

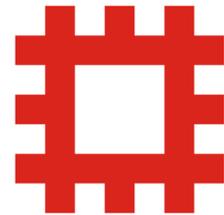
ARCHITECTURE

April 2019: English Heritage

This month we had an introduction to the history of the English Heritage organisation, followed by a viewing of one of its DVDs.

About English Heritage

There has been a long history of protecting noteworthy heritage sites in this country. The 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act identified 50 sites that would be monitored. This was superseded by an Act in 1913 and by 1931 over 3,000 'monuments' had preservation orders and 270 were in public ownership. The 1947 Town and Country Act provided for the listing of important buildings. During this period various Ministries of Works looked after important sites and buildings, and after WW2 industrial heritage sites and castles were brought into the mix. By 1970 there were 300 sites. Note the difference with the National Trust that mostly owns stately homes.



English Heritage was started as a non-departmental body (now known as a 'quango') in 1983 combining the work of several public bodies concerned with heritage protection. Financially it made its first operating surplus in 2011. In April 2015 it was split into two. One part - Historic England - took over the statutory responsibilities for preservation. The other part – English Heritage – became a charity responsible for operating the sites for the benefit of the public. It now gets over 5 million visitors a year at its 400 sites, which include Stonehenge, Iron Bridge, Dover Castle and locally Donnington Castle.

The video gave insights into nine of these sites, the highlights of which follow.*

1. Kenilworth Castle

Originally a Norman stronghold, it was a mansion with a keep that in 1266 withstood a siege for 9 months. In the late 14th century it was modernised by John of Gaunt who created a Great Hall. In its grounds was once a large lake – the Great Mere – since drained and now a meadow. It became a popular tourist attraction in the 19th century. It has geometric shaped gardens which were restored in the 1970s.



2. Down House near Reigate

This former home of Charles Darwin dates from the 17th century but was extensively extended and rebuilt in 1783. Darwin made alterations to suit his lifestyle and there are many artefacts of the type that he used there today, including a revolving drum table and a microscope. He worked in his study daily from 8am, writing in 1- 1½ hour stints. Pride of place among the artefacts is his hand-written diary of his first voyages. From 1907-1922 it was Downe House School for Girls, now located at Cold Ash. The house was acquired by English Heritage in 1996, restored and later turned into a Darwin museum.

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3. Orford Castle near Felixstowe

This was another Norman fortress (notice the small windows). The keep was set high on the marshes with a clear view of the surroundings. Its design reflects both the circular design of castles together with the squared buttresses of other Norman buildings. It had a well that enabled it to withstand sieges lasting months. The castle opened to the public in 1930 and came into public ownership in 1962.



4. Framlingham Castle



Also in Suffolk, this castle was completed around 1213 on the site of an earlier castle destroyed by King Henry II. Made predominantly of flint it has no keep but was defended by 13 mural towers and relied on the strength of its walls. It is estimated that just 50 people with cross-bows could defend it. Its grounds were extensive forming a 600 acre Grand Park.

5. Bolsover Castle near Sheffield

Dating from 1608, it took 35 years to build from local stones. Among its key features are oak roof beams, a vaulted ceiling and an alabaster and marble fireplace in the hall. It has “a labyrinth of rooms” which include the interesting Jacobean Pillar Parlour. In recent years a walk along the top of the castle’s walls has been opened for visitors.



6. Brodsworth Hall near Doncaster

The current T-shaped house was built in Italianate style in place of an earlier house, and is virtually unchanged since its completion in 1863. It is built of limestone, some from the estate. Gifted to English Heritage in 1990, a major conservation programme preserved its interior with many of the original furnishings. Three sets of marble steps lead down from the terrace to the lawn and a ring of gardens and pleasure grounds.



7. Castle Acre Priory, Norfolk

These are the impressive remains of a late 12th century priory, which was once home to 20-30 monks. Its features are the beautiful West gable, the prior’s lodging and other buildings around the site. The place grew in importance as a stopping off place for pilgrims on their way to Walsingham.



8. Carisbrooke Castle, Isle of Wight

One of Britain’s finest Norman castles. Charles I was prisoner in the Governor’s House from 1647-8. Things to see are the Great Hall, the Constable’s Chamber, the chapel and the Well House which has a donkey wheel for drawing up water.



9. Walmer Castle and Gardens

Walmer was one of the five Cinque Ports. In 1539 King Henry VIII turned the fort here into a comfortable country home, which later became the official residence of the Warden of the Cinque Ports. In the 1950s new formal gardens were created, including a rectangular pond with impressive reflections.

