



Kenilworth Castle by Jamie Gray Photography

Welcome to Kenilworth, a place most definitely worth your time.... Step into our monumental story amongst the noble ruins of Abbey Fields, or venture just a little further into beautiful countryside alive with nature. Spend a day uncovering the rich threads of our history, browse intriguing shops or simply kick back over some fabulous food & drink.

But wait, there's more here than you'd think So, slow down, savour each moment and...

Discover the story for yourself...



Lapidarium Wall in Abbey Ruins by James Turner

Want a deeper experience?

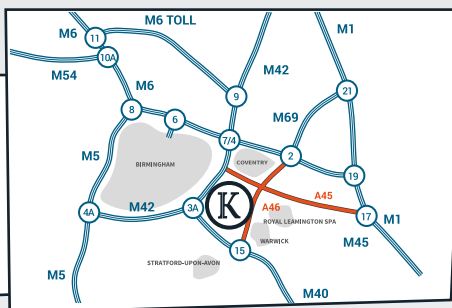
This leaflet is just the tip of the iceberg! We have also developed a companion mobile website which expands on each of our trails, with bags more information and interactive features.



Visit the website or scan the QR code:

visit.kenilworthweb.co.uk/discover/trails

Getting here:



By Car

Kenilworth is located on the A46 just 6 miles from both Coventry and Warwick.

There is plenty of parking in the town centre at Abbey End.

By Bus

Regular services connect Kenilworth with Warwick, Royal Leamington Spa and Coventry.

www.traveline.info

By Train

Trains run regularly from Kenilworth Station to Coventry and Royal Leamington Spa.

www.nationalrail.co.uk

By Foot or By Bike

The Kenilworth Greenway connects to Berkswell and the Centenary and Millennium Ways pass through the town.

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/pathsandtrails

Further Information:

Visit visit.kenilworthweb.co.uk for more information



Visit www.shakespeares-england.co.uk for information on the wider area



Supported by the
**HS2 Business &
Local Economy Fund**



**Kenilworth
Town Council**

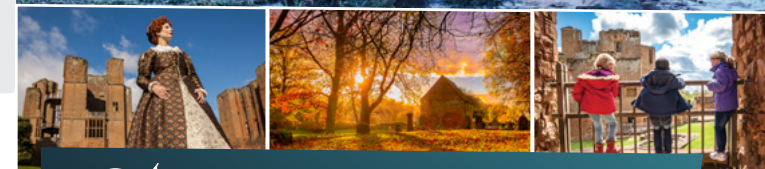
These trails were produced by Kenilworth Town Council, and were funded by a grant from HS2's Business & Local Economy Fund (BLEF), adding benefit to communities demonstrably disrupted by the construction of Phase One of HS2 from London to West Midlands.

Design by: www.blackspiraldesign.co.uk

visit.kenilworthweb.co.uk

Visit Kenilworth

Castle & Abbey Trail



Discover Kenilworth's greatest story!

3.5 Miles Approx. 2 hours

Easy route on roads & footpaths (can be muddy)

Cover image by Matthew Sugars Photography. Inset images © English Heritage & Jonathan Corbett Photography

visit.kenilworthweb.co.uk

Kenilworth's Greatest Story...

Uncover the monumental tale behind Kenilworth's greatest treasures! A tale of love, death, triumph and tragedy all played out across the ruined stones of the Castle and the Abbey. Uncover the truth, shatter myths and enjoy a journey through some of the greatest moments of Kenilworth's history.

The walk is around **3.5 miles** and takes approximately **2 hours** (not including a visit to the Castle). The route is mostly on roads and paths, but can be muddy in winter, particularly on the site of the mere, however the views and stories make it worthwhile!

