



Bring the world of medieval castles to life through an exploration of replica objects based on surviving evidence from the period.

INVESTIGATING OBJECTS FROM THE PAST MEDIEVAL CASTLE LIFE





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About this resource

Introduction

The collection of replica medieval objects is contained in two Handling Boxes. These have been created to support a class visit to a Historic Scotland site. The replica objects contained in the two boxes will help pupils to explore the world of medieval castle life through things that would have been used during the period.

Using the Handling Box

Medieval Castle Life Handling Boxes are available at:

- Blackness Castle (tel: 01506 834807)
- Bothwell Castle (tel: 01698 816894)
- Doune Castle (tel: 01786 841742)
- St Andrews Castle (tel: 01334 477196)
- Urquhart Castle (tel: 01456 450551)

Other locations may be added. Check the Historic Scotland website for other participating sites: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education_unit

The Handling Boxes should be booked directly with the site.

The Handling Boxes are designed to allow the group leader the flexibility to use them as appropriate to the needs of the class. Some suggestions for activities using the boxes are included in this booklet.



Three primary pupils proudly show off model siege engines.



Supporting learning and teaching

Use of the Handling Boxes, as part of a visit to a Historic Scotland site, will help pupils to develop in the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence.

It will enable pupils to:

- develop an understanding of how Scotland has developed as a nation, resulting in an appreciation of their local and national heritage within the global community
 - broaden their understanding of the world by learning about human activities and achievements in the past
 - develop their understanding of their own values, beliefs and cultures
 - learn how to locate, explore and link periods, people and events in time and place
 - learn how to locate, explore and link features and places locally and further afield
- It will also contribute to the development of the following Social Studies skills:
- observing, describing and recording
 - comparing and contrasting to draw valid conclusions
 - exploring different types of evidence
 - curiosity and problem-solving
 - interacting with others and developing an awareness of self and others
 - the capacity for critical thinking through accessing, analysing and using information from a variety of sources
 - discussion and debate
 - putting forward reasoned and justified points of view
 - an awareness of sequence and chronology



Bothwell Castle, overlooking the River Clyde, as it might have looked around 1420



