

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF KENILWORTH CASTLE'S ELIZABETHAN GARDEN

EXCAVATION AND INVESTIGATION
2004–2008

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1. Introduction

As part of the Property Development Programme for Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire, English Heritage created an ambitious reconstruction of the former Elizabethan garden on the north side of the castle keep (Keay 2013a). In order to achieve a reliable representation of the original garden, a team with a broad range of specialist knowledge was brought together to advise first upon the practicality of undertaking the project and then to assist in the delivery of its design. Related detailed studies have been assembled in an English Heritage monograph, *The Elizabethan Garden at Kenilworth Castle*, edited by Anna Keay and John Watkins (2013). An overview of the archaeological component of the project is contained within that monograph, but a full account of the archaeological investigations in the garden area could not be included due to space restrictions (Dix *et al* 2013). The present report is therefore intended to provide the necessary detail relating to the Elizabethan garden, as well as medieval remains, later Civil War activity, and more recent land-use. The excavations have the project number 3866, with the associated archive and finds retained by English Heritage.

A previous garden reconstruction had been attempted in 1975, and was based on a plan of the Kenilworth garden published in William Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* in 1656. The decision to undertake a further re-creation of the Elizabethan garden was partly based on evidence from archaeological evaluation carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology, a service of Northamptonshire County Council (now MOLA Northampton) in autumn 2004, and from two seasons of more extensive work in 2005 and 2006. This period of works included open-area excavation and individual further trenches intended to elucidate specific aspects of the boundaries to the garden and southern terrace (Figs 1.1 and 2.1). Amongst other discoveries, the work uncovered for the first time the foundation of an

octagonal fountain basin described by Robert Langham in a contemporary letter relating to Queen Elizabeth I's visit in 1575 (Keay and Watkins 2013 Appendix 1.1; Goldring 2013). Its discovery showed that the 1975-garden reconstruction had little in common with the Elizabethan garden (Keay 2013b, 80-82). The results of the excavation also clarified to some extent the original dimensions of the garden, the foundation level upon which the fine surfacing detail would have been applied, and contributed to understanding its geometry, including the identification of a series of rubble-filled pits which may relate to possible locations of structural elements.

As the purpose of the excavation was to investigate the Elizabethan garden, only limited work was carried out on the preceding medieval use of the north court, and any associated remains were largely sealed below make-up layers intended to create a level surface for the garden. Two principal medieval features were examined: part of the north curtain wall and associated flanking towers; and the inner bailey ditch. The excavation also shed light upon the history of the site during the English Civil War as well as showing how the garden was subsequently cultivated and used up to the late twentieth century.

During the construction phase of the new garden, the present surface was built up from the now protected foundation level identified in the 2005-6 excavation, so that service runs and other interventions are mostly contained within the introduced soils. However, due to new access arrangements being made into the garden from the forebuilding and also to the east, further archaeological recording was undertaken in those areas. A watching brief was also carried out along the line of a new service trench which extended east of the garden, before turning north to connect with mains supplies in Castle Road. As the trench was only 300mm deep, only modern layers were encountered.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF KENILWORTH CASTLE'S ELIZABETHAN GARDEN

