



The dramatic ruins of the castle at Huntly reflect its turbulent history. Its inhabitants, the Gordons, were major players on the Scottish political scene.

# INVESTIGATING HUNTLY CASTLE

Information for Teachers





### Timeline

**Late 1100s** First wooden castle built by Earl Duncan

**1314** Lands of Strathbogie granted to Gordon family

**Early 1400s** New stone tower house built

**1452** Castle burnt during struggle between Crown and Black Douglas family

**c. 1460** Tower house replaced by 'palace' to south

**1550** George, 4th Earl of Huntly, remodels palace

**1556** Visit of Marie of Guise

**1562** Castle wrecked and contents looted following Battle of Corrichie

**1594** Old towerhouse blown up by James VI

**1597** 1st Marquis repairs and remodels palace

**1640** Palace occupied by Covenanters

**1650** Charles II visits on way to coronation

**1745** Palace occupied by Government troops

**1923** Taken into state care

**The dramatic ruins of the castle at Huntly reflect its turbulent history. Its inhabitants, the Gordons, were major players on the Scottish political scene. At various times razed, blown up, and flamboyantly embellished, the castle is still an exciting place to visit.**

### Historical background

The story of Huntly Castle begins in the late 12th century when Duncan, earl of Fife, built a castle at the strategic point where the Bogie and Deveron rivers meet. This first structure was wooden, built on a constructed mound (motte) and surrounded by an enclosed service area (bailey).

Just before Bannockburn in 1314, in a poorly timed shift of loyalties, the family switched their allegiance away from the crown for the first time. As a punishment they forfeited the lands, which were then given to Sir Adam Gordon of Huntly in Berwickshire.

In the early 15th century a large stone tower house was built to replace the earlier timber structure. Burnt during the struggles against the Black Douglas family in 1452, it was repaired and then extended to include a new range on the south side, later known as the 'palace'.

George Gordon, 4th Earl of Huntly, known as the 'cock of the north', was one of the wealthiest men in the north-east by the mid-16th century. He reworked the castle extensively in time for a visit by Marie of Guise in 1556. She was impressed by her lavish reception, but was advised that the cock's wings be 'clipped' lest he become a threat.

Mary Queen of Scots found the opportunity to do this in 1562 when she and Huntly clashed forces at the battle of Corrichie. Huntly lost and the castle was looted. Further damage was inflicted in 1594 when, following a further rebellion, James VI blew up the old towerhouse.

The 6th earl was rewarded with the title of Marquis of Huntly in 1597. He launched into a programme of elaborate building works and decoration to create a home fit for his new status.

In the 17th century the castle was occupied by Covenanters and Charles II stayed briefly in 1650 on the way to his coronation. Government troops occupied the castle during the 1745 Jacobite rising but after this it became little more than a source of stone. It was taken into state care in 1923.



## Supporting learning and teaching

A visit to **Huntly Castle** is particularly appropriate for teachers working on class study topics such as:

- **The Middle Ages**
- **Castles**

The **Curriculum for Excellence** aspires to motivate and challenge pupils through a wide range of varied learning experiences. Site visits have a particular role to play in joining up learning outcomes across the curriculum. A visit, and use of the supporting materials, will help to:

- **develop successful learners** by challenging pupils to consider how life has changed for people. It will help them to think critically about evidence and arrive at their own conclusions.
- **develop confident individuals**. Pupils will learn about aspects of their community's past, develop an understanding of social changes, establish some of their own values and communicate their views on different historical and social issues.
- **develop responsible citizens**. It will help to increase pupils' social and historical knowledge and understanding and encourage greater respect for their own historic and built environment.
- **develop effective contributors** by broadening pupils' knowledge and understanding through investigative, creative and critical thinking.