The contents of Handling Box 1

Layer 1



Chainmail coif



Great helm



Shackles

Layer 2



Arrows



Layer 3



Coins



Falconry hood



Writing equipment





The contents of Handling Box 2

Layer 1



Chafing dish

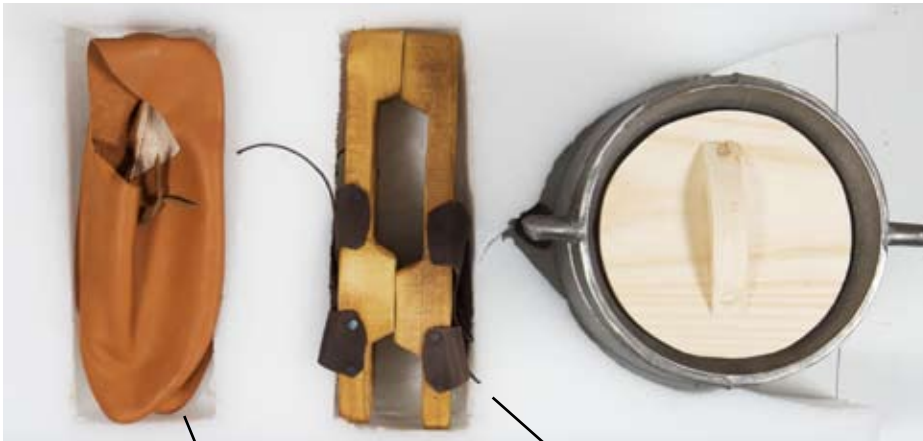


Pewter plate



Chalice

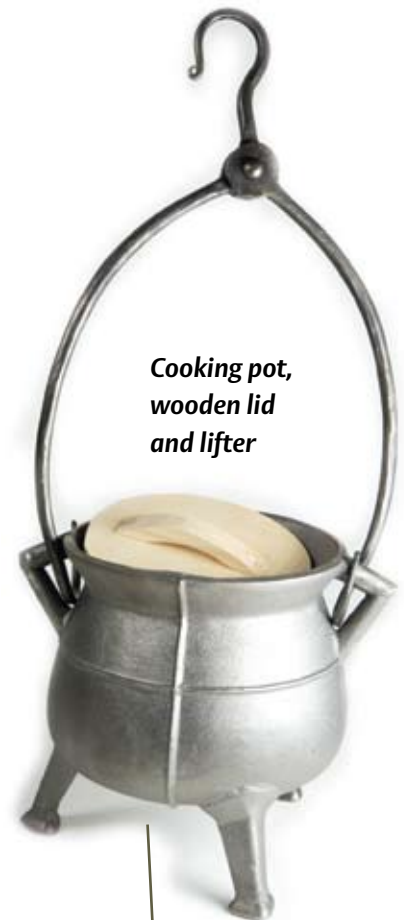
Layer 2



Turn shoes



Pattens



*Cooking pot,
wooden lid
and lifter*

Layer 3



Urinal





Integrating the Handling Boxes with classroom studies

Before leading a handling session using the boxes, you might want to prepare your class with a couple of simple activities to get them thinking about how to look at evidence and what objects can tell us about people's lives.

The rubbish game

Bring in a selection of some of your own personal, everyday objects. Be careful not to choose anything that is obviously yours, though; the idea is that the class have to build up the picture of a character from the objects.

Feel free to use your own imagination when selecting items, but some that can work well include:

- a bus/train ticket
- an ear-ring
- an empty drink bottle
- a food wrapper
- an old book
- an item of clothing (for example, a shoe)
- a cinema/theatre ticket (or similar)

Organise the class into small groups and pass the objects around. Ask the groups to consider each item in turn and discuss what they think the objects tell us about the owner. They can then report back their conclusions to the rest of the class.

After they have looked at several objects they will have built up a picture of the type of person that the evidence points to, for example their sex, hobbies, nationality, where they live, occupation, etc. You might actually be surprised by some of their conclusions! In the end you can reveal the identity of the mystery person (you).

The important point to emphasise here is that this is just how an archaeologist works by piecing together evidence from people's lives and coming to informed conclusions about the lives they led.

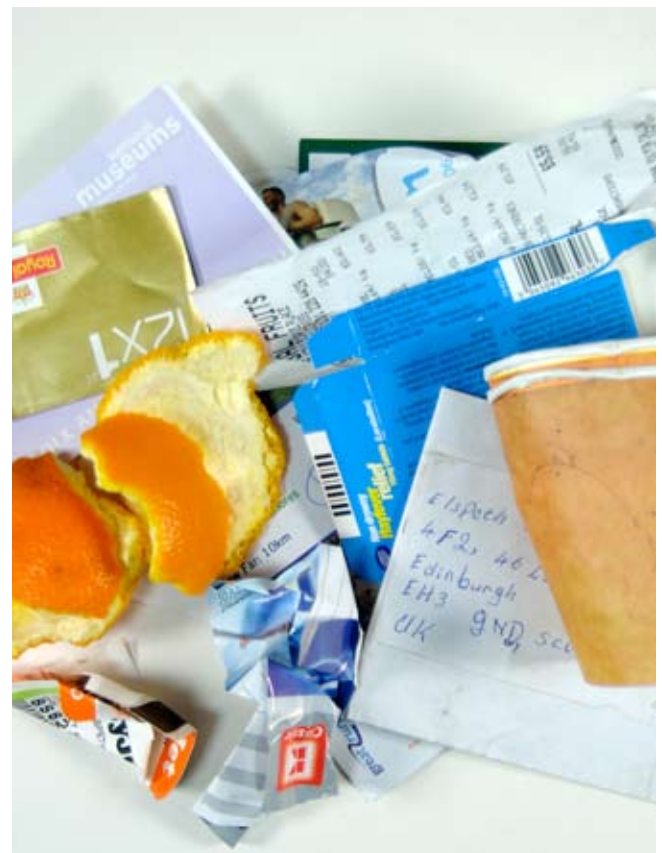
Mystery object

Another good way of getting pupils to really think about an object is to give them a 'mystery' object to investigate.

Bring in objects that the pupils are unlikely to be familiar with. Organise the class into groups. The groups can discuss each object and come up with their best idea as to what it might be.

Encourage the groups to think carefully about each object in front of them, consider all of its possible uses and agree on their best idea.

Finish with a feedback session with the whole class and open up all the ideas to debate. Each group can contribute their own ideas as to what each object might be, and perhaps even persuade others around to their point of view.





Object investigation sheet

Make a sketch of the object.

What do you think the object is made of?

Does it look like anything that we have today?

What might the object have been used for?

*Is there any decoration on the object?
What does it show?*

Do you think this was a valuable object?

*Does the object tell us anything about the people
who used it?*

Describe the colour.



Handling guidelines

All of the objects in the Handling Boxes are replicas and most of them are fairly robust. However, by following the simple guidelines listed in the next column you will help to ensure that any damage or wear to the objects is kept to a minimum.

