KENILWORTH CASTLE

Castle Green, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 1NE

13th June 2022

During a holiday in the Cotswolds, we realised that Kenilworth Castle was very fortuitously within driving distance. On a morning that was supposed to be sunnier than it actually turned out to be, we endured a tedious drive up the motorway that was busy with far too many lorries that were good for it – and for us.

It was therefore a relief to reach the town of Kenilworth and arrive at the castle car park by 10:00, which happened to be the castle's opening time. In fact, we were the first visitors of the day and after clocking in with our pre-booked tickets and being supplied with an audio guide, we were soon walking briskly towards the entrance – or Mortimer's Tower, the main medieval entrance of the castle.

Our tickets were checked by a member of staff, who advised us that a group of school children was due shortly, so we set about taking photos while the site was empty, apart from some crows. It felt slightly eerie, as if the different buildings were whispering their long-past secrets to each other. This evocative experience didn't last for long, though, as we left Leicester's Building and the Great Tower (the keep) and moved up and beyond to the Great Hall.

Leicester's Building (left) & the Great Tower/keep (photo by Alan Santillo)

The first castle at Kenilworth had been built in the 1120s on land granted by King Henry I (reign 1100-35) to Geoffrey de Clinton, his chamberlain and treasurer, who depended on the king's support. The castle's original form is unknown, thought at first to be only an earth motte, or mound, with timber buildings on top.

It's likely, however, that the existing stone Great Tower was built soon after 1124, as such a huge project would have been impossible without royal resources. When Geoffrey died circa 1133, his successor was his son, Geoffrey II, a minor. At that time, Roger de Beaumont, Earl of Warwick, was gaining royal favour and in order to keep the family's standing, Geoffrey's uncle, William de Clinton, succeeded in arranging a marriage between Geoffrey II and Roger's daughter, Agnes.

Despite this, the rivalry between the de Clintons and the de Beaumonts continued to fester. Geoffrey's situation also wasn't helped by the ensuing turbulent years of the Anarchy and King Stephen's reign (1135-54). His financial situation was poor, all of which delayed any further progress at Kenilworth Castle.

In King Henry II's reign (1154-89), the castle was garrisoned during the revolt of 1173-4, when the king faced an uprising from his son Henry, backed by the French Crown. At around the same time, Geoffrey II died and the castle was considered to be of such strategic importance that it was taken into royal ownership.

At that time, it consisted of at least the Great Tower and its forebuilding, plus a bailey approached by a causeway over a small lake (that preceded the later creation of the great mere) and the local chase for hunting. The two-storey keep had no doubt been the main castle residence, possibly with a great hall on the upper floor and the basement used as accommodation for household staff.

The Great Tower (photo by Alan Santillo)

During the next 70 years, the castle took on the form and extent seen today. King Henry II died in 1189, but his successor, King Richard I (reign 1189-99), paid little attention to Kenilworth. However, during the reign of King John (1199-1216), the castle was notably strengthened, with its defences most likely commissioned by Henry II and King John, the latter of whom spent the sum of around £1,100.

The existence of the original stone gatehouse, later to become Mortimer's Tower, suggests an outer bailey had also been built, probably surrounded by a bank and ditch. The outer bailey's circuit of stone walls with towers is most likely to have been built during John's reign, with its best surviving examples being Mortimer's twin-towered Tower and Lunn's Tower, opposite Leicester's later gatehouse.

At the same time as the defences were extended, the dam was heightened to enlarge the mere, while inside the castle, many improvements were made to the Great Tower. A small barbican was probably added to protect the inner bailey gate. Although some of the earlier work is prone to supposition, a good outcome of royal ownership was that the castle's history became better documented.

Remains of Mortimer's Tower (photo by Alan Santillo)

Mortimer's Tower was the main medieval entrance to Kenilworth Castle, first given this name by a 17th-century antiquary, Sir William Dugdale. It probably refers to Roger Mortimer, who hosted a tournament at the castle in 1279. Although outdone by the impressive remains inside the main complex, the two D-shaped towers built as part of King John's ring of defences, can still be easily recognised.

King John rebuilt and improved several other major royal castles, including Corfe, Dover, Odiham and Scarborough, but his work at Kenilworth made it one of the largest English castles at that time, with one of the largest artificial lake defences in England. Despite his building successes, though, his negative personality traits and failures at diplomacy led to the First Barons' War at the end of his reign, which ultimately led to the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215.

