

Welcome to Leeds Castle. We hope you enjoy looking around. This guide will tell you more about the rooms in the castle and who lived here. If a room is closed today, we are sorry that you cannot view it, but it is probably being used for a meeting. It is also possible that pictures or furniture will be removed temporarily. 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. A Norman Knight called Robert de Crevecoeur built Leeds Castle in 1119. The moat that runs around the castle was made in the 13th century and is fed by the river Len.

In 1278, King Edward I became the owner and during this time, he and his wife, the Spanish princess, Eleanor of Castile created together a wonderful whitewashed fortress with brilliant defence. It was also very beautiful with Eleanor's Glorieta surrounded by a wide moat, which Edward had created by diverting the river Len to flow round the castle before continuing its course down the valley. Inside Eleanor brought bright colours in the form of tapestries and rugs and windows were installed. She had a garderobe: very modern plumbing – a toilet hole with a chute going down directly into the moat. We get the word wardrobe from the word garderobe – a place where you kept your clothes as the stink from the toilet kept the moths away. Eleanor even had a stone bath made for herself and a bathhouse for Edward under the Maiden's Tower (which was right next to the moat!).

It stayed a royal castle until 1552. Its most famous owner was Henry VIII. During the Tudor period, another floor was added to the castle providing bedrooms; windows were put in and fireplaces installed. It was King Henry VIII who built The Maidens' Tower.

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 hosted weekend parties with rich and famous guests, playing croquet and golf, swimming in the pool, and enjoying the grounds, which had zebras and llamas grazing.

Today you will see the castle presented as it may have been in the 1920s and 30s.

Before you reach the castle, stop at the

THE GATEHOUSE

King Edward I, built the Gatehouse and the ruins of the Barbican. Inside the Gatehouse, visit the Queens with Means cinematic experience to get an insight into the challenges for, and strengths of, medieval queens.

Before you reach the castle, look to your right to see the Maiden's Tower, built by Henry VIII. It has mullioned windows and doors with typically flattened Tudor arches. You will find these features inside the castle.

THE ENTRANCE HALL

Enter through the large door into the Outer Front hall and turn right into the Library. Pass through the Library, Dining Room and Servants Quarters and go down the Servants Corridor. You are crossing the moat into the Gloriette, the oldest part of the castle.

THE PRIVATE DINING ROOM

The fireplace was put into the castle by Henry VIII – Look out for his Insignia (Tudor Rose, Dragon) carved in the spandrel of the fireplace.

THE WRITING ROOM

The fireplace is again a Tudor one, with the Castle of Castile and pomegranates (emblems of Katherine of Aragon) on the right corner and the Henry VIII's coat of arms on the left. With the carvings we can directly date this fireplace to the time when Henry was married to Katherine, although the fireplace was originally in an upstairs room.

THE SALON

Lady Baillie used this room for dancing and the ebony floor was sprung! During the reign of Henry VIII the room was used for banqueting! The large bay window was put in by Henry VIII

THE COURTYARD

The courtyard is at the centre of the Gloriette. How might it have looked when Eleanor of Castile lived here?

LADY BAILLIE'S BOUDOIR

Look at the portrait of Katherine of Aragon in later life, to the right of the door as you enter. This upper level of the Gloriette was installed on the orders of Henry VIII in the 1520s.

THE BAILLIE ROOM

This room today is a temporary display space.

THE BOARDROOM CORRIDOR

The rooms along this corridor have Tudor door cases that were taken from other parts of the castle and installed here, during the 1822 renovations.

Make your way down the main staircase, through Lady Baillie's rooms and out of the castle.

After leaving the castle, look back at the bell tower on the second island. Is there a flag flying today? Try to find out which flag it is and what it represents.

Cross the Causeway and as you reach the slope up to the Fairfax Courtyard, look back at the castle and locate the two arches which lead to Edward and Eleanor's bathhouse under the Maiden's Tower on the main island.