You could even ask the pupils to think up their own set of handling rules before starting a session.



A primary pupil is helped to try on a great helm.

Guidelines

- Before a handling session examine the objects and assess any potential risks to the children in your group. This might, for example, involve careful monitoring of delicate or sharp objects.
- Take care when carrying the Handling Boxes. Use both hands and always ensure the boxes are the correct way up.
- Supervise the handling of the objects at all times.
- Ideally, handle the objects using both hands over a firm, clean surface such as a tabletop.
- If the boxes are being used on the floor, seat the children in a circle and pass the objects one at a time to and from the facilitator.
- Before returning the boxes after a session, please check that all the objects, and any accompanying material, are placed correctly in the boxes.
- Accidents do happen and the objects are replaceable. Please report any missing or damaged objects to Historic Scotland immediately. Please do not attempt to repair a broken object, but do return all the broken pieces.



Some secondary pupils are shown how a siege engine works.



Suggested handling session

There are various ways that you can organise a handling session using the boxes, depending on the size and ability of your class. Of course, it is entirely up to you how you want to use the resource, but the following suggestions might provide some useful pointers.

- Organise your class into small groups – ideally with no more than five to a group.
- Each group could concentrate on a different theme, for example Castle Defence, Domestic Life, Court Life.
- Then you can either give each group three or four objects to look at and discuss, or give each group one object to look at and discuss in detail.
- Allow each group 5–10 minutes to talk about and/or draw the objects.
- You can help to lead discussion by getting the class to list for each object:

◆ What they **see/feel**, for example:

What shape is it?

What colour is it?

Are there any patterns or decorations on it?

Is it heavy or light?

Is it rough or smooth?

Does it smell of anything?

◆ What they **think**, for example:

Who might have used it?

How does it work?

What might it have been used for?

What is it made of?

Is it broken? Is there anything missing? If so, how did it happen?

What is it?



Secondary pupils take turns to try on gauntlets.

◆ What they **wonder**, that is, any questions they still have about an object, for example:

Who owned it/used it?

What would you be doing if you were using this object?

Why is it made of these materials?

What is it?

How was it made?

Where might it be used?

- Of course, pupils will often ask their own questions about the objects and this should be encouraged. It might be useful to get someone to make a note of these questions so that they can carry out their own research, either on-site or back at school.
- The objects can then be rotated around each group.
- You can follow this up with a group discussion session where the pupils can share their ideas, discoveries and thoughts about the objects.



Notes on the objects

The following notes are intended to help group leaders to run a handling session. They provide information on each of the objects in the two Handling Boxes.

The objects can be grouped into three main themes:

- castle defences
- domestic life
- court life

Castle defences

Great helm

The great helm was commonly worn during the 14th century. It protected the wearer's whole head and face, with only small slits at the eyes for visibility. It was often only worn during the initial engagement in a battle and then taken off to allow greater freedom of movement, as it could become very uncomfortable and restrict the wearer's vision.



Chainmail coif

A coif was a chainmail hood that protected the wearer's head and neck. Chainmail was quite simple to produce, being made up of lots of small metal rings linked together. It was lighter and more flexible than plate armour, but provided excellent protection against sword blades or arrow points. Not all soldiers, however, would wear chainmail as it was very expensive, but it was an essential part of the armoury of any medieval knight or man-at-arms.





Arrows

There are three different arrows in the box. Each type had a distinct purpose.

Swallow-tailed arrow

This arrow was designed to cause as much damage as possible to your enemy. The swallow tail is obviously named after the vicious barb shape on the arrow head. If this was to enter your body, it would be impossible to pull out without making a real mess!

Triangular bodkin

An arrow like this was specifically designed to smash through enemy armour. The heavy, triangular head could pierce through chainmail.

Barbed hunting arrow

Arrows were designed specifically for hunting. A hunting arrow had a barbed head which ensured the arrow would remain in an animal's flesh.

Hunting would have been a popular pastime in the area around the site, and one in which the local lord and his friends would have indulged regularly. Hunting would usually have been carried out on horseback, normally using hounds to chase down the prey. Deer were commonly hunted and the greatest prize for a hunter was the male red deer – the hart.

Although hunting provided food for the table, it was also an important social event that could show off your status. It also provided essential training for war.



Shackles

Shackles like these would have been used to hold the prisoners in the castle prison. Those shown here are leg irons – a prisoner would not get far wearing a set of them. Leg irons would often have been attached to the walls, allowing the prisoner no prospect of movement. Pupils can try them on for size!



