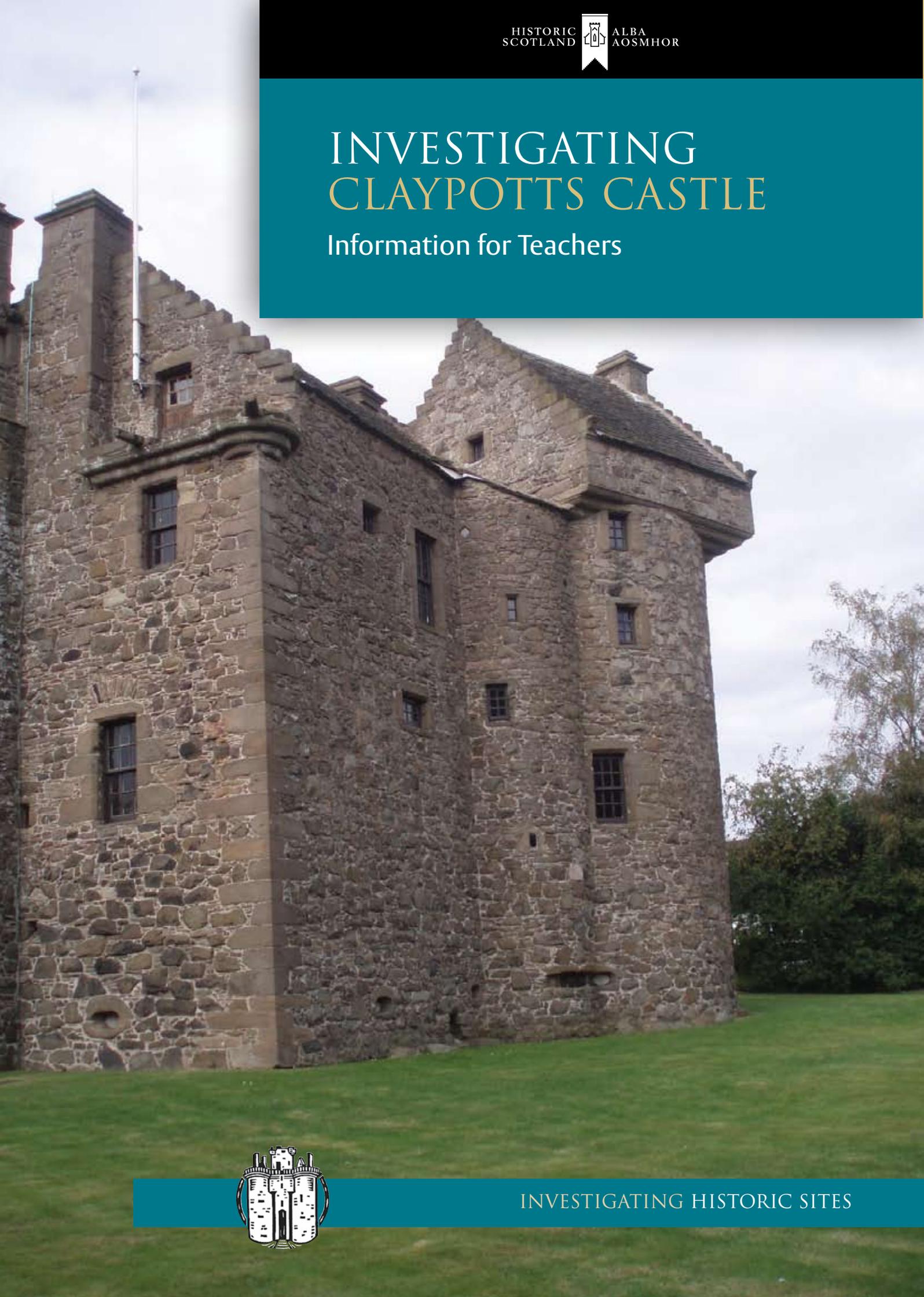




# INVESTIGATING CLAYPOTTS CASTLE

Information for Teachers





## Timeline

**Early 1500s** Lands of Claypotts leased from Lindores abbey by the Strachan family

**1569** John Strachan begins work on Claypotts Castle

**1588** Building of Claypotts Castle finished

**1593** John Strachan dies

**1601** Sir William Graham buys Claypotts from Strachans

**1620** Claypotts sold to Sir William Graham of Claverhouse

**1689** Castle and land forfeit to the Crown

**1694** Claypotts and other Claverhouse lands granted to the Douglas family

**1800s** Castle and lands pass to the Earl of Home; lands leased to tenants

**1847** Castle occupied by farm labourers

**1926** Homes place Claypotts under the guardianship of the state

**Claypotts Castle is a delight. Built in the late sixteenth century, the building has survived almost intact, with very few changes. Its domestic atmosphere makes it an ideal place for pupils and their teachers to explore castle life.**

## Historical background

Today the castle of Claypotts sits peacefully but incongruously in the centre of a modern housing estate. Over 400 years ago, this land was owned by Lindores Abbey, across the Tay in Fife and was leased to the Strachan family.