John's son, King Henry III (reign 1216-72), inherited Kenilworth, but gave custody of the castle to his sister Eleanor and her husband Simon de Montfort, 6th Earl of Leicester in 1244. Simon was granted the castle for life in 1253, when it was already an outstanding fortress, but he is reported to have strengthened it even more and is likely to have installed trebuchets (counterweighted catapults).

In 1258, he led the Second Barons' War against Henry III, but died at the Battle of Evesham in August 1265. Afterwards, however, some of Simon's followers made a last stand at Kenilworth. Simon's eldest son, Simon the younger, promised to surrender the castle to Henry III, but his father's supporters inside refused.

After one of the king's unfortunate messengers returned from the castle with a severed hand, a full-scale siege began on 25th June 1266. The castle was protected by its extensive water defences and the stone-throwing machines used by royal forces to bombard the castle failed because of the long distance. That and the castle's superior weaponry, forced the king to send to London for larger machines.

It must have been very violent, but terms were finally agreed, in which the rebels could re-purchase their confiscated lands. Disease and starvation had also taken their toll and the garrison surrendered in December 1266.

Immediately after this, Henry III gave the castle, land and titles to his second son, Edmund, who had been a commander during the siege. He was created Earl of Lancaster in 1267 and so began nearly two centuries of ownership by the House of Lancaster, who successively were earls, dukes and kings and responsible in their turn for the castle's characteristic development as a palace.

In 1279, Kenilworth Castle held a programme of tournaments and festivities based on medieval romance literature, very popular among the elite of European chivalry at that time. The main guest was Edmund of Lancaster's brother, King Edward I (reign 1272-1307), along with 100 knights and their ladies. The prize was a gold lion, won by royal favourite, Roger Mortimer (of tower fame).

Edmund passed on the castle to his eldest son, Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, in 1298. Thomas was fond of entertaining on a grand scale and built the first great hall at the castle from 1314-17. He also constructed the Water Tower along the outer bailey and increased the size of the chase. Along with many other English barons, he found himself in increasing opposition to King Edward II and when war broke out in 1322, he was captured at the Battle of Boroughbridge and executed.

His estates were confiscated by the Crown, but four years later, Queen Isabella and her ally, Roger Mortimer, were instrumental in having King Edward II deposed. Edward fled, but was captured by Henry Lancaster (younger brother of Thomas, above) in south Wales. Edward's custody was assigned to Henry, who brought him to Kenilworth in 1326, where Edward resigned as king in 1327.

As the months passed, it became clear that Kenilworth was a less than ideal place to keep Edward, as several nobles in the area still supported him and were thought to be plotting a rescue. Isabella and Mortimer had Edward transported by night to Berkeley Castle, where the rest of his story is history (in the shape of the red-hot plumber's soldering iron up his nether regions).

Henry Lancaster's son, Henry of Grosmont, inherited Kenilworth Castle in 1345 and remodelled the great hall. Upon his death in 1361, ownership passed to his daughter Blanche. She married John of Gaunt, the fourth son of King Edward III (reign 1327-77), but died in 1368 at the age of 26.

In 1371, John married Constanza, daughter and heiress of Pedro I, the recently assassinated king of Castile and León in Spain. It was more or less a marriage of convenience for John to title himself 'King of Castile and León', which in turn led him to create accommodation fit for a king. Since Kenilworth was one of the most important of his thirty or more English castles, it's no surprise that building on a grand scale there is recorded from around 1373 until 1380.

He was so wealthy that similar work was underway simultaneously at several of his properties, including the Savoy Palace in London and Hertford Castle. Only Kenilworth, though, survives to illustrate the opulent quality of his architecture, in a style probably designed to reinforce his royal claims in Iberia.

His main construction was his Great Hall, with remodelled state apartments, the Strong Tower, the Saintlowe Tower and a new kitchen complex with services. In fact, my first impression on entering the castle had been that this Great Hall stood out from the other main buildings as being more fancy and refined.

John of Gaunt's Great Hall, porch left & entrance hall right (photo by Alan Santillo)

Due to his constant involvement in national government and campaigns abroad, John seldom visited Kenilworth, so it's surmised that the grand new work may also have served to appease his wife during his blatant adultery with she of the slightly unfortunate surname, Katherine Swynford. After the death of John's second wife, he married Katherine, despite this causing dissent among the English nobility.