Domestic life

Urinal

A urinal (or *pis-pot* as it was known in medieval times) was made from clay and clearly designed for a man. It had a fairly obvious purpose – a pot like this would have been a handy receptacle for a gentleman to save him the walk to the draughty latrines on a cold winter's night. The handle at the top made it easily transportable for the unfortunate servant who would have had to empty the contents in the morning.



Cooking pot, wooden lid and lifter

This is a typical iron cauldron that would have been used in the castle kitchens. It would hold half a gallon (2 litres) of liquid. The three legs allowed it to stand above an open fire. It would have been lifted either by the handles on the sides or by attaching the lifter. The lifter could also be used as a hanger to suspend the cauldron over the fire.

Shoes

There are a pair of shoes and a pair of pattens in the Handling Boxes. The pupils are welcome to try these on for size.



Turn shoes

Most medieval shoes were front laced 'turn shoes' like these, sewn together inside-out and then turned right side out to keep the stitching protected from wear. In the 14th century shoes became more pointed in the toe and these were typical designs of the time.

Evidence from the time suggests that a large percentage of ordinary people simply went barefoot. However, simple thin shoes like these were often worn to provide some protection against damp and cold. You will notice that they were not nearly as thick and sturdy as the shoes we wear today.

Shoes called front-latchet shoes were worn by higher status individuals, but they didn't offer any more protection against the elements. They would have been worn by both ladies and well-dressed, fashionable men.



Pattens

By the late 14th century, wooden pattens like these also became common. Pattens, sometimes referred to as clogs, were a form of overshoe with a protective raised sole made from wood. This would have protected the actual shoes from the muck and filth that were part of medieval life.

Coins

The replica silver coins all date from the period of the Wars of Independence. Pupils can compare these coins with ones that we use today – a lot of similarities can be drawn.

In the bag there are silver coins from the reigns of Edward I, II and III. All three of these English kings invaded and occupied Scotland with their armies in the 14th century.

On the front of all of these coins, pupils will see the face of the king and a Latin inscription round the outside. They should be able to make out the following words:

EDWARD or EDWARDUS – DNS = Lord

REX = King – HYB/HIB = Ireland (Hibernia)

ANGL = England – FRA = France

Thus the inscriptions are all some variation on 'King Edward of England, France and Lord of Ireland'.

On the reverse, pupils will see a cross and the Latin 'CIVITAS LONDON', which just means 'made in London'. Also inscribed on the larger coins are the words 'POSUI DEUM ADIVTOR MEUM' meaning 'I have made God my helper.'

Also in the bag is a King Robert the Bruce silver coin. Robert the Bruce became Robert I of Scotland in 1306 and by 1328 eventually re-established Scotland as an independent nation.

On the front of this coin is the king's head in profile and the Latin inscription 'ROBERTUS DG', meaning 'Robert by the grace of God'. On the reverse are the words 'SCOTORUM REX' which simply means 'King of Scots'.





Court life

Falconry hood

Training a hawk was a painstaking process. In ancient times it was common to 'seal' the bird's eyelids by sewing them shut. This meant that it would not be scared or distracted. The trainer would then carry the hawk on his arm for several days to get it used to being around humans. The eyes were gradually unsealed and the training would begin.

By medieval times, instead of sealing the bird's eyes, they used a hood. Hoods are still used today to keep the bird calm, both in the early part of its training and throughout its falconry career. The hood is the falconer's most important piece of equipment.

During training the bird was encouraged to fly from its perch to the falconer's hand over a gradually longer distance. The bird was encouraged to hunt game, first by using meat, then a lure, and eventually live prey.

The birds were extremely valuable and got very special treatment. They even had their own accommodation, called a mews, which was at a distance away from the main buildings so that the birds were not disturbed.

Chalice

A medieval castle would normally have had its own chapel as a place of worship. The chalice was used to hold the sacramental wine during the Eucharist, just as it still is today. Naturally, the vessels used in this important act of worship were treated with great respect. Medieval chalices were often made of precious metal and were normally highly decorated. They were also sometimes richly jewelled as a sign of their importance.

Chafing dish and pewter plate

This bronze table-top chafing dish was a bit like a medieval barbecue. Hot coals would have been burned inside it and the plate or a small pot placed on the legs at the top. The dish would have ensured that food was kept warm in cold castles. Notice the holes around the side that allow air through to keep the coals burning.

A dish like this would have been used by high-status guests in the Great Hall.



