Bothwell Castle is one of Scotland’s largest 13th century castles. It was captured and recaptured, many times during the Wars of Independence.
Bothwell Castle is one of Scotland’s largest 13th century castles. Its strategic location meant it became a key location during the Wars of Independence, being captured and recaptured many times in dramatic circumstances. The castle provides an excellent opportunity for investigation of the Wars of Independence and medieval castle life.

**Historical background**

Building of this mighty castle began with Walter of Moray after 1242. Repeated invasions and sieges meant that the original design was never completed and what you see today is largely the work of the Earls of Douglas from the years around 1400.

The present castle is roughly rectangular. At one end is the massive donjon with an adjoining prison tower, which was the original part of the castle. The other end of the castle comprises the Great Hall, and the remains of two towers.

The castle played a key role during the Wars of Independence when it changed hands several times.

In 1296 Edward I invaded Scotland and captured Bothwell Castle. By this time only the donjon and prison tower had been completed. The Scots then starved out the English garrison in a 14 month siege in 1298-9. In 1301 Edward I returned with a huge army and a siege tower, specially constructed to access the top of the donjon. The siege lasted just three weeks before the English took the castle for the second time.

The English then surrendered the castle to the Scots, led by Edward Bruce, after the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. It was recaptured during the second Wars of Independence in 1336, when it briefly became the headquarters of King Edward III. In March 1337 a Scots army, under Sir Andrew Murray of Bothwell, took the castle once again. Though this was Murray’s ancestral home, he ensured much of the mighty donjon was destroyed for fear it might fall into enemy hands once again, leaving it much as you see it today.

By the late 1300s the castle had passed to the Earls of Douglas. They repaired and extended Bothwell Castle. By 1424 they had constructed the two residential towers and a range between them which included the Great Hall. They connected the rest of the castle with curtain walls.

Bothwell Castle was the property of the Crown through much of the 1500s, and in 1669 it passed to the Earls of Forfar. In the late 1600s they abandoned the castle in favour of Bothwell House, a large mansion built nearby. Ironically the castle has outlasted this house, which had to be demolished in 1926.

In 1935 Bothwell Castle was placed in the care of the State, and today it is cared for by Historic Scotland.
Supporting learning and teaching

A visit to Bothwell Castle is particularly appropriate for teachers working on such popular classroom study topics as:

- Castles
- The Middle Ages
- The Wars of Independence

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 timescale by making a timeline with them, counting back the centuries and then marking on key events. This could be added to after the visit.

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, defences) to prepare them for the visit.

It is helpful if pupils know some of the architectural terminology of castles as this makes discussion on site easier. Useful words might include: **courtyard, chamber, latrine, portcullis, archway, arrow slits, dungeon, siege, moat, and drawbridge**. Pupils could develop a class illustrated dictionary to explain these terms.

Though you may not be studying the Wars of Independence, it might help if pupils were familiar with some of these names and ideas attached to the castle’s history: **William Wallace, Robert the Bruce, Edward I, II and III, Bannockburn**.

The idea of a siege should be explored and discussed, as so much of what makes Bothwell Castle exciting relates to siege and siege breaking. There is plenty of good evidence on site relating to defending and attacking castles. Discuss with pupils the range of ways that castles could be attacked and defended and consider suitable sites for building a castle.

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 do you think the castle has changed over the years?

Pupils could record evidence by:

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

**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.
Tour of Bothwell Castle

Bothwell Castle provides an opportunity for classes to explore many aspects of castle life. The largely intact donjon and defences can allow them to consider the sieges of the Wars of Independence, while the Great Hall, chapel and prison tower offer an insight into the many functions of a medieval castle. A suggested tour takes in five key locations, marked on the plan below:

1. The Central Courtyard
2. The Donjon
3. The Prison Tower and South Curtain Wall
4. The Chapel and South-East Tower
5. The Great Hall

Background information is given in this pack for each location. It is written in fairly 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. Allow about an hour for the suggested tour.
Tour notes

Enter the castle through the main entrance and take up a position in the centre of the courtyard (the main grassy area)

Location 1: The Central Courtyard

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

- Orientation. These are the areas that we are going to visit – the donjon, the prison tower, the living quarters, the chapel and the Great Hall.
- It is important to remember that these were all built at different times and that the castle developed in stages.
- The oldest part of the castle is the donjon and prison tower, which was built by the first owner, Walter of Moray. You have to imagine that these were all that would have been here during the time of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce.
- If you were an attacking army, you would have been standing right here, trying to get inside the big tower in front of us – the donjon.

