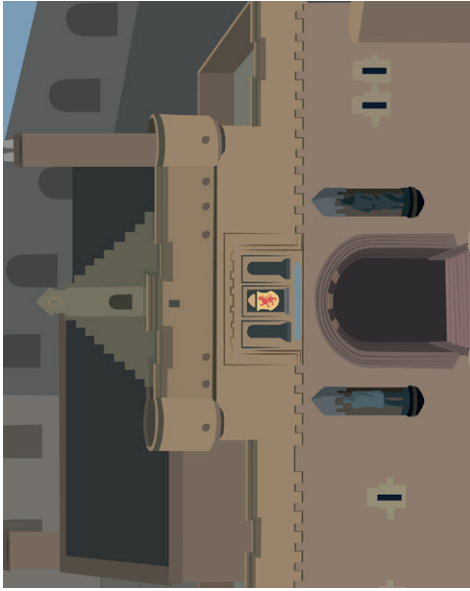
- To intimidate visitors
- To try to stop people attacking
- They don't feel safe so are trying to seem brave or fierce

Who do you think looks after the castle today?

Historic Environment Scotland care for the castle so it can be enjoyed by people from Scotland and all around the world.

Stop 2: Gatehouse

A gatehouse is the entrance to a castle; they were built to protect castles and to impress visitors. This gatehouse's design includes clues about who this castle belonged to.



Challenge

Look closely at the gatehouse, find the shield with an animal on it.

Write or draw the animal in the shield.

Underneath the shield is a **motto** (a saying that represents values or behaviour). It's written in Latin but in English it means 'If you hit me, I'll hit you back harder'.

What motto would you pick for your family or yourself?

Reflect

Who do you think this castle belonged to?

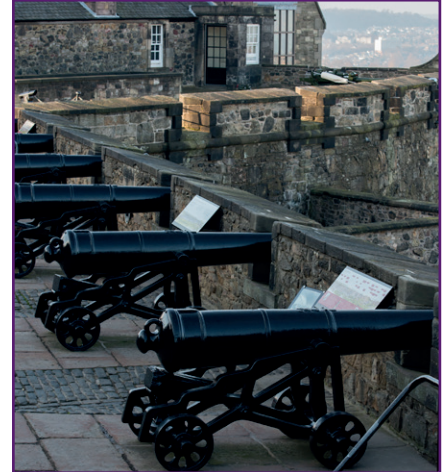
Why do you think they chose that animal for their shield?

'Lion' /
drawing
of a lion

Learner's
own answer



Stop 3: Defences



Introduction

As you cross the drawbridge and enter the castle, you will see lots of features designed to defend the castle from attack. Like the Portcullis Gate, made up of two sets of thick wooden doors and an iron portcullis.

Despite all its defences, people still tried to attack the castle; it is the most besieged castle in Britain, having been besieged around 50 times! Some succeeded but many failed.

Questions for learners

What defences can you spot to stop people getting into the castle?

- Cliffs
- Dry ditch
- Drawbridge
- Thick wooden doors
- Portcullis gate
- Narrow twisty passages
- Cannons and gun holes
- High thick walls

What did guards need to be good at?

- Watching people who might be acting suspiciously
- Being observant even when they are bored
- Standing very straight

How would you try to break in to the castle?

In the past people have:

- Dressed up in disguises
- Climbed the steep cliffs and over the walls
- Bombarded it with cannon fire

Who do you think guarded the castle?

- The guards would have been local people who guarded the castle walls.
- King/Queen's Guards would have travelled with the king and queen and guarded their rooms.
- Knights would only come to guard the castle if there was a siege or war. They were rich people who often had their own castles to protect.

Stop 3: Defences

Edinburgh Castle was home to royals and riches that were important to keep safe. Enemies would always be looking for weak points to attack. The castle needed to have lots of defensive features.



Challenge

As you enter and explore the castle look for examples of **defensive features and weak points to attack**. Write or draw the ones you've spotted in this table.

defensive features

- Dry ditch
- Portcullis
- Gun loops
- Cannons
- Arrow slits

weak points to attack

- Only one well
- destroy their water supply
- The cliffs – an attack this way would be unexpected
- Bribe a guard

Do you think Edinburgh Castle is easier to attack or defend? Why?



