

Castles Through Time:

How Historical Context Has Shaped The Purpose of Castles, with
particular discussion regarding castles as a symbol of power

By

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Abstract:

The study of castles throughout history often omits one key element in their history. For historians to create a full picture of the history of a castle, it requires the ability to ask questions about the context of the period. This research predominantly focuses on how the historical context shaped the purpose of castles; it also touches on castles as a method of power, both metaphorically and physically. This thesis focuses on the use of case studies as a form of research. The purpose of this work was to focus on certain time periods that demonstrated society at different stages, therefore this work follows both a chronological and thematic approach. Overall, the findings of this research has opened up the conversation behind historical context, and through contextual analysis, new research can come to light. This research has most crucially uncovered the importance of considering the events of the time period in order to access, fully, the purpose of a castle.

Introduction:

Castles, a method of defence during the bloodiest of battles, were formal residences for the richest of British society. Castles, a powerful weapon that embodied the fusion of medieval history with contemporary necessity, have been a prominent structure in the historical landscape of Europe for centuries, protecting, defending and defeating invading enemies. Castles in the United Kingdom have been at the forefront of battles, some battles include the Welsh Wars for Independence and the Second World War. It is during times of political unrest that leaders and monarchs turn to the strength and resilience within castle walls, however, this dissertation will also consider the times when castles were not in use and were cast aside as financial burdens. This dissertation will investigate the historical context and find the connection between events and the eventual ruin or transition in the role.

This dissertation will also ascertain how the historical context has shaped the transition between castles for defence and castles to castles that have been left for ruin, to castles that have been recommissioned in the face of German invasion. Castles have always been a symbolic and physical presence that has laid the foundations for future historical study. They are the symbol of power, dominance and authority. Therefore, to return to the structures that saw the earliest battles in our history not only has a strong symbolic meaning but also was a practical solution. Castles were built for battle, they stood for centuries, left to ruin.

Whilst investigating this thesis, one common theme has been apparent: the way in which a castle was used was dictated by the political atmosphere at the time and the political motivation behind the use of a castle. Primarily, this dissertation will focus on case studies from castles across the United Kingdom, where the focus will be finding the link between historical events and the development of society as to how the use of castles has changed. Whilst the use of case studies may be a common method to study castles, this dissertation must assess various examples of structures that offered not only defence but also saw a transition to a formal residence.

The structure of this dissertation will follow both chronologically but will also see a thematic approach. The chapters will follow chronologically, touching on medieval Welsh history and the battles during that time, then discussing the role of modernisation in the Tudor Period and how the change in the political atmosphere saw the slighting of castles. Slighting was used to determine if a fortification should be destroyed or left to ruin. The dissertation will then finish by discussing the Second World War and how the recommissioning of castles played a significant part in winning the war. A thematic approach is favoured as it allows the chapters to be grouped into how the castles were used, however, this did happen as society modernised and, therefore is chronological as well.

Castles, most notably, have been used for defence against an enemy. The monarch and political leaders used a castle to dominate a region, they were “ancient instruments of baronial power” and would include various features as a method for defence.¹ However, the “gradual suppression of feudal violence” meant that the need to do battle for the throne became less, thus leading to the gradual redundancy of castles.² A prime example of this is the Tudor Dynasty, the Tudors saw a significant shift in the political atmosphere, where for the first time monarchs no longer fought for the throne through battle, but rather through the legal question of legitimacy. Tudors began their reign in blood during the War of the Roses but sought to secure their power through different methods, the use of castles saw a major shift. However, the most significant shift the Tudors saw was that the claim to the throne was not as at risk as it had been in the past, their political legitimacy was no longer in question and their focus turned to the claim to the throne in France. This is a prime example of how the political atmosphere has seen a shift in the need for castles, the Tudors sought claim over the French throne and as a result, forts along the English Channel were built, and castles were slighted. Forts became particularly useful as they were small, defensive temporary structures that

¹ H.M Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 327 (Oxford University Press, 1968), p.225.

² Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.225.

served very few purposes, whereas castles were defensive and residential, which became superfluous to the Tudor monarchs.

H.M Colvin has argued, “so far as foreign invasion was concerned, the old coastal castles had been superseded by the new artillery forts built by Henry VIII, and it was upon these - together with the navy - that the security of the kingdom now depended.”³ Therefore, not only did the political atmosphere shift towards the fight for the French throne, but it is also clear that the military was modernising and the need for defensive mechanisms such as murder holes and arrow slits was soon becoming redundant. This thesis will investigate this event in far greater detail in chapter two.

The first chapter will focus primarily on medieval castles and how castles were, not only, utilised as a method of defence during times of battle, but also used as a symbol of power. It was during the medieval period that the battle for land and the throne were most present. Castles were, for the most part, built during this time for the purpose of defending a region. However, what this chapter will investigate is the link between events that led to the building of a castle. This chapter will investigate why particular features were built into the castle and how that aided or hindered the success of the battle. This chapter will use case studies of castles built in North Wales during the Second Welsh War for Independence. These were a collection of fourteen castles built by Edward I known as the Iron Ring. The conquest of North Wales and the building of fourteen castles has been criticised by historians. Richard K. Morris was particularly vocal when discussing this topic and argued that “the English castles in North Wales represent an overkill.”⁴ This contribution to the debate will form much of the discussion to the first chapter. The castles that will be studied will include Caernarfon, Harlech and Conwy. Each of these castles has extensive defensive features and will be discussed during chapter one.

³ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.225.

⁴ Richard K Morris, “The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm: Castle Symbolism in the Reigns of Edward I and his Successors,” *Late Medieval Castles* (Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press, 2016) p.349.

The second chapter will consider the transition from a castle as a tool during a battle to being developed into a luxurious residential home or even left to ruin. This chapter will primarily look at what changed during the period to implement this transition. As previously mentioned, a prime example of this is that of the Tudor Dynasty as castles' military value decreased many were left to ruin. Essentially, this chapter will largely investigate why some castles had been "slighted". This term was used heavily during the Tudor period as many structures had been left to ruin. Colvin argued that "the history of the royal castles under the Tudors is one of neglect and gradual decay," and this is mainly due to the "gradual suppression of feudal violence."⁵ The Tudors saw the value in castles to suppress uprisings in the aristocracy and prevent the risk to the throne, therefore obtained several castles across the country to maintain their power. Unfortunately, it was during this time that castles became a financial burden. H.M Colvin will inform much of the debate in chapter two. This chapter will consider the sheer power that a castle held and question why particular castles were maintained, and what their new purpose may hold. This chapter will include case studies from structures such as Dover Castle, The Tower of London and Arundel Castle. Castles such as Arundel Castle did begin their lives as a tool for battle but soon became formal residences that are still lived in today, whereas The Tower began as a means for defence against all threat and remained in use for this purpose until 1952.

The third chapter will see a three-sixty turnaround. It was during the Second World War that castles were recommissioned once again as command centres. English Heritage has highlighted the use of Dover Castle during the Second World War, when the castle was recommissioned and had "secret wartime tunnels" installed.⁶ This is a prime example of how castles became in use during this time. These structures had been built with defence in mind; therefore, when Britain was at risk of enemy invasion, the most logical next step was to return to castles across the country. Castles have always been a symbolic and physical presence that has laid the foundations for future historical

⁵ Colvin, "Castles and Government in Tudor England," p.230.

⁶ English Heritage, *Dover Castle Operation Dynamo, Rescue from Dunkirk*, https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/dover-castle/things-to-do/operation-dynamo-rescue-from-dunkirk/?_gl=1*j3nnv5*_up*MQ..*_ga*MT11ODk3MzY0MC4xNzE1NDIxNDgz*_ga_QK86RM1N34*MTcxNTQyMTQ4My4xLjAuMTcxNTQyMTQ4My4wLjAuMA

study. However, their fortifications were strong and a useful asset to have during the Second World War. However, these structures had their flaws. Dover, Edinburgh and Pevensey Castle were all built from the 11th to the 12th Century. These castles were not built with air raids, bombs and powerful artillery in mind. Nonetheless, castles provided fortitude against the invading enemy and allowed troops to defend the United Kingdom.

Political motives had and still have a role to play in the use of castles. They are a political hammer in a warfare toolbox, to be used when danger strikes the United Kingdom, and this is particularly obvious during the Second World War. Therefore, if a monarch had the motive to defend an area from an invasion, or had the political need to create dominance, they would have likely built a strong structure, also known as a castle. However, once the monarch no longer had a use for their castles, they became not only a financial burden but also could have the potential to make a monarch vulnerable, the monarch would then have the castle slighted. In addition to this, if a monarch needed a progress house, then castles that had previously left to ruin, would be hastily refurbished for the royal visit and then left to ruin once more after the sovereign had departed.

Castles were built for a purpose, and as soon as they lived out that purpose they were surplus to requirement. This cycle continues throughout history as this purpose changes. The tragedy is that many castles across the UK were used and left for ruin with little thought for their historical significance. Therefore, historians must be grateful for the work of antiquarians such as John Leland and Ella Armitage fought for their historical preservation.