**Writing equipment: quill, ink horn, sandbox, seal**

These are some of the tools of the trade used in medieval writing. In the Middle Ages, churchmen were amongst the few who could read and write and most manuscripts were made by hand in monasteries by people known as scribes. The production of manuscripts was a slow and expensive process.

Medieval manuscripts were generally written on pages of vellum or parchment made of animal skin, which is very strong and long-lasting. They were written using quill pens similar to the one that you see in the box. A strong feather was first buried in hot sand to make it stronger and less brittle. Usually the flights of the feather were removed, making it easier to handle. The nib was cut to shape with a small knife, splitting the end like the nib of a modern fountain pen. The pen was then ready for use.

In medieval illustrations a scribe is usually shown seated at a sloping desk equipped with ink horns, holding a quill pen in one hand and a small knife in the other. The knife was for re-cutting the quill and also worked as an eraser for small mistakes.

There were various recipes for making ink. The most common was iron gall ink, which was a combination of chemicals and parts of an oak tree mixed with wine, water or vinegar.

Sand from the sandbox was shaken over the wet ink to help it to dry.

The chief purpose of a seal like this one in the Middle Ages was to authenticate a document – just like a modern signature – at a time when the majority of the people could not read or write. As well as by royalty, seals were also widely used by barons, lords, monks and merchants.

Encourage pupils to look closely at the designs on the seal and see if they can identify any important figures and a coat of arms.



Suggestions for follow-up activities

The following suggestions can be used as ideas for further work back in the classroom.

Creative writing

A visit to a medieval castle and use of the Handling Boxes can inspire opportunities for creative writing exercises. Possible topics could include:

• Surviving the siege

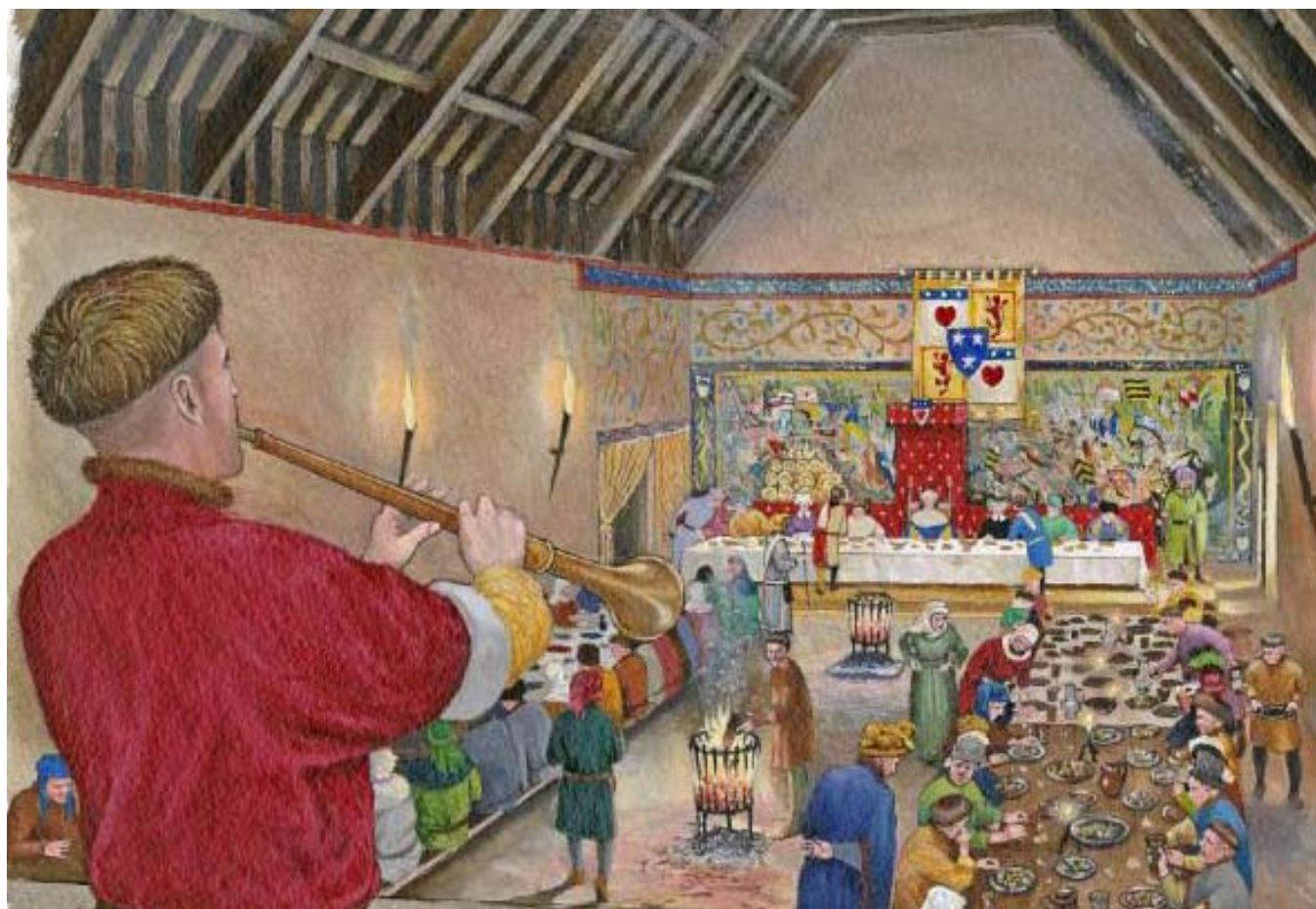
Pupils can imagine that they have to defend the castle, which has come under siege from an invading army. Describe the siege, the weapons that were used, how they defended the castle, how they felt (scared? excited?) and what the eventual outcome was.