## Before the visit

- Help pupils gain a clearer grasp of the time scale by making a time line with them, counting back the centuries and then marking on key events. This could be added to after the visit.
- Discuss the organisation of life in a castle. Pupils could investigate the roles of these key 'managers': **steward** (in charge of the household), **constable** (in charge of castle security), **marshal** (in charge of travel and communications).
- Discuss with pupils all the different activities that would have gone on in a castle. Pupils could research different topics (e.g. food, travel, entertainment, weapons) to prepare them for the visit.
- It is helpful if pupils have some of the architectural terminology of castles as this makes discussing on-site easier. Useful words might include: **courtyard, chamber, shield, coat of arms, archway, gun loop, turnpike stair, motte, privy beam**. Pupils could produce a class illustrated dictionary to explain these terms
- Some children find it hard to imagine that a castle was ever anything other than a ruin. Discuss how buildings change with age – does the house they live in look the same now as it did a few years ago? Has their family made any changes to the house? If so, why? Discuss how wind and weather can affect the look of a building as well as the deliberate changes that people choose to make to buildings.

## Working on site

When exploring the castle, pupils should be encouraged to look critically at what they see, and to make and test theories based on physical evidence. Useful starting points are:

- Why do you think the castle was built here? What are its natural defences?
- What materials were used to build the castle?
- What evidence is there for everyday life?
- How has the castle changed over the years?

Pupils can record evidence by:

- Taking notes.
- Sketching.
- Taking photographs.
- Recording impressions into a tape recorder.

On the Historic Scotland website: [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education\\_unit](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education_unit) teachers can find additional resources to help with work on site. These include compiling an *Evidence Record* and *My Impressions Record*.

## Suggestions for follow-up work

Following the visit pupils can pool their findings in groups to create a fuller record of the castle and the lives of the people who lived and worked there. This could form the basis for a range of presentation activities, for example:

- A guide book or promotional leaflet for future visitors.
- A slide show with commentary of their visit.
- Imaginative writing based on the lives of the inhabitants of the castle.
- A series of drama sketches showing different snapshots of life in the castle through the ages.





# Plan of Huntly Castle

## On the trail of the Marquis of Huntly

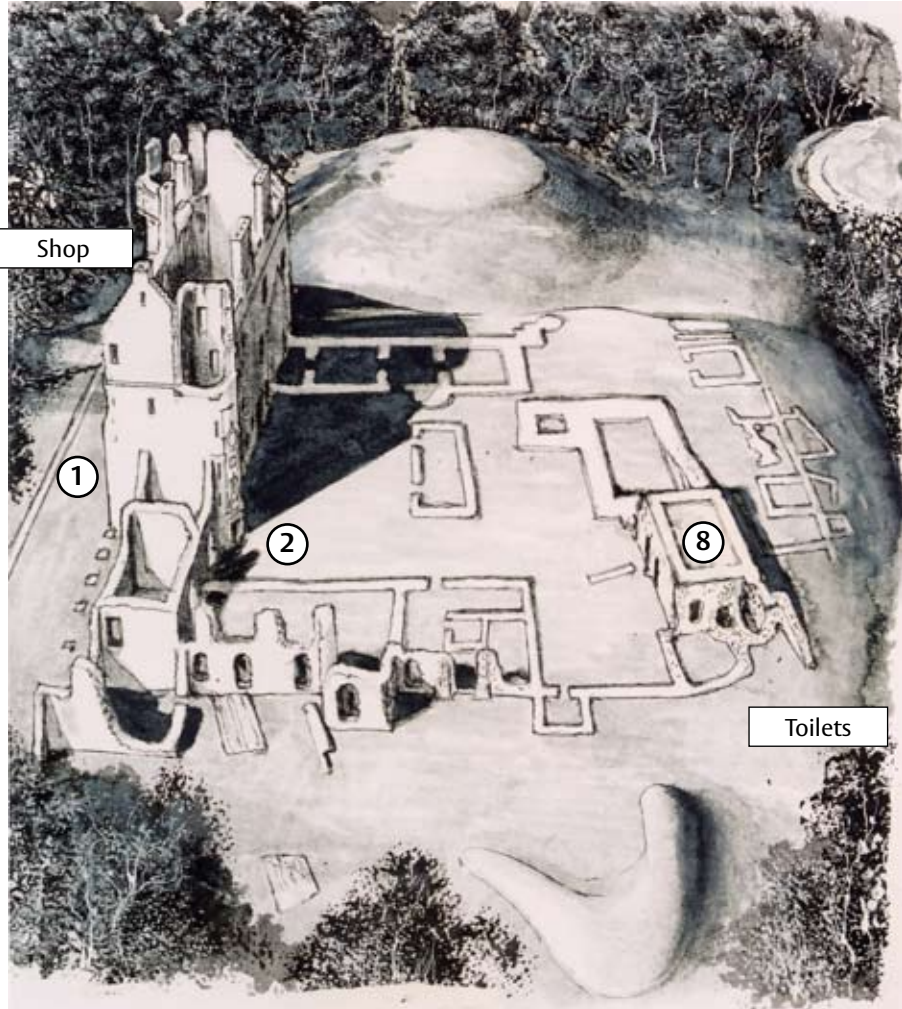
There is much to explore in this wonderful and well-preserved building. Our suggested **tour route** focuses on everyday life in the best-preserved part, the palace, at the time of the 1st Marquis of Huntly (around 1600). It takes in eight key locations, marked on the plan to the right:

