Medieval castles
What was their purpose and significance?

Portchester Castle – The Keep
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
The castle as we know it today was introduced into England in 1066 during the Norman invasion led by William the Conqueror. After their victory at the Battle of Hastings, the Normans settled in England. They constructed castles all over the country in order to control their newly-won territory, and to pacify the Anglo-Saxon population. These early castles were mainly of motte and bailey type. The ‘motte’ was made up of a large mound of earth with a wooden tower on top, while the ‘bailey’ was a large ditch and bank enclosure which surrounded the motte.

These timber castles were quite cheap and very quick to build. However, the timber castles did have disadvantages. They were very vulnerable to attacks using fire and the wood would eventually start to rot. Due to these disadvantages, King William ordered that castles should be built in stone. Many of the original timber castles were replaced with stone castles.

Over time, stone castles were built in different architectural styles as builders experimented with castle-building techniques. In their infancy, castles were primarily military fortifications used to defend conquered territories from attack. The strategic location of the castle was paramount. However, once the Normans began to consolidate their control over England, castles began to take on a variety of different roles. Castles could serve as a centre for local government, administration and justice. They were also used by powerful lords to display their wealth and power through lavish architectural styles and decoration. Castles were not only built and used by the crown. In fact, the majority of castles were granted by the king to his loyal lords and nobles along with large areas of land. In return for these grants, the king expected his nobles to control and administer these lands on his behalf. The castle itself also represented a whole group of people who contributed to its function from constables, masons, blacksmiths and servants to name a few.
The purpose of this enquiry is to allow students to explore documents relating to the general function of castles. Did some people find them intimidating? Did a king view a castle in the same way as a peasant? Did a queen think about a castle in the same way as a builder?

The questions provided with each source act as prompts for students to answer the overarching question: What was the purpose and significance of castles?

The records used cover a range of material including royal grants, extracts from pipe rolls and the Calendar of Patent Rolls, royal orders, licences and pardons. We hope that these documents will offer students a chance to develop their powers of evaluation and analysis. All sources have been provided with a transcript and, as the language may prove challenging, we have also provided a simplified version with more difficult words defined within the text. Each source is captioned and dated to provide a sense of what the document is about.

Alternatively, teachers may wish to use the sources to develop their own lesson in a different way or combine with other sources.

The documents included in this lesson relate to the following castles: Framlingham, Portchester, Stokesay, Berwick and Alnwick, some of which also feature in the specification for OCR History GCSE module: Castles Form and Function c1000-1750 as specified sites in conjunction with English Heritage. Framlingham Castle is the first named site for OCR in 2018. For AQA, GCSE History, module Historical Environment of Medieval England, Stokesay Castle is the specified site for 2018.

External links

Images of historic sites
(https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/educational-images)

An overview of the ‘Middle Ages’
(http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages)
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Tasks

Source 1: Questions
Do you think this order would have changed Alnoth’s opinion of castles?

Clue: think about what a castle might represent: an intimidating fortress? An impressive building? An important centre of government? A building to be demolished like any other – all part of the day job?

Source 2: Questions
What does Portchester Castle represent for the king?
What does Portchester Castle represent for Queen Eleanor?
What does the granting of Portchester Castle mean to the bailiffs of Portchester (the people who worked at the castle)?

Source 3: Questions
What does Portchester Castle represent to the king?
What does Portchester Castle represent to the constable?
What does Portchester Castle represent to foreign spies?

Source 4: Questions
What does Portchester Castle represent to King Edward II?
What does Portchester Castle represent for foreign invaders?

Source 5: Questions
What does Portchester Castle represent to King Richard II?
What does Portchester Castle represent to John Cook and Peer Geveyn?
What does Portchester Castle represent to the masons and carpenters employed to work on the castle?

Source 6: Questions
Compare this document to Document 5.