Around 1569 John Strachan began work on building a new home at Claypotts. Although the core of his home was a traditional stone tower, it was made different by the addition of round towers built at diagonally opposite corners of this central block. Claypotts Castle is today one of the most complete examples of this 'Z-plan' tower house in Scotland.

John Strachan had seven children. It is unlikely that many of them lived in the castle as children, however, because it took nearly twenty years for the building to be completed. The castle was finished in 1588, and John Strachan enjoyed it for just five years before he died in 1593.

Unusually, some evidence survives about the other inhabitants of the castle at this time: the Strachans' servants. John Strachan's will, dated 1594, mentions three of the women servants of the house, including Janet Wilkie who had been with the family for at least fourteen years. Four ploughmen and a shepherd are also mentioned.

In 1601 the castle was sold to William Graham of Ballunie. In 1620 his son sold Claypotts to Sir William Graham of Claverhouse. His great-grandson was to achieve fame in 1689 as Stewart loyalist 'Bonnie Dundee', when he was killed at the battle of Killiecrankie. Though he had never lived at the castle, following this, his land including Claypotts was confiscated by the Crown. The castle then passed to the Marquis of Douglas and was probably leased to tenants from the early 17th century.

In the 19th century the castle passed to the Home family, who still own Claypotts today. It is now maintained by Historic Scotland, and is one of Scotland's most complete sixteenth-century fortified homes.



## Supporting learning and teaching

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

- **Castle Life**
- **The Middle Ages**

**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** by helping to 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.

While most of the activities would be suitable for pupils in P4-7, the language used in this pack is aimed at lower to middle primary groups (i.e. P2-P5).

## 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 in the history of the castle and the surrounding area. This could be added to after the visit.
- Discuss with pupils the many servants who would have worked in the castle. Get the pupils to make lists of all the jobs that would have had to be done in a pre-machine world. These lists can be added to after the visit.
- Discuss with pupils all the different activities which 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 are familiar with some of the architectural terminology of castles as this makes discussing on site easier. Useful words might include: chamber, shield, coat of arms, great hall, archway, gun loop, spiral stair, roof 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, in addition to our suggestions for discussion, pupils should be encouraged to look critically at what they see and to make and test theories based on physical evidence. Some general starting points could include:

- What materials were used to build the castle? Why were these materials chosen? Are there any materials which might have rotted away or been stolen since then?
- Do you think this room has always looked like this? Can you see anywhere it has been altered? Why might it have been changed?
- What evidence is there for everyday life?

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 a *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 Claypotts Castle

### On the trail of the Strachan family

There is much to explore in this wonderful and well-preserved building. Our suggested tour route focuses on everyday life in the castle at the time of the Strachans (c1570-1600). It takes in eight key locations:

1. The Main Door
2. The Kitchen
3. A Bedchamber
4. The Hall
5. The Main Bedchamber
6. The Upper Hall
7. The Garret
8. Outside the Castle

It is not essential to view these locations in this order. Ideally, split your class into groups of 8-10, to allow maximum participation.

**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**.

Because the castle is so well preserved, it lends itself easily to **role play**, particularly for younger groups. Suggestions for role play have been included in a Let's Pretend section for each location, featured in red.

One way to manage this type of activity is to give out the roles, allow a few minutes for practising and then on a given signal allow the action to take place for a minute or two, until you give the signal to stop.



**Note: A set of costumes (servants, lords, ladies etc) may be available on site – please discuss when booking. Suitable for P1-P2-sized pupils.**



### Did you know...

The Strachans rented the land of Claypotts from the monks at Lindores Abbey in Fife. Every year they had to pay rent of £11 16s 8d - plus twelve cockerels!