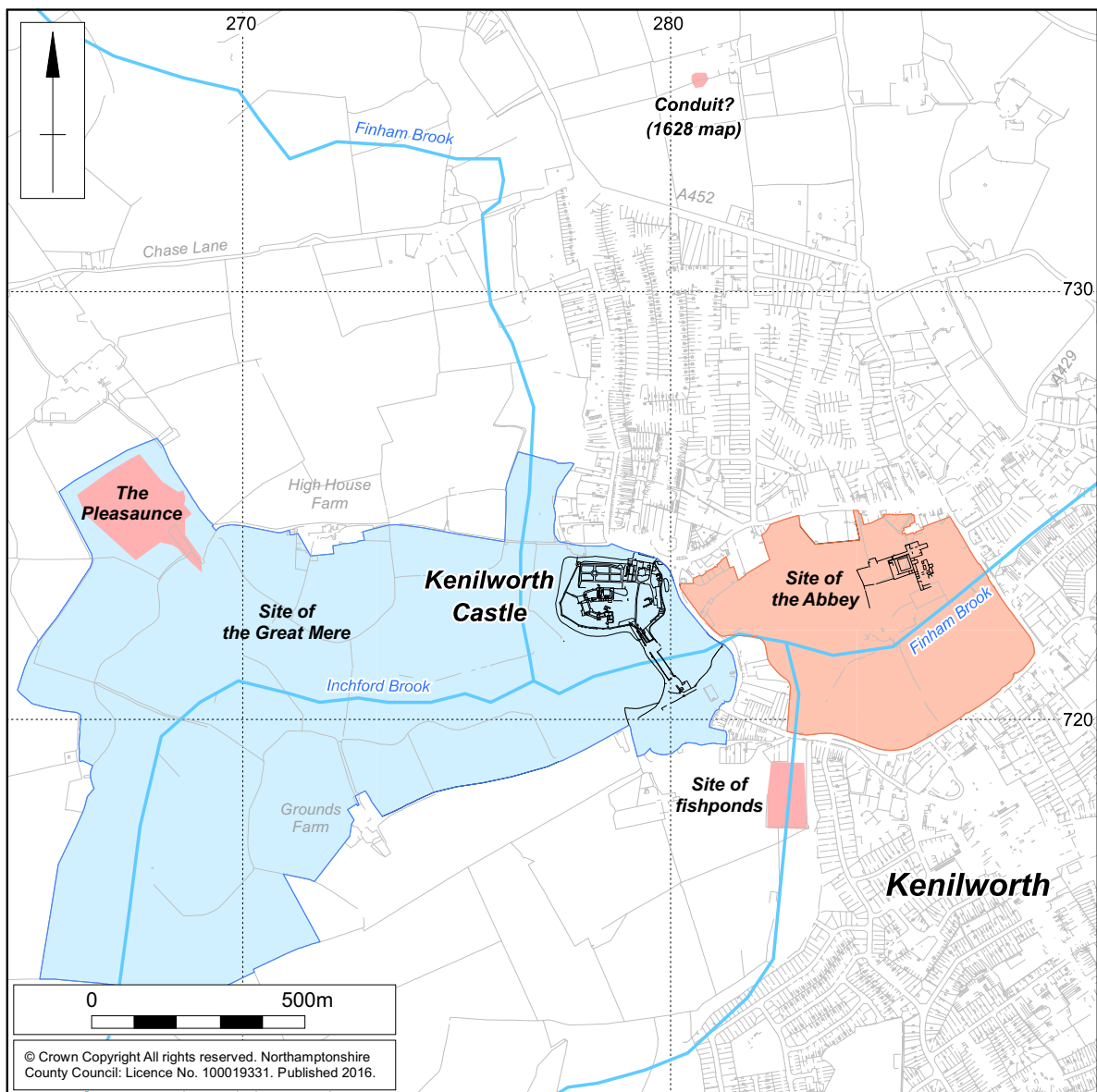
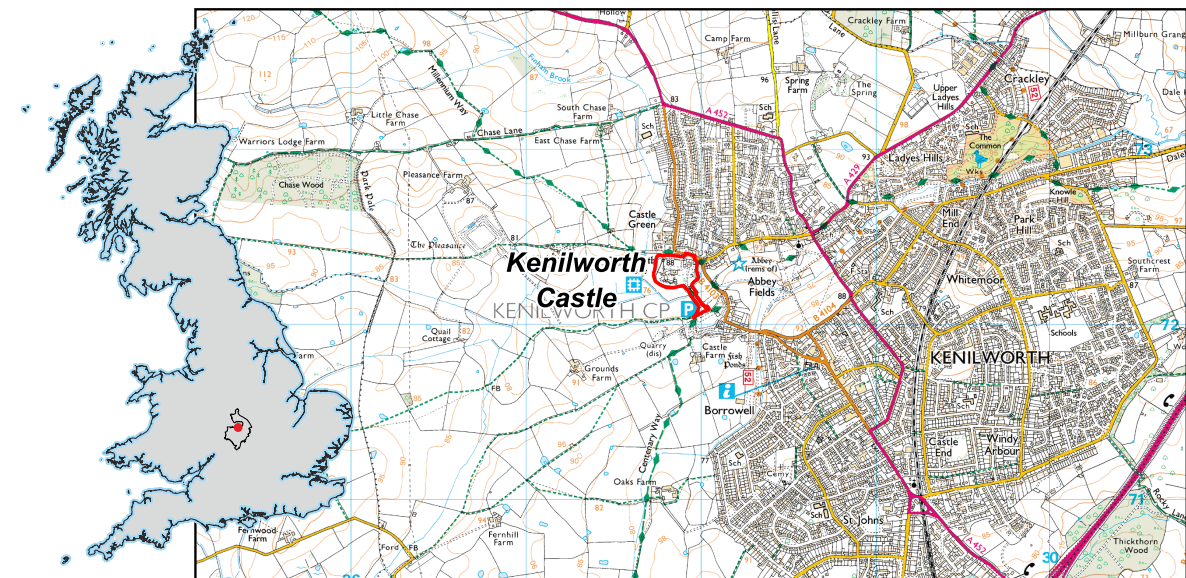


FIGURE 1.1 SITE LOCATION

2. Background

Location, topography and geology

Kenilworth Castle lies to the north-west of the town, bounded to the north and north-east by modern development and on its other edges by fields and open land. It is a site of national importance, comprising spectacular ruined buildings of various periods and is currently managed by English Heritage as a flagship property which enjoys high visitor numbers. The castle is a Grade I Listed Building and a Scheduled Monument (nos. 1035327, 1014041 and 1000496 in the National Heritage List for England), centred on NGR SP 278 723 (Fig 1.1).

