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Foreword by Cllr Richard Davies, Mayor of Kenilworth

In 2016 Kenilworth commemorates the 750th anniversary of the Siege of Kenilworth. It was a momentous, yet still relatively little known, event in Kenilworth’s history, the story of which you will find inside this booklet.

The siege was last celebrated in the town in 1966 and in 2016 it is worthy of further recognition.

It gives Kenilworth an opportunity to reflect on its history and to showcase some of the features that give the town its unique identity. Kenilworth is a wonderful town in which many of us are lucky to live and work and the siege anniversary gives us the chance to share the town with others.

The commemoration also gives us the opportunity to celebrate Kenilworth’s community spirit and I am delighted by the number of local people and organisations that are choosing to mark the occasion with special events and activities. Please give them your support.

I would like to thank Kenilworth Historical and Archaeology Society for their support in writing this booklet. Thank you also to English Heritage for the photography. Without their contributions this booklet would not exist.

750 years ago Kenilworth was at the centre of a long and bloody civil war in Britain. We are fortunate today to live in more peaceful times.

Let us reflect on the past, enjoy the present and look forward to Kenilworth’s future.
COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

The Summer of Siege at Kenilworth Castle
Various dates
Kenilworth Castle and Elizabethan Garden
Kenilworth Castle hosts a range of mediaeval themed activities for all the family throughout the summer months, including circus performers and arts and crafts.

Commemorating the Siege 1966
From July 2016
Kenilworth Library
Share memories as the library service hosts an exhibition remembering how the siege was commemorated in Kenilworth 50 years ago.

Knights and Castles
Tuesday 9 to Thursday 11 August
Kenilworth Library
Art workshop series with Steve Smallman. 10.30am-3pm each day (ages 8-11).

Siege!
Tuesday 23 to Thursday 25 August
Kenilworth Library
Dance workshop series with Motionhouse Dance Company. 10.30am-3pm each day (ages 12 to 15).

Kenilworth Carnival
Saturday 2 July
Kenilworth Town Centre and Abbey Fields
Join the fun of a siege themed carnival. Expect rebel forces and the King’s men. Whose side are you on?

The Siege of Kenilworth – The Town Commemoration
Saturday 27 August
Abbey Fields
Join us in Abbey Fields and meet King Henry III as he prepares for the siege. See how the Dictum of Kenilworth would have been created and learn more about life in 1266 as the scene is set for the siege to follow.

The Siege of Kenilworth Castle
Sunday 28 and Monday 29 August
Kenilworth Castle and Elizabethan Garden
The Summer Extravaganza! The biggest show at Kenilworth Castle since 1266. See the siege encampments, meet the soldiers and learn more about what life during the siege was like. With flaming trebuchets and battle re-enactments this is a show you won’t want to miss!

The Round Table Bonfire and Fireworks Gala
Saturday 5 November
Kenilworth Castle
Set in front of the magnificent ruins of Kenilworth Castle, enjoy a special evening of fireworks set to a backdrop of lights and music.

Old Town Christmas Light Switch
On presents a Mediaeval Christmas
Friday 2 December
High St
The always popular light switch-on event will feature a mediaeval twist.

Churches Together Thanksgiving Service
Sunday 11 December
St. Nicholas Church, High St
Churches Together marks the end of the events commemorating the 750th anniversary of the Siege and Dictum of Kenilworth with a service of thanksgiving.
THINGS TO SEE AND DO IN KENILWORTH

1 Kenilworth Castle
The stronghold of Simon de Montfort, Kenilworth Castle hosted the rebel forces between 1265 and 1266 as they fought the King and his men. Enjoy a range of mediaeval themed events and activities at Kenilworth Castle throughout 2016. Don’t miss the spectacular recreation of the siege taking place on 28 and 29 August!

2 Kenilworth Abbey and Museum
A Priory in mediaeval times, Kenilworth’s Abbey, though now in ruins, is likely to have hosted the King and the many other important people during the Siege in 1266. It is also the site at which historians believe the Parliament would have been held. Visit the Barn Museum between June and mid-September where a special siege exhibition will be on show. The town will also be commemorating the siege on 27 August with an event in Abbey Fields where visitors will be able meet King Henry III as he prepares for the siege of the castle.
Parliament Piece
Now a nature reserve, Parliament Piece has long been thought of locally as the site at which King Henry III held his Parliament. An interpretation board at the site explains more about the site’s history and its current management.