1. Outside the Palace: the South wall
2. Entrance to the Palace
3. In the Basement
4. The Kitchen
5. Steward's Chamber
6. Lord Huntly's Lodgings
7. Lady Huntly's Lodgings
8. The Brewhouse and Bakehouse

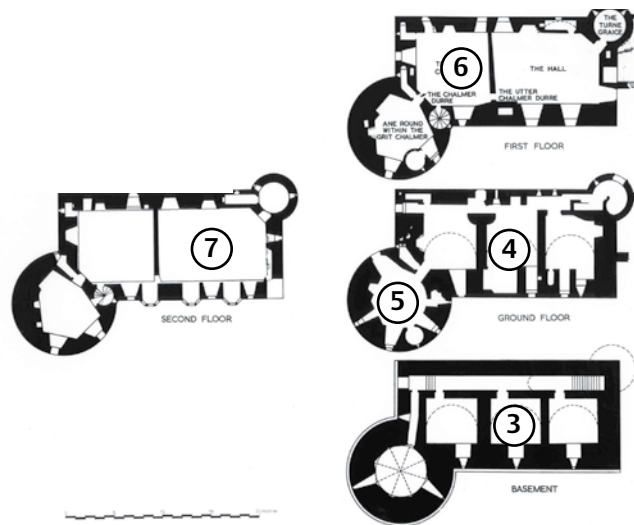
Background information is given in the pack for each location. It is written in simple language so that it can be read aloud to pupils if desired.

Also included are suggested **questions for discussion**. The focus is on encouraging pupils to **interpret** the building and deduce what they can from clues they see around them.

Ideally divide your class into groups of about ten. Allow about an hour for the suggested tour.



Drawing of site



Maps of palace



## Tour notes: On the trail of the Marquis of Huntly

***Setting the scene. This can be read to pupils.***

Let's go back in time about four hundred years, to the early sixteen hundreds. Let's imagine that we have been invited to this castle by our friend George Gordon. He is the 6th Earl of Huntly, and we call him Lord Huntly. But not long ago he was given a great honour by King James VI. He was given the important title of Marquis. He has recently been renovating his castle and we've heard he has spent a lot of money. Let's go and have a look!

***Go through the gate by the castle shop. Walk straight ahead until you are facing the great south wall of the castle with the giant stone inscription at the top.***



*Artist's impression of castle in 1643*



**Did you know...**

George's father died while playing football in 1576! Hope he scored first...



South wall with carved names



Tower with ropework pattern



Hand of God



Remains of arches in walkway

**Location 1: Outside the palace – the South Wall**

**Background information for teachers:**

- The Gordon family lived in this castle for about four hundred years. They often added new parts of the castle, or changed and improved parts that were already there. George Gordon spent some time in France in the 1590s and picked up new ideas about decorating castles there. He added a lot of decoration to this wall.

**Teacher prompts**

**Desired pupil responses**

Look up to the top of the wall. You can see some giant writing carved into the stone.

What names can you see?

George Gordon,  
Henrietta Stewart

Who do you think they were?

The people who owned and lived in the castle – Lord and Lady Huntly.

Some of the writing is missing. It says:

FIRST MARQUIS OF HU.....

A marquis is a very grand title, like a lord.

