

Warwick Castle: Bringing the past to life

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Britain is a nation of castles and churches. One of the largest, most well preserved with numerous attractions, such as the knights' school, is Warwick Castle just over an hour's train ride from London's Marylebone Station.

The castle is set in 60 acres of landscaped grounds and gardens, which include the beautiful Peacock Garden and Conservatory, the Victorian Rose Garden and Pageant Field.

A fortified town (burh) was first established at Warwick by Aethelflaed, widow of King Ethelred, in 914-6. The castle was created as a fortification in AD 914, to protect the small

hilltop settlement from Danish invaders who posed a threat to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia. It was later enlarged by William the Conqueror who turned it into a motte and bailey fort in 1068. At the time of the Domesday book (1086) the only towns in what is now the county of Warwickshire were Warwick, Tamworth and Coventry. Warwick had a population of around 1800.





In the early 17th century, Sir Fulke Greville converted the castle into a country house. It was owned by the Greville family, who became earls of Warwick in 1759, until 1978. From 1088, the castle traditionally belonged to the Earl of Warwick, and served as a symbol of his power. It was taken in 1153 by Henry of Anjou, later King Henry II. It has been used to hold prisoners, including some from the Battle of Poitiers in the 14th century. Under the ownership of Richard Neville – also known as "Warwick the Kingmaker" – Warwick Castle was used in the 15th century to imprison the English king, Edward IV.

Since its construction in the 11th century, the castle has undergone structural changes with additions of towers and redesigned residential buildings. Originally a wooden motte-and-bailey, it was rebuilt in stone in the 12th century. During the Hundred Years War, the facade opposite the town was refortified, resulting in one of the most recognisable examples of 14th century military architecture. In the 17th century the grounds were turned into a garden.

Warwick Castle was purchased by The Tussauds Group in 1978 and opened as a major tourist attraction. It is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Grade I listed building. It has been compared with Windsor Castle in terms of scale, cost, and status.





The gardens are as much of an attraction as the castle itself. Formal gardens belonging to Warwick Castle were first recorded in 1534. Landscaping in the 17th century added spiral paths to the castle motte during Fulke Greville's programme of restoration. Francis Greville commissioned Lancelot Brown to relandscape the castle grounds; he began working on the grounds and park in 1749 and had completed his work by

1757, having spent about £2,293 (£250 thousand as of 2009) on the project. The gardens cover 2.8 square kilometres (690 acres).

Robert Marnock created formal gardens in the castle's grounds in 1868–69.

Started in 1743 and originally known as Temple Park, Castle Park is located to the south of the castle. Its original name is derived from the Knights Templar who used to own a

manor in Warwick. Houses around the perimeter of the park were demolished and the land they stood on incorporated into the park. Attempts to make profits from the park in the late 18th century included leasing it for grazing, growing wheat, and keeping sheep. A water-powered mill in the castle grounds was probably built under Henry de Beaumont, 1st Earl of Warwick. By 1398 the mill had been relocated to just outside the eastern castle walls, on the west

bank of the River Avon. Both mills were subject to flooding. By 1644, an engine house had been added. The mill was reused as an electricity generating plant after it had stopped being used to grind, but once Warwick Castle was fitted with mains electricity in 1940, it was no longer required and was dismantled in 1954. The water wheel from the mill is still working and has been turned into a living museum.





Today, visitors can explore the varied history of the castle's dungeons. There is an impressive display of waxwork figures, showing how the rooms would have looked in the late 19th century. Across the River Avon is the Island, where jesters, archers and craftsmen show off their skills in the summer months alongside re-enactments of battles and tournaments.