The area of the former Elizabethan garden lies on the north side of the red sandstone twelfth-century keep (Fig 2.1). It was contained within the line of the former north curtain wall, now marked by a hedge inside a later garden wall that was built further out on a slightly different alignment. The garden occupied the only large, fairly flat, space within the castle on the north side of the keep. A very gentle slope down to the south and west is barely discernible. On the south side of the garden a low earth bank or terrace extends either side of the forebuilding beside the outer wall of the keep. At the west, the garden area is bordered by a stone wall, possibly of sixteenth-century date, with a modern beech hedge planted in front of it. The east and north sides are also bounded by recently planted beech hedges. The entire garden area is a roughly rectangular plot of approximately 0.5ha which, until the 2005-6 works, was occupied by a topiary 'Tudor Garden' laid out in 1975.

The natural geology of the site comprises an outcrop of Bunter Sandstone and Conglomerates overlain by sands and gravels of Pleistocene origin. Study of the levelling layer within the excavation area showed that the natural surface originally sloped gently westwards towards the Great Mere. For this reason, the area had to be levelled to create the Elizabethan garden.

The castle occupies the southern end of a long, low promontory from which the ground falls away on the east, south and west sides. The primary defensive element, the keep, occupies the highest point with its four walls corresponding with the cardinal points. The keep and other buildings around it were enclosed within a north curtain wall studded with a series of towers, some of which remain. The neck of the promontory was defended by the cutting of a great ditch which protected the northern section of the outer bailey. Marshes on the south and west sides at the junction of the Finham and Inchford brooks were later flooded by the creation of a dam to create the Great Mere, which afforded added protection on the south side of the castle (Fig 1.1).

Historical and archaeological background

For a convenient history see the English Heritage guidebook (Morris 2010), upon which much of the following summary is based.

Kenilworth Castle was established in the 1120s as an earth-and-timber stronghold by Geoffrey de Clinton, Chamberlain to King Henry I (1100-35). Construction of the stone castle keep may have begun as soon as a decade later. On the death of Geoffrey de Clinton II in 1172/73, King Henry II (1154-89) took the castle into his own hands. Thereafter, Pipe Rolls indicate that both Henry and his son John (1199-1216) began to expand the stone-built stronghold. It is during this mid twelfth- to early thirteenth-century period that the north curtain walls were constructed, thereby creating three enclosed spaces. One of the spaces was later described as the north court, into which the Elizabethan garden was subsequently built. Further developed by King Henry III (1216-72) and his son Edmund Crouchback, Earl of Lancaster (d. 1296), Kenilworth was established as one of the strongest and most significant castles in the realm by the end of the thirteenth century. In the later fourteenth century, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (1361-99), transformed the site into a palace fortress; his new Great Hall and other apartments representing some of the finest domestic architecture of the period. As part of this work John Deyncourt was instructed in 1374 to enclose the garden, though it is uncertain where this was located, and it may not have been in the same area as the later Elizabethan garden (Demidowicz 2013). The wider landscape was enhanced by the Great Mere in the early thirteenth century; although primarily a defensive feature it was later used in conjunction with entertainments. From 1399 until 1563 the site was once more in the hands of the Crown.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, Kenilworth was granted to John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, who initiated fresh building programmes. The Chirk Survey, almost certainly carried out when his son Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, was granted the castle in June 1563, mentions the north court but does not describe any buildings or other features within it (Molyneux 2008; Demidowicz 2013). Leicester further remodelled the castle with a range, still known as Leicester's Buildings, that was constructed to the south of the keep, as well as a new gatehouse (Fig 2.2) and the Elizabethan garden. The works were largely in anticipation of visits by the Queen who came to Kenilworth on three occasions in 1566, 1568 and 1572. Her final visit in July 1575 lasted nineteen days.