Huntly.

What do you think HU... is short for?

Why do you think they carved the names there?

To show off - proud of their new title.

What other bits of decoration can you see on the wall?

Decorated windows; 'rope' pattern round the top of the tower.

The Gordon family were very religious. Can you see the 'hand of god' carved onto the wall?

Top left hand corner of the wall, pointing to 'George'; also below pointing to 'Henrietta'.

- There used to be a kind of covered walkway with arches against the castle wall. You can imagine George and Henrietta going for walks here. They would look out onto beautiful gardens. **Can you see any signs of the arches?** (you can see stone stumps of arches).

**Keep going along the path, round the corner of the big wall, turning left and then left again until you find yourself in front of the elaborately decorated doorway to the palace.**





**Did you know...**

Every important family had its own pattern or symbol. They put these symbols on their coat of arms – a bit like a logo today.



Entrance doorway



Arms of Lord and Lady Huntly



Arms of James VI

**Location 2: The Entrance to the Palace**

**Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.**

- This area would have looked very different five hundred years ago. There was often building work going on here. **Can you see a green grassy mound?** This was the site of the very first castle, built about eight hundred years ago. Then there was a stone tower house, but that's almost all gone now too. All that's left is the part of the castle known as the palace, and some of the buildings where castle work.
- In 1594 George had been plotting against King James VI, so James blew up part of the castle with gunpowder, and sent George away to France. When he came back, George wanted to show James that he was now going to be loyal. When he was rebuilding his palace, he added decorations to the doorway that showed how much he respected James.
- Above the doorway are two big shields, one above the other. The first shield is for George Gordon and his wife, Henrietta. **Can you see a stag's head and a bull's head on the shield?** The stag's head was a symbol for the Gordon family. The bull's head was the family symbol for his wife, Henrietta Stewart. Look out for these symbols again as you go around the palace.
- The second one, higher up, is the shield of King James and his Danish wife, Anna. **Can you see their initials above the shield?** – 'IR 6' for James Rex the 6th (King James in Latin) and 'ARS' for Anna Regina Scotiae (Queen Anna of Scotland in Latin). Can you see the royal crown above it?
- Right at the very top of the doorway is an angel – **can you see it?**
- When the doorway was new, the stone carving was painted in wonderful bright colours.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
There are lots of other animals on the doorway. What can you see?	Hunting dogs (on the doorway).  Wolf (headless – on right of bottom shield). Unicorn – holding Scottish banner. Kind of dragon with a fish tail called a wyvern – holding Danish banner.
Can you see the initials of Gordon, Marquis of Huntly and Henrietta Stewart, Marquise of Huntly anywhere?	GMH/HSMH below the lowest shield.
Do you think the order of the shields is important?	Yes – lord and lady at the bottom, followed by the king and queen, with God at the top.

**Go through the doorway and down the stairs. Take the second entrance on your left.**



**Did you know...**

The Gordons themselves were often in trouble. George's grandfather fought a battle against Mary Queen of Scots. When she won, she executed his son. His dead body was tried and found guilty so Mary took the castle away from the Gordons. The other son, George's father, was kept prisoner. When Mary got married, she forgave the Gordons and gave them the castle back.

**Location 3: In the Basement**

**Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.**

- This is the oldest part of the castle. There are three cellars like this. They were built in about 1455 and were used to store food and drink.
- The cellar might have been used to shoot from. **Can you see the gun loop or gun hole for firing out of?**

<b>Teacher prompts</b>	<b>Desired pupil responses</b>
Why do you think the cellars are so big?	A lot of people would have lived here when Lord Huntly was at home – would have needed a lot of food. Space to store things that might be needed if the castle was attacked and you couldn't get out.
How does it feel inside the cellar? Why was this a good thing?	Cold, dark. Things would last longer – the cellars are like a huge fridge.
What kind of things apart from food might they store in here?	Wine, weapons, ammunition, firewood for the fires and the kitchen.



The pit prison

**Go along to the end of the corridor, up some little steps, and turn left into the corridor leading to the pit prison.**

- In the old days the lords of castles were the local judges. They would be responsible for keeping law and order in their neighbourhood. If you were a criminal you would be kept in a prison like this until it was time for your trial.
- If a noble person did something wrong, he or she would not be kept in a prison like this. They would be kept somewhere more comfortable.