Teacher prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher prompts</th>
<th>Desired pupil responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look carefully at the defences. What barriers would you</td>
<td>Moat, drawbridge, arrow slits, gate, machicolations,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have to face to get inside the donjon?</td>
<td>thick walls, wall walk, fighting platform at top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might you try to attack the castle?</td>
<td>Own suggestions (siege weapons etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For exploration of the donjon, it is advisable to take a group of no more than 15 pupils, as parts of the building are steep and narrow. For this part of the tour you might want to split the class in two. One group could be exploring the donjon, while the other half explores the castle exterior. Those exploring the castle exterior could be looking for specific evidence of:

- the castle defences – including the remains of the original 13th century castle in the grounds
- how they might attack the castle
- the latrine exits
- coats of arms
- changes over time
- reasons for choice of location
Take the group across the wooden bridge (which originally was a drawbridge over a moat) and through the entrance into the donjon. As you pass through the entrance pupils can look for:

- how the entrance would have been defended
- the gap through which the portcullis gate would have dropped
- the holes through which the drawbridge chains would have been lowered
- the holes at the side where the hinges of a second gate would have been

On the left as you enter the donjon there is a large window area in the main wall. Gather the group there.
Location 2: The Donjon

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

First floor

- When you look over the wooden fence at the inside of the tower, you have to imagine that this was really like a huge house with lots of rooms. There were four main levels.
- You also have to remember that this was a circular building, with a pillar right in the middle at ground level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you work out where the four levels inside the donjon used to be?</td>
<td>Pupils should look out for evidence of the windows, fireplaces and ceiling supports on each level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you see the remains of the central pillar?</td>
<td>You will see it, half embedded in the current wall, at ground level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The four levels would have been
  - The basement – which was used for storage and had a well for water
  - The first floor, where we are now, would have been the Lord’s Hall, where the lord would have met and entertained his guests.
  - The second floor was the Common Hall, which might have been for his staff and soldiers during a siege
  - The third floor was the Lord’s Private Chamber – where he would have lived
  - At the very top, on the roof, was a fighting platform, from which guards would have defended the castle

- The window area that we are standing next to was actually a small room where the women might have sat on cushions on the ledges. These walls would have been decorated with tapestries and hangings. Look at how thick the walls are here.

- You’ll see lots of graffiti on the walls here. Some are masons’ marks, left by the men who built it.
- If you follow the passageway to the right hand side (facing the window) you will find a small latrine. Can you see where the waste would go?
Now go back towards the donjon entrance and take the stairs up the tower to the first room on the left hand side.

Please note: the steps leading up the tower are dark, narrow, uneven, and winding. They can also be quite slippery when wet. If you decide to take children up the stairs, we recommend that you take them up in small groups and supervise closely at all times. Ensure that they proceed in single file and hold onto the rope bannister as they climb.

Second floor

- This was the portcullis room. The drawbridge and portcullis gate would have been operated from here.
- Look around for clues as to how this room worked.

Teacher prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Desired pupil responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you work out how the drawbridge would have operated?</td>
<td>The holes in the floor would have had chains running through them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you work out how the portcullis gate would have operated?</td>
<td>There is a long narrow gap in the floor where the gate would have been lowered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The arrow slit here is much bigger, caused by damage during a siege. Why do you think attackers would have aimed for this part of the castle?</td>
<td>If they knocked down this room, they might release the drawbridge and be able to get in.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carefully continue up the stairs to the last room at the top.

Third floor

Teacher prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Desired pupil responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you notice the stairs getting steeper and narrower? Why do you think it is such hard work to get up the stairs?</td>
<td>Easier to defend – attackers would have to work very hard to fight their way up the stairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This was one of the Lord’s private chambers. Why do you think he lived so high up?</td>
<td>It was safer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at the views from the window. What makes this a good site for a castle?</td>
<td>High on a bank. On a bend in the river – attackers couldn't attack from behind. Woods and the river would have supplied food.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very carefully descend the stairs all the way to the basement level.
Basement level

- This was the storage area for the castle. It also has a well, which is about 6 metres deep.
- You’ll find lots of graffiti on the walls, but the oldest was left by the Duke of Buccleuch in 1786.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you find the Duke of Buccleuch’s graffiti?</td>
<td>On the wall to the left of the well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think might have been stored in this area?</td>
<td>Food and drink.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digging a deep well would be hard work – and there is a river nearby. Why was it important to have a water supply inside the castle?</td>
<td>When under siege, needed to have access to water inside the gates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who would collect the water and how would they get it out of the well?</td>
<td>Servants would use a bucket on a rope with a pulley. It would be very heavy and hard work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Return back up the stairs to the donjon entrance. Cross over the bridge and into the main courtyard again. Cross the courtyard to your right to the prison tower.
Location 3: The Prison Tower and South Curtain Wall

Background information for teachers. This could be read to pupils.

- Gather around the prison and the postern gate. The postern gate was a ‘tradesman’s entrance’ into the castle.
- The prison would once have been a building where all kinds of prisoners would have been kept.
- The poorest prisoners, though, would have been thrown in the ‘pit’ at the very bottom. You can still see down into it.