Castles have been studied in various ways for centuries. John Leland was the first person to declare themselves an antiquary and was the first example of what historians would recognise as an antiquarian. He spent his career working in the court of Henry VIII, during which he witnessed the dissolution of the monasteries. He was appalled at the destruction of important ancient texts, therefore he received permission from the King to rescue certain scholarly assets from various sites across the country. During his

travels, he made a point of documenting all that he saw, from castles to churches to tombs. Leland had planned to create a comprehensive catalogue of Britain.⁷ This was the only survey of its time and had laid the foundations for the antiquarian movement. The survey is known as *The Itinerary of John Leland*.⁸ It was Leland's work that allowed future historians to continue this work using more sophisticated approaches.

In addition to John Leland, Ella Armitage has been noted as one of the most influential voices in the study of castles. The 1912 publication of *The Early Norman Castles of the British Isles*.⁹ Armitage was one of the first five students of Newnham College and was involved in women's education throughout her life. "Ella Armitage and her contemporaries advanced the subject on various fronts. For example, by relating surviving physical sites to medieval documentary sources."¹⁰ Armitage's contribution to the study of castles was one of great renown, she has influenced how we study castles even today, and her work laid the foundations for the development of the growth of the study of castles.

In addition to the extensive works and contribution of Leland and Armitage to the study of castles, H.M Colvin has also made headway in the field. Colvin's publication *Castles and Government in Tudor England* begins by promptly attributing the creation of gunpowder to the downfall of castles being used as a method of defence.¹¹ Castle sieges were not at the forefront of political crisis as they had been during of the Norman period. Instead, Colvin argues that the use of castles was superseded by the introduction of artillery forts. He continues his argument by claiming that once the battle for the throne had been won, Henry VII no longer required the strength that a castle could offer. He explained that it was the "gradual suppression of feudal violence" that meant castles were not used as a method of defence or even as a way to strengthen a monarch's power in an area.¹² This essentially refers to the reduction of unrest in this

⁷ Oliver Creighton, *Medieval Castles*, (Shire Publications, 2003) p.7.

⁸ John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland The Antiquary*, (Oxford, 1744).

⁹ Ella Armitage, *The Early Norman Castles of the British Isles*, (Project Gutenberg, 1912).

¹⁰ Oliver Creighton, *Medieval Castles* (Shire Publications, 2003) p.7.

¹¹ Colvin, "Castles and Government in Tudor England," p.225-234.

¹² Colvin, "Castles and Government in Tudor England," p.225-234.

period. Henry VII was a genius when reducing the unrest across England, he claimed various castles to reduce the power the aristocracy held.

Once Henry VII had established his claim, the threat to the throne was not as present as it had been in previous years. Colvin points out that castles during the Tudor reign were allowed to fall to ruin as their use became obsolete. Tudors began to modernise their artillery in the shape of forts. Therefore, Colvin concludes that it was Queen Elizabeth I who felt it was her duty to preserve the historic significance of castles. He argued that “the queen’s long reign it was accepted that the duchy had a duty to maintain its castles, however obsolescent as fortifications and however inconveniently large as estate offices they might be.”¹³ He finishes his article by explaining that the destruction of castles occurred because the English Government and the monarch viewed them as more of a nuisance than an aid once “feudal violence” had been suppressed and the fight for France had begun yet again from previous attempts throughout history.¹⁴

Another particular historian who will feature heavily in this discussion about the transition of castles is Nicola Coldstream. Coldstream’s publication *Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I’s Castles in Wales* begins by discussing the castles built by Edward I during the war for Welsh independence. During the various wars for independence in Wales, Edward I built a collection of castles in the North of Wales to, in essence, dominate the north. Coldstream goes on to discuss their military and political importance during this political unrest as they were the “apogee of military architecture.”¹⁵ The article argues that the construction of Caernarfon, Harlech and Conwy were all to act as “centres of government” and “all castles were situated by the sea to enable them to be supplied readily and the differences between them reflect both their functions and their sites.”¹⁶ Edward I aimed to dominate the North of Wales through his castles, his castles were a symbol of strength, fortitude and wealth. His castles, arguably, are some of the largest and strongest structures in Europe. continues by

¹³ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.232.

¹⁴ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.232.

¹⁵ Nicola Coldstream, “Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I’s Castles in Wales,” *Architectural History*, Vol. 46 (2003), p. 19.

¹⁶ Coldstream, “Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I’s Castles in Wales, p. 21.

describing the Edward I Collection of castles as “Imposing and stylish, they represent all that was required in a fortified castle at the time: a visible, formidable presence that dominated its surroundings; defensive strength in walls, mural towers, and gatehouses equipped with multiple portcullises and murder holes; and domestic apartments suited to the administrative and judicial duties and the constable would dispense in peacetime.”¹⁷

Coldstream attributes the building of these castles to one architect. “The buildings seem to follow a common pattern in planning and detail, which suggests not only that their construction was centrally controlled, but that they were deigned by the same architect.”¹⁸ She continues by discussing the work of A.J Taylor, who has investigated the identity of the architect. The identity of the architect is largely unknown, however the work of Taylor, makes a strong case for an individual called James of St George. James was a master architect and military engineer who has been proven to have been residing in Wales at the time. Coldstream considers Taylors findings to be “stimulated by an inspired guess.”¹⁹ Whilst the architect of Caernarfon, Conwy and Harlech cannot be named with any certainty, many historians have made educated guesses towards this investigation, and Coldstream supports the theory of James of St George.

The literature available when studying castles is vast. It is logical and appropriate to argue that the area of historical study is overcrowded. However, the study of castles will never be complete, historians uncover new histories every day, from archaeological digs to uncovering lost material in the dark depths of an archive. In June 2023, a team of archaeologists found evidence of a Norman Castle in Chichester. This castle was believed to have been built by Earl Roger Montgomery, who would later become Earl of West Sussex. It is thought that Chichester Castle would have been comparable to the size of Arundel Castle. Therefore, historical research into the history of castles can never be complete. There will always be a new contribution to be made. The contributions of this dissertation will include an investigation into the use of castles

¹⁷ Coldstream, “Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales, p.19.

¹⁸ Coldstream, “Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales, p.19.

¹⁹ Coldstream, “Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales, p.19.

throughout time, and it will investigate the importance of castles during the Second World War. This dissertation will also consider political motivations and discover exactly why castles were used and when.

As already discussed, castles have always been a metaphorical and physical presence that has shaped the landscape of history. They have been a symbol of power, fortitude and authority. From the towering walls over sixty metres high in Northern Wales at Harlech Castle to the intricately crafted mediaeval fortifications of Arundel Castle. Castles have been the focal points for, politics, culture, and warfare. Throughout the ages, castles have witnessed the rise and fall of empires, bloody battles, and the intrinsic drama of daily court. They have been besieged, defended, and repurposed, reflecting the ever-changing tides of history. Yet, even as their strategic importance became redundant with the development of modern warfare, castles retained their significance, becoming cherished symbols of heritage to be preserved by the likes of Elizabeth I in the 16th century.

Chapter One: Welsh Edwardian Castles: defensive structures or symbols of status and authority?

Edward I built a staggering fourteen castles from the years 1277 to 1295.²⁰ On the surface, these fourteen castles could be interpreted as “overkill,” however what Richard Morris fails to access is the context of the political atmosphere.²¹ This chapter will discuss exactly why Edward I saw fit to erect fourteen castles and will determine that the purpose of his castles was not superfluous. This chapter will primarily focus on the construction of Edwardian Castles during the conquest of Wales from 1283 to 1287.²² Edward I planted castles throughout the North of Wales to assert dominance in the region. It has been noted that “the castles of King Edward I in North Wales have long been acknowledged as one of the crowning achievements of European military architecture.”²³ However, it has also been noted by Richard K Morris that “the English castles in North Wales represent an overkill.”²⁴

When considering the use of a castle and how it is placed in history, one must also consider the historical context of the time. The conquest of Wales, led by Edward I, was a complicated political feat. Initially, Edward's predecessor, his father, Henry III had signed various treaties whereby England and Wales would live peacefully side by side.²⁵ The first of these treaties was the Treaty of Montgomery. This was an Anglo-Welsh treaty signed in 1267 in which Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was acknowledged as Prince of Wales by King Henry III of England, and acknowledged that the Four Cantrefws were his.

²⁰ Graham Lott, “The Building Stones of the Edwardian Castles,” *The Impact of the Edwardian Castles in Wales*, (Oxbow Books, 2010) p.114.

²¹ Richard K Morris, “The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm: Castle Symbolism in the Reigns of Edward I and his Successors,” *Late Medieval Castles* (Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press, 2016) p.349.

²² Nicola Coldstream, “Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales,” *Architectural History*, Vol. 46 (2003), pp. 19-36.