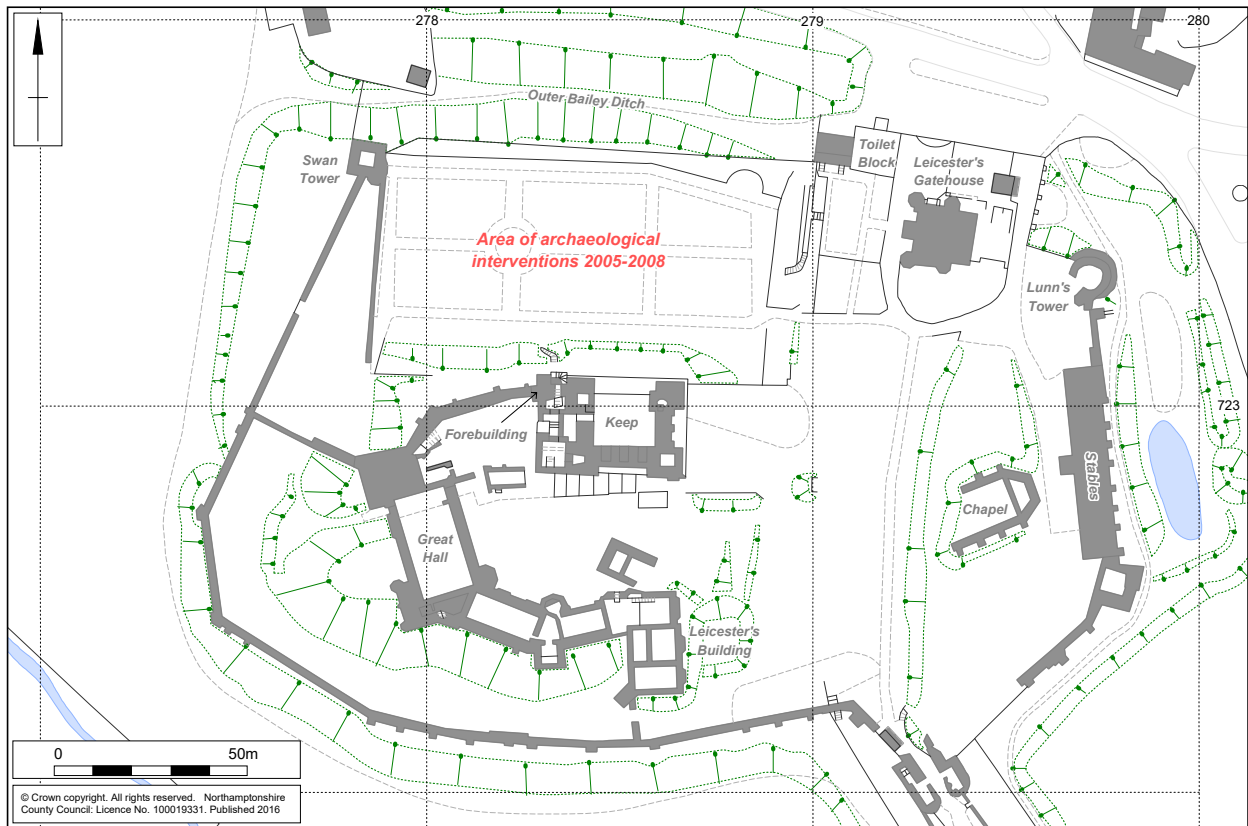


FIGURE 2.1 KENILWORTH CASTLE LAYOUT, WITH AREA OF INVESTIGATION MARKED

Of Leicester's garden for Queen Elizabeth, there is only one secure descriptive reference (Keay and Watkins 2013, Appendix 1.1). A contemporary letter written by Robert Langham describes the focus of the garden as an octagonal white marble fountain at the centre, surrounded by four quarter plots, each with a pierced obelisk apparently carved from a single piece of porphyry. The quarters were separated by grass paths, probably bordered with sand, and sculptures including the bear and ragged staff (one of Leicester's emblems) and spheres were placed around. Along the southern side of the garden there was an earth terrace with grass summit and slope, whilst opposite a large, finely decorated aviary was built against the north curtain wall. It is unclear from the wording of the letter exactly how the east and west sides of the garden terminated, and how the arbours fitted within the garden.

Whilst there may have been some remodelling when Leicester's son, Robert Dudley, inherited, the only clear historical evidence for alteration dates to the time when the castle was sold to Henry, Prince of Wales, and comprises an instruction for repairs and replanting in connection with a proposed royal visit in the summer of 1612 (Jacques and Keay 2013, 39). There is no other indication of further building or changes during the Stuart period.

Two later versions survive of a fresco, formerly at the Warwickshire house of Newnham Paddox, which apparently depicted a birds-eye view of the castle as seen from the east c1620 (Fig 2.3; Keay 2013b, 75-80). Both views show much the same for the garden area: a grass lawn devoid of paths, arbours, aviary, and obelisks but still retaining a fountain, though not with an octagonal lower basin. The reliability of the views remains the subject of debate since some details faithfully represent elements which are known to have existed or are still extant, whilst others are depicted inaccurately or not at all. However, these images, or rather the original source for them, remain chronologically closest to the Elizabethan garden and must be taken into account.

Details of the Civil War period (1642-8) are surprisingly scant. The castle was held by both protagonists, first by the King's troops and later garrisoned by Parliament, although it is not clear that any military action took place here. Following the Civil War, Parliament gave an order in 1650 to render the castle untenable for military occupation, and it was subsequently slighted (Jacques and Keay 2013, 40). An engraved plan accompanying Sir William Dugdale's description and views of the castle published in 1656, but drawn before the slighting, has for long been taken to show the Elizabethan garden. However, it is now thought that it could represent a seventeenth-century adaption of the earlier garden,



FIGURE 2.2 VIEW OF LEICESTER'S GATEHOUSE, CONVERTED TO A RESIDENCE AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, LOOKING NORTH-WEST

although it may not even have been implemented (Fig 2.4; Keay 2013b, 80-2).