Graffiti man

<b>Teacher prompts</b>	<b>Desired pupil responses</b>
How do you think the prisoners would get into the prison?	There would probably have been a ladder lowered down.
How do you think you would feel if you were a prisoner here?	Cold, damp, hungry, frightened. You might go crazy because it would be dark.
There would have been a door and a gate in this little passage. Can you see signs of them?	Bolt holes in the walls at either end of the passage.

- As you come out of the prison and go down the little steps, look at the walls. There is very old graffiti on the walls. **Can you see a little man carved on the wall on the right?**

**Go back along the corridor, up the stairs and into the ground floor corridor. Go into the second room on the left.**





### Did you know...

Many fireplaces were so big that there was space for a small boy to sit at the side and turn the spit so that the meat cooked. He was called the *turnbrochie*. It must have been hot work.



Fireplace



Water inlet and outlet

## Location 4: The Kitchen

**Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.**

- This was the kitchen for the castle. Four hundred years ago this would have been a very busy place. You can imagine people chopping, people carrying things, people serving food onto serving dishes, and the cook shouting at everyone. It would have been very hot and quite dark.
- You can see the huge fireplace. This was used for cooking. The cook could boil food in a big pot or cauldron which hung over the fire, or he could roast meat on a big metal spike called a spit. Big pieces of meat needed long spits, tiny birds were cooked on thin spits.

### Teacher prompts

In kitchens today there is always a sink. Look around the kitchen.

Where would cooks in this kitchen get their water from?

Where would they tip the dirty water?

By the window there's a big cubby hole. What do you think this could have been?

It's probably a salt cupboard. Salt was very valuable and expensive then and was used to make food last longer.

### Desired pupil responses

There is a stone channel leading in from the courtyard for bringing in fresh water.

You could tip water away down the lower one.

There's also a drain underneath the hearth.

(Suggestions)

**Go along the passage and turn left into the first room at the end.**



### Did you know...

In a castle like this, there would have been about 150 servants working here! The *steward* was in charge of the household – cooks, servants, and so on. The *marshall* was in charge of transport – horses, carts, boats. The *constable* was in charge of security – guards and weapons. The *chaplin* was in charge of writing letters – a kind of personal secretary – and also gave Lord Huntly spiritual advice. It must have been like a busy little village here.



Original door



Latrine closet by Steward's room

## Location 5: The Steward's Room

**Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.**

### Teacher prompts

The door on display is one of the original doors from the castle. Look at the fancy hinges.  
What do you think happened to the rest of the doors?

### Desired pupil responses

Rotted, stolen, burnt for firewood.

**Continue into the next room – a round room.**

- In the old days there were a lot of servants who worked at the castle. Looking after them all was a big job! The person in charge of the servants was called the Steward. He would also collect rent from local people. He was an important person in the castle. If Lord Huntly was away, then the Steward would be the one in charge, supervised by Lady Huntly. This might have been the room where he worked and slept.

### Teacher prompts

On the right of the entrance doorway is a tiny room with a hole leading down.  
What do you think this could be?

### Desired pupil responses

A toilet.

The staircase to the left leads up to Lord Huntly's room. Why do you think this was?

In case he needed anything – he could just yell for the steward!

**Go up this winding stair and come out into the 'great chamber' on the first floor.**



The Great Hall



Plaster Work



Roof beams in great hall

### Location 6: Lord Huntly's Lodgings

**Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.**

- Lords and ladies at this time had separate areas for living. We are now standing in one of Lord Huntly's three rooms. Up above were rooms for Lady Huntly, which we'll see later.
- This room is called the Great Chamber. It was a kind of living room for Lord Huntly. He might have had meetings or small private parties in here.
- Off this room is a private bed chamber for Lord Huntly, directly above the steward's room. His bed would go into a specially built section of the wall. Can you find where this was?
- Can you see three holes? This is the remains of a bell system. When Lord Huntly wanted his servant, he would pull on a string here which would ring a bell below. He could also listen to what his servants were saying...walls really do have ears!