²³ Morris, “The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm,” p.349.

²⁴ Morris, “The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm,” p.349.

²⁵ Michael Prestwich, “Edward I and Wales,” *The Impact of the Edwardian Castles in Wales*, (Oxbow Books, 2010) p.1.

This treaty is crucial to consider when discussing Edward I's conquest of Wales. Before Henry III signed the Treaty of Montgomery, a grant of lands had been made to Edward during the time of his marriage to Eleanor of Castile. This grant "included the earldom of Chester. With this came the Four Cantrefs (Perfeddwlad), the lands between the rivers Dee and Conwy."²⁶ However, Edward was 15 years old and required royal officials to manage his affairs. Edward's officials chose a cruel and abrasive approach to ruling these lands and a rebellion broke out in 1256. This brought Llywelyn ap Gruffudd great success across Wales, most crucially, the North of Wales. . Edward had been granted lands in the North of Wales, however, due to political unrest he had lost those lands to the Prince of Wales through a Treaty that his father signed. Therefore, it is valid to argue Edward I would have been outraged by this. In addition, this treaty also declared that the English acknowledged Llywelyn ap Gruffudd as the Prince of Wales.

The second treaty that is important to discuss is the Treaty of Shrewsbury. The autonomous principality of Wales was led by the Prince of Wales, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. The Treaty of Shrewsbury dictated that Llywelyn ap Gruffudd had to pay Henry III a portion of money for the freedom to rule the Welsh nation. In essence, Henry III allowed Wales to continue as an autonomous principality. However, after the death of Henry III, the payments ceased. The newly crowned Edward I chased Llywelyn ap Gruffudd multiple times for the funds, however, Edward I was met with silence. It was this silence that spurred Edward I into action.

Edward invaded Wales in 1277 with three advances and naval support, blocked Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in Snowdonia and starved him to the point of surrender. Edward I stripped Llywelyn ap Gruffudd of all of his previous conquests since 1247 and proceeded to construct a series of 14 castles across the North of Wales to assert his dominance and power. Castles are built with purpose, in this case not only were they built to defend the region from the enemy, but they were symbols of royal powerul; the construction of these castles gave the impression of "an elite group of men-of-war, long-standing comrades in arms of the king, indulging in an orgy of military architectural

²⁶ Prestwich, "Edward I and Wales," p.1.

expression on an almost unlimited budget.”²⁷ Nicola Coldstream has argued that “these castles are judged to be the apogee of military architecture in the late thirteenth century. Imposing and stylish, they represent all that was required in a fortified castle at the time: a visible, formidable presence that dominated its surroundings; defensive strength in walls, mural towers, and gatehouses equipped with multiple portcullises and murder holes; and domestic apartments suited to the administrative and judicial duties and the constable would dispense in peacetime.”²⁸

The final treaty that will be discussed is the Treaty of Aberconwy. This treaty was signed in 1277, by King Edward I and Llewelyn ap Gruffudd (the Last), Prince of Wales.²⁹ This superseded the Treaty of Montgomery, following the successful conquest in the North. The treaty granted peace, however, did dictate that upon the death of Llewelyn ap Gruffudd, the autonomous principality would end. This treaty could be considered the final nail in the coffin for the conquest of Wales. This treaty solidified Edward I’s power in Wales and was the catalyst for beginning the construction of the Iron Ring. Following the first invasion, several castles were built. These included Flint, Rhuddlan, Built and Aberystwyth Castle.

The Iron Ring began its construction in 1277 with Flint Castle (Figure one). The castle was built as a result of the first invasion into Wales; Edward chose this site very carefully. The castle was located on the River Dee and formed the moat around the castle. This made delivery of goods and artillery by sea very easy. As well as convenient transport of goods via sea, this position also secured the route from Chester to the River Conway, and Flint was known to be just a few days' walk from Chester.

In addition, Edward built Flint Castle with a town attached and surrounded the entire structure by a castle wall (Figure one). Caroline Shillaber wrote that “after Edward had conquered Wales, he began to build castles and found towns in the northern principality

²⁷ Morris, “The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm,” p.349.

²⁸ Nicola Coldstream, “Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales,” pp. 19-36 .

²⁹ Morris, “The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm,” p.349.

to strengthen his hold on a hostile region. This policy of creating centres of authority was furthered by establishing small colonies of English people in boroughs.”³⁰ This was implemented in Flint Castle, the town was mere metres away from the castle. In doing this, Edward I reinforced his stronghold by surrounding his castle with the English. Therefore, if the occasion arose and an attack were to occur, it was made very difficult to conquer the castle. This was a new strategy in terms of building a castle and had never been seen before in England or Wales.

To this day, Flint Castle is still considered a unique design as there is no other castle in the UK designed this way. It is thought that Edward I took inspiration as he campaigned across Europe, “who had been crusading in the Holy Land, returned to England by way of France, where he remained two years.”³¹ It was the castles in France that stood out to Edward. One castle that is of note is Aigues Mortes. Historians have argued that the Aigues Mortes donjon is a similar structure to that of Flint Castle. Flint Castle has a donjon or keep which is separate to the main structure of the castle. However, the keep is located nearer the town, away from the River Dee, which has remained in a similar position to what we see today. Whereas, in the keep at Aigues Mortes is next to a canal. The inspiration for Flint Castle was taken from Aigues Mortes, and what historians fail to assess is the historical context behind this. Flint was a new way to build castles and was unseen by the locals.

King Louis XI built Aigues Mortes as a port to send his Crusaders into the Mediterranean. The castle is next to a canal, the keep being on a key cross-section of this canal with multiple paths. It can be assumed that whilst building this castle, the protection of the canal, more specifically the cross-section, would have been a priority. The canal appears to be a key waterway as it has the structure you would expect a road to have with various routes. This would have been key for Louis XI's strategy. However, Flint Castle is positioned on the River Dee with access to the River Conway. The castle is a very large river, however it is important to consider that control of the River Dee

³⁰Caroline Shillaber, “Edward I, Builder of Towns,” *Speculum*, (The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Medieval Academy of America, 1947) p.297.

³¹ Shillaber, “Edward I, Builder of Towns,” p.297.

would not have been as straightforward as the canal was for Louis XI. The position of the keep is unusual for English or Welsh castles.

This line of thought is further reinforced by that of Richard Morris who discusses the development of Edward I's castles. He argued that "they mark the culmination of almost two centuries of development, from the first crusading experience in the Near East, through the castles of the Plantagenets and Philip Augustus in France; resulting in virtually impregnable fortresses relying on such features as concentric walls and heavily fortified gatehouses."³² The castles that were built after the first invasion; Flint, Rhuddlan, Builth and Aberystwyth, are vastly different from that of later castles. From merely glancing at images of the castles, the differences are immediately apparent. It is clear that Conwy and Caernarfon were "intended centres of government, attached to new walled towns."³³ Both castles have a vast structure compared to the earlier castles.

Caernarfon Castle is a vast structure, Edward I and Master James of St George spent £25,000 building this castle over a staggering 47 years.³⁴ They erected town walls, a quay and a castle at the same time. The castle was the result of a bitter war with the Welsh princes. Therefore, the thought of battle was very much in mind when constructing this beast of a castle. However, despite having fought in a battle against the Welsh, the thought of withstanding brutal assault was not their only thought when designing this castle. The polygonal towers, the multi-coloured masonry and the eagle statues pointed to a rather imperial design. It has been said that Caernarfon castle echoed that of imperial Roman architecture, this has been further reinforced by the work of Alun Ffred Jones. Jones states that "in the case of Caernarfon, the polygonal design of the towers, the coloured bands of masonry, and the gratuitous height of the walls are recognized as a deliberate evocation of Roman imperial power."³⁵ It is well known that

³² Morris, "The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm," p.349.

³³ Coldstream, "Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales," pp. 19-36.

³⁴ A. J. Taylor, "The king's works in Wales, 1277-1330," from *The History of the King's Works: the Middle Ages*, Edited by R. A. Brown, H. M. Colvin and A. J. Taylor (London 1963) p.380.