The door

## Tour notes: On the trail of the Strachan family

### Location 1: The Main Door

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

- Four hundred years ago, this castle was brand new. It was the home of the Strachan family, where they lived with their servants.
- John Strachan started building this castle more than 400 years ago, in 1569. It took him a long time to finish it – it wasn't ready till 1588, nearly 20 years later!
- John Strachan and his wife, Eufame, had seven children – five girls and two boys. They were probably boys and girls when he started building, but by the time it was finished, most of them were grown up and he had at least three grandchildren.
- In the old days, the castle was surrounded by fields, where animals grazed and where food was grown for the Strachans to sell. All around the castle there would have been workshops, stables and other buildings for keeping animals. **Can you see any fields today?**

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
Look at the door. Does it look like your front door? Why not?	Big iron hinges, huge keyhole, shape, wooden planks., studded with iron pins.
Why do you think it was built like this?	For strength.
Above it you can see a stone square. What do you think this was?	Used to have the Strachan family shield carved on to it – to show you who lived here. Like a name plate.
Today most visitors to the castle are friendly, but John Strachan had to protect himself and his family against thieves. What do you think the hole on the right of the door was used for?	A gunhole – for guards to shoot through if they had to!
Look out for other gunholes around the castle.	

Let's pretend... that we have just arrived on our horses. Some people are the guards, coming out to have a look and ask us our names, other people are servants coming to take the horses. Maybe the Strachans will come out to greet us.

**Enter the castle and turn right into the kitchen.**



### Did you know...

Some kitchen fireplaces were so big that there was space for a small person, often a boy, to stand in the fireplace and turn the meat on the metal spit. He was called the 'turnbrochie'.



Fireplace in the kitchen



Water outlet



Water inlet

## Location 2: The Kitchen

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

- This was the kitchen for the castle. Grand visitors would never come in here...so we must be servants! This room was only for the servants and the Strachans. We don't know the name of the cook but the housekeeper was a lady called Janet Wilkie. Perhaps she would come here to boss everyone around!
- In the old days the kitchen would have been whitewashed – but it would often have got very dark and smokey.
- **Can you see the huge fireplace? What do you think this was used for?** (cooking)
- **What would it feel like in here when the kitchen was busy? What could you smell or hear?** (very hot, dark, smokey; nice smells of cooking food; sound of chopping, shouting, sizzling etc).

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
Go and stand in the fireplace. How do you think the cook would have cooked food over the fire?	Food could be boiled in a big pot hung over the fire. Food could be roasted on a metal spike over the fire.
Inside the fireplace look for a little cubbyhole. It used to have a little door What do you think this was used for?	This was an oven, used for baking bread and pies.
Look up the chimney. You can see it's quite black. What do you think the black is?	Soot from the fires from long ago.
Sometimes the cooks would hang big pieces of meat and fish in the chimney to get a smokey flavour. Can you see where they would have hung?	On nails for smaller pieces.
In kitchens today there is always a sink where dirty water could be poured away.	Tipped away down slop chute (to right of fireplace).
Look around the kitchen to find what the did they do with dirty water?	
Is there anything which is the same as your kitchen at home?	Same: place to cook food, place to tip away water, space to store food
What is different?	Different: we don't cook over fires, we have running water, we have fridges and other gadgets to make life easier



### Did you know...

There were four ploughmen at Claypotts at the same time as Janet Wilkie: Patrick Abbot, John Mathew, James Donaldson and Henry Watson. There was also a shepherd called Gavin Duncan.



Spiral stair



Bed alcove

### Location 3: A bedchamber

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

- **Can anyone guess what room this used to be?** Experts think it was a bedroom. We don't know exactly who would have slept here, but it might have been a guest room, or it might even have been the room for the housekeeper, Janet Wilkie. She was an important servant, so unlike the other servants, she might have had a room of her own.
- Other servants probably slept on the kitchen floor of the kitchen or had their own little cottages outside the castle.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
Janet Wilkie might have been a folding bed in here. Can you look around the room, and see where she might have folded her bed away during the day time?	Desired pupil responses
There is a fireplace in this room too. How is it different from the fireplace we saw in the kitchen?	Large space in the wall for bed to fold up .
Do you think it was used for cooking too?	Much smaller
Can you find a place where Janet would have kept her things?	Used for heating the room.
Janet Wilkie would have been in charge of a lot of different household servants. What jobs can you think of that they would have to do?	Another alcove (to right of window) – probably had shelves.  Fetching and chopping firewood, carrying water, sweeping and scrubbing, washing and mending clothes, looking after the children, helping the Strachans get dressed etc etc

Let's pretend....that everyone is a servant in the castle, busily working away. Watch out for Janet Wilkie! She doesn't like skivers!