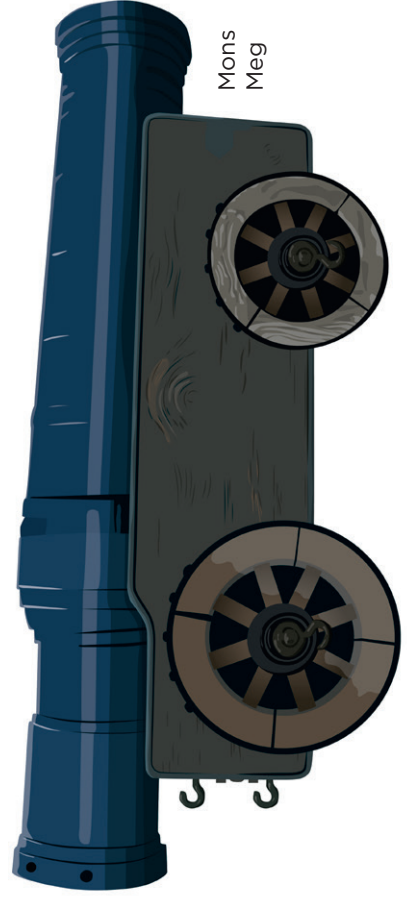
Any answers with justification, for example:

- The castle would be easier to defend as there are lots of good defensive features like a portcullis.

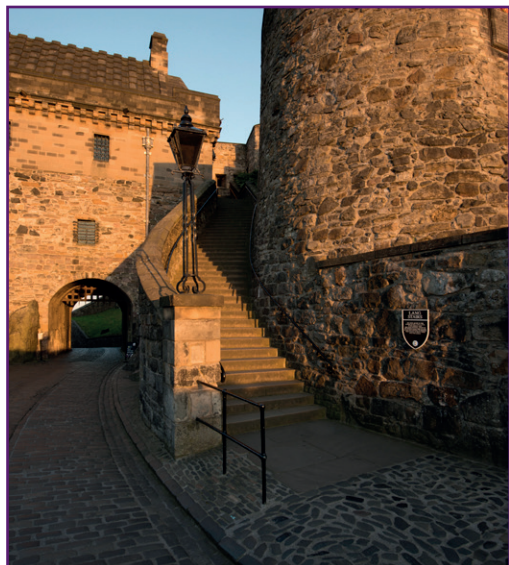
Reflect

Sieges were attacks on the castle and could last a long time. One siege at Edinburgh Castle lasted for two years.

How would it feel to be trapped inside the castle for so long whilst trying to keep enemies out?



A The Lang Stairs



Introduction

The steep narrow path of the Lang Stairs was the original route into the medieval castle. Everyone from kings and queens coming home, to servants carrying heavy loads and those attacking the castle, would have used them. The slope that leads up into the castle was added in 16th century to move heavy goods like guns. The smaller cobbles in centre of the road were designed to help horses' hooves grip in wet weather.

? Questions for learners

Why are they called the 'Lang' Stairs?

'Lang' is Scots for long

Can you spot the three window-like openings at the top of the stairs?

What would these be used for?

They are gun loops, holes to allow guns to be fired down the stairs at attackers.



About halfway up the Lang Stairs you will find the entrance to Argyle Tower.

Next to the door you will spot some strange marks carved into the stone.

What do you think they are for?

- They are masons' marks.
- Masons cut the stone used to build the castle.
- All masons had a unique mark they made on the stones they cut so they would be paid for it.
- Sometimes you can spot their marks in the stones in old buildings.





Alternative route for step free access:

If you require a step free route, continue up the hill instead of taking the Lang Stairs. Both routes will take you to your next stop, St Margaret's Chapel.

Ask your learners to pause as they climb the hill and take in the view of the city.



Introduction

This steep slope is called Hawk's Hill. It is possible it gets its name as this part of the castle was used for Falconry: hunting with birds of prey such as Hawks or Falcons. Falconry was a popular sport among the wealthy and powerful in Medieval Europe.



Questions for learners

What do you think this view would look like 500 years ago?

The city would not be there; it would mostly be wilderness with forests or fields.

To reach the top of the castle you will need to pass through Foog's Gate. Why do you think it is called Foog's Gate?

'Foogies' was a term used to describe older soldiers. Foog's Gate is the final gate attacking armies would have to get through to take the castle. As it needed less defending, perhaps it was guarded by the Foogies, the oldest soldiers.



Stop 4: St Margaret's Chapel



Introduction

St Margaret's Chapel is the oldest building in Edinburgh Castle. It was built around 1100 by King David in honour of his mother, Queen Margaret, who later became a saint.

Religion was an important part of royal life, so castles would often include a private royal church.

Questions for learners

Why do you think castles had their own churches?

- For the royal family and their court to worship privately.
- To hold weddings, funerals and baptisms.

Who do you think would have used this church?

- Probably just the king, queen and other nobles
- Servants might go to churches in town or another larger church in the castle

What evidence can you spot that shows this building is a church?

- Benches/pews
- Candles
- Font for baptism
- Crosses
- Holy book (in glass case on wall)
- Stained glass windows

In 1314 the castle was destroyed but they left one building standing, the chapel. Why do you think this chapel has survived for so long?