Does this change your impression of what Portchester Castle represented for John Cook and Peter Geveyn?
Does this change your impression of what Portchester Castle represented for the masons and carpenters employed to work on the castle?
Source 7: Questions
What does Stokesay Castle represent to Lawrence of Ludlow?
Do you think he wanted to build fortifications around his home?

Source 8: Question
What do you think castles represented for William Perheved?

Source 9: Question
What does the castle of Berwick represent to John de Leycestre?

Source 10: Questions
What does Alnwick Castle represent to Anneys?
What does Alnwick Castle represent to Richard Croftus?
In 1175 a group of carpenters and masons, led by Alnoth the Engineer, travelled to Suffolk to dismantle Framlingham Castle on royal orders. King Henry II ordered that the castle should be knocked down because Earl Hugh Bigod had joined a rebellion against his rule.

(Framlingham Castle demolished 1175, catalogue ref: E372/22, rot. 5, m.1, Pipe Rolls, Henry II, 22, 1175-1176, p. 60)

Source 1: Transcript

Et in custamento prosternendi castri Waleton’ .XXXj. l. et .vij. s. et. iij. D. per breve regis et per visum Roberti de Willauesham et Ailnođi ingeniatoris. Et pro prosternendo castro de Framingeham .vij. l. et .x. s. et. vj. d. per idem breve et per visum predictorum.

Source 1: Simplified translation

Payment of £7 10s 6d (seven pounds, ten shillings and six pence) to Alnoth the engineer for dismantling the castle of Framlingham, by order of the king.
In 1273, King Edward I gave Portchester Castle to his mother.
(Grant of Portchester Castle by Edward I, catalogue ref: C 66/92 m.5, Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1271-1281, p. 27)

Source 2: Transcript

‘Writ de intendendo directed to the bailiffs, etc. of the following castles manors, etc. assigned in dower to Eleanor, the king’s mother, queen of England:-

...Bailiffs and good men of Portchester, Guldeford and Aulton, the foresters, etc. of Porcestre forest, the hundredors and good men of the hundred of Aulton, and the parker of Guldeford — Castle and manor of Porcestre with the forest, manor of Guldeford with the mills and park, manor of Aulton with the hundred...’
(Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1271-1281, p. 27)

Source 2: Simplified transcript

‘A writ of intent to the bailiffs [kept law and order in a castle] and any other relevant persons to say that the following castles and manors are to be given, in dower [property given by law to a man’s widow in her lifetime], to the king’s mother...the castle, manor and forest of Portchester, the manor of Guldeford [Guildford] with its mills and park, and the manor of Aulton [Alton] with its hundred (an area of land)...’
This document reveals that King Edward II ordered that Portchester Castle should be garrisoned with soldiers if there was any sign that England might be invaded by forces from abroad. If this were to happen, any people who were suspected of being spies within the castle were to be arrested.
(Order to arrest spies, 1323-27, catalogue ref: C 54/143 m. 11d., Close Rolls 1323-1327–19 Edward II Membrane 11d – cont. p. 551)

Source 3: Transcript

To Robert de Hausted, constable of Porchester castle. Order to cause diligent search to be made in all places within his bailiwick [bailiff’s area of control] of all persons entering the realm, and to cause to be arrested all of whom there is probable suspicion that they are entering the realm to spy out the secrets of the realm in order to do certain things prejudicial to the king and his realm, and to certify the king from day to day of the names of those whom he shall thus arrest, as the king learns upon trustworthy information that many armed men, Englishmen and others, coming from parts beyond sea, are entering the realm in the port of Portesmuth [Portsmouth] and in other places on the sea coast in Robert’s bailiwick, and are wandering about secretly in divers [various] parts of the realm for the purposes aforesaid, and no search or arrest has hitherto been made by Robert or his men... 1326. March 10. Merevale.

