

## U3A History Group Visit to Tutbury Castle.

The History Group visit to Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire was one that exceeded all expectations. From the moment of welcome the group became involved in the fascinating history of the Castle, which was originally built at the command of William the Conqueror, shortly after 1066. The Castle is a fine example of a 'motte and bailey' castle, perhaps unique in having three baileys. The site was chosen as it was on a prominent hill, with outstanding views in all directions over the Dove Valley and the River Dove, and not far from the strategic crossing of the River Trent.

Our Guide gave us a thorough and absorbing account of the ownerships, from the de Ferrers family, a Norman dynasty who were gifted the land by William the Conqueror, through many owners and visitors, including Katherine Swynford, the mistress (and later third wife) of John of Gaunt. The castle also played an important part in the Civil War and was destroyed by Act of Parliament in 1647-48, after holding out for Charles I in the Civil War. The castle is now in the possession of the Duchy of Lancaster, owned by Her Majesty the Queen, who is the Duke of Lancaster.