Start: Abbey End

Postcode (for Sat Nav): CV8 1QJ

Coordinates (for GPS): 52.344, -1.579

Plentiful parking is available in Abbey End or Square West

www.warwickdc.gov.uk/info/20548/kenilworth_car_parks

Start your walk at the pedestrian area in **Abbey End**. You'll find options for refreshments nearby as well as public toilets. **Cross the road to the Holiday Inn and head right along Abbey End to the War Memorial.**

1 The Beginning

In 1119 **King Henry I** granted land on the Royal Manor of Stoneleigh to his Chamberlain **Geoffrey de Clinton**. On the king's orders, Geoffrey built a **Castle** to the west, raising a stone keep on a sandstone outcrop protected by marshy ground. This made the castle a formidable stronghold and a key defence of Henry's realm east of the Forest of Arden. Geoffrey further gifted land (the current Abbey Fields) for the establishment of an **Augustinian Priory**. **Take Forrest Road to the Junction. Turn right, cross Borrowell Lane and then turn left on the small road and bear right behind houses to reach woodland. On leaving woods turn right and follow the track to the gate next to the Castle ticket office.**



Kenilworth Castle in 1575. © Historic England Archive (illustration by Peter Urmston)



Sandstone in Castle Walls

2 The Castle Defences

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/kenilworth-castle/

Around 1210 **King John** built the Castle's outer walls and towers, with stone from the quarry on the hill behind you. The defences were further reinforced by earthworks on this side of the brook (known as the Brays), likely topped with a wooden palisade. In 1266 after the death of the rebel **Simon de Montfort, Sir Henry de Hastings** refused to surrender the Castle, holding it in the name of Simon's wife and son. In response, **King Henry III** laid siege to the Castle for almost six entire months. Trebuchets hurled 300lb stones against the walls, although they would prove ineffective against the sturdy defences. **Continue west on the footpath through three gates.**

Short Cut...

For a shorter walk... Continue ahead towards the Castle then right around the walls anti-clockwise to the car park, cross the road and bear right to rejoin the main route at point 7.



Working Trebuchet at Warwick Castle by-nc-sa/2.0 - © Hari Menon



Re-enactment of a Norman siege at Kenilworth Castle © English Heritage

3 The Mere

The walls were not the castle's only defence however, Finham Brook was dammed at the tilyard to create a huge artificial lake. The **"Mere"** was 1.2km long and in places 152m wide defending the Castle on two sides and creating a moat on the others. These formidable defences kept Henry's siege engines at a distance and forced an unsuccessful night-time assault using barges hauled overland. In later times the Mere became more of a royal pleasure lake for boating, hosting regattas, and as a backdrop to firework displays. **Turn right along the track and continue through two fields to reach the Pleasance.**



Fireworks over Kenilworth Castle by Wael



The Pleasance in 1420 © Historic England Archive (illustration by Peter Urmston)

4 The Pleasance

In the early 15th century, **Henry V** built the **"Pleasance in the Marsh"**, a secluded banqueting lodge hidden away here on the edge of the Mere. Reachable by boat, the four-acre site comprised a rectangular moated earthwork topped by timber buildings, with stone towers at each corner, and enclosing a courtyard garden. Sadly, it was demolished on the orders of Henry VIII in 1524.

The land around the Mere had been used as a royal hunting park since the 14th century but around 1565 **Robert Dudley** expanded this by 800 acres to create a walled hunting forest or "chase". **Take the gate to your right and continue on footpath to Purlieu Lane. Continue until Castle comes into view.**

Continue overleaf...



Elizabeth I at Kenilworth Castle © English Heritage

Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester

stripped of its wealth, much of its stone re-cycled (mainly by Robert Dudley) and it was left to ruin. The 1370 **Gatehouse**, was the main entrance to the abbey, manned by a porter who lodged in the adjacent two-storey rooms. A wall or further structures would have created a courtyard extending to the museum and the cloister. **Walk east from the gatehouse through the churchyard, the southern part of the ruin is the Outer Parlour.**