Source 3: Simplified transcript

An order for Robert de Hausted, constable of Portchester castle, to make sure that all places within his bailiwick are searched for people entering the realm who are suspected to be foreign spies. These people are to be arrested, and the constable of Portchester castle is ordered to send a daily report to the king listing the names of those he has arrested.
King Edward II ordered that Portchester Castle should be garrisoned with soldiers if there was any sign that England might be invaded by forces from abroad.
(Order to protect the castle in times of war, 1323-27, catalogue ref: C 54/144 m. 10., Close Rolls 1323-1327 – 20 Edward II Membrane 10 – cont. p. 603)

**Source 4: Transcript**

‘To him who supplies the place of the treasurer and to the barons of the exchequer and to the chamberlains. Order to provide with all speed, by the advice of Adam de Lymbergh, king’s clerk, 100 crossbows with windlass for two feet, 200 crossbows for one foot, with the baldricks and quarells sufficient for the same, 100 hand-bows with 1,000 cords for the same, 1,000 arrow-heads, 20 lbs. of glue, 100 lbs. of thread suitable for the strings of crossbows, and of catgut as much as shall suffice, and to cause them to be taken to Portchester castle, so that they be there by Sunday the morrow of the Decollation of St. John the Baptist next at the latest, to be delivered to those whom the king shall depute to receive them, giving credence to what Adam shall tell them in this matter on the king’s behalf.’ 1326. Aug. 18. Clarendon.

**Source 4: Simplified transcript**

An order, issued upon the advice of Adam de Lymbergh, the king’s clerk, to quickly provide 300 crossbows, their associated windlasses [machines for hoisting or hauling], baldricks [belts worn over one shoulder that is used to carry a weapon, usually a sword] and ammunition; 100 hand-bows with 1,000 bow strings; 1000 arrow-heads; 20lbs of glue; and 110lbs of thread suitable for the strings of crossbows. All of these should be delivered to Portchester castle by Sunday, the morrow [following day] of the Decollation [beheading] of St John the Baptist, at the latest.
This document records that, during the last three years of the reign of King Richard II, a lot of building work took place at Portchester Castle. A new range of domestic buildings – hall, kitchen, chambers and offices – was constructed.

(Building works at Portchester Castle, 1396, catalogue ref: C 66/343 m.15. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1391-1396, p. 700)

Source 5: Transcript

‘Appointment of John Cook of Wykenham and Peter Geveyn to repair all defects in the castle of Porchestre, and to pay by view and control of William Hursel, prior of Suthwyk [Southwick, Hampshire], masons, carpenters and other workmen their wages at the king’s charges. By bill of treasurer. Mandate to the said prior in pursuance.’ 1396, April 29. Westminster.

Source 5: Simplified transcript

Appointment of John Cook of Wykenham and Peter Geveyn to repair Portchester Castle, and to pay, under the control of William Hursel the prior of Suthwyk [Southwick, Hampshire], masons, carpenters and other workmen.
This document reveals that those given the responsibility of overseeing the repair and expansion of Portchester Castle struggled to find craftsmen and labourers to work on the project. The King gave them the authority to 'arrest' people and force them to work on the castle. If anybody who was arrested refused to work on the castle, they were to be imprisoned.

(Forced labour and threat of imprisonment, 1396. Catalogue ref: C 66/343 m. 14, Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1391-1396, p. 702)

Source 6: Transcript

Appointment of John Cook of Wykeham, Peter Geveyn, Walter Walton, mason, Walter Weston and Thomas Clevere, carpenter, to arrest the masons, carpenters, sawyers, artificers and labourers necessary for the repair and fortification of the castle of Porchestre and set them to work at the king’s chargers, also to provide the necessary stone, lime, lead, boards, tiles, cinders, timber and materials, with power to imprison contrariants. By bill of treasurer. The like of John Grenford, John Wrythoke and Thomas Clopton, for the works at Calais.’