³⁵ Alun Ffred Jones, "King Edward I's Castles in North Wales – Now and Tomorrow," from *The Impact of the Edwardian Castles in Wales*, Edited by Diane M. Williams and John R. Kenyon, (Oxbow Books, 2010) p.199.

before being crowned King of England, Edward I was a well-travelled individual. He spent much of his time in France and Italy, namely, Rome.³⁶

This is crucial to this idea of castles being used as a symbol of power. Alun Ffred Jones has argued that “four of the castles (Conwy, Harlech, Caernarfon and Beaumaris), built during Edward I’s second campaign against the Welsh princes and perhaps representing, in terms of their size and complexity, the high point of medieval castle building in the United Kingdom.”³⁷ He continues by arguing that “the continuing symbolic power of Edward’s castles should hardly surprise us. Recent years have seen a shift in emphasis in how medieval castles are understood. No longer are they seen as purely military in design and function. Rather, increasing attention is being paid to their role in communicating status and authority.”³⁸ This viewpoint is crucial to the overall argument, that the Edwardian Castles in Northern Wales were coined an “overkill,” implying However, one must consider why Edward chose to dominate the region in this manner. In addition, one also must consider the success Edward had because of this campaign across North Wales. Jones solidifies this argument by concluding that “the precise mix of roles depended on local circumstances. The military function of the Edwardian castles in north Wales clearly ranked highly, but equally, impressing and overawing the native Welsh population was an intrinsic part of their political role.”³⁹

This is indicative of Edward’s maturity during this time of unrest. Castles are often interpreted by historians, arguments are made about how effective they were, or research is compiled about who built the structure or which battles a particular castle succeeded in. However, very few, if any, historians discuss the reason or even attempt to question the logic behind building a castle. The most interesting factor surrounding castles is not who built them or what impressive features they might possess, but actually, the most fascinating element of the history of castles is the narrative behind why it was built, and what that meant in terms of the structural choices.

³⁶ Prestwich, *Edward I*, p.83.

³⁷ Lott, “The Building Stones of the Edwardian Castles,” p.114.

³⁸ Jones, “King Edward I’s Castles in North Wales – Now and Tomorrow,” p.199.

³⁹ Jones, “King Edward I’s Castles in North Wales – Now and Tomorrow,” p.199.

Edward I was a young boy when he first had ownership of land, however he had land stolen from under him by his father and previous king. He was determined to gain back those lost territories. Kings often desire to appear powerful, in the medieval and early modern periods, appearing powerful was particularly difficult. A large proportion of the English people would never know what Edward I even looked like. Therefore, making political statements and creating this idea of status in the minds of the people, was the way forward. The building of impressive structures allowed this. Flint is an early example of using castles as a symbol of power. Edward I built Flint and included a town for the English people to reside in. The local Welsh people did not need to be in the presence of the king to understand his power. This appearance of power was well executed by building fourteen castles across the North of Wales. As previously mentioned, some historians argue that this is “overkill,” in some sense this may seem true.⁴⁰ He began with Flint, a small modest castle that took inspiration from his time in France. However, towards the end of his conquest, the construction of castles such as Harlech and Caernarfon take shape. Caernarfon alone is a prime example of using castles as a symbol of status and power. Caernarfon was inspired by imperial Roman architecture and loomed over the surrounding towns.

Nicola Coldstream highlights some of the differences in these castles by discussing that “Flint has a detached keep, Conwy is planned for consecutive defence, Harlech and Beaumaris rely on concentric defences of near perfect symmetry; Caernarfon experiments with polygonal towers, Conwy with a very early example of stone machicolation, and so on.”⁴¹ Each of his castles were vastly different, the severe jump between Flint to Caernarfon was huge and it is fair to judge that Edward I did do an element of experimentation during this time to see what worked most effectively.

Linking back to this idea of Edward I’s castles being “overkill,” one would argue that Edward I’s castles were far from being “overkill.” The key purpose behind the building of

⁴⁰ Morris, “The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm,” p.349.

⁴¹ Coldstream, “Architects, Advisers and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales,” pp. 19-36.

fourteen castles across North Wales was power, strength, dominance and influence over the region. . Edward learned about the importance of castles when demonstrating his strength during his time in France. He witnessed the effectiveness of this strategy and implemented it in his conquest. Therefore, attributing the term “overkill” to constructing an impressive fourteen castles over 18 years would be a weak argument. Each castle had its purpose and served a much greater objective. It is generally recognised that “Edward I deserves a high place in the history of medieval England, and it is plain why this should be so. Few medieval kings achieved such undisputed mastery of their dominions as he contrived to do.”⁴² G. Templeman supports the argument that Edward I’s reign was masterful, “his statutes set a deep and lasting mark on English law, and he had much to do with the beginnings of Parliament. He conquered Wales, and, as his tomb proclaims, he was the hammer of the Scots.”⁴³ Overall, the conquest of Edward I was a fascinating demonstration of castles being used a symbol of power, his castles may be effective in battle but Edward I’s Iron Ring demonstrated the sheer strength of the English throne across Wales.

⁴² G. Templeman, “Edward I and the Historians”, *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, (Cambridge University Press, 1950) pp. 16-35.

⁴³ Templeman, “Edward I and the Historians”, pp. 16-35.

Chapter Two: A discussion of the “suppression of feudal violence” by way of castle acquisition in the Tudor Dynasty and the decision process behind slighting of castles

Castles represent strength, power and dominance. The previous chapter discussed how Edward I used castles to dominate North Wales. This chapter will discuss the power and dominance of castles in the Tudor Dynasty. The use of castles during the Tudor period saw a different motivation and a shift in use. This chapter will discuss how castles were acquired by the Tudors as a way of controlling the aristocracy and preventing uprisings. The crucial element of this discussion will be the question of why and will assess the importance of these acquisitions. As previously discussed, the context of the period is crucial to understanding why the monarch decided to use castles in a particular way. Essentially, a common theme that is arising in this thesis is that castles are political pawns in a game of chess. They are used to the advantage of the monarch, and how they are used depends on the political context at the time. However, it has become clear that many historians fail to assess the political context and focus on the elements within a castle. This chapter will close the gap, contextual analysis is crucial when investigating a castle and it allows a historian to create a full picture when learning the history of a particular castle.

The consensus for historians when discussing the use of castles during the Tudor period is that “the history of the royal castles under the Tudors is one of neglect and gradual decay.”⁴⁴ Two main factors led to the decay of many castles across England. The first is the “gradual suppression of feudal violence.”⁴⁵ When Henry VII won the Battle of Bosworth, he acquired with the crown some forty castles.⁴⁶ From there he continued to acquire castles across the country, in a bid to gain control over the aristocracy. The second factor is the modernisation of military strategy and resources. They had developed their defensive methods using more modern techniques such as

⁴⁴ H.M Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 327 (Oxford University Press, 1968), p.230.

⁴⁵ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.227.

⁴⁶ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.227.

gunpowder and forts. This meant castles were no match to the force of gunpowder, castles were simply no longer used and left to deteriorate. In addition, Fortresses have thick stone walls that are thicker but shorter than castle walls, making them less susceptible to artillery damage. Therefore, the introduction of newer methods, led to the redundancy of castles. It was after Queen Elizabeth succeeded to the throne, that the attitude towards castles saw a significant shift. Her approach to the issue of castles was that of restoration and protection, she saw castles as a history to be preserved and historians today have Queen Elizabeth to thank for the beautifully preserved castles such as Windsor, Hever, Leeds and Arundel Castle.

The purpose and subsequent use of castles as a method of defence during the Tudor period has been widely discussed. The need for defensive structures did not simply disappear overnight. However, the requirement for castles changed as the political atmosphere transitioned from fighting for the English throne to defending England from foreign invasion. Henry VIII was bitterly aware of the French threat, therefore he chose forts that lined the English Channel as his method of defence which led to castles being obsolete. The Tudors allowed castles to fall into gradual ruin because the military value of castles had declined along with the financial drain that came with owning a castle was what essentially led to their downfall. It is only a few castles that continued their history as royal residences or for progress, whether that be permanent or occasional visits. For example, significant funds were spent on Windsor Castle to maintain it as a Royal Palace. This chapter will discuss the key factors behind the transition from castles used for defence against civil war to either gradual decay or royal residences. The context of the period will be important to understand why certain decisions were made regarding the slighting of castles.

Castles have been studied for centuries, historians widely recognise John Leland as the first antiquary, he spent his career working for Henry VIII during the dissolution of the monasteries. As an antiquarian, he was horrified at the destruction of important historical texts. He gained permission from Henry VIII to rescue certain scholarly texts for the preservation of history. During his extensive travels across England, he

documented everything he saw, from churches to castles to tombs. Leland had planned to create a comprehensive catalogue of Britain.⁴⁷ The work carried out by Leland laid the foundations for future historians to come, this was the first survey of its time and was known as *The Itinerary of John Leland*.⁴⁸ It was Leland's work that allowed future historians to continue this work using more sophisticated approaches.

One historian who has an important voice on the topic of castles and was predominantly informed by John Leland is Ella Armitage. Much like John Leland, she was one of five students of Newnham College and was original in her field. John Leland paved the way for historians such as Armitage, allowing Armitage to become one of the most influential voices in the study of castles. Her 1912 publication *The Early Norman Castles of the British Isles* begins by debunking many early historians, Armitage's main focus is the study of earthworks and topography.⁴⁹ She commends Leland's contribution to the topic and his work informs much of Ella Armitage's work. She also discusses the invaluable research conducted by 17/18th-century topographers. However, she continues by arguing that the study of earthworks has been neglected and the work that has been produced she claims is only theory. Armitage had strong opinions concerning George Clark's works on *Medieval Military Architecture in England*.⁵⁰ She argued that his work was based on a "mere guess of his own" and was "absolutely devoid of foundation."⁵¹ Armitage was critical in her work and has been commended by modern historians. Oliver Creighton commented that "Ella Armitage and her contemporaries advanced the subject on various fronts. For example, by relating surviving physical sites to medieval documentary sources."⁵² Armitage's contribution to the study of castles was one of great renown, she has influenced how we study castles even today, and her work laid the foundations for the development of the growth of castle research.