• A lord's banquet

Pupils can imagine that they have been invited by the local lord to attend a banquet in the Great Hall. Describe the sights, sounds and smells of the occasion. What sort of food was served? What entertainment was provided? What did they wear? How did they feel walking into the Great Hall and seeing everyone?

• Living in the castle

Pupils can choose a character whom they have learned about who would have lived in a medieval castle – perhaps a priest, servant, lord or lady, or castle guard. Write about a day in the life of the castle for that person. This could possibly take the form of a diary entry or a letter.



The Great Hall of Bothwell Castle as it might have looked in the early 15th century



Some pupils role play a scene from life in a medieval castle.

Role play

A visit and use of the Handling Boxes might inspire plenty of group role-play ideas.

You could possibly use the ideas in the creative writing section to get the class to create and perform their own role plays.

Drawing and writing

Encourage pupils to make a record of one of the objects that they have worked with. They could choose a favourite object and record it by:

- making a detailed sketch of it
- researching information and creating their own interpretation label
- writing a short descriptive piece about it, for example:
My favourite object was the ...
I liked it because ...
I thought it was interesting because ...

Another alternative might be to create a souvenir postcard for a gift shop with their favourite object as the subject. Again, this would require a detailed drawing of the object and a short sentence to describe what it is.



Junior Guides in medieval costume at Craigmillar Castle, Edinburgh.

Class museum

The class could set up their own mini-museum in the classroom, based on their drawings and what they have learned about medieval castles. Groups could decide on their own theme for presentation, for example castle defences, court life, living in a castle.

Using the Handling Boxes as inspiration, they could even make their own artefacts, for example seals from clay or quill pens, and organise their displays with supporting labels, diagrams and photographs.



DID YOU KNOW?

Hunting with falcons and other birds of prey was a popular sport, and a status symbol amongst medieval nobles throughout Europe. It was especially popular with the Scottish nobility.

Background information for teachers

Although there were a few castles in Scotland before 1124, many more were built under the reign of David I (1124–53). Castles became an important part of his strategy for ruling his kingdom.