Major Joseph Hawkesworth, a Parliamentary commander who bought the castle, established a residence in the northern (Leicester's) gatehouse, blocking the central archway and adding a gabled range on the east side (Fig 2.2). Only the stables were retained as serviceable buildings with the remainder of the castle left to ruin. After the Restoration, short leases were granted by the Crown to the Earl of Monmouth and his family, which lasted until the early eighteenth century (Jacques and Keay 2013, 40). In 1665 the freehold had been granted to the Earls of Rochester and Clarendon, and Clarendon's son Laurence Hyde came into full possession after Monmouth's leases finally ended. The family retained ownership into the twentieth century.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, an increasing interest in historic sites brought Kenilworth to the attention of a growing number of antiquarian visitors, and with the publication of the novel *Kenilworth* by Sir Walter Scott in 1821, the castle became a visitor attraction for a wider public. The site also attracted artists who endeavoured to capture romantic views of the ruins, although none apparently chose directly to

illustrate the area of the former Elizabethan garden. Scenes of the northern side of the castle tended to concentrate on the remains of the slighted keep and depict a great mass of rubble from its broken north wall, while the area of the garden is shown heavily wooded (Fig 2.5). Extensive repairs to the fabric of the castle were made between 1868 and 1872 and it is possible that the mound of rubble within part of the garden was cleared around this time. Early twentieth-century photographs show that the area comprised a flat garden with the terrace against the north side of the keep, and its floor largely planted with fruit trees (Fig 2.6; Jacques and Keay 2013, figs 5.4 - 5.5).

In 1937 John Davenport Siddeley, first Baron Kenilworth, bought the castle and by 1939 had placed it in the care of the Office of Works. The fruit trees were removed in the 1960s leaving a bare space until the creation in 1975 of a 'Tudor garden'. Excavation prior to its construction by Dr. M. W. Thompson, former Inspector of Ancient Monuments, largely concentrated on the original defensive north curtain wall and its associated towers (Thompson 1969). Further excavations by Beric Morley in 1970 comprised two hand-dug trenches cut diagonally across the area of the garden, with the easternmost trench turning southwards to sample the foot of the

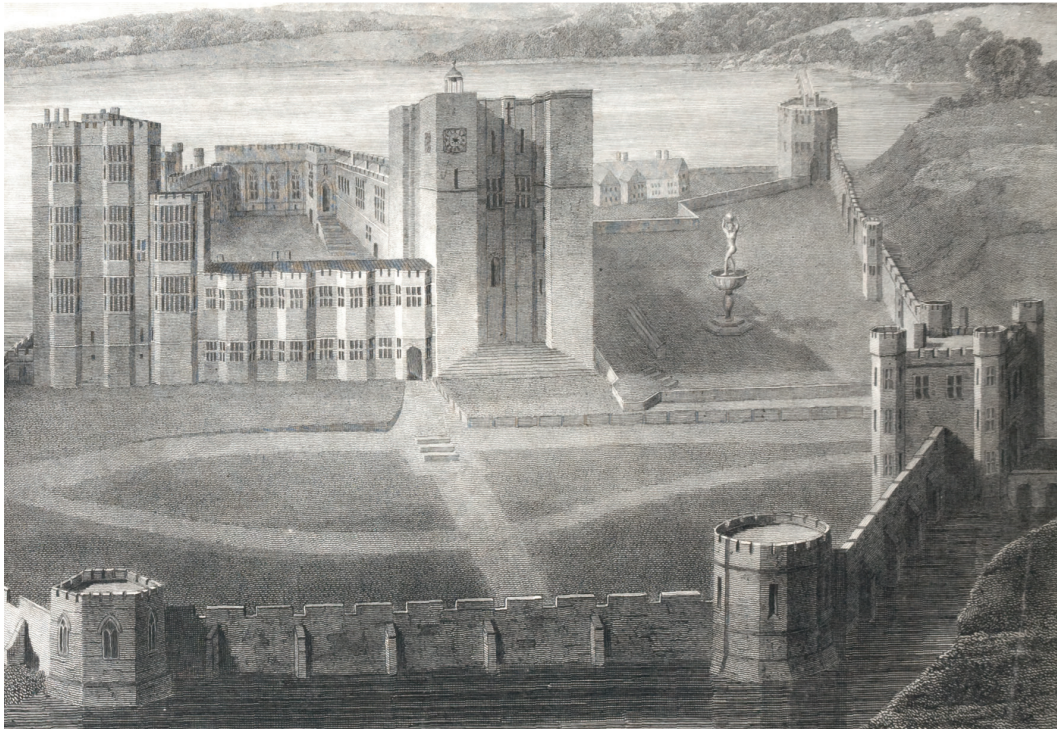


FIGURE 2.3 DETAIL OF 1817-ENGRAVING OF THE NEWNHAM PADDOX FRESCO (C1620)

