INTRODUCING WINDSOR CASTLE
The first castle at Windsor was built in wood in about 1070 during the reign of William the Conqueror. After winning the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the new King William had lots of castles built across the land to protect his soldiers from attack by the hostile people of England, as his army invaded the country and gradually established control.

Windsor Castle was one of a ring of 9 fortresses built around London, each one 20 miles from London and each other, which was the distance of a day’s march. This meant that, if reinforcements were needed to protect London from attack, soldiers could march from these fortresses and be ready to fight within 24 hours.

The site of the Castle was chosen because it is the highest point along this stretch of the River Thames, with a steep cliff on the north side to give security, and sufficient height for the soldiers guarding the Castle to see who was approaching.

The Castle was rebuilt in stone in the 1170s when Henry II was King. Hard heath stone that came from Bagshot, about 10 miles south of Windsor, was used to construct the half a mile of stone walls you see today, in some places 4 metres thick.

By this time the Castle had become a royal home because it was so strong and safe. This was tested on two occasions when the Castle was besieged by enemies – in 1193 and 1216 – but on neither occasion did the attackers succeed in breaking into the Castle or taking it over.

CASTLE HILL
From Castle Hill some of the medieval defences can still be clearly seen. Arrow loops are wider on the inside of castle walls to enable the defending archer to move from side to side, giving him a wider field of fire. They are also tall which allowed him to aim upwards and make his arrows travel further.

From the late 1100s, square towers were often replaced by round or semi-circular ones, which were more stable and presented fewer blind spots for archers. Many of the towers at Windsor are wider at the base, which added stability and made rocks dropped from above bounce outwards towards the enemy.

The shiny sharp stones in the mortar are pieces of flint which stopped the mortar being squeezed out by the weight of the stone blocks. The sharp stones stuck out from the walls to deter the enemy from climbing up. Before flint, oyster shells were used between the blocks of stone.

MIDDLE WARD
The Castle is built on a hill that overlooks the River Thames. A hill was an excellent site for a castle because it gave the defenders a good view of anyone coming to attack and it was hard for the enemy to fight going uphill.

During the invasion of England after the Battle of Hastings, many motte and bailey castles were built by the forced labour of the local inhabitants, under the supervision of the conquering army. A mound of earth, the motte, was made by digging a ditch in a circle and piling up the earth inside the circle. A courtyard, or bailey, with a wall and another ditch around it was made next to the motte. This provided protection for men, animals and stores. A tower was then built on top of the motte called a keep, which was the safest and strongest part of the castle.
The design of Windsor Castle with its motte and two baileys made best use of the long narrow site. The Round Tower is built on top of the motte and the baileys are on either side. The upper bailey is where the State Apartments are, and in the lower bailey are the Guard Room and St George’s Chapel.

There used to be a wide, deep ditch around the Castle walls called a moat which was very difficult for enemy soldiers to cross or tunnel under. However there was never any water in the ditch because the Castle is built on chalk soil which lets the water drain through it.

**NORTH TERRACE**

Early castles were built to protect major roads, rivers and towns. The River Thames was the main route for supplies from this part of the country to London. It would also have provided an enemy from the east with an easy route inland and so an important job for the soldiers on watch duty at the Castle was to keep a close eye on river traffic. As the Castle was built long before the town, it was then much easier to see the river than it is today.

Siege engines and other devices shown in the trail for attacking castles had limited effect at Windsor because the moat, although dry, prevented attackers from bringing the equipment up close to the walls. The steep cliff here was also a formidable barrier. However the Castle walls took a severe battering during the siege in 1216, which lasted three months, and the damage was repaired at the time of the next king, Henry III, in the 1220s.

**THE QUADRANGLE**

Jousting tournaments were often held here and knights would travel to Windsor from all over Europe to test their fighting skills. Each contestant was allowed three lances and when they had been broken, the knights dismounted and continued fighting with heavy swords until one of them was beaten. Although blunted weapons were used, knights were sometimes injured or killed.

**NORMAN GATEWAY**

The Norman Gate was built in 1360 by King Edward III and was heavily defended because it guarded the entrance to the royal apartments. Lowly prisoners were thrown into the dungeons beneath the gate towers and often forgotten about. Royal prisoners, including at one time the King of France, were treated much better and were allowed to have their own apartments and to go hunting in the forest surrounding the Castle. The Scottish king, David II, was held at Windsor for 11 years at a cost of 3s 4d a day (about 16p today), which was a lot of money in the 1300s.

**ST GEORGE’S CHAPEL**

The building of St George’s Chapel was completed during the reign of Henry VIII, and 10 kings are buried in the Chapel including Henry and his favourite queen Jane Seymour.

The Most Noble Order of the Garter is Britain’s oldest and most senior order of knighthood and was established in 1348 by Edward III. In the Quire of the Chapel are the banners of the present Knights of the Garter, of which there are 24 plus the Sovereign and the Prince of Wales. There are also additional Royal and Stranger Knights and Ladies of the Order.

Each Knight has a banner, crest, helmet and sword above his allocated stall (seat) in the Quire and a metal plate fixed to the back of the stall showing his coat of arms. In days gone by, a Knight displayed his coat of arms on his shield, his banner, the coat he wore over his armour and even on the coat worn by his horse. It was a badge different from that belonging to any other knight and it showed friends and enemies who he was – essential when fighting in battle and hidden inside armour!

The Garter symbol looks like a belt with the cross of St George inside it, the patron saint of the Order as well as of England. It is said that the garter was chosen as the symbol for Edward’s new order following a ball when the garter belonging to a lady fell to the floor as she danced. To save her embarrassment he picked it up, tied it to his own leg and said ‘Honi soit qui mal y pense’ meaning ‘Shame on him who thinks evil of this’. The king told his courtiers they too would soon be proud to wear such a garter and the words became the motto of the new order and part of its symbol. The Garter symbol can be found in many parts of the Castle and a fine example decorates the outside of one of the houses opposite St George’s Chapel.