- Religion was important, people would not want to destroy a church.
- It has strong and thick walls, that would be difficult to knock down.

Stop 4: St Margaret's Chapel

Religion was a very important part of the life of kings and queens. They would have prayed regularly in chapels like this one or in their own rooms.



Challenge

This chapel is the oldest building in Edinburgh Castle.



Reflect

During one siege of the castle all the other buildings were destroyed but this chapel was left standing. This might be because religion was important to those destroying the castle. **What things, people or places would you like to protect because they are most special to you?**



Stop 5: The Fore Well

Introduction

The Fore Well was the main water supply for the castle from around the 14th century. The well provided water for the whole castle, which was vital for eating, drinking and washing, particularly during a siege.



Questions for learners

How deep do you think the well is?

34m deep, which is about the same as two very tall trees or twenty children standing on each other's shoulders.

How did they get the water out of the well?

- A water carrier would need to lower and raise the bucket on a long rope.
- They would need to be very strong to pull up the full buckets and carry them around the castle.

The well often ran dry. You can see that the water level in the well is quite low. What do you think they did when water supplies ran out?

- They would have to find another way to get water, which might take a long time or cost money.
- If they were trapped in the castle under siege they could get ill and need to surrender.

What do you think they used the water for?

- Washing
- Drinking
- Cooking
- Cleaning

Down the Well

We know that two people have been lowered down the well. One of them went down in a bucket! They found all sorts of things including coins, buttons, and cannonballs.

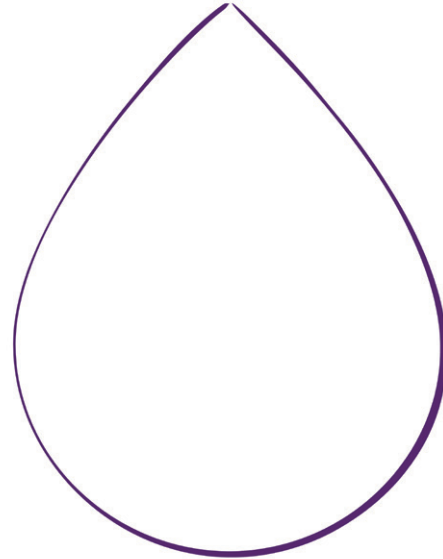


Stop 5: The Fore Well

A well was vital to life in the castle. Water from this well would be carried all over the castle and used for all sorts of jobs, from washing clothes to filling huge cauldrons used for boiling meat and puddings.

Challenge

Water is so important to our lives. **Think about yesterday, what did you use water for?** Write or draw your answers in this water drop.



Now think what water might have been used for in the past, write your thoughts in the second water drop.

Reflect

Imagine that instead of turning on a tap to get water you have to come and fetch a bucket from the well.

What would that be like?



B Crown Square

Not in the learner trail

Introduction

Crown Square is where the royals would have spent most of their time when at the castle. The Palace, where the royals would have slept, and the Great Hall, where they would hold important events, still stand.

Opposite the Palace would have been the Royal Gun House which held all the castle's cannons. Today it is a tea room. Opposite the Great Hall is the National War Memorial of Scotland which would have been a large church.



? Questions for learners

Why do you think the most important buildings are at the highest point in the castle?

- The highest point is the highest status part of the castle.
- It's also the safest as there are so many defences to get through.

Why do you think it is called Crown Square?

This is where the Scottish royal crown is kept. The crown was used, along with a sword and sceptre, to crown the kings and queens of Scotland. We call the crown, sword, and sceptre the Honours of Scotland.



What symbols can you spot on the outside of the Palace?

- Crowns - royalty
- Thistle - Scotland
- Harp - Ireland
- Rose - England
- Fleur De Lis - France/royalty
- Initials & dates - James VI & I and his parents' initials and his birth year.



The Honours of Scotland

The Honours of Scotland: the crown, sword, and sceptre, which were used to crown Scottish monarchs, are kept in the Palace. The Honours have a long and exciting history; they have often been hidden to protect them. During WW2 they were hidden in the ruins of David's Tower in a medieval toilet!

Stop 6: The Palace



Directions

To enter the Palace directly:

- Enter through the archway with the date 1566 in gold on the panel above it.
- Enter the archway and **turn right**, follow the corridor until you reach the room of portraits, the bedchamber.
- As you enter it, through the doorway to the **right** you can see the tiny Birth Chamber, and through the door on the **left** you can explore the other rooms.



Alternative route for step free access:

The palace does not have step free access. There are 5 steps down into the palace and six steps to exit. To request a step free resource pack or ask any questions about access please **email ec.learning@hes.scot**.