Compared to other areas of Kenilworth, the state apartments gave rather a messy impression, since the floor, roof and walls are almost entirely missing. Surveys taken in the 16th century indicate the three main rooms were the great chamber, another chamber and a privy chamber, although room names and their functions would have altered to some extent between the 14th and 16th centuries. These rooms, or apartments, would have been used by the lord of the castle.

State apartments next to the Great Hall (photo by Alan Santillo)

Records show further extensive works were carried out during John of Gaunt's ownership, after he had almost given up campaigning overseas. These renovations seem to have been more practical, with major repairs to gates, walls and bridges and some work on the Great Tower (to safeguard the duke's jewels there, no less). He also enclosed the garden and carried out work on the bridges and park.

John died in 1399, the same year that his son, Henry Bolingbroke, became King Henry IV (reign 1399-1413). Thus Kenilworth became part of the Crown estate and remained so for 150 years. Throughout the 15th century, the Lancastrian kings favoured Kenilworth as a residence, drawn by its excellent hunting.

It was while King Henry V (reign 1413-22) was staying at Kenilworth in 1414 that the French openly mocked him by sending a gift of tennis balls, presumably to imply a lack of military prowess. Henry V had been crowned at a time of ongoing conflict between England and France and after much conciliatory negotiations on his part, it's thought that the insulting gift was the spur that led him to invade Normandy, with his ensuing famous victory in the Battle of Agincourt.

King Henry VI (reign 1422-71) and Queen Margaret were often at Kenilworth in the 1450s, but the king's mental collapse brought much upheaval that intensified the Wars of the Roses, when Lancastrians and Yorkists were in mortal conflict. Kenilworth was an important Lancastrian stronghold and after the momentous Battle of Bosworth, Tudor King Henry VII (reign 1485-1509) also visited.

Following the splendid programme of building set in place by John of Gaunt, his successors concerned themselves with maintenance and repairs befitting such a high standard. Henry VII had a tennis court built for his use and Henry VIII (reign 1509-47) decided that Kenilworth should be maintained as a royal castle.

After the death of King Henry VIII, John Dudley, 1st Duke of Northumberland, led the government of the young King Edward VI (reign 1547-53) and was granted Kenilworth in 1553. After the young king died, John's failed attempt to oppose the succession of Mary Tudor (by promoting Lady Jane Grey as queen) resulted in his execution. John Dudley had the stables built as still seen today – although not in the form of a tea room – wherein we sat to consume cappuccinos and cake.

The stables, now a tea room (photo by Alan Santillo)

In 1563, Kenilworth was restored to John Dudley's son, Robert, Earl of Leicester. He was the childhood friend and 'favourite' of Queen Elizabeth I (reign 1558-1603) and she generously granted the castle to him. Although Robert was a significant landowner, his wealth and power depended ultimately on the grace and favour of the queen. As a courtier, he was fortuitously on intimate terms with Elizabeth during the first half of her reign, sharing her passions for dancing and riding. She even considered taking him as a husband several times.

Robert continued his father's work to modernise Kenilworth, knowing he needed to boost his claims to noble heritage to win the queen's hand in marriage and by 1568, he was considering major new works. Letters to Robert in 1571 from his architect, indicate that extensive work was in progress on a new tower (Leicester's Building), Caesar's Tower (the Great Tower) and the state apartments.

His embellishments also included creating an enclosed hunting park of around 320 hectares/800 acres, with dramatic views, while Leicester's Gatehouse provided an impressive new entrance to the castle. The new tower within the inner court, known as Leicester's Building, was four storeys high and designed specifically for the queen's use during her visit in 1572.

Front view of Leicester's Building (photo by Alan Santillo)

Elizabeth would have seen the partially completed results in 1572, but the finished splendour wasn't apparent until her mammoth 19-day visit in 1575, when Robert spared no expense in his attempt to convince her to marry him – which was no mean feat considering she arrived with 400 staff and 31 barons.

He entertained Elizabeth with music, dancing, lavish banquets, hunting, pageants, fireworks, bear-baiting and mystery plays. In between these festivities, Court matters had to proceed, which apparently included the queen knighting five gentlemen and touching nine others to cure them of scrofula.

This visit, the longest that Elizabeth had ever paid to a subject, was considered a huge success, but despite Robert's sensational efforts that almost bankrupted him, she would not commit to marriage. She did, however, retain her affection for him.

