



OPW



Welcome to Kilkenny Castle

To help keep our visitors and staff safe, we've made some changes on site and we'd be grateful if you could follow the guidance below

To keep visitor numbers at a safe level, the layout and flow of the tour route was changed to a strictly one-way system. Please follow the signs within the Castle. Please don't sit on the furniture and avoid touching any of our displays /furniture/exhibitions

Our guiding staff might not always be able to answer an in-depth query during your visit however if email your question to kilkennyguides@opw.ie, our guiding team will do their best to give you the information you are looking for.

Together we can make the visit of Kilkenny Castle safe & enjoyable.

KILKENNY CASTLE stands dramatically on a strategic height that commands a crossing on the River Nore and dominates the High Town of Kilkenny City. Over the eight centuries of its existence, many additions and alterations have been made to the fabric of the building, making Kilkenny Castle today a complex structure of various architectural styles. The original Anglo-Norman stone castle was built for William Marshal, 4th Earl of Pembroke (c.1146-1219) during the first decade of the 13th century. Kilkenny Castle later became the principal Irish residence of the powerful Butler family for almost 600 years. The Butler ownership began when James (c.1360-1405), 3rd Earl of Ormond, purchased the castle in c.1391, and lasted until 1967 when Arthur, 6th Marquess of Ormonde (1893-1971), presented it to the people of Kilkenny in return for a token payment of £50. The buildings have been in the care of the Office of Public Works since 1969 and many important programmes of archaeological excavation, conservation and restoration have been carried out.

1 The Terrace Corridor is down a short flight of steps and under the garden terrace. On the left, a passage cut through the north curtain wall leads into a small cellar, where the curved shape of the adjoining tower projects into the room. Excavations revealed the foundations of a 16th century building probably built for Thomas, 10th Earl of Ormond.

2 Medieval Foundations In the corridor, a floor glass panel covers access to another postern gate that opened into the dry moat that ran around three sides of the castle. A flight of steps at the opposite end leads to the undercroft.

The Undercroft. In this circular chamber, the massive girth of the 13th century walls is evident. There are plunging arrow loops within the wall embrasures and an example of wicker centering on the ceiling that was used to support the vault during the building process. From here a few steps lead up to the Withdrawing Room.

3 The Withdrawing Room was recreated to its original 1830s proportions. During the 1850s, the ladies withdrew here from the dining room leaving the men to enjoy their port and cigars. On the walls are remnants of hand painted Chinese wallpaper with monochrome infill carried out at the studio of David Skinner. The fireplace is a 19th century reproduction of an earlier French design.

4 Dining Room. This was the dining room in the 1860s and on the walls is a hand blocked wallpaper. The cast iron fireback probably depicts Bacchus in his chariot being drawn by two tigers or leopards, inside floral and Classical motifs.

5 Entrance Hall. There has been an entrance hall here since the 17th century rebuilding of the castle but it now occupies a larger area. The doorway through the massive curtain wall was twice remodelled in the 19th century. The black and white stone floor also dates from the 19th century rebuilding and the marble table is supported on an 18th century base. The portraits are from the family collection, which were purchased by the Irish government from the family estate in 1995.

The Grand Staircase.

This 19th century mahogany staircase was designed and made by the local firm of R. Furniss and Son, Kilkenny and leads to the Tapestry Room, then turns to give access to the first floor.

6 The Tapestry Room: Temporary closed

7 Library. The decoration is a recreation of the furnishing styles of the mid to late 19th century. Thanks to a remnant found behind a skirting board, the French silk poplin on the walls was specially woven and is based on the original pattern by the firm of Prella of Lyons. The silk damask curtains are by the same firm and the pelmets are original and matching reproductions gilded in gold leaf. The bookcases were reproduced from the original glazed mahogany example in the right end corner. The mirror over the mantelpiece was also restored and re-gilded. The Berber-style floor carpets are based on patterns adapted from Izmir motifs and were specially woven by the firm of Woodward Grosvenor who had produced the originals.

8 Drawing Room of the same period style also has surviving paintings from the original Ormonde collection. On the end wall, The Five Eldest Children of Charles I dates from the 17th century and is by an unknown artist after the original by the Flemish painter, Sir Anthony van Dyck. On the left, An Allegory of Avarice is signed by the Flemish painter Jan de Herdt and on the right are several 18th century Italianate landscapes. Over the fireplace are two 19th century Scottish landscapes by a member of the Nasmyth family of Edinburgh.

The Private Stairs from the 1830s rebuilding is of granite and leads into the bedroom corridor of the same period. The earlier decorative plasterwork on the ceiling comes from the South Tower

9 Blue Corridor. The original 16th century Long Gallery was situated here. During the 17th century, the Ormonde collection of paintings was the largest in the country.

Victorian Nursery: This room provides a fascinating glimpse into 19th Century childhood. Period appropriate furnishings including children's chair, cradle and cot complete the room along with everything you would expect a privileged child of the time to have.

Private Sitting Room: The "lady of the house" used this private space for reading, dealing with social correspondence and private visits. The room contains a selection of 19th Century prints and miniature portraits of various family members.

Bedrooms: Temporary closed

The Moorish Staircase offers an exciting and innovative space. It was created by the architects

Deane and Woodward to allow better access to the Picture Gallery and provide another major staircase in this awkwardly shaped building. It is a rising half-turn stairs around a sky-lit well.

Charles William Harrison (1835-1903), the stone carver, is credited with the carved naturalistic foliage and small animal details that decorate the stairs.

10 The Picture Gallery was built during the early 19th century building programme carried out by the architect William Robertson and was constructed on earlier foundations. Robertson's Picture Gallery, in keeping with his work on the rest of the castle, was in Castellated Baronial style. It was initially built with a flat roof that began to cause problems shortly after its completion. The distinguished architectural firm of Deane and Woodward was called in during the 1860s to make changes to the overall design of the Picture Gallery block and other corrections to Robertson's work. These changes included the insertion of four oriels in the west wall and the blocking up of the eight existing windows, while another oriel was added to the east wall. A pitched roof was put in place, with central glazing. The hammer-beam roof structure by Harrison is supported on carved stone corbels. It was decorated by John Hungerford Pollen (1820-1902), then Professor of Fine Arts at Newman College, Dublin, using a combination of motifs ranging from the quasi-medieval to the pre-Raphaelite, with interlace, gilded animal and bird heads on the cross beams.

The Marble Fireplace is made of Carrara marble and was designed by J. H. Pollen also in a quasi-medieval style. It was supplied by the firm of Ballyntyne of Dorset Street, Dublin. Foliage carving attributed to Charles Harrison covers the hood and a frieze beneath is decorated with the Butler/Ormonde arms and significant episodes from the family history.

Paintings. Some of the portraits in this room date from the 17th century while others are of later date. In the 19th century the picture collection at Kilkenny Castle consisted of almost 300 paintings; a mixture of ancestral and royal portraits, Dutch landscapes, Italian religious paintings, and Italianate landscapes.

The Kitchen Corridor. This corridor is down three short flights of stairs from the Picture Gallery, it leads to the Victorian kitchen where the Castle's Tea-Room is now located.

We hope that you enjoyed your visit to Kilkenny Castle, its extensive grounds and garden.