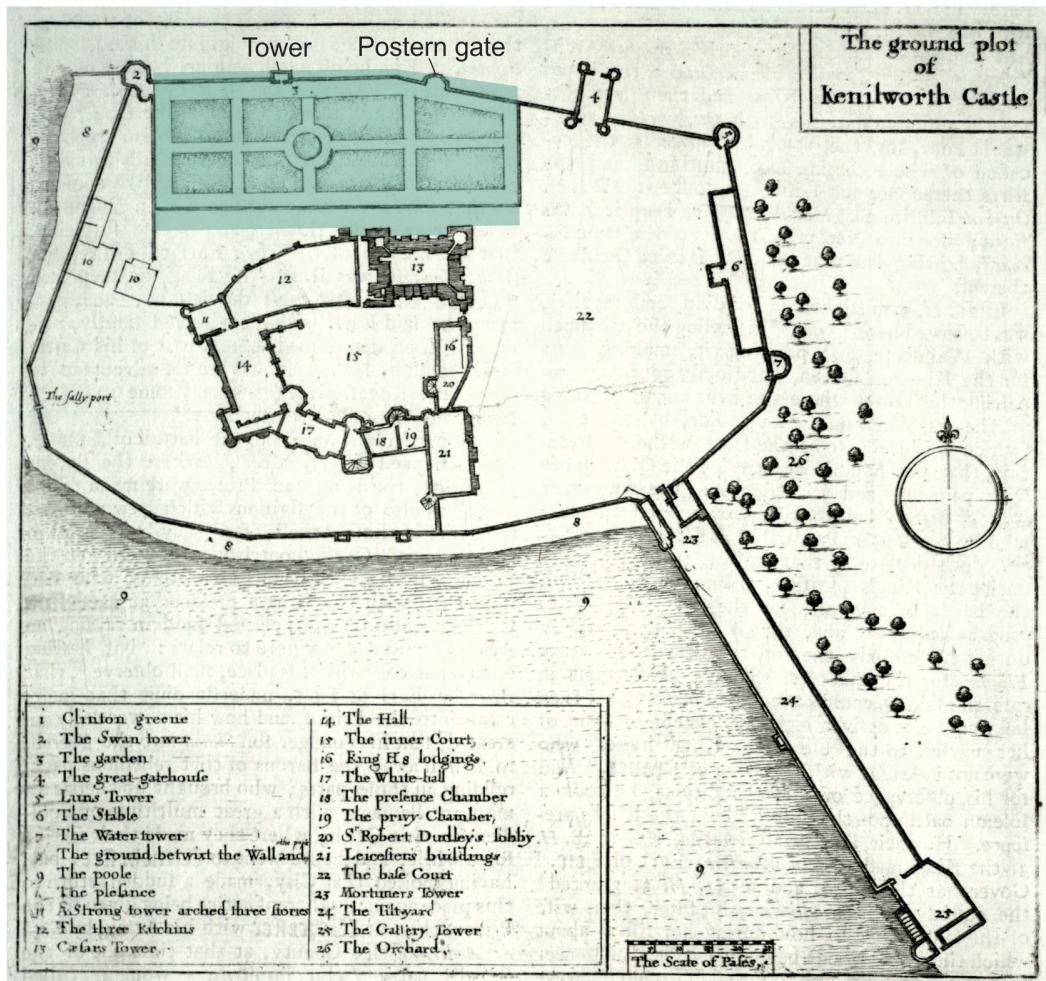


FIGURE 2.4 PLAN MADE FOR SIR WILLIAM DUGDALE, PUBLISHED IN 1656 AS PART OF HIS ANTIQUITIES OF WARWICKSHIRE ILLUSTRATED



FIGURE 2.5 DETAIL OF AN UNDATED ENGRAVING, C1820, OF THE KEEP WITH SLIGHTING DEBRIS SPILLING INTO THE GARDEN AREA AT RIGHT