Robert had also created a privy garden for the queen, laid out with all the features of an Elizabethan garden, including a terrace, arbours, marble fountain, aviary and giant obelisks. The garden has been reinstated as described by an eye-witness account at the time and although the sky was troublesome when we explored the garden, it was nonetheless impressive and a pleasure to walk around.

The Queen's Garden (photo by Alan Santillo)

Robert died in 1588, heavily in debt and without an heir. In accordance with his will, Kenilworth passed to his brother Ambrose, Earl of Warwick, but after Ambrose died in 1590, it passed to Robert's illegitimate son, Sir Robert Dudley. In 1605, the governor of Prince Henry, eldest son of King James I (reign 1603-25), was commissioned to oversee castle repairs, including work in the grounds.

During 1611-12, Dudley arranged to sell Kenilworth to Prince Henry and although Henry died before the purchase was made, his brother, the future King Charles I (reign 1625-49), finalised the transaction. At Charles's marriage in 1626, the castle was part of the marriage settlement for his new queen, Henrietta Maria, held in stewardship for her by Robert Carey, Earl of Monmouth.

The castle was a popular location for the first Stuart kings and was thus well-maintained. One of the most famous royal visits took place in 1624, when Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Owls* was performed for King Charles I. Records state that in 1634, the state apartments were adorned with chimneypieces of black marble and alabaster, with curiously carved wood.

The first English Civil War commenced in 1642 and during its early campaigns, Kenilworth acted as a Royalist counterbalance to the Parliamentary stronghold of Warwick. Charles I used it during his advance to Edgehill as a base for raids, but withdrew the Royalist garrison after an indecisive outcome. The castle was then garrisoned by Parliamentarians.

In 1649, Parliament ordered Kenilworth to be slighted so it would be unusable in any further military action, but the damage was fairly mild, with only one wall of the Great Tower, parts of the outer bailey and the battlements being destroyed.

The commander who had overseen the slighting, Colonel Joseph Hawkesworth, acquired the estate in lieu of back payments for the local militia. He kept the castle for himself and converted Leicester's Gatehouse into a residence, with a farm established in the bottom end of the lower court. His fellow officers divided the estate into farms for themselves and the residential buildings of the inner bailey were stripped for their materials. The castle quickly became a roofless ruin, with its fixtures and fittings recycled in dwellings all around the area.

At the Restoration of King Charles II (reign 1660-85), Hawkesworth was evicted from Kenilworth and the Queen Mother, Henrietta Maria, briefly regained the castle. The earls of Monmouth again acted as stewards, but in 1665, King Charles II granted Kenilworth to Laurence Hyde, 2nd Earl Clarendon, whose family retained it until the 20th century. The buildings of the lower courtyard continued their function as a farmyard, with tenants occupying Leicester's Gatehouse.

Leicester's Gatehouse (photo by Alan Santillo)

Kenilworth remained a ruin used as a farm during the 18th and 19th centuries, but because of its picturesque appearance, it had become increasingly popular as a tourist destination. Its first guidebook was produced in 1777, but it leapt into the public consciousness after the publication of Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* in 1821. Thousands of visitors came to see the ruins, including Queen Victoria, Charles Dickens and Henry James, tended by an on-site 'aged protector'.

In the 19th century, work was undertaken to protect the stonework from further decline, both from the detrimental effects of mass tourism and natural age decay. The latter included the removal of the romantic-looking, but ultimately destructive creeping ivy. Efforts were also made to investigate the castle's history more fully.

Significant restoration continued up until 1936, when Lord Clarendon decided he could not keep up with the cost of the necessary maintenance. In 1937, the local motor industry magnate, Sir John Siddeley, bought the castle. He lived in Leicester's Gatehouse, but in 1938, he placed the castle into the guardianship of the Commissioners of His Majesty's Works, with £5,000 to fund repairs. In 1958, Siddeley's son gave the freehold to Kenilworth Town Council.

English Heritage has managed the property since 1984, continuing to repair and enhance such a wonderful example of English history over the centuries. It was the sort of castle you had to walk around at least twice, in order to absorb its fascinating history, whilst trying to appreciate different aspects and time scales. In order to keep our energy levels high, we returned to the tea room in John Dudley's old stables for lunch, before making another circuit around the ruins.

As we wandered purposefully, listening to the available sound bites with our audio guides, I found the general look of the buildings to be most attractive, having been built almost entirely with local new red sandstone (as opposed to old red sandstone, which is … older?) The nature of sandstone meant that it had eroded in very interesting ways, which to my mind enhanced the allure of the site. Add to that some graffiti and my satisfaction was complete.