Teacher prompts

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are no steps leading down to the pit – how do you think prisoners would have got in?</td>
<td>Possibly lowered down or by a ladder? Maybe thrown down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would there be any way to escape?</td>
<td>Pupils can give their own ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sorts of crimes do you think you might get thrown in prison for?</td>
<td>Pupils can give their own ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What punishments might there have been for more serious crimes?</td>
<td>Torture, execution etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think conditions might have been like in the pit prison? How would you feel?</td>
<td>Pupils can give their own ideas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Move along the south curtain wall towards the south-east tower at the far end. All along the wall would have been rooms inside the castle. Look out for the latrine block here as you walk along. Stand in the chapel area at the south-east tower.
Location 4: The Chapel and South-East Tower

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

• The area where you are standing was actually a cellar - the chapel was on the floor above you.

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you see any evidence of what is left of the chapel above you?</td>
<td>Big windows, basin, holy-water stoup, ‘sacrament house’, priests’ bench.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think a castle would have a chapel inside it?</td>
<td>People were very religious. Showed you were important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at the tower. Can you see any more evidence of the castle defences?</td>
<td>Defence parapet and machicolations at the top.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continue through into the circular south-east tower.

• Again, you are in the basement storage area, but look up and you will see there were three levels of large rooms where people would have lived – probably including the priest.

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you see where the fireplaces and windows used to be?</td>
<td>Pupils should be able to point out the window spaces and fireplaces in the tower.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Come back out of the tower and chapel and turn right. You will pass by three doors on your right hand side. These were all cellars that served the main tower above it. Enter the third cellar and you will see some of the cannonballs that were found at the castle. Climb the wooden stairs at the end and enter the Great Hall.
Location 5: The Great Hall

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

- The Great Hall would have been used to entertain guests and to hold great banquets and celebrations.

- At one end of the hall (from which we entered) was the minstrel’s gallery. This is where the music would have been played to entertain the guests. Underneath the gallery was where the servants would wait, behind a screen, to serve the food.

- The kitchens would have been in a building next door to this end of the Great Hall. You can no longer get to that area, but you can still look in the latrine, off to the corner.

- In the other corner you can still see the doorway that would have led to the old tower, behind the Great Hall. This was the Lord’s private residence, built by the Douglases to replace the lordly apartments in the damaged donjon. The tower has pretty much disappeared now.

- Unlike some Great Halls, this one didn’t have a big fireplace at one end. Instead there would have been a fire right in the middle of the room. The guests would sit on benches at long trestle tables that ran up and down the hall, around the fireplace.

- Originally, the hall would have been protected by a fine timber roof and the walls would have been covered with beautiful hangings that would help keep the hall warm.

- At the other end of the hall there would have been a ‘dais’, or small platform. This is where the lord and lady would have sat – raised slightly above their guests.

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look at the big windows down one side. How many can you count?</td>
<td>Eleven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are they all the same?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think one is different from all the others?</td>
<td>It’s bigger and lower down. It would have shone straight onto the lord and lady. Showed they were more important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine you had been invited to a banquet at the Great Hall. What do you think it would have been like?</td>
<td>Pupils could try to describe what the Hall might have been like, sights, sounds, smells. Describe how they might feel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Visiting Bothwell Castle

Pre visits: We strongly recommend that teachers 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 01698 816894 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.

Location: At Uddingston off the B7071.

Parking: Coaches should park in the first car park you come to. It is then a short walk to the steward’s office and castle entrance.

Health and safety:
Please note the following:
• The donjon, in particular, is high above ground level and the steps leading to the top are very steep and narrow. Because of this pupils should be supervised extremely closely at all times, ideally in small groups.
• Steps and surfaces within the castle are uneven and become quite slippery in wet weather.
• There is a good chance that scaffolding for conservation work will be erected. Pupils should take care around any work being carried out.

As part of our commitment to Green Tourism, we ask that any rubbish be disposed of back at school.

Additional resources

For teachers:
C Tabraham Bothwell Castle Historic Scotland 1994. The official guidebook; essential reading for teachers for further details on the architecture and history of the site.
Historic Scotland Education Investigating Medieval Castles in Scotland Historic Scotland 2005
- designed for teachers with lots of background on castle life and suggestions for class activities.

For pupils:

English Heritage What were Castles For? Usborne Starting Points in History ISBN: 0746052561.

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/ Explore 16th century burgh life in Scotland.

Acknowledgements

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FAQ
Q What is the minimum number of adults required for supervision?
A 1 adult to 10 pupils

Q Is it possible to have a guided tour?
A If staff are available it may be possible to organise a tour. This must be arranged in advance.

Q Is there disabled access?
A Wheelchair users can access the courtyard but the donjon and Great Hall are accessible only by stairs.

Q Are there lunch facilities?
A Pupils can picnic outside or shelter in the cellars in wet weather.

Q Where are the toilets?
A Next to the castle entrance. Please note that there is only one toilet on the site – a rota system of small groups might be advisable!

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.