Kenilworth Library
The library service will be marking the 750th anniversary of the siege with an exhibition about life in Kenilworth in 1966 – the last time the town marked the event during the 700th anniversary! There will be a series of talks between July and December, as well as workshops for young people during the summer holidays. Participants will take part in the town celebrations on 27 August.

St. Nicholas Church
Kenilworth’s oldest church first referred to in 1281 just a few years after the Siege of Kenilworth. During the siege weekend in August, the church will be displaying High Mass vestments. The church will also be hosting a service of thanksgiving to mark the end of the siege events in December.

Castle Hill
Cardinal Ottobuono excommunicated the rebels from Castle Hill. The document from which the Cardinal read was a Papal Bull and Castle Hill remains known locally as Bull Hill.
**THE SIEGE OF KENILWORTH - TIMELINE**

**1216**
King Henry III becomes King of England.

**1230**
Simon de Montfort, future Earl of Leicester, arrives in England. He later marries the sister of King Henry.

**1253**
King Henry III gives Kenilworth Castle to Simon de Montfort and his wife.

**1258**
Powerful landowners, known as Barons, become unhappy with the rule of King Henry III. They force reforms - known as the Provisions of Oxford - which reduce the power of the King.

**1264**
The Barons' army defeats the Royal Army at the Battle of Lewes. Simon de Montfort is killed and power returns to King Henry III.

**1264**
The Second Barons War begins as the King fails to keep to the changes agreed in the Provisions of Oxford. The war pits the King's men against the armies of the Barons.

**1265**
The Royal Army defeats the Barons' army at the Battle of Evesham. Simon de Montfort is killed and power returns to King Henry III.

**1265**
The surviving rebel army retreat to Kenilworth Castle. King Henry III offers them several chances to surrender the Castle but these are turned down.

**June 1266**
King Henry III and his men march on Kenilworth and the Siege of Kenilworth begins.

**July 1266**
The representative of the Pope in England excommunicates the rebels in the Castle.

**August 1266**
A Parliament takes place in Kenilworth to find a way to end the siege peacefully. The Dictum of Kenilworth is agreed which sets out the terms of surrender.

**October 1266**
The rebels reject the Dictum of Kenilworth.

**November 1266**
Fighting continues but disease and famine start to affect the rebels in the Castle.

**December 1266**
The siege ends. The rebels surrender and accept the terms of the Dictum.
To understand the background to the Siege of Kenilworth, we need to know something of the main characters concerned, King Henry III and Simon de Montfort, and the events that led up to it.

Henry III became King in 1216 when he was only nine years of age.

From 1232 Henry ruled England personally, investing heavily in a handful of his favourite palaces and castles, including Kenilworth Castle.

In the feudal hierarchy of mediaeval England, Henry ruled the country supported by his barons. One of these barons was Simon de Montfort.

Simon de Montfort was born at Montfort-l’Amaury, France, around 1208 and came to England in 1230 to regain the earldom of Leicester which had once been held by his family. He found favour with King Henry III, became Earl of Leicester and married Eleanor, the King’s sister.

Kenilworth Castle was a favourite family residence of the De Montforts and two of their seven children were born there. In 1253 the King gave the castle to Earl Simon and his wife for both their lifetimes – a generosity which he would no doubt come to regret!

Despite the fact that Simon de Montfort and King Henry were very different people, they got on well. However by 1258, Henry’s rule had become unpopular with his barons, including Simon, because of his abuse of power, his expensive overseas campaigns, high taxation and his growing reliance on his foreign favourites for advice.

A group of his barons - including Simon De Montfort - forced the King to make changes to how he ran the country and reformed the royal government through a process called the Provisions of Oxford which took some of the King’s power away from him.

The King ignored the Provisions of Oxford. This led to civil war – the second Barons War of the 13th century - where the armies of the King battled for power against the armies of the Barons – now led by Simon de Montfort.

In May 1264 The Battle of Lewes took place. At Lewes, King Henry was defeated by the Barons and taken prisoner along with his eldest son Edward. Simon de Montfort became virtual leader of England.
Life After Lewes

King Henry struggled with his barons for the right to rule over England. Having been defeated at the Battle of Lewes in 1264 his army again fought the barons the following year at Evesham where this time his army, led by Prince Edward, claimed victory over Simon de Montfort.

The Battle of Lewes in May was a resounding victory for the Barons. The King, his son Prince Edward, and his brother Earl Richard of Cornwall, were taken prisoner. Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, ruled England in the King’s name for the next 15 months.

In May 1265 Prince Edward escaped from imprisonment and began the fight to restore his father to the throne. He organised an army and on the 4 August he led them against Simon de Montfort’s army at the Battle of Evesham.