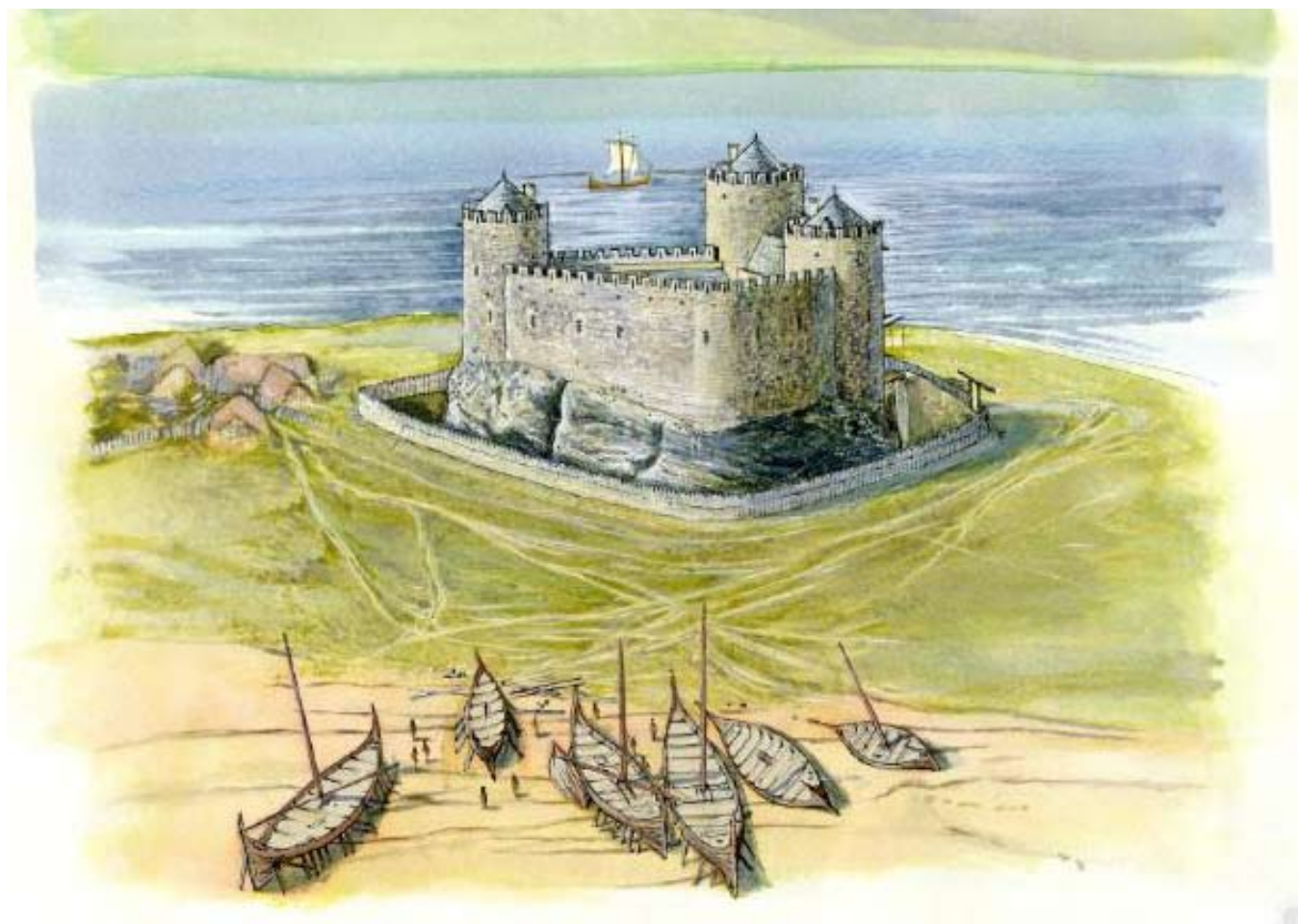
Who built the castles?

The king allowed his most trusted nobles to build castles and to govern on his behalf. They were responsible for collecting taxes and keeping law and order. The king also gave barons, knights and bishops the right to build castles and in return they provided men to fight for the king when he needed them. Castles also provided the king with somewhere

safe and comfortable to stay when he travelled round the country.

Why were they built?

Scottish castles were built to protect people from invasion from England and also from Viking raids. All castles were built to defend important locations such as river crossings, seaports or areas of land, so careful consideration of the site was very important. Many castles were built on hill-tops or rocky outcrops. Others were built on islands or peninsulas, making them as difficult to attack as possible.



An artist's impression of how Dunstaffnage Castle, overlooking the Firth of Lorn in Argyll, might have looked in medieval times



How were they built?

Early castles were usually built from earth and timber. They consisted of a wooden tower for the lord and lady, built on top of either a natural outcrop or an artificially raised mound of earth (motte). Castle buildings such as the Great Hall, stores, stables, chapel, kitchens, workshops and accommodation for people who lived in the castle were grouped together in a courtyard (bailey), at the base of the motte. The whole castle was encircled by an earth bank, ditch or moat.

Although these castles were quick and easy to construct, they rotted in damp conditions and were easily destroyed by fire. In the 13th century, stone-built castles appeared. These were stronger, fireproof and more permanent, giving extra protection against arrows and other weapons of attack. In addition, they also looked grander, adding to a lord's prestige.

Who lived there?

Castles differed in size and scale, but they all served the same purpose: to protect the owner and provide a home. All castles had to be fitted out for the daily life of the lord and lady and their family and servants. The greater the lord and lady, the more people lived in the household. There might be as many as 150 people living and working in and around the castle of a great lord.

What was life like in a castle?

Castles were damp, cold, dark and draughty places to live in. Heating and lighting depended on log fires and oil lamps fuelled with animal fat (which were very smelly). Only the lord and his family had beds – most people slept near to fires on the floors. The stench of animals, cooking, rotting food, smoke and unwashed bodies crowded together would have made most castles very foul-smelling and unpleasant.