⁴⁷ Oliver Creighton, *Medieval Castles*, (Shire Publications, 2003) p.7.

⁴⁸ John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland The Antiquary*, (Oxford, 1744).

⁴⁹ Ella Armitage, *The Early Norman Castles of the British Isles*, (Project Gutenberg, 1912).

⁵⁰ George Clark, *Mediaeval Military Architecture in England*, (Wyman and Sons, 1884).

⁵¹ Ella Armitage, *The Early Norman Castles of the British Isles*, (Project Gutenberg, 1912).

⁵² Oliver Creighton, *Medieval Castles*, (Shire Publications, 2003) p.7.

Various historians inform this discussion, the work of Leland and Armitage is crucial to the modern-day debate because it is the early historical preservation and investigation that will inform much of this debate. This chapter will consider the arguments from wider historians, whilst also forming an original point of view. The perspective that the Tudors allowed much of Britain's castles to fall into decay is a valid point to discuss, however, one must consider the political context of the period before casting judgment. This chapter will identify the causes behind a castle that has been slighted but this chapter will also discuss the merits of a castle that has been preserved and maintained.

The first factor this chapter will discuss is the “gradual suppression of feudal violence.”⁵³ H.M. Colvin will inform a large proportion of the discussion in this chapter. His published work *Castles and Government in Tudor England* is an excellent contribution to the discussion and makes an invaluable argument when discussing the decline of castles. He makes an excellent point by stating “it was one thing to acquire castles, but quite another to maintain them... it was their surrender which mattered, rather than their intrinsic military value to the government, which was generally slight.”⁵⁴ In essence, whilst Henry VII continued to acquire castles across England, it was not their military or financial value that interested Henry VII.

Before the Tudors came to power, the aristocracy was leading uprisings, and rebellions and there were various claims to the throne. Up until the Tudor period, the throne had been fought for in battle, with the winner becoming the rightful claimant to the throne. Henry VII (formerly Henry Tudor) returned from exile, defeated Richard III in the Battle of Bosworth and proceeded to marry Elizabeth of York to unite the families and end the civil war.⁵⁵ Henry VII was an intelligent king, he recognised the power the aristocracy held within their castles and property. Therefore, Henry VII began an incidental campaign to suppress feudal violence. H.M Colvin argued “it would be misleading to

⁵³ H.M Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 327 (Oxford University Press, 1968), p.227.

⁵⁴ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.227.

⁵⁵ J.R Lander, “The Crown and the Aristocracy in England, 1450-1509.” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, (The North American Conference on British Studies 1976) pp. 203–18.

suggest that the acquisition of castles was a major object of Tudor political strategy. In general, it was a by-product of forfeiture or rebellion, an incidental part of the process of bringing the aristocracy to heel.”⁵⁶ Colvin continues his discussion by stating “nevertheless, the way in which Henry VII and Henry VIII took possession of one great feudal fortress after another does show that in their estimation the acquisition of castles was very well worthwhile.”⁵⁷

Whilst this was not an intentional policy that Henry VII enforced the collection of castles that he built up over time certainly did solidify his power. As previously discussed, castles are a symbol of power. During Edward I's reign, he used this symbol to appear strong against his enemies, he built numerous castles to dominate the region and assert his power as king. Henry VII used the same method, however, Henry VII acquired castles to squash the aristocracy's power. He removed their power to prevent uprisings or revolutions. This was a successful method of asserting his dominance and suppressing feudal violence. This meant Henry VII could turn his attention to the foreign threat, France.

The modernisation of warfare in Tudor England was a pivotal factor in the decaying of castles. The purpose of castles was to defend territories during times of civil unrest. Therefore, once Henry VII had eliminated the risk of civil war among the aristocracy, the Tudor's attentions turned to France. The placement of most castles across England is not coastal and is very much in land with some exceptions such as Dover Castle. However, introducing forts across the English Channel was at the forefront of defence. H.M Colvin stated during his discussion that “so far as the foreign invasion was concerned, the old coastal castles had been superseded by the new artillery forts built by Henry VIII, and it was upon these - together with the navy - that the security of the kingdom now depended.”⁵⁸ There were one or two castles that were maintained for military defence purposes, the rest were either left to decay or dedicated to residential

⁵⁶ H.M Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 327 (Oxford University Press, 1968), p.227.

⁵⁷ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.227.

⁵⁸ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.225.

homes or progress houses.⁵⁹

In addition, introducing gunpowder led to the redundancy of the strong castle walls that would have previously protected those inside. Colvin argued that “gunpowder was undoubtedly beginning to make the freestanding stone wall obsolete as a method of fortification, and the possession of an artillery train was a more potent token of military power than a dozen moated strongholds.”⁶⁰ The introduction of gunpowder could be considered the catalyst in the decay of many castles across England. To use a castle as a method of defence against the use of gunpowder would have been a dangerous strategy and a castle would not withstand a battle through gunpowder. Castles were made, originally, with bow and arrows in mind, not highly explosive materials. Therefore, with the introduction of gunpowder along with the focus on the French threat, as well as squashing feudal violence, the English castles were no longer required as strongholds.

From this point, the Tudors proceeded in one of two ways, either castles were slighted, as in left to ruin, or castles were maintained as formal residences. Henry VIII came to the throne, his father had successfully squashed the power that the aristocracy previously held, paving the way for Henry VIII to have a powerful reign. Several castles would remain as functional castles. It was “in 1561 when the beginning of a new reign prompted a general survey of superfluous buildings in the queen's hands.”⁶¹ It was Queen Elizabeth I who fought to preserve the historic significance of castles as a result. Colvin argued that “during the queen's long reign it was accepted that the duchy had a duty to maintain its castles, however obsolescent as fortifications and however inconveniently large as estate offices they might be.”⁶² He finishes his article by explaining that the destruction of castles occurred because the English Government and the monarch viewed them as more of a nuisance than an aid once “feudal violence” had been suppressed and the fight for France had began.⁶³ There was a large amount of money spent on a select few castles. These were “Windsor, Dover, the Tower,

⁵⁹ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.230.

⁶⁰ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.225.

⁶¹ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.230.

⁶² Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.227.

⁶³ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.232.

Pontefract, Tutbury, Chester and Ludlow.”⁶⁴ Pontefract was the only castle that was saved 'to prevent the ruin of a monument of such antiquity and goodly building'.”⁶⁵ The rest were either preserved as a royal palace (Windsor) or served as a centre of local government (Chester) or even used as a stud farm (Tutbury).⁶⁶ Only two remained as a form of defence, these were the Tower and Dover Castle.

The Tower would remain as a form of power for quite some time. Controlling the Tower has always been an important element in controlling the country. Built by William the Conqueror, he was keen to dominate his newfound territories but also the hearts and minds of the defeated Londoners. This was in the 1070s, no one had ever seen a structure like it and the building process took over 20 years.⁶⁷ This strategy dominated and maintained power through to the modern day. Fast forward to the Tudor era and the Tower was very much still a centre of power and repression. Used predominantly as a prison as well as having luxurious living quarters, the Tower housed those who faced a real threat to the security of the nation.⁶⁸ The Tower was misused at times, such as Anne Boleyn and Lady Jane Grey who were executed to an end, nothing more. However, their deaths were portrayed as necessary because they allegedly posed a threat to the nation. This is why the Tower was crucial to be kept as a method of defence because every monarch had and still has the security of the nation at heart. The Tower is interesting because, unlike other castles, the Tower continued as a security measure throughout history, including the First and Second World Wars. The last person to be executed in the Tower was Josef Jakobs, a Nazi Spy in 1941 and the last people to ever be imprisoned in the Tower were the Kray Twins in 1952. The maintenance of the Tower during the Tudor era had one purpose, this was to utilise the castle as a prison for the many beheadings that would take place during this time. This theme continued throughout. The Tower, throughout history, has remained as a strong symbol of power to all.

⁶⁴ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.227.

⁶⁵ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.227.

⁶⁶ Colvin, “Castles and Government in Tudor England,” p.227.

⁶⁷ “The Tower of London.” *The Illustrated Magazine of Art*, vol. 4, no. 19, (Thomas J. Watson Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1854) pp. 17–18.

⁶⁸ Simon Thurley, “Royal Lodgings at The Tower of London 1216-1327,” *Architectural History*, vol. 38, (SAHGB Publications Limited, 1995) pp. 36–57.