#### Move through into the Great Hall

- This used to be the Great Hall. This was where Lord Huntly would have grand dinners. He might also sort out local problems, collect rents, or have business meetings.
- If there was a banquet, Lord Huntly as the host would sit on a proper chair on a platform at one end and everyone else would sit on wooden benches. People would eat from wooden plates. There might be dogs waiting to eat scraps, servants coming up the stairs from the kitchen. Maybe there would be musicians too and later there might be dancing.
- On the floor there would be rushes or straw – no rugs or carpets!
- The walls are bare stone now. In the old days they would be covered with plaster, like in houses today. The walls might have been painted with patterns, or they might have had wall hangings to help them keep warm.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
Why do you think the windows were so big?	To allow light into the room.
The ceiling and roof have gone now. Can you see where the ceiling used to be?	You can see the remains of one or two wooden beams, sticking out from the wall near the modern wooden balcony.
If you were at a banquet here, where do you think the best place to sit would be? Who do you think would sit there?	Best place would be by the fire – warmest. Lord Huntly would sit there.
Why do you think there are little plastic roofs over some parts of the walls?	To try and protect the plasterwork. Most of it has rotted away.

**Go through the door at the far end of the hall and make your way up to the second floor.**



### Did you know...

This was once one of the grandest castles in Scotland. At one point there were nine extravagantly decorated beds in the castle! Even Mary Queen of Scots' mum, Mary of Guise was impressed when she came to visit...and then she got worried the Gordons were getting too powerful.



Fireplace in outer hall, showing initials and sockets for candles



Lady Huntly

## Location 7: Lady Huntly's Lodgings

**Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.**

- Lady Huntly had her own set of rooms. This is the hall where she might receive guests and have banquets.
- On the fireplace there is another beautifully carved set of shields. **Can you see the royal coat of arms again and the two shields of the families of George and Henrietta?**
- At this time King James VI of Scotland had just become king of England too. This shield shows symbols connected with both countries, as well as the Irish harp.
- At the top of the mantelpiece there used to be other religious carvings. The Gordons were very keen Catholics. Later on the castle was attacked by Protestants who disapproved of the carvings, so they hacked them off. Look for where they used to be.

### Teacher prompts

Can you see the initials of George Marquis of Huntly and Henrietta Stewart anywhere?  
Can you see the Scottish flag, the saltire, anywhere? Can you find the English flag?

It would have been quite dark in here in the evenings. The Gordons would still want people to see the expensive carved mantelpiece, so they had special candle holders built into the mantelpiece. Can you see where they used to be?

### Desired pupil responses

In the middle of the fireplace, all mixed up together.  
The unicorn on the left is holding it.  
English flag is now very worn away to the right.

Two holes in the middle of the mantelpiece would have held candles.

### Go through into the next room.

- This room is a more private room for Henrietta, where she would only invite her closest friends or have private meetings.
- If her husband was away, Lady Huntly would run the castle household with the help of the Steward. If she was relaxing, she might play games like backgammon, play instruments, sew, or just chat with her family and friends.
- If you look at the fireplace, you can see a carving of a man and a woman. **Who do you think they might be?** (George and Henrietta.)
- Look out of the window to the front of the castle. This used to be beautiful grounds where the Gordon family would go for walks and relax with sports like archery or hawking.

**It is possible to go up the stair at the end to come out on the tower but the stairway is very narrow and there is little space at the top. Ideally take pupils up in twos or threes if you want them to go up.**

**Otherwise, go back through the Lady's lodgings and all the way down the stairs to come out through the main doorway again. Walk away from the palace to the stone buildings labelled 'bakehouse' and 'brewhouse'.**





Brewhouse and Bakehouse



Brewhouse

## Location 8: The Brewhouse and Bakehouse

**Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.**

- Four hundred years ago this would have been a bustling courtyard. There would have been chickens and dogs running around, people looking after horses, servants carrying food and buckets of water to the kitchen, and Lord and Lady Huntly watching the new building work. There would have been the sound of horses hooves and shouting, and the lovely smell of bread baking.