Prince Edward’s army of 10,000 outnumbered the army of Simon de Montfort by two to one. The battle became a massacre and over three quarters of the baronial army were killed including Earl Simon. The royal army had won the battle.

Reeling from the loss of their leader at the Battle of Evesham, Simon de Montfort’s surviving supporters retreated to Kenilworth Castle. King Henry attempted to negotiate the surrender of the castle but his demands for the rebels to give it back were rejected. The scene was set for the Siege of Kenilworth.

In August 1265 survivors of the Battle of Evesham made their way back to Kenilworth Castle where Simon de Montfort’s wife Eleanor was waiting with her younger children. The castle had been kept well stocked with food and siege equipment. Several months of negotiations followed between the King and the rebel Barons. During this process, the Countess Eleanor and her younger children left Kenilworth for Dover Castle and eventual exile in France.

Later in 1265 Simon also left Kenilworth to meet other supporters at Ely. On his way back to Kenilworth young Simon was captured by Prince Edward and forced to agree to surrender Kenilworth Castle to the King. However on arriving at the Castle the garrison commander, Henry de Hastings, refused to hand it over the Castle saying that he held the castle in the name of the Countess of Leicester and would only surrender it to her. Simon was then sent under guard to London but escaped and fled to France to try to raise support for the rebels.

In March 1266 the King sent a messenger to Kenilworth Castle to discuss terms with Henry de Hastings for the return of the castle. De Hastings, in no mood to negotiate, gave the King his response in savage fashion. The messenger returned from Kenilworth minus a hand. The King was outraged by this brutal act of defiance and assembled troops in Northampton in May 1266 as he planned his next move.
June 1266 - The Siege Begins

Having turned down the chance to make peace on King Henry’s terms, the supporters of Simon de Montfort prepared to defend Kenilworth Castle. The King moved his men to Kenilworth and the Siege of Kenilworth began in June 1266.

The King arrived outside Kenilworth Castle with a vast army, vowing not to leave until he had won the Castle back. Four siege camps were established around the Castle commanded by King Henry, Prince Edward, Prince Edmund and Roger de Mortimer.

Prepared to fight a long battle for the Castle, the King ordered huge quantities of weapons, money, food and drink to be sent to Kenilworth. Powerful siege machines – including trebuchets, mangonels and ballistas - and fighting towers were brought in, as were barges for an assault across the water that surrounded the Castle. When not in his siege camp, the King is likely to have stayed in the Priory with his Queen where he would have been fed and entertained.

During the siege, powerful and influential men such as the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and a personal representative of the Pope - the Papal Legate, Cardinal Ottobuono - spent much time at Kenilworth as they tried to bring the fighting to a peaceful end.

July 1266 - The Defiant Rebels

The strong defences of Kenilworth Castle meant the rebels successfully fought off the King’s Army outside. Intervention from the Pope did little to dampen the spirit of the rebels.

During July, on the Pope’s instructions, Cardinal Ottobuono excommunicated those inside the castle. This meant that they could no longer take part in any church services and their immortal souls were in peril – a terrifying prospect in these dangerous times when most people in England took great comfort from the Church.

The Cardinal read out the Papal Bull, which contained the details of excommunication, from a safe distance at the top of Castle Hill.

This act only led to a defiant response from the rebels. To show they did not care about the excommunication, they dressed up one of their men in white sheets to represent the clothes of the Pope. The rebel then stood on the battlements of the castle and called back that he had ‘excommunicated’ the King, the Cardinal and the King’s army!

Siege Trivia

Trebuchets were capable of throwing stone balls weighing up to 300 lbs (the size of a Giant Panda) with remarkable accuracy.

Siege Trivia

During excavations at the castle in 1960 archaeologists found several such stone balls in the outer court which had been catapulted 350 yards (1 fifth of a mile) across the Mere and had apparently destroyed a building inside the curtain wall.
August 1266 - Parliament in Kenilworth

As the siege continued, the Church asked the King to consider peaceful ways to end the skirmish. Cardinal Ottobuono requested that the King call a Parliament at Kenilworth to try and end the siege through talks and negotiations. Given the people involved and the facilities which they would require, the most likely venue for this meeting would have been the Priory.

The purpose of the Parliament was to set up a committee of twelve men (Earls, Barons and senior members of the Church) to decide what steps should be taken to return peace to the land and to consider the case of the “disinherited”, as the rebels had come to be known. Cardinal Ottobuono and the King’s nephew were asked to play the part of arbiters in case of disagreement. Their services were called upon several times during the tense and difficult deliberations.