The reason for the slighting of castles was mainly due to finance. Henry VII was well known for his frugal tendencies, and although considered to be one of the duller Tudor monarchs, his financial policies were very intelligent. B.P Wolffe argued that “Henry VII completely broke away from the medieval financial system and laid the foundations for the more modern English revenue system...from the very moment that he came to the throne Henry began to set things right.”⁶⁹ The many castles were slighted because they were deemed financial strains, however, one castle that was maintained throughout history was Arundel Castle. Once built as a Motte and Bailey castle, on top of an artificial mound, around 1070.⁷⁰ Roger De Montgomery built the castle and the reason for building this castle seems to be simple. Roger De Montgomery was the cousin of William the Conqueror.⁷¹ For his loyalty, he was rewarded with lands across England, including the Rape of Arundel (West Sussex).⁷² He began building the castle in 1067, to protect his lands. However, during the years 1101 and 1102, the castle was besieged by Henry I and surrendered to the king. The castle then passed through various hands, beginning with Henry I's widow and her new husband, William d'Aubigny. The castle remained in the d'Aubigny family until it passed to the Fitzalan family, and then the Howard family.⁷³

This is where the Civil War occurred and the parliamentarians succeeded, and the government slighted Arundel Castle. Once the monarchy had been restored, the castle remained with the Howard family and began life as a formal residence with major restoration works taking place. Objectively, Arundel Castle was built with a Motte and Bailey as its first structure which heavily suggests that its intended use was to defend Montgomery lands.⁷⁴ However, the first battle this castle saw, it lost and quickly became

⁶⁹ B. P. Wolffe. “Henry VII's Land Revenues and Chamber Finance.” *The English Historical Review*, (Oxford University Press, 1964) pp. 225–54.

⁷⁰ Suzannah Lipscomb, *A Visitors Guide to Tudor England*, (Ebury Press, 2012) p.121.

⁷¹ C. G. Harfield, “A Hand-List of Castles Recorded in the Domesday Book.” *The English Historical Review*, vol. 106, no. 419, (Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 371–92.

⁷² Armitage, “The Early Norman Castles of England.” pp. 209–45.

⁷³ Lionel Cust, “Notes on the Collections Formed by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel and Surrey, K. G.” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, vol. 19, no. 101, (Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd, 1911) pp. 278–86.

⁷⁴ Armitage, “The Early Norman Castles of England.” pp. 209–45.

a residence soon after that. We fast forward to the English Civil War, a war that England was already losing, Arundel did not stand a chance. Therefore, despite Arundel Castle formally being built for defence, it certainly did not live up to that purpose and very much has enjoyed its life as a formal residence for the majority of its timeline. In total, this castle has seen one year and around 18 days of battle since the year 1068.

Overall, Arundel Castle was used to defend the Rape of Arundel. The castle is positioned higher than the town of Arundel as a method of power and dominance. The use of power with regards to castles is a common theme throughout this discussion and the decision to slight or maintain was based on several criteria. The Tudors would consider elements such as the cost associated with maintaining the castle and would weigh up the cost alongside the benefits of maintaining the castle. For example, Dover Castle was not slighted. Dover is a crucial castle not only in defence against civil disruption but also against overseas invasion. This is where the political context becomes crucial to the discussion. During the Tudor era, the Tudors squashed civil unrest and turned their focus to the issue of French invasion. Therefore, the strategic use of Dover Castle was crucial to their foreign policy. The Tudor's main concern when making any decision was how a choice could benefit the monarchy, throughout their reign, decision-making was fuelled by motivation. Henry VIII was passionate about his campaign to invade France, therefore to invest time and money into Dover Castle was a critical element to Henry VIII's rule.

Overall, this chapter sought to discuss the Tudor Dynasty and its effect on the castles scattered across England. The Tudor period saw the suppression of uprisings in the aristocracy, typically throughout history, the claim to the throne would won through battles such as the Battle of Bosworth. The Tudors sought to change this, they secured their power by reducing the power of the aristocracy through taking their castles. As previously discussed, a castle is a symbol of power, therefore Henry VII was ingenious in securing his throne through the acquisition of castles. Unfortunately, owning castles is a financial strain. When civil unrest was reduced due to Henry VII's fantastic domestic policy against the aristocracy, the need for so many castles became redundant. Many

were left to ruin, but a few were maintained. The choice to maintain them depends on the political context. As discussed, the Tudors required solid reasoning to invest their funds into maintaining a castle. The castles that modern-day tourists can visit today often do not realise the importance of a castle's power. Overall, the history of the royal castles under the Tudors could be argued to be one of neglect, and for the most part that is true. However, one must not overlook the work of Elizabeth I and John Leland when referring to the gradual decay of castles. Both believed passionately that our castles should be preserved as instruments of history. In addition, one must also not overlook the context of the time. Many castles were indeed left to ruin because of the Tudors, however, the events of the period are crucial to accessing this argument.

Chapter Three: A case study analysis on Dover Castle during the Second World War, with a particular focus on how Dover Castle facilitated the success of Operation Dynamo.

Castles have consistently been a symbolic and physical presence that has shaped the landscape of history. They have been a symbol of power, dominance establishing the purpose a castle had. During this discussion, the use of castles has been debated. In the beginning, castles were used to defend land, to protect and maintain power. However, during this discussion, it has become abundantly clear that castles were not just used for their physical purpose. Castles as a symbol of power and dominance had a more significant purpose, they towered over the enemy, a force to be reckoned with. From times of civil unrest to using their innate power to squash feudal power, castles have been at the forefront of countless moments in history.

Yet beyond their medieval significance, castles across the United Kingdom witnessed a geopolitical transition, when they were recommissioned back into service to defend against the looming threat of German invasion during the Second World War. The repurposing of castles became an integral part of British wartime strategy, showing the adaptability and resilience of these ancient structures in the face of modern warfare. Castles across the United Kingdom became a “powerhouse of a different kind” providing stability and strength to the military.⁷⁵ They endured external modifications such as the installation of anti-aircraft guns, as well as internal conversions to become strongholds for military operations and resting soldiers.

Castles during the Second World War embodied the fusion of medieval history with contemporary necessity. There is an argument to be made concerning the collective psychology of British citizens. During times of unrest, when Britain is at risk or fighting a war the decision to resort to castles as their protection could be argued to stem back to the mindset during the mediaeval period. Castles are ingrained into our society, many

⁷⁵ Robert Jackson, *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation, 1940*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012).

sitting in their locations for centuries, ready to serve their purpose. Therefore, it makes sense that British citizens would resort to their ancestors' way of defence.

After the invasion of France in June 1940, an invasion on British soil seemed imminent. Old castles and forts across the country had to be recommissioned as artillery stores such as Pendennis and Hurst Castles. Others became dedicated command centres, such as the Secret Wartime Tunnels at Dover Castle. Strongpoints were quickly thrown together in the form of 20,000 concrete pillboxes, which can be seen across the country at castles such as Bodium⁷⁶

Castles during the Second World War had a key role in the success of the war and the protection of the country. Each castle contributed a different use, Windsor Castle was used as a refuge for the British Royal family. Whilst Windsor did not contribute to military operations, the remote location and strong fortifications made it an ideal location to protect the monarch and their family. Warwick Castle was used to evacuate an entire school from London during the Blitz, and its remote location provided safety for the children. Whilst the war mainly required military reinforcement, the castles across the United Kingdom were also able to allow civilians to retreat into a safe environment.

In addition, the moat around the Tower of London became an allotment to contribute to feeding Britain as a part of the Dig for Victory Campaign. Everyone was encouraged to turn all green spaces into allotments to continue to feed Britain, access to food overseas was non-existent so Britain needed to become self-sufficient. The Tower was no exception. In addition to this, the Tower was used for high-profile prisoners such as Rudolf Hess. Hess was interrogated in the same location as notable historical figures such as Guy Fawkes, which carries significant symbolism. The Tower throughout history has remained as a power symbol of strength and dominance. To use The Tower to interrogate the most high-profile prisoners in the Second World War is very strong messaging, this sends a message of strength unity to the enemy. In addition, the

⁷⁶ English Heritage, *Castles Through Time*,
<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/castles/castles-through-time/#world-wars-and-after>.

government had also planned to use the Tower as a last resort plan in the event of an invasion.

A significant number of castles were recommissioned during the Second World War, many being used for artillery storage or living quarters for the army. This links back to the early beginnings of many castles, where these structures were used to store artillery, fight battles and protect the armies that reside inside. One significant example of castles being repurposed to defend against the threat of German invasion was Dover Castle. Dover Castle played a very significant role in the success of a secret operation during the Second World War and arguably made its most valuable contribution to history during this time. As already discussed, Dover Castle was used due to the expansive tunnels dating back to the Napoleonic period as well as the proximity to the French border, Dover Castle became the perfect location during the Second World War. Whilst other castles were being used for storage or as living spaces, Dover Castle was contributing to saving thousands of lives.