1396. April 29. Westminster.

Source 6: Simplified transcript

John Cook of Wykeham, Peter Geveyn, Walter Walton, mason, Walter Weston and Thomas Clever, carpenter, are ordered to arrest all masons, carpenters, sawyers, artificers and labourers necessary for the repair and fortification of Portchester castle, and they are given the power to imprison contrariants [those who refuse to work]. They are also to arrange for the provision of stone, lime, lead, boards, tiles, cinders, timber and materials for the building work.
The wool merchant Laurence of Ludlow, who had become one of the richest men in England, was granted a licence to fortify his home with a stone wall and ‘crenellations’ [rectangular gaps at intervals along the wall that allowed defenders to shoot arrows/missiles from within the castle]. (Licence to build Stokesay Castle, 1291, catalogue ref: C 66/110 m. 2 continued, Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward I, 1281-1292, p. 450)

Source 7: Transcript

Licence for Lawrence de Lodelawe to strengthen his dwelling-house of Stoke Say, co. Salop, with a wall of stone and lime, and to crenellate the same. 1291. Oct. 19. Hereford.

Source 7: Simplified transcript

‘Licence for Lawrence of Ludlow to strengthen his dwelling-house of Stokesay with stone walls and to crenellate his castle.’
Source 8

William Perheved asks to be pardoned for murder because he served in the king’s army at the sieges of several castles.
(Pardon for murder, 1326, catalogue ref: SC 8/266/13290)

Source 8: Transcript

William Perheved requests a grant of pardon regarding the death of William le Sotheren, on account of his service to the king at the sieges of Berwick and Leeds, at Burton upon Trent and in Scotland.
John de Leycester asks the king to follow up on his promise to reward John for his service in the king’s army during the siege of Berwick.

(Reward for fighting in a siege, 1330, catalogue ref: SC 8/261/13034)

Source 9: Transcript

John de Leycester states that he has served the king as sergeant-at-arms (a type of soldier) in their wars in Scotland, and is still ready to serve him. He asks that he might be given some bailiwick or office in aid of his sustenance, as the king promised to reward him at the siege of Berwick.
Following the death of her husband at the siege of Alnwick, lands that belonged to Anneys Wynslow’s family were taken forcibly by a man called Richard Croftus, who then held the lands for ten years. In this document, Anneys asks the Prince of Wales to use his legal power to intervene on her behalf and help her family regain her lands.

(Woman is robbed of lands following the death of her husband at the siege of Alnwick, 1474, catalogue ref: SC 8/344/E1309)

Source 10: Transcript

Anneys Wynslow states that her husband, Thomas Wynslow, died in the king’s service at the siege of Alnwick and shows that they were both seised lawfully of land and tenements in Eldersfield, Longdon and Chaceley Hole in fee tail, and afterwards Thomas Wynslow granted the same to certain people in fee, who, when seised, enfeoffed Ralph and Isabel Seymour with the same in tail with remainder to Humphrey and Elizabeth Seymour, and then the right heirs of Thomas. But now Richard Croftus wrongfully holds the same by his might and strength for ten years or more, and Anneys is of insufficient power to pursue her remedy by the common law, and Croftus refuses to restore the same despite Anneys having showed her evidences. Wynslow requests that Croftus be sent before the prince’s council and cause him to restore her to her right and possession in all the lands and tenements with all the arrears and profits.
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Source 10: Simplified transcript

Anneys Wynslow requests that Richard Croftus be summoned before the council of Edward, Prince of Wales, and be ordered to give back to Anneys and her family all the lands and tenements that are rightfully hers, along with all the profits that he has taken from those lands and tenements. Anneys explains that her husband, Thomas Wynslow, owned lands in Eldersfield, Longdon and Chaceley Hole before his death at the siege of Alnwick, where he was serving in the king’s army. Following the death of her husband, Richard Croftus occupied these lands illegally through his might and strength (by using the threat of violence). Anneys lacks the power to reclaim the lands from him, and has been unable to make a successful case against Richard in a court of law.