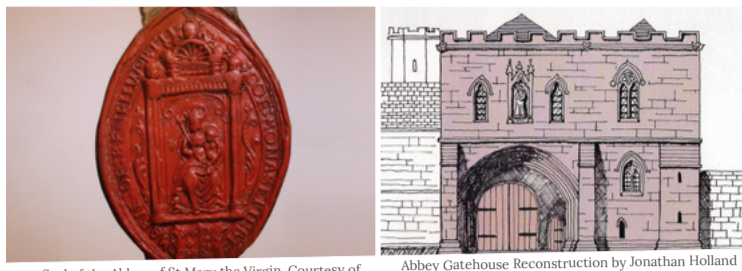


1922 Excavation of the Chapter House by Ken Blackham courtesy of Kenilworth History & Archaeology Society

1922 Excavation of the dormitory by Ken Blackham courtesy of Kenilworth History & Archaeology Society

5 Elizabeth I & Robert Dudley

Over time the castle developed from fortress to palace; **John of Gaunt** added the immense great hall and Robert Dudley undertook extensive works in anticipation of the visits by **Queen Elizabeth I**. He also constructed a 183m bridge over the mere to give access to the chase. Much has been written of their "romance" but "Kenilworth" by **Sir Walter Scott** is the most famous (albeit fictional) representation. A theory suggests a young **William Shakespeare** may have visited in 1575 with this view inspiring Theseus' Palace in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*. **Continue along Purlieu Lane, turning right through the gate.**



Seal of the Abbey of St Mary the Virgin. Courtesy of the Public Records Office, London.

Abbey Gatehouse Reconstruction by Jonathan Holland courtesy of the Harry Sunley Memorial Project

6 Golden Age & Decline

Dudley spared no expense for **Elizabeth I's** visit in 1575 with lavish pageants, hunts, barge cruises and fireworks over the Mere. The castle was taken by parliamentary forces in 1642, and its defences dismantled, including breaching the dam at the tilyard to empty the Mere (known as Hawkesworth's gap). The castle deteriorated, and although famous as a tourist attraction, its stones were reused elsewhere in Kenilworth, with only Leicester's Gatehouse maintained. In 1937 car manufacturer **Sir John Siddeley** bought the castle and in 1958 the freehold passed to Kenilworth Urban District Council. **Continue anticlockwise, over the Tilyard, until you reach the car park. Cross the road and turn right.**

9 The Abbey Ruins

The **Outer Parlour** was where visitors were received. Extending southwards was a wing of storerooms with possibly guest accommodation above. **Henry III** would have likely lodged here during the siege. Ahead is the square **Cloister** which extended beyond the churchyard wall. The Cloister was surrounded by a covered arcade lined with seating, for the canons to work. Part of the north wall (the "Lapidarium") was rebuilt in 1984 using decorated stonework discovered in the 1922 excavations. **Take the steps into the nave.**



Reconstruction of the Abbey © The Virtual Experience Company

North Wall of the Cloister

11 The Chapter House

Much of this green space would have been occupied by buildings, including the two-storey infirmary to the south east and the dormitories and latrines which ran south as far as the tennis courts. Used for meetings, the **Chapter House** was a large building 15m long and 8.5m wide, decorated with ribbed vaulting and Romanesque arches. The visible wall is actually just the tip of the iceberg and would have been over 20m high and 2m thick! Excavations in 1922 uncovered two stone coffins, and theories abound that these are the tombs of **Geoffrey de Clinton**, his son or the first prior of the Abbey. **Follow the churchyard wall then turn left at museum and bear right around the Swimming Pool.**

*** Detour: Abbey Museum**

If it's open, make sure to stop at the **Abbey Museum**, housed in the only complete medieval structure remaining. Run by volunteers, it houses a detailed interpretation of the Abbey and artefacts from the Bronze Age to 20th century.