Eventually an agreement was reached and the terms of surrender were set out in a document known as the Dictum of Kenilworth.

Siege Trivia
The King’s Siege Tower was known as “The Bear”.

Stories of the siege suggest missiles from trebuchets on both sides were seen colliding in mid-air.

October 1266 - The Dictum of Kenilworth

The Dictum of Kenilworth formalised the terms of surrender. The rebels were given their last chance to give up Kenilworth Castle.

The Dictum was read out to the rebels and was also publicly proclaimed at St. Mary’s Church in the County town of Warwick on the 31 October 1266.

The terms of surrender included allowing most of the rebels to leave the Castle unharmed. It also gave the ‘disinherited’ barons the chance to buy back their lands on payment of heavy fines set on a sliding scale dependent upon the extent of their involvement in the war and siege. The exceptions to this included the leader of the rebels, Henry de Hastings and the members of the garrison who cut off the hand of the King’s messenger before the start of the siege. They were to be put in prison.

The rebels rejected the terms of the Dictum on the basis that they were unfair and they had not been given any say in choosing the Committee. The rebels continued to hold out hope that help would come from France. The King gave the rebels 40 days of grace to consider. They were told that if no word had been received from France by 11 December, they must surrender or expect no mercy. The King and Prince Edward prepared for an all-out final assault.

The Dictum of Kenilworth was later incorporated into the Statute of Marlborough. The Statute of Marlborough remains the oldest piece of statute law in the United Kingdom.

Siege Trivia
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Kenilworth Castle’s strong defences meant the King’s Army continued to struggle to take it by force. Five long months of siege were making conditions unbearable inside the Castle.

After many weeks defending Simon de Montfort’s former stronghold, conditions for the rebels inside the castle deteriorated very quickly. By mid-November food supplies were almost exhausted - the rebels had already eaten their starving horses - and disease began to spread rapidly through the Castle with many deaths occurring.

November 1266 - famine and disease sets in

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Siege Trivia

- It is alleged that the rebels inside the castle picked up and reused undamaged arrows which had been fired by the King’s army.
- According to folklore King Henry III ordered a whole whale to be brought to Kenilworth to feed his army and to entice the starving rebels out of the Castle.

December 1266 - The Siege Ends

The rebels were finally forced to accept the terms of the Dictum of Kenilworth and surrender. Starvation and disease succeeded where siege warfare had failed!

On 13 December representatives of the rebels surrendered to the King’s army. Keeping true to the terms of the Dictum of Kenilworth, the King granted letters of safe conduct to the rebels to go where they wished. They left the Castle with their banners still flying.

The Annals of Dunstable tell us that “at the beginning of the siege there were within the castle 1,000 men – 700 of whom were armed and vigorous – plus 160 women and an unknown number of servants.” There is no record of how many survived.

On 15 December 1266 the King left Kenilworth ending an almost six months’ stay during which time England was governed directly from Kenilworth – a situation unprecedented in English mediaeval history.

Despite the exclusion of Henry de Hastings and others from the ‘benefits’ of the Dictum, by July 1267 Prince Edward had taken pity on the men as they had sworn on the Holy Gospels to keep the peace and never bear arms against the King or his heirs again.

Having been released, Henry de Hastings did not keep his word. He became leader of the remaining “disinherited” in the Isle of Ely just prior to their surrender and died the following year in 1268.
After the Siege

Once it had been cleared up, King Henry III passed Kenilworth Castle on to family ownership. The town and its castle began the next stage of its history.

The conditions inside the castle would have been dreadful and the Sheriff of Warwickshire and Leicestershire was given the horrible task of having it cleared up. He was also instructed to dismantle the siege engines. The Priory was completely bankrupt, having been forced to support the King for such a very long time.

On 16 December 1266 the King granted the castle and the earldom of Leicester to his second son Prince Edmund, later also creating him Earl of Lancaster. Thus began almost 200 years of Lancastrian ownership of the castle and patronage of the priory during which time both grew and prospered once more – but that is another story!

Siege Trivia

In 1966 an estimated 6,000 people attended the Siege event held at Kenilworth Castle.
English Heritage
Kenilworth Carnival
Kenilworth Chamber of Trade
Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society
Kenilworth Lions
Kenilworth Round Table
Kenilworth Town Centre Partnership
Kenilworth Town Council
Open Spaces Society
Shakespeare’s England
Warwickshire Library Services
Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

www.kenilworth750.co.uk