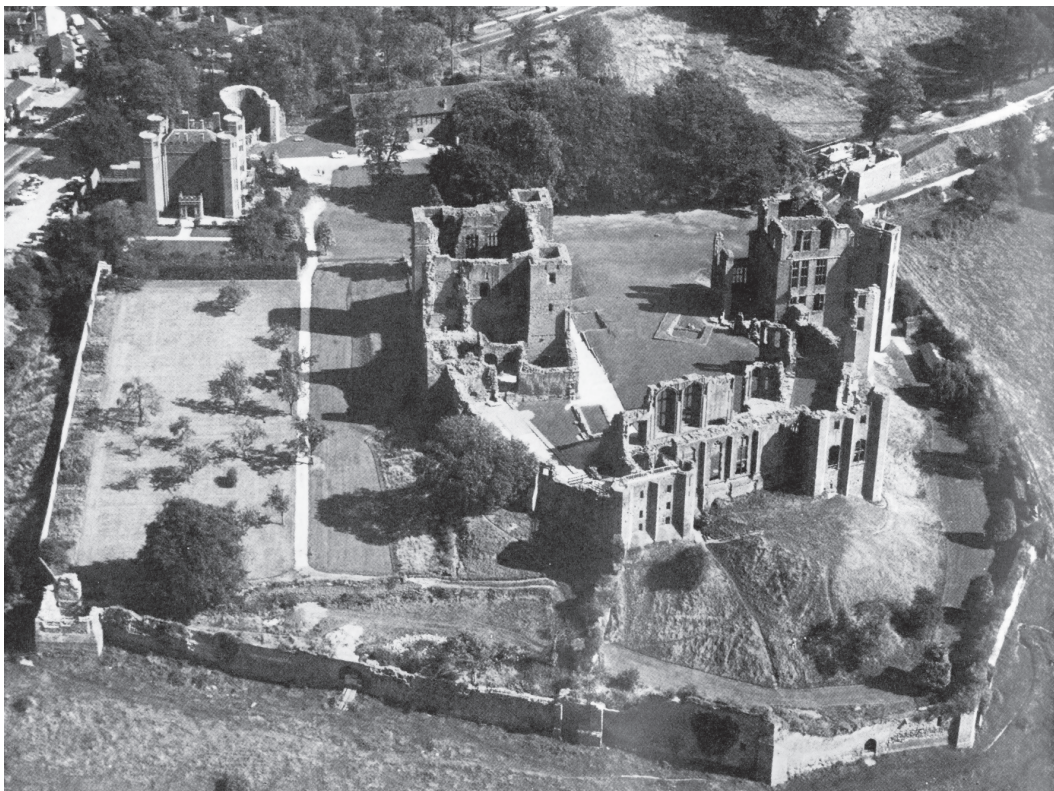


FIGURE 2.6 UNDATED AERIAL VIEW OF KENILWORTH CASTLE FROM THE WEST, PROBABLY LATE 1960S

terrace (Fig 7.1; Ellis 1995). The trenches were located to intersect features shown in the Dugdale plan but instead located a linear slot and a possible path surface which have since been shown to relate to later cultivation. No features were found from the Elizabethan garden. Despite the lack of associated evidence, Dugdale's plan was used

as the inspiration for the reconstructed garden, which was completed in 1975 and was maintained for almost 30 years. The Property Development Programme plans for Kenilworth at the beginning of the present century provided an opportunity to investigate the garden area further.

3. Aims, Objectives and Methodology

Aims and methodology

Previous reliance upon Dugdale's plan resulted in the misplacing of archaeological trenches intended to capture evidence of the true Elizabethan layout. In consequence, the garden created in 1975, although attractive, had little to do with the 1575 garden. The 2004 evaluation approached the problem of the garden in a different way, using Langham's letter as the principal description and considering the surviving architectural and topographical evidence from the site, including the contemporary point of entry from the main castle buildings through the surviving forebuilding arch.

Having established the survival of the stone and mortar foundations of the fountain in 2004, it was decided to investigate any further details that might survive from the sixteenth-century layout. A total area excavation was considered to be the most promising method of identifying any significant remains of the Elizabethan garden. These would need to be preserved in the new garden design, and would inform a more accurate recreation. The removal of the trees and hedges of the former garden would also prevent potential damage by root penetration.

Archaeological investigation of the garden was proposed in response to a brief prepared by Focus Consultants on behalf of English Heritage. Following tendering, Northamptonshire Archaeology was appointed to carry out the required works commencing in July 2005, to be followed by a second season of excavation in 2006. The Elizabethan Garden Project was considered to comprise four main stages:

The complete and careful removal under archaeological supervision of the existing arrangement of paths and modern planting, including the hedge bordering the wall at the western side;

Archaeological excavation of the entire garden area to investigate and record the evidence for post-Elizabethan use as well as to record the full extent of the surviving Elizabethan garden and to examine its relationship with earlier land use in so far as practicable;

Protection and preservation of the remains of the Elizabethan garden within the programme of archaeological investigation, to be followed by reconstruction using the archaeological evidence where available;



FIGURE 3.1 2005 EXCAVATION LOOKING WEST FROM THE GATEHOUSE ROOF



FIGURE 3.2 2006 EXCAVATION LOOKING WEST FROM THE GATEHOUSE ROOF

Upon the completion of archaeological fieldwork a programme of assessment, analysis and dissemination to be implemented in accordance with English Heritage procedures.

The work was spread over two seasons with the excavation of the southern half of the garden being undertaken first, followed by the area to the north (Figs 3.1 and 3.2); these excavations were designated trenches 4 and 5 respectively. This phased programme was due to the decision to retain soil on site for reuse. In each instance, modern topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision to reveal earlier layers and features, principally the levelling layers for the Elizabethan garden (Trench 5) and the Civil War ditch (Trench 4), which were then cleaned by hand. A series of smaller trenches were dug around the edges of the main work in order to investigate the boundaries of the garden; trenches 1, 2, 3, 6 and 8 examined the terrace beside the keep, together with the inner bailey and Civil War ditches. Trenches 9 and 11 were positioned to investigate the north curtain wall and towers of the outer bailey, while trenches 7 and 10 were opened to examine the eastern side of the garden (Fig 3.3). Geophysical surveys were carried out during each season by Dr Neil Linford, Archaeometry Branch of then English Heritage, but the results were inconclusive, with few distinct anomalies being detected, and none which could be identified archaeologically.

New garden design

Plans for the creation of a new garden were carried forward by English Heritage in conjunction with Richard Griffiths Architects, and based upon the archaeological evidence and other studies (Keay and Watkins 2013). The new garden was opened to the public on 2 May 2009.