**Go out of the room and turn right, up one step into the hall.**



### Did you know...

At this time people didn't use forks to eat their food. They used knives to cut their food, and then ate with their fingers!



The hall



Alcove for salt in fireplace

## Location 4: The Hall

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

- Long ago this room was the heart of Claypotts Castle. This was where the Strachan family would have dinner together, or where they would entertain visitors.
- When there were no visitors, this is where the family would gather, to chat, or play music, or play games.
- The furniture is modern, but the Strachans' furniture might have been similar. They would have had a big long table which stretched the whole length of the hall.
- The hall looks quite plain and bare now, but in the old days it would have felt warm and welcoming. There would have been colourful wall-hangings on the walls, for warmth as well as decoration. The ceiling might have been painted bright colours, and there would have been rushes or straw on the floor.
- If there was a feast, John Strachan would sit on a proper chair and everyone else would sit on wooden benches. People would eat from wooden plates. There would be servants coming up the stairs from the kitchen, and dogs waiting under the table to eat scraps. Maybe there would have been musicians too. The room would sparkle in the candlelight.
- One end of the room was screened off. This was where the servants would wait to serve food and drink. Which end do you think it was? (end nearest kitchen)

### Teacher prompts

### Desired pupil responses

Look inside the big fireplace. Can you find a little compartment? What do you think this might have been used for?

Pupils' own responses – e.g. to keep something special in

It was used for keeping salt! In the old days, before fridges, salt was used to make food last longer. It was very expensive. It was kept here to keep dry. It used to be locked up.

There's another place for keeping valuables too. Can you find it?

Alcove in wall by window.

In the old days it would have had a secure door too.

If you were Mr and Mrs Strachan, where would you like to sit in this room, and why?

Close to the fire for warmth with the light from the window shining on to you

Let's pretend...that there is a feast taking place. Some people are serving food or drink, some people are the Strachan family and their guests, some people are entertainers. Maybe there are even some dogs!

**Cross the room and go through the left door into the bedchamber.**



### Did you know...

Four poster beds had a wooden platform over the bed to stop bats, bugs and beetles dropping out of the ceiling on to you when you were asleep!



Replica four-poster bed



Entrance to toilet

## Location 5: The Main Bedchamber

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

- Whose room do you think this was? That's right – this would have been the main bedchamber for John and Eufame Strachan.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
The bed is modern, but the Strachans probably had one very like this.	
How many posts can you count on the bed? Do you know what you call a bed like this?	4 posts – so a four-poster bed
Why do you think they had a bed with curtains round it?	Curtains would have kept it warm and private from servants.
If you look very carefully, close to the window, you can find a clue showing what the walls used to look like in the old days .	Faint painted pattern can be made out.
In the days before wallpaper, people painted patterns on to the plaster. It's really rare for any pattern to survive.	
This bedroom also has one of the first private toilets in Scotland! Can you find it? This is called a garde-robe.	Tall cupboard, with a wooden surround just inside the door
The Strachans would have used a chamber pot, like a potty, in here. Then a servant would have taken it away and emptied it.	

**Turn left out of the bedroom. Go up the stairs, past a bedroom on the right. Go through the second door into the upper hall.**



Upper hall

## Location 6: The Upper Hall

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

- There is something strange about this room. **Can anyone see what?** (there are two fireplaces, one at each end). **Why do you think there are two fireplaces in one room?** (pupils' own ideas)
- The secret is that this room used to be two rooms. We're not sure exactly what these two rooms were used for, but they were probably the family's bedrooms, each with a private staircase. They would have been nice, bright rooms with big windows. At some point it was made into another smaller hall.

<i>Teacher prompts</i>	<i>Desired pupil responses</i>
Some of the walls still have the plaster on them. Can you see how thick it is?  It might have been painted with nice patterns.	Around 2cm.
Out of all the bedrooms we've seen, which one would you have liked best and why?	Pupils' own responses
We've seen lots of bedrooms, but no bathrooms. How do you think the Strachans washed?	Servants brought water for washing which was tipped away after.

Let's pretend...it's first thing in the morning. The Strachans are waking up in their four-poster beds. The servants are bringing them water to wash in and then help them get dressed.