During the summer of 1940, the Nazi invasion had advanced into France, threatening the stability of Western Europe. The British, underprepared and surprised by the use of blitzkrieg tactics, found themselves facing the prospect of a full-scale German invasion.⁷⁷ This situation became particularly evident during the evacuation of Dunkirk, also known as Operation Dynamo, where Dover Castle served as the headquarters directing the rescue operations. Dover Castle was the hub of British intelligence to complete Operation Dynamo and has been described as “the gateway to England.”⁷⁸ Separated from the Continent by the English Channel, Dover is in the perfect location. Dover Castle acted as the headquarters for the “desperate bid to rescue the troops stranded at Dunkirk” as German forces surrounded them.⁷⁹ Dover Castle played a significant role in the success of Operation Dynamo. It was “on the 4 June, the

⁷⁷ The Imperial War Museum, *The German Lightning War Strategy of the Second World War*, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-german-lightning-war-strategy-of-the-second-world-war> .

⁷⁸ John Cannon, *A Dictionary of British History*, (Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷⁹ English Heritage, *Dover Castle Operation Dynamo, Rescue from Dunkirk*, https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/dover-castle/things-to-do/operation-dynamo-rescue-from-dunkirk/?_gl=1*j3nnv5*_up*MQ..*_ga*MT11ODk3MzY0MC4xNzE1NDIxNDgz*_ga_QK86RM1N34*MTcxNTQyMTQ4My4xLjAuMTcxNTQyMTQ4My4wLjAuMA.. .

Admiralty made the signal ending Operation Dynamo. Originally, it was thought that some 45,000 soldiers might be rescued. In the end, a total of 338,226 were taken away, 308,888 in British vessels.”⁸⁰ Dover Castle not only had the perfect structure and tunnel system to be able to plan such a large task, but Dover also is perfectly situated on the English Channel making Dover Castle the best choice for such a mission.

Robert Jackson, author of *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation 1940* discussed the origin of the code name *Operation Dynamo*.⁸¹ Jackson claims “it was a singularly appropriate code-name and had been thought up by someone on Ramsey’s staff because the operations room at Dover Castle had once housed an electrical plant.”⁸² Jackson provides an interesting viewpoint on the choice of code name. He argues that the room that once provided power through electricity “was now a powerhouse of a different kind, and in the days to come it would be taken to the utmost of its capacity.”⁸³ Whilst other historians object to this notion and do not believe there is a correlation, Robert Jackson makes a solid link between the choice of the code word and the location of their headquarters. It is feasible to assume this because Dover Castle did indeed become a “powerhouse of a different kind.”⁸⁴

One key reason Dover Castle was selected as the headquarters for Operation Dynamo was its strategic location. Chapter Two discussed the transition from civil unrest to war with France as the Tudors dominated aristocratic power. Dover Castle was built with France in mind. Henry VIII sought to protect his lands from the threat of French Invasion in the 1540s. Fast forward 200 years and Britain faces another threat from across the English Channel. Between 1803 to 1815, the Napoleonic Wars left Britain vulnerable to invasion. It was this threat that led to the creation of the tunnels that Dover is so well known for possessing. Jonathan Coad argued that “within the famous white cliffs, hidden from view beneath the castle and safe from bombardment, lies a network of tunnels. They were first excavated in the chalk over 200 years ago. At this time, Britain

⁸⁰ Julian Thompson, *Dunkirk: Retreat to Victory*, (Arcade, 2011).

⁸¹ Jackson, *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation, 1940*.

⁸² Jackson, *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation, 1940*.

⁸³ Jackson, *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation, 1940*.

⁸⁴ Jackson, *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation, 1940*.

faced the threat of the French invasion, and the government poured money into fortifying the town and port of Dover as well as the castle.”⁸⁵ He continues his argument by stating that “the danger was never greater than during the Napoleonic Wars, and from 1797 onwards an extraordinary complex of tunnels was excavated behind the cliff face to provide underground barracks.”⁸⁶

These fortifications that were put in place hundreds of years prior, paved the way for a new need for protection. It has been argued that from 1740 onward, there had been new additions made to defend Dover Castle in the face of the threat of invasion from France.⁸⁷ This is supported by a letter written, during the Second World War, to South Eastern Command from the GHQ Home Forces which stated “regarding the Dover Project... It is pointed out that even if the rest of Dover should be overrun by the enemy, the castle itself is a very strong defended locality which is intended to hold out independently and must therefore be self-contained.”⁸⁸ Dover Castle was made with strength in mind, and the threat of invasion from the direction of France was a real concern.

When war broke out in 1939, the British were not threatened by the French themselves but rather by a German-occupied France. Dover Castle was made for this very scenario, invasion from the direction of France. Admittedly, the Tudors and Hanovers could not predict what the future may hold, however, the location, complex tunnels and structure of the castle were a perfect headquarters for *Operation Dynamo*. It was clear that “speed was the essential factor, and for this reason, it was planned to use the shortest sea crossing between Dunkirk and Dover.”⁸⁹ It is the importance of this short distance and how this allowed for quick rescue that is key to this argument. This is supported by Roy Humphreys who stated that “it was during the Second World War, with the enemy only 21 miles away, that the underground Napoleonic complex really

⁸⁵ Jonathan Coad, *Dover Castle: A Frontline Fortress and its Wartime Tunnels*, (English Heritage, 2011).

⁸⁶ Coad, *Dover Castle: A Frontline Fortress and its Wartime Tunnels*.

⁸⁷ Coad, *Dover Castle: A Frontline Fortress and its Wartime Tunnels*.

⁸⁸ Roy Humphreys, *Dover Castle: England's First Line of Defence*, (The History Press, 2010).

⁸⁹ Jackson, *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation, 1940*.

came into its own.”⁹⁰ This was key during the operation and a main factor in the choice of Dover Castle.

During the Operation, Dover Castle was a hub of activity. The extensive network of tunnels was transformed into an underground hospital called the Annex. This was fundamental during the Second World War, as the intense German bombings targeted key areas of significance. The hospital was a roaring success, with over “180,982 troops landed in Dover, of this number 6,880 were casualties requiring hospital treatment” in the “Royal Naval Sick Quarters at Dover.”⁹¹ This was crucial to facilitating the success of the operation as the soldiers fleeing Dunkirk required medical attention, therefore the proximity to their landing location was ideal. The tunnels were deep underground away from the threat of the enemy, making this facility the safest place an injured soldier could go.

There are multiple reasons why the government chose Dover Castle as their base for Operation Dynamo. It is evident that the location was key, to be located 21 miles from the enemy but having the safety of secret underground tunnels to allow vital operations to take place was invaluable. As well as this, the infrastructure of the castle was fundamental to allowing this operation to remain top secret. This was crucial to set a solid foundation for this operation. The town of Dover was known as Hellfire Corner due to its proximity to the border of France, meaning Dover was consistently under threat of attack, whether that be naval or air raids.⁹² It was “the presence there of the Naval and Military Commands would make the task of close liaison a lot simpler. The fact that Dover was relatively exposed and close to the French coast, with the consequent danger of air attack, was a risk that had to be taken.”⁹³ The reward outweighed the risk in this particular case, despite being located in dangerously close proximity to the enemy (21 miles to be exact), it was in Dover where “Vice Admiral Ramsay secretly masterminded the evacuation of over 300,000 British and Allied troops from the

⁹⁰ Humphreys, *Dover Castle: England's First Line of Defence*.

⁹¹ Jackson, *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation, 1940*.

⁹² Tanya Firth, “Hellfire Corner,” *Britain's Best Guides*, (Britain's Best Guides, 2021) <https://britainsbestguides.org/blogs/hellfire-corner/> .

⁹³ Jackson, *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation, 1940*.

beaches of Dunkirk.”⁹⁴ It was a risk worth taking and the early modern infrastructure dating back to Henry VIII allowed the British to be successful.

Overall, this chapter has discussed the political transition that the United Kingdom witnessed during the Second World War. The threat of invasion was not a new fear to the British citizens, a generation of people who had only been at war some 20 years prior. However, this was a different type of threat, the threat of being controlled by the Nazis and Adolf Hitler. Britain prepared for invasion through any means, the government destroyed directional signage to confuse the enemy, installed anti-tank cubes and sent out leaflets to civilians with instructions on how to defend the country. Therefore, the choice to recommission castles across the country was a wise decision. This thesis has discussed the importance of the strength of castles, both physically and metaphorically. The choice to use castles during times of unrest stems back to our medieval past, castles will forever be deemed as a method of, not only defence but also protection from the enemy.

This chapter has also focused on the case study of Dover Castle, specifically the importance of this castle during Operation Dynamo. This chapter has sought to establish how recommissioning Dover Castle during the Second World War facilitated the success of Operation Dynamo. It is evident that the tunnels “were brought back into service in the Second World War, is when they made their most notable contribution to British history. From 1939 they housed the command centre that controlled naval operations in the Channel, and it was from here that in May 1940 the extraordinary evacuation of the British Army from Dunkirk was planned and coordinated. In the operation, which involved no fewer than 693 British ships, over 300,000 men were rescued.”⁹⁵ Dover Castle began as a defensive castle during the Tudor Period. In chapter two, the threat of French invasion was discussed and Dover Castle has proven to be required throughout history.

