

Leeds Castle Teachers' Guide

With links to the Potted History of Leeds Castle

Welcome to Leeds Castle. We hope you enjoy looking around. This guide will tell you more about the different rooms in the castle and who lived here, and you will hear more about some of those people in your workshop session today. We ask that if talking to the children in a room, you group them in such a way that they do not block any doorways, and other visitors can get past.

A brief history of Leeds Castle

When the Normans invaded England in 1066, William the Conqueror and his knights built many castles. Some were built for defence; others, like Leeds, were built as homes, to show off wealth and strength. The manor of Leeds was given to William I's half-brother, Bishop Odo until he disgraced himself and was sent home to France. Leeds Castle was built in 1119 by a Norman Knight called Robert de Crevecoeur. In 1278 Queen Eleanor of Castille, wife of King Edward I bought the castle and surrounding lands. The King then commenced building work, and also created the moat. Leeds Castle stayed a royal castle until 1552. Its most famous owner was Henry VIII, and he visited several times. In 1520 he had a sleepover her with his wife Catherine of Aragon. Soon after his death, the castle passed into private hands where it remained until 1926 when a very rich lady called Lady Baillie bought it to create a fabulous country house. She spent over £20 million in today's money restoring it. She had French artists and craftsmen rebuild the inside to make it look like it did in Tudor times - and then filled the place with rich and famous guests, playing croquet and golf, swimming in the pool, and enjoying the grounds, which had zebras and llamas grazing.

The Heraldry room

Along the walls of this room, you will find a timeline of the history of Leeds Castle and the people who owned it. The portraits are all members of the Fairfax family who owned the castle from 1690 – 1806. In the middle with the long black curly hair is Thomas Fairfax who married Catherine Culpeper and opposite him in the burgundy coloured coat is Robert, his second son.

The Queen's Room

This room is set up as it would have looked in 1420 when Henry V's widow, Catherine de Valois owned the castle. It is actually a day room where the Queen would sit (on the chair beside the bed) and receive guests. Beds at this time were very expensive, with only Royalty or Nobility being able to afford them, and the large bed is purely for show and to impress her visitors.

The Queen's Bathroom

The bath is made from wood.

The cloth covers would stop the Queen from getting splinters.

The Queen's Gallery

The Marble statues of Henry VIII and his three children were made when Elizabeth I was alive. The picture above the fireplace of a child in a white dress is of Thomas Smythe. Boys wore dresses up to the age of 7.

Henry VIII Banqueting Hall

England's most famous King held parties in this room and ate banquets of exotic food like roast peacocks and swan! Lady Baillie used the room as a Ballroom

The Chapel

King Edward I and his queen, Eleanor of Castile had 16 babies! When she died, he built this chapel at Leeds Castle to remember her.



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The Boardroom

If this room is open, have a quick look in. Many important meetings, including some between world leaders, have taken place in this room.

The Seminar Room

This room used to be Lady Baillie's private sitting room, but was turned into a meeting room in 1978.

The Dressing Room

As you pass through this room, look at the luxurious bathroom on your right. Every bath in the castle has a bell next to it, to ring for a servant to help you get dressed!

Lady Baillie's Bedroom

This room follows the French regency style of the 18th century. When Henry and Catherine stayed here in 1520, this side of the upper floor housed Catherine's suite of rooms. The Louis Vuitton trunk was just as fashionable then as it is today.

Catherine of Aragon Bedroom

When Henry and Catherine stayed here in 1520, this side of the upper floor housed Catherine's suite of rooms. Look out for the rare picture of Catherine after her divorce, to the left of the door as you go out.

Main staircase

Upstairs, where you can't go today, are the bedrooms that are used by people who visit the castle for meetings, weddings and parties, but you can see the portrait of Catherine Culpeper with her dog.

Yellow Drawing Room

The walls in this room are covered in silk, not wallpaper. The piano is over 150 years old and sometimes played by volunteers.

Thorpe Hall Drawing room

The wooden panelling on the walls comes from Thorpe Hall in Cambridgeshire. The panels were taken out of the house in 1928 and sold to Lady Baillie, so the walls are 200 years older than the room, and they had to alter the room to fit the panels.

The Inner Hall

The 16th century Horseman is carved from oak and is the oldest horse statue in England. The knight holds a battle hammer – look behind you and there is one above the door.

The Library

This room was once the schoolroom for Lady Baillie's two daughters. When they grew up it was turned into a library – there are now 3,000 books in this room. If it took you a week to read each one it would take 57 years to read them all!

The Dining Room

If this room is open you may see a large dining table that can seat up to 30 people. This room is also used for weddings and dinners.