The land around the castle would have provided a lot of the food. Hunting and fishing provided an important source of fresh meat and farms provided mutton, beef, pork and small birds. For special occasions there might be roast peacock and swan. Food was preserved for winter by salting, smoking or drying. Fruit, vegetables and herbs were grown on the castle estates, whilst spices imported from abroad added flavour. Honey from the castle's beehives was used as a sweetener.



A re-enactment of jousting at Linlithgow Palace

Most people, including children, drank ale brewed in the castle but the lord and his guests drank wine imported from France.

Entertainment included jousting tournaments, archery, hunting and hawking. Travelling musicians toured the country performing at feasts and celebrations in castles. Children amused themselves with simple toys and games.

The lord of the castle also had responsibility for law and order. Depending on their social status, wrong-doers were held in cells or pits until they were tried in the Great Hall. Then, depending on the crime, prisoners were fined, tortured, or hanged (only the nobility were beheaded). Prisoners of war were also held in castles. In medieval times these were often noblemen who were held captive until a ransom was paid. Since ransoms were extremely lucrative, it paid to keep these political prisoners alive and in comfort.



DID YOU KNOW?

Archers were an important part of a castle's defences. They would be positioned high along the castle's ramparts to fire rapidly at incoming enemies. A skilled archer was able to fire up to 15 arrows in just a minute. It was the archers' job to break the spirit of their enemies before they even got close.

Were they safe from attacks?

Castles were usually captured by siege, although sometimes attackers would take a castle by surprise. A siege could last for a day or several years. Attackers aimed to enter the castle forcibly by breaking down the walls. If this failed, they would try to starve the defenders out. Most castles did not have the resources to be defended for a long period and even the strongest castles fell after prolonged sieges by a large and powerful army.

More information on castles

More detailed information on medieval castles in Scotland is included in the Historic Scotland 'Investigating' series of publications, which can be found on the Historic Scotland website at:

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education_unit

Pupils will also find the series of Homework Helpers a useful resource for different aspects of medieval castle life. Again, these can be found on the Historic Scotland website at:

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education_unit



An artist's impression of the siege of Caerlaverock Castle, in Dumfries and Galloway, in 1300 by Edward I of England



Additional resources

For teachers

BOOKS

Official Historic Scotland guidebooks to our sites are essential reading for teachers. These provide further details on the architecture and history of the sites.

Historic Scotland Education *Investigating Medieval Castles in Scotland* Historic Scotland 2005

This publication, designed for teachers, contains lots of background on castle life and suggestions for class activities.

Historic Scotland Education *Investigating The Wars of Independence: 1296–1357* Historic Scotland 2005

Designed for teachers, this publication gives an informative overview of the period with suggestions for sites to visit and class activities.

Chris Tabraham *Scottish Castles and Fortifications* Historic Scotland 2000

Hands On. Learning from Objects and Paintings: A Teacher's Guide Museums Galleries Scotland 2008

This excellent guide to working with objects in the classroom can be purchased from Glasgow Museums, Communications Section, Martyrs' School, Parson Street, Townhead, Glasgow G4 0PX Tel: 0141 271 8307.

Gail Durbin, Mike Corbishley, Susan Morris and Susan Wilkinson *Learning From Objects: A Teacher's Guide* English Heritage 1990

An extremely useful handbook for teachers with plenty of advice and guidance on working with objects and running handling sessions.

WEBSITES

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education_unit

Further information about school visits, activities and resources for teachers.

Downloadable tours for several Historic Scotland sites which are included in the 'Investigating ...' series of publications.

For pupils

BOOKS

Allan Burnett *Robert the Bruce and All That* and *William Wallace and All That* Birlinn 2006

Relevant titles from the popular series presenting key characters from the past in a lively and engaging style.

English Heritage *What Were Castles For?* Usborne 2002

A title from the *Starting Points in History* series.

Christopher Gravett *Eyewitness Castle* Dorling Kindersley 2002
Lavishly illustrated guide to castles and castle life across the world.

Terry Deary *Bloody Scotland* Scholastic 1998

One of the ever-popular *Horrible Histories* series. Lively, engaging and provocative.

WEBSITES

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education_unit

A series of Homework Helpers that explore different aspects of medieval castle life can be found on the Historic Scotland website at the address above.

www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory

An excellent library of resources for pupils relating to various eras in Scotland's history. Useful for personal research projects. Includes games and information.

www.nationalgeographic.com/castles/enter.html

Explore a virtual castle.

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