**Cross the room. Go up the stairs opposite, right to the top (ignoring the room on the right) to enter the garret, right under the roof.**



Roof tiles attached by pegs



The garret room

### Location 7: The Garret

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

- We're right at the top of the castle here, under the roof. This room was probably where the family relaxed and enjoyed the lovely views. If you look out the window, on a clear day you can see for miles.
- The roof is still the original roof. Even if it took 20 years to build the castle, John Strachan picked some good builders! It's really unusual for a roof this old to last this long.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
What materials has the builder used to build the roof?	Wooden beams and stone (slate) tiles
Can you see how the tiles are attached?	They are just hooked over smaller piece of wood with pegs.
Look out of the windows. Can you see anything which the Strachans might have seen 400 years ago?	Sky, trees, hills, people walking about
What can you see which is modern?	Modern houses, cars, streets, windmills, etc.

Let's pretend...the Strachans are relaxing all together. Some people are sewing, some are practising musical instruments like harps or pipes, some people are playing games like chess. Can you sing any traditional songs which they might have sung?

**Go all the way down the stairs and turn left at the bottom to leave the castle. right) to enter the garret, right under the roof.**



Kitchen water outlet from outside



Claypotts castle - general

## Location 8 : Outside the castle again

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

- Our tour of Claypotts Castle is just about finished. Where the modern houses are today, there would have been other buildings, like barns, workshops and stables for horses.
- Outside the castle there would have been orchards and fields, growing crops and fruit for the Strachans to eat or sell. There would have been chickens running about and pigs. In the garden would have been herbs for cooking and for medicine.
- The Strachan children would have enjoyed running about and playing outside, just like we do today. They would have enjoyed playing with their friends, chasing and hiding, making up games and pretending. Boys and girls would learn to ride, to train hawks and go hunting. Although they lived here a long time ago, you'd probably have enjoyed playing with them.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
Today the castle is surrounded by modern houses, where families live today.	
What differences can you see between these houses and Claypotts Castle?	Modern houses are lower, smaller, not built of stone, bigger windows, no gunholes etc etc
What is the same?	Both types of building have: door, windows, chimneys
Would you rather live today, in a house like one of these, or 400 years ago, in a castle like Claypotts?	Pupils' own responses
Why?	
Look at the castle from the outside. Who can find...:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• decorations</li> <li>• gun loops</li> <li>• gutters to drain water from the roof</li> <li>• marks on windows where bars used to be</li> <li>• chimneys</li> <li>• the water outlet for the kitchen?</li> </ul>	

Let's pretend...it's a sunny day and the Strachans are outside the castle. Some people are chatting and playing with their friends, other people are practising archery. Some people are riding on their horses, other people are training their hawks. Their servants are there to help them.



## 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** Ask about this when booking.

**Q** Is there disabled access?

**A** The castle interior is currently inaccessible to wheelchair users.

**Q** Are there lunch facilities?

**A** Pupils can picnic outside or in poor weather can shelter in the castle.

**Q** Where are the toilets?

**A** There is one toilet in the castle which can be used in emergencies.

**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 currently no shop at the castle.

## Visiting Claypotts 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 **01786 431324** 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).

**Special programmes:** Sometimes special events are run for schools at Claypotts. In the past these have included The Maid's Story, an interactive tour. See the annual schools programme on the Historic Scotland Education Unit website (see below).for details, or ask when booking.

**Location:** Off the A92 east of Dundee at Claypotts Junction.

**Coach parking:** Only drop off space outside the castle; ask steward for directions where coaches can park.

Health and safety: Please note the following:

- Pupils should be supervised at all times.
- Pupils should not climb on the walls.
- As part of our commitment to Green Tourism, we ask that all litter be disposed of back at school.

**Historic Scotland Education Unit:**

For further information about school visits, activities and resources for teachers linked to Claypotts Castle, visit:

[www.historic-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk)

## Additional resources

**For teachers:**

Historic Scotland Education *Investigating Medieval Castles in Scotland* Historic Scotland 2005. A useful booklet designed for teachers with lots of background on castle life and suggestions for class activities.

Chris Tabraham *Scottish Castles and Fortifications* Historic Scotland 2000  
<http://www.dundeeCastles.freeuk.com>

This site has some useful photographs and a good historical overview.

**For pupils:**

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

Phil Roxbee Cox *What were Castles For?* Usborne Publishing Ltd 2002

Christopher Gravett *Eyewitness Castle*, Dorling Kindersley 2002

[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.