**Go into the right hand building.**

- This was the bakehouse, where bread was made. Like today, people then ate a lot of bread - maybe two loaves a day! But unlike today, all the bread was home made. **Can you see what's left of the two giant ovens here?** They used to have a rounded roof.
- The baker would light a fire so that all the bricks would get hot. Then he would rake out the ashes after the fire had died down. Then he would put the dough in to bake. Afterwards the ovens might be used to dry out firewood.

### Teacher prompts

The oven would heat up with a fire.  
Where do you think the fire would be?  
Where would you put the bread to bake?  
How would the baker get the bread out of the oven?

### Desired pupil responses

In the middle.  
The dough would go on the stone shelves round the side.  
With a long handled shovel – like in a pizza oven today.

- The other building is a brewhouse, where they made a kind of beer called ale. Ordinary people drank ale all the time – even children! The lords and ladies would drink wine.
- The beer would be boiled up in a huge copper pot in the middle of this room.

**Our suggested tour is now finished. If time allows, pupils can explore the remains of the outbuildings – the 'motte' or mound and the remains of the medieval entrance road.**



## FAQ

**Q** What is the minimum number of adults required for supervision?

**A** 1 adult to 10 pupils

**Q** Is there disabled access?

**A** Wheelchair users can gain access to castle area, though some areas of the castle are only accessible by steps. There is an accessible toilet.

**Q** Are there lunch facilities?

**A** Pupils can picnic on site. In poor weather they can shelter in the bakehouse or brewhouse.

**Q** Where are the toilets?

**A** Toilets are available in the castle grounds.

**Q** Do you carry out risk assessments on behalf of schools?

**A** Risk assessment of the site is the responsibility of the teacher in charge of the group. Hazard information sheets available on the Historic Scotland website provide information that can help teachers prepare their risk assessments.

**Q** Is there a shop?

**A** There is a shop that sells postcards, guidebooks and souvenirs.

**Q** Do you offer guided tours for school groups?

**A** If staff are available it may be possible to organise a tour.

## Visiting Huntly Castle

**Pre visits:** We strongly recommend that teachers should make a free visit to the castle to familiarise themselves with the site and to make a risk assessment before bringing school parties.

**Booking a visit:** Phone **01466 793191** to book a visit, discuss your needs and confirm opening times with the Steward.

**Cost:** Admission is **free** to a range of educational groups including school parties. More information about who qualifies for free visits can be found on the Historic Scotland Education Unit website (see below).

**Location:** In the town of Huntly, 40 miles NW of Aberdeen.

**Parking:** The driveway to the castle passes through a narrow gateway. This is passable for small minibuses but not for large coaches. Large coaches should drop pupils off here; it is a pleasant 10 minute walk from here up the drive to the castle.

**Health and safety:** Please note the following:

- Pupils should take care going up narrow turnpike stairs.
- Pupils should not run around unsupervised and should not climb on the walls.
- As part of our commitment to Green Tourism, we ask that any rubbish be disposed of back at school.

**Historic Scotland Education Unit:**

For further information about school visits, activities, and resources for teachers visit:

**[www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education\\_unit](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education_unit)**

Activities at Huntly in the past have included the popular Knight School.

## Additional resources

**For teachers:**

Chris Tabraham, *Huntly Castle* 1995 Historic Scotland. The official guidebook to the site which includes information, maps, and lots of photographs.

Historic Scotland Education *Investigating Medieval Castles in Scotland* 2005 Historic Scotland. An excellent booklet designed for teachers with lots of suggestions for class activities.

**[www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/huntlycastle/](http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/huntlycastle/)** A good overview of the history of the castle, with some good photographs.

**[www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory)** An excellent library of resources.

**[www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk)** An excellent source of photographs and images.

**For pupils:**

Deary, *Horrible Histories: Bloody Scotland*, 1998 Scholastic.

English Heritage: *What were Castles For?* Usborne Starting Points in History.

**[www.nationalgeographic.com/castles/enter.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/castles/enter.html)** Explore a virtual castle.

**<http://home.freeuk.net/elloughton13/castle1.htm>** A good source of pictures of castle life which can be downloaded.

**[www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/education/as/burghlife/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/education/as/burghlife/)** Explore 16th century burgh life in Scotland.

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