In particular, I found myself admiring the south-east turret of the Great Tower, where the original portcullis groove was still visible at the base and where the sandstone was looking particularly delicious in the sun.

Portcullis groove in delicious sandstone

On the side of the Great Tower facing the inner court, three periods of building can be seen. The two main floors were probably built in the 1120s, with most of the top stage added by King John in 1210-15, characterised by fish-tail arrow loops. Crossbowmen usually had to kneel to support the weight of their weapon and arrow loops had to be lower, often with a triangular opening at the bottom.

The three Elizabethan grid windows on the first floor were an addition by Robert Dudley in about 1570-71, to light a great room for entertaining and at the top of the right-hand turret are peg-holes for the square face of the castle clock.

South elevation of the Great Tower (photo by Alan Santillo)

Adjoining the Great Tower on the left was the forebuilding, which we entered through a restored, round-arched doorway. This forebuilding would have served as additional security, as well as a ceremonial entry. Originally an enclosed space, with a staircase going up to the Great Tower's first-floor entrance, it nowadays leads either to the Great Tower or the Elizabethan garden beyond.

Coming out of the forebuilding and continuing towards John of Gaunt's Great Hall, we were in the kitchen area. There had presumably been a castle kitchen since at least the 13th century, but the existing remains seem to be John of Gaunt's work.

The main kitchen was twice as large as the usual aristocratic kitchen, measuring 66 feet/19 metres long, by 28 feet/8.5 metres wide. It was positioned against the far curtain wall, where the backs and hearths of three great fireplaces can be seen in the wall. The brickwork was fascinating:

Fascinating brickwork in the kitchen area

It was definitely a large space, with a drain for waste running along the centre of where the building had been. A second kitchen, the privy kitchen, had been closer to the courtyard, behind the stairs to the Great Hall. Food would have been prepared there for John himself, his family and special guests – it's funny to think that nowadays the majority of us have a privy kitchen.

Moving on to John of Gaunt's Great Hall, it was easy to see how it had been an architectural masterpiece in its day. It's also little wonder that it was the only part of the castle left unaltered by Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester, 200 years later, since it admirably suited the upmarket image he was striving to project.

The hall is six bays long, with the bay window on the left balancing the porch on the right. The hall itself was on the first floor above stone-vaulted cellars, with its porch originally approached via a long stair way of 20 steps. The entrance arch led into the screens passage at the low end of the hall.

Then there were the windows, very tall and delicate, looking more like cathedral windows than functional castle windows. Each of them is divided by horizontal transoms (a structural beam or bar) into three sections. The rectangular sections would have been barred and shuttered, while the tracery in the upper section was fitted with glazing, a luxury in the 14th century.

Interior of John of Gaunt's Great Hall (photo by Alan Santillo)

In the photo above, the entrance to the hall is on the left, showing how the hall was raised on the cellars below. The fireplace to the right of the windows has a large wall above it on which a tapestry could be hung. The most elaborate ritual taking place in the hall would have been the serving of food, featuring a lavish display of hospitality, enhanced by music – John of Gaunt kept his own company of musicians and the Great Hall very likely featured a minstrels' gallery.

On the porch side of the Great Hall is the Saintlowe Tower, a name Sir Walter Scott used in his 1821 publication for a fictitious Norman founder of the castle. The ground floor was a cellar, while the first floor formed a gallery and the second floor contained lodgings, possibly for the chamberlain in charge of the apartments.

I must confess that the state apartments confused me somewhat and I was only able to perceive them as interesting ruins without much cohesion. Maybe I was tiring at that point! There is no documentation about how the apartments were used in Gaunt's time, but it's thought the great chamber was his audience chamber and the second chamber his dining room, with the state bedchamber beyond.

The state apartments (photo by Alan Santillo)

By the time of Queen Elizabeth's visits in the 1570s, the second chamber had become the audience chamber, while dining took place in the privy chamber and the state bedroom had been relocated in Leicester's Building. All this talk of chambers was driving me potty, so we moved on to Leicester's Building, which seemed popular, possibly due to its Elizabethan history.

Leicester's Building (photo by Alan Santillo)

On its right-hand side, the exterior shows a vertical effect of 'toothing' where the connecting walls to the lost east range once linked this building to the Great Tower.