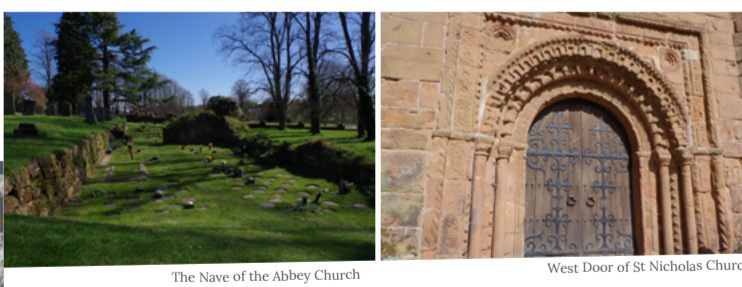
www.khas.co.uk/kenilworth-abbey-museum-heritage-centre-abbey-fields-kenilworth/

7 Castle Hill

In July 1266 Papal Legate **Cardinal Ottobuono** (later Pope Adrian V) excommunicated the castle's defenders, from beyond catapult range on Castle Hill. It did not have the intended effect as a defender dressed as the papal legate subsequently returned the favour to the King and his army! However, by December 1266 famine and disease had finally bought the siege to an end.

The cottages of **Little Virginia** date from the 17th century although there is evidence of earlier structures and stone working indicating housing for masons in Dudley's time. Excavation in 1973 also discovered a sandstone wall that would have marked the boundary of Abbey lands. **Continue uphill, turn right into Abbey Fields. Follow the tarmac path downhill.**

The **Abbey Church**, whilst dating from the Abbey's founding was extended under the patronage of **John of Gaunt**. This created a vast church with walls 45ft high that ran some 283 feet to the high altar at the far eastern end. The canons would have attended prayer here eight times a day. Excavations have uncovered numerous tombs including that of at least one prior. **Up a level to your left** are the remains of the octagonal **Bell tower**, built separately due to the weight of the bells. **Return to the nave, walk east along its length and bear left at the churchyard wall.**



The Nave of the Abbey Church

West Door of St Nicholas Church

8 The Abbey Gatehouse

www.khas.co.uk/abbey-of-st-mary-the-virgin-kenilworth/

The **Augustinian priory of St Mary the Virgin** was founded in 1119. It became one of the largest in the Midlands and in 1447 the Pope raised it to Abbey status. Dissolved in 1538 it was

10 St Nicholas Church

Dating from 1291 St Nicholas provided a place of worship for the community who were not allowed in the Abbey. It features several Abbey remnants, including the West Door – built from Abbey stones in a renaissance frame. On her visit in 1575 **Elizabeth I** attended two services here so the door may have been part of Dudley's efforts to impress. Inside are carved stone seats from the Abbey and a "pig of lead", discovered in 1888. Often thought to be the Abbey's roof, it could be one (or several) of the Abbey's bells, melted down after dissolution (and therefore not lead either!). **Return to the churchyard wall and follow the outside southwards towards the large ruined wall.**

12 Abbey Pool & Fields

www.friendsofabbeyfields.org.uk

To support the Abbey, the surrounding land was given over to food production with orchards, a vineyard, pastures and gardens. A dam, constructed c1200, created the Abbey Pool (roughly on the site of the modern lake). This was stocked with fish and powered a watermill on the south bank of the brook. A bridge over the brook has existed since the 12th century although it was washed away and replaced at least twice. Following dissolution, the land remained private, but a concerted effort over the last 150 years has made it a public space. **Continue around the Swimming pool to iron bridge. Turn right uphill back to the War Memorial and Abbey End.**

Finish!

You've certainly earned a reward so why not grab a tasty treat or tipple before you call it a day?

Check out the directory: visit.kenilworthweb.co.uk/food-drink

If you enjoyed this trail then why not try another next time you visit?

Find more trails at: visit.kenilworthweb.co.uk/discover/trails



Kenilworth Castle after JMW Turner 1832 - cc-by-nc-nd(3.0 Unported) Photo © Tate - <https://bit.ly/3fMwvzv>



Pope Adrian V by Artaud de Montor (1772 - 1849)

Robert Dudley's initial on former Castle stonework at Robsart Cottage