⁹⁴ Humphreys, *Dover Castle: England's First Line of Defence*.

⁹⁵ Coad, *Dover Castle: A Frontline Fortress and its Wartime Tunnels*.

Historians such as Jonathan Coad have supported the debate that Dover Castle played one of the most significant parts in not only Operation Dynamo but also the war. He stressed the importance of location and it is evident that “Dover Castle's location, overlooking the shortened sea crossing between Britain and mainland Europe, has given it immense strategic importance and ensured its long use as a powerful fortress.”⁹⁶ In addition, Historian Robert Jackson supports this notion that the location of Dover was key to the success of the Operation. He states that “Dover was selected as the principal railhead since its port facilities were more extensive than those of other cross-channel stations like Folkestone.”⁹⁷ In essence, Dover Castle was vital to the success of Operation Dynamo. Overall, the political context during the Second World War led to the use of Dover Castle as a defensive castle during a time when political unrest was not expected. When Dover Castle was originally built, the country was not stable, the throne was not certain and the threat from overseas was a real concern. Whereas, during the 1930s, a time when the country had only just recovered from the threat of the First World War, Dover Castle was a crucial base for the Second World War. Until the fall of France, the British government was not prepared for invasion because they simply did not believe it would happen. However, the threat moved to just 21 miles away from British soil and it became very real.

This thesis has consistently argued that understanding the purpose of castles across the United Kingdom requires a strong emphasis on contextual analysis. While many historians focus on the architectural features of a castle, those who resided in the castle, and its various structural elements, there is a notable lack of attention to the political climate of the period in which these castles were built or slighted. Few historians investigate the core reasons for a castle's construction or its eventual ruin. This thesis sought to fill that gap by examining the specific factors that influenced how certain castles were utilised and by assessing their functional significance within their historical context.

⁹⁶ Coad, *Dover Castle: A Frontline Fortress and its Wartime Tunnels*.

⁹⁷ Jackson, *Dunkirk: The British Evacuation, 1940*.

Over the centuries, castles have stood as enduring monuments to change in the political atmosphere, the brutality of battles, and the complexities of courtly life. These structures have been besieged, defended, and repurposed, reflecting the shifting tides of history. While archaic defensive assets, such as murder holes and arrow slits became redundant with the introduction of modern warfare, castles have continued to be symbols of power and have supported the country through countless periods of unrest.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this thesis was to bridge the gap in the research of castles. When investigating a castle, many historians quite literally remain at a surface level. Castles across the United Kingdom have many interesting features, such as impressive defensive tools and remarkable architectural design. However, the investigations stop there. Arguably, the most fascinating aspect of a castle lies in understanding the reasons behind its existence. This thesis has aimed to explore the underlying questions of why: why was a specific castle designed in a particular manner, why was it situated in that exact location, and what circumstances in the country at the time justified the substantial investment in creating such monumental structures? This thesis has focused on contextual analysis throughout and has continuously asked, why? There has been a key theme throughout this discussion, how a castle was used was dictated by the political atmosphere at the time and the political motivation behind the use of a castle. In essence, the key theme was how a castle's purpose was affected by the political context of the time.

Whilst forming this discussion, one key element came to fruition. Many historians investigate the physical power of a castle, focusing on the defensive methods, how large the army was and the success of a castle during battle. However, this dissertation also sought to reveal the symbolic messaging behind castles. To own a castle, was to be powerful. For example, the fourteen castles, built by Edward I, were inspired by French architecture. This new way of building was unseen by the Welsh people. Therefore, when Edward began conquering North Wales and erecting huge castles, it was intimidating. To besiege a usual medieval castle would have been a difficult task, therefore to even attempt to besiege Edward I's castles would have been a monumental task and it was the sheer appearance of power that deterred this from occurring.

Throughout this work, the key theme of political context has been apparent. The use of a castle meant power, authority and dominance over the region in which it sat. A castle did not just provide physical power, but also metaphorically. It became abundantly clear during this research that political context was a major factor in the construction or

desertion of castles. As discussed, a key example of this was during the Tudor period. Many historians have attributed the destruction of numerous castles to the actions of the Tudors, however, few historians investigate why this happened. This dissertation revealed that the modernisation of weaponry, ie gunpowder and the repression of feudal power led to castles becoming obsolete. Therefore, throughout this work, it was not only the political atmosphere but also the modernisation of society. Castle walls were no match for gunpowder, and fast forward 400 years, a castle walls were certainly no match for the bombings and threat of German invasion that the United Kingdom saw during the Second World War. However, despite this, the government saw fit to repurpose castles and modernise these structures to prepare the country for war, and in doing this, castles such as Dover Castle facilitated the rescue of 300,000 men.

The research conducted during this thesis predominantly remained within case study analysis. This was crucial to the investigation because to investigate political context one must choose specific times to fully delve into the time period. This research maintained a chronological approach, a journey through the transition of castles over time. Whilst following chronologically, this thesis also saw a thematic approach by way of assessing how throughout time, the country modernised and the purpose of castles adapted to the ever-changing tide of history. The research conducted throughout will not only bridge the knowledge gap but it also opens up new areas of research.

New histories are uncovered every day, there are archaeological digs taking place across the world to discover new information. Historians are often wrong or do not have the whole picture. History is a study of the past, many non-historians assume that nothing new can be investigated with history because it has already happened. However, there are histories that we have never uncovered and new information changes our perception of history all the time. What we once believed can change. The dinosaurs were always believed to have scales like reptiles but some researchers believe that some species could have had feathers. Or the case of Richard III under the car park, he was originally believed to have been dumped in the River Soar. Therefore, research can be extended beyond this thesis, there are unlimited possibilities when conducting contextual analysis of castles.

Importantly, this thesis was limited to three time periods. Edward I and how he conquered North Wales through the use of castles. The Tudor Period and their business-like approach to the financial burden or residential use of castles. The Second World War and how the government returned to their ancestors' way of battle to protect the country from enemy invasion. To be able to ascertain the total number of castles across the United Kingdom would be close to impossible, however, it is clear the country has had thousands of castles throughout time, therefore this work has enabled a new approach going forward. This thesis barely broke the surface when researching castles through the eyes of those who built them. Historians are often too quick to finish their investigation without asking why, but this work will enable a new conversation to take place.

Going forward, the research that could take place because of this thesis is limitless. Further work could be conducted into how the choice to resort to castles during the Second World War was a collective psychological approach. Their ancestors were safe within castle walls, they provided security through their strong fortifications. There is an argument to be made when considering why the country turned to their ancestor's way of battle. This could be an interesting topic to investigate and is another form of context that could be researched.

Overall, this investigation has allowed a new conversation to take place when considering the full picture of a castle's history. Every castle across the United Kingdom had a purpose, and every castle had a slightly different purpose too. Historical research can never be completed, new information comes to light daily and with changing historical perspectives comes new historical research. This field is an exciting one, and going forward the work that can be contributed to this topic is not only going to be dynamic but will also change as new information is discovered. The research conducted in this thesis will likely look different in years to come as some information about the Second World War is still kept top secret, as well as the Tudors being known for destroying documents that implicated them in unsavoury activities and even Edward I's campaign to conquer North Wales as historians are still unsure on who was his

architect. There are gaps everywhere in history which is why historians must continue to uncover information.

This thesis sought to investigate the use of castles throughout time, as well as a case study analysis of the importance of castles during the Second World War. This dissertation considered political motivations and discovered exactly why castles were used and when. This thesis has consistently maintained that understanding the purpose of castles across the United Kingdom necessitates a thorough contextual analysis. Although many historians concentrate on a castle's architectural features, its residents, and its structural elements, there is a significant gap in attention to the political climate during the periods in which these castles were constructed, left for ruin or repurposed. Few historians delve into the fundamental reasons behind a castle's construction and its eventual ruin. This thesis began to close this gap by investigating the specific factors that determined how certain castles were utilized and by evaluating their functional significance within their historical context. However, there is more work to be completed in this field.

To conclude, castles have stood for centuries, they have witnessed the changing tides of history. They have stood during times of battle, and military occupation, they have been besieged and turned into residential homes. Castles have become refuges for vulnerable people and have held the most dangerous prisoners. Castles have stood the test of time throughout history. They were built with defence in mind and when the country faced unrest or threat, castles protected the lands in which they stood. The castles in the United Kingdom will forever be a part of the country's beloved cultural heritage. Castles have and always will be a symbolic and physical presence that has shaped the landscape of history and will forever inform topical debates. This thesis aimed to ascertain the political context that led to the purpose a castle might live out. It is important historians continue to research this topic, because one day, society might need to turn to castles for protection once again.

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