Leicester's Building was four-storeys at its full height, but because it descends downhill and also out over a former ditch, the ground floor and the basement were below the main floor level. Since our visit, I've read that the exterior is best viewed from every angle. We probably viewed it from most angles…

From the east/front elevation, the main floor is indicated across the façade by the tallest windows (which are tall when you're up close). The north/right bay is wider than the rest, terminating the state apartments range, while the block containing the royal chambers in the centre and left bays is indicated by an extra storey.

The huge windows of the main floor on the west façade were apparently the cause of much wonderment during Queen Elizabeth I's visit, while the south-west turret is thought to have been added between 1572-1575, to provide Elizabeth with a private stair between the upper floors.

When we entered the ruined shell of Leicester's Building, it certainly seemed a lofty place. All the floors had been removed after 1650, but in 2014, English Heritage had installed stairs and platforms to take visitors right up into the queen's private chambers. We were able to ascend 59 feet/18 metres into where her bedroom once was, with glimpses into her private staircase and a long gallery where the queen would take her leisure with close intimates and favoured visitors.

This new access enables visitors to see close-up examples of Elizabethan doorways and fireplaces, as well as other architectural features. It was also very easy to appreciate how back in Elizabethan times, such an elevated aspect would have allowed the queen spectacular views over the rest of the castle, the surrounding grounds and wooded parkland, while enjoying an elaborate programme of events.

Elizabethan architecture (photo by Alan Santillo)

After Leicester's Building, we moseyed down to his esteemed gatehouse, which had been built in around 1571-2 and originally would have straddled the medieval curtain wall that had been removed in 1650. The corner turrets were originally battlemented, with the front pair containing porter's lodges, while the south-west turret contains a spiral stair to the upper floors.

The ground floor contained much wood, including Elizabethan panelling, but what stood out was an alabaster fireplace. Relocated after 1650, it's thought to have been in the privy chamber. It has the initials 'R' and 'L' carved, with the motto and badges of the Order of the Garter. On the far right, the date '1571' can be seen.

Leicester's fireplace (photo by Alan Santillo)

The Parliamentarian officer, Colonel Hawkesworth had converted the gatehouse into a residence in 1650 and had built an extension on the east side. There was a lot of remarkable old wood on the first floor also and to reach the second floor, we climbed a very old wooden spiral staircase. From 1958, the second floor had been used as the council chamber of Kenilworth Town Council, but now housed an exhibition mainly concerning Queen Elizabeth I and the ambitious Robert Dudley.

After leaving the gatehouse, we headed down towards the left of the stables, to Lunn's Tower, the best-preserved of King John's wall towers from about 1210-15.

Lunn's Tower (photo by Alan Santillo)

The ground floor of this once sturdy tower originally had five fish-tailed arrow loops, although only two now remain that are best seen from outside. An external stair turret led to the wall-walk and the two upper floors. The second floor had been a residential chamber and the first floor was subsequently made into another chamber. A two-storey building had once been connected to the tower, probably built in around 1400 by the constable who was permanently resident at the castle.

As we walked past the stables, there was a sunken area of ground with lines of stone foundations. An information panel stated it was the site of a chapel that had been built by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster in about 1314-22, with the intention of serving 13 priests. The three-sided site of the apse was where the high altar had been. Such a pity it had been completely demolished.

To the right of the stables was the Water Tower, so-named because it had once overlooked water. It had probably been built by Thomas Lancaster in the early 14th century, with pyramidal corner buttresses and cruciform arrow loops characteristic of that time. It had provided additional lodging for Thomas's retainers, with the ground-floor door leading into a private chamber with a latrine and fireplace. A spiral stair led to a first-floor chamber with windows and seats.

I must confess to walking right past the Water Tower without investigating, as we ambled outside the curtain wall for a photo. This wall once led to Mortimer's Tower and retains features indicating there were buildings adjacent to it – a room with a latrine and fireplace in the wall's thickness most likely dates from the early 14th century. In a survey from 1563, there are records of a bakehouse, a water mill and a brewhouse that were also once in this area of the outer bailey.

Curtain wall & Water Tower on the right (photo by Alan Santillo)

As we walked through Mortimer's Tower and prepared to leave the castle, my head was buzzing with information. There is generally a lot of depth to the history of castles anyway, but Kenilworth's history spans centuries of intrigue and machinations concerning the higher echelons of society. There would have been even more to discover if we'd had the time and energy, but for an initial visit, I felt it had been well-covered. If I had the chance to visit again, I'd be there!

Outside the curtain wall (photo by Alan Santillo)