Watching brief

Following the main excavation a series of watching briefs was carried out during setting-out works for the new garden, both within the garden area and to the east where access for services was required from the car park on the north side of the gatehouse.

Specific details of the north face of the keep were also recorded both photographically and through annotating existing drawings held by English Heritage. Such recording was necessary since approximately 1m of the exposed batter of the keep wall would be buried by raising the terrace to the dimensions indicated in the Langham letter. Minor variations were noted between the existing elevations based upon rectified photographs and the current condition of the stonework. However, it is not possible to determine whether this denotes actual deterioration or the difficulty in identifying fine detail from the original photographs. Within the archway of the forebuilding, the plan and elevation of the flight of

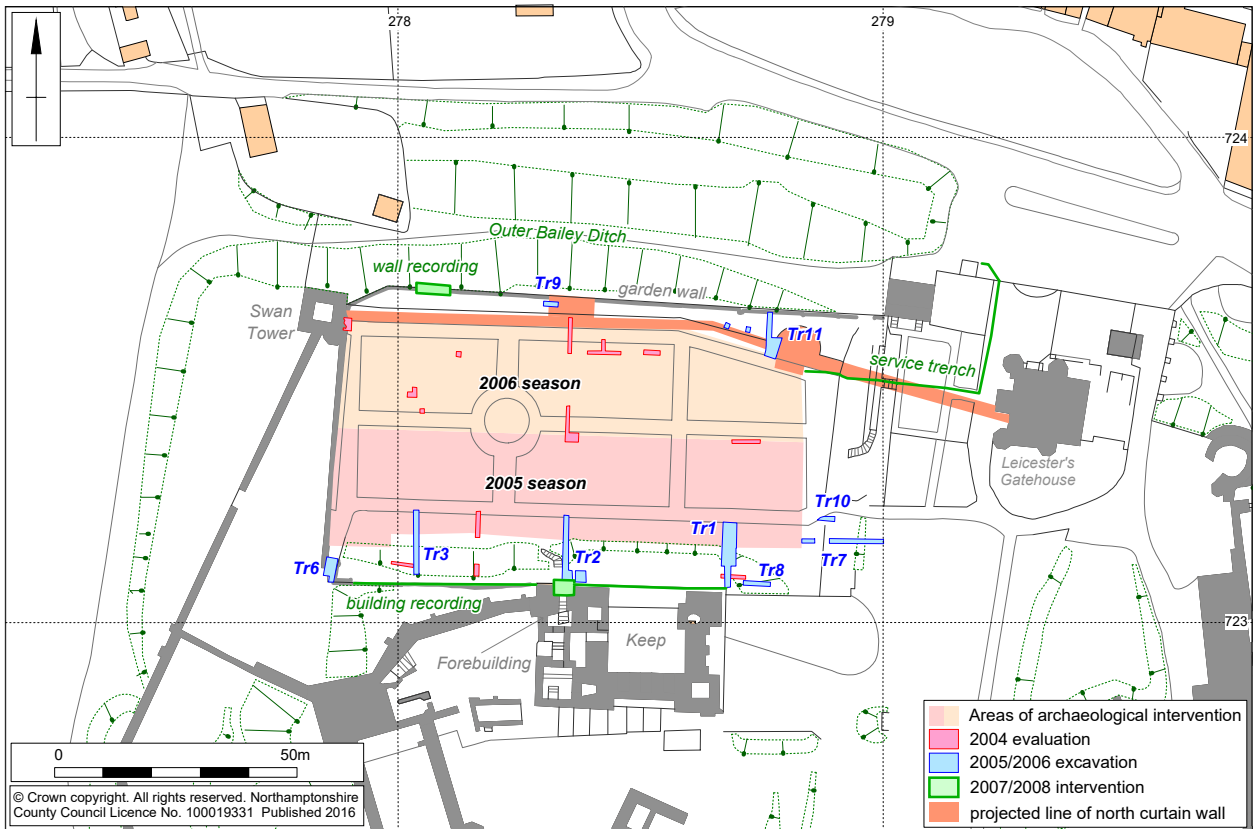


FIGURE 3.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2004-2008

steps onto the former terrace were also recorded since these were to be hidden by a new arrangement of timber steps providing a safer and more visually appropriate entrance into the new garden (Fig 3.4). At least part of the existing configuration of steps was identified as a modern construction.

Other recording was carried out on a stretch of walling along the south-west edge of the terrace which was also due to be buried below the newly raised terrace.

The upper surface of the wall was cleaned of moss and weeds following removal of the adjacent beech hedge, which had been planted as part of the late twentieth-century remodelling of the area. The upper surface of the wall was photographed and drawn stone-by-stone at a scale of 1:20 along the length which was to be buried; the remainder, which would be left exposed, was recorded only in outline. It is not thought that any of the exposed upper surface predates the Office of Works period.



FIGURE 3.4 VIEW OF THE SLIGHTED NORTH SIDE OF THE KEEP OVERLOOKING THE 1975-GARDEN, TAKEN IN 2005.