Note to Group Leaders

The inside of the Palace can be very busy and the rooms are not large. To ensure a more enjoyable visit experience we suggest:

- Reading the introduction outside the Palace in Crown Square.
- Splitting into smaller groups to explore the Palace.
- Asking the questions for learners in the Laich Hall or once back outside.

Introduction

The Royal Apartments are where the king and queen would live when visiting the castle; it is where they would work and relax. There are four rooms: the Bedchamber, the Birth Chamber, the Antechamber and the Laich Hall.

Bedchamber

Once the queen's Bedchamber, it is now a portrait gallery full of portraits of Scottish kings and queens.



Birthchamber

Just off the Bedchamber, a tiny cupboard sized room, where it is said that Mary, Queen of Scots, gave birth to her son James VI. Kings and queens would often use small rooms like this to sleep in, rather than the large bedchambers.



Antechamber

A waiting room between the Bedroom and the Laich Hall, housing a display of embroideries which are copies of ones made by Mary, Queen of Scots.



Laich Hall

This is an audience chamber, a room where the people of Scotland could come to meet the king or queen and ask them questions or favours.



Laich Hall Reconstruction



Today the Palace doesn't have any furniture. These images give you a better idea of how it might have looked in the past.



Bedchamber reconstruction

Stop 6: The Palace

The Palace is where the King or Queen would live and work. The Palace had lots of rooms. Two of the most important were the Laich Hall (where people met the King or Queen) and the bedchamber (where they would have slept).



Challenge

Find the bedchamber. It is now an art gallery with lots of portraits. The bedchamber is where the royals would have dressed and got ready for the day.

Choose your favourite portrait and look at their clothing. **Use the frame to sketch it** or write a few words to describe it.

Now show your sketch or words to someone from your group without telling them which portrait - can they work out which portrait you have chosen?



Words or drawings related to the portraits



Stop 6: The Palace (continued)

Explore the Palace and find the Laich Hall.

Chat to someone from your group and imagine you are meeting with the king or queen.

How would you greet them?

Good morning your Grace

What do you want to ask them for?

- Property
- A job
- A marriage

How would you convince them to give it to you?

- Flattery
- Bribe them
- Threats

Reflection

What would it be like to wear the King or Queen's clothes? How would you feel? What things could you do or not do?



Stop 7: Great Hall

Introduction

The Great Hall was where the king and queen held their grand feasts and celebrations. There would be many courses of food, perhaps followed by music, dancing or entertainment like a jester or acrobats.

When it wasn't being used for feasts it may have been used for servants to sleep in, like a big dormitory.



Questions for learners

Where do you think the king and queen would have sat?

- At the very front of the room on chairs by the fire.
- The rest of the guests would be at long tables on benches.
- The further you sat from the king and queen the less important you were.

Where do you think the food came from?

- Most would come from local farms. There was a rabbit warren in Dunbar that supplied the royals.
- Very wealthy people would be able to afford to import food from other countries, like wine from France or spices from Indonesia or Sri Lanka.

What do you think they ate?

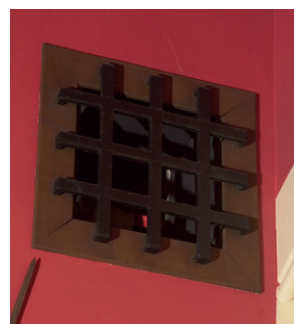
They would have eaten:

- **Fish and meat**
beef, lamb, rabbit and birds including ones we eat today like chicken and pheasant and more unusual ones like swan or peacock.
- **Bread**
wealthier people would eat fine white bread, poorer people would eat coarser brown bread.
- **Vegetables**
kale, onions, and turnips.
- **Sugar and spices** - the very rich people would be able to afford to flavour their food with these.

Lairds Lug

You might spot an old-fashioned listening device in the Great Hall.

It looks like a little window with bars on it and is called the Lairds Lug (meaning the Lord's ear). The king or queen could use it to listen to their guests, so people had to be careful about what they said.



Stop 7: The Great Hall

The Great Hall would have been used for parties, feasts, dancing, and entertainment. There would have been long tables down the hall for eating all sorts of fancy foods, space for dancing and entertainers like musicians and jugglers.



Challenge

Look around the Great Hall. Imagine planning a party here. Jot down any reasons why the Great Hall would be a good place for a party and any reasons why it would be bad.



Reflect

Look at this image of a royal feast.

What do you imagine the Great Hall would have smelled and sounded like?



Good for a party because...

- Large space for lots of guests
- Impressive to show off to your guests
- Big fireplace for warmth
- Minstrel's gallery for musicians

Bad for a party because...

- Only one fireplace, chilly for far away guests
- Not near the kitchens, food could get cold.
- Too big, might need to shout so people can hear you.

Would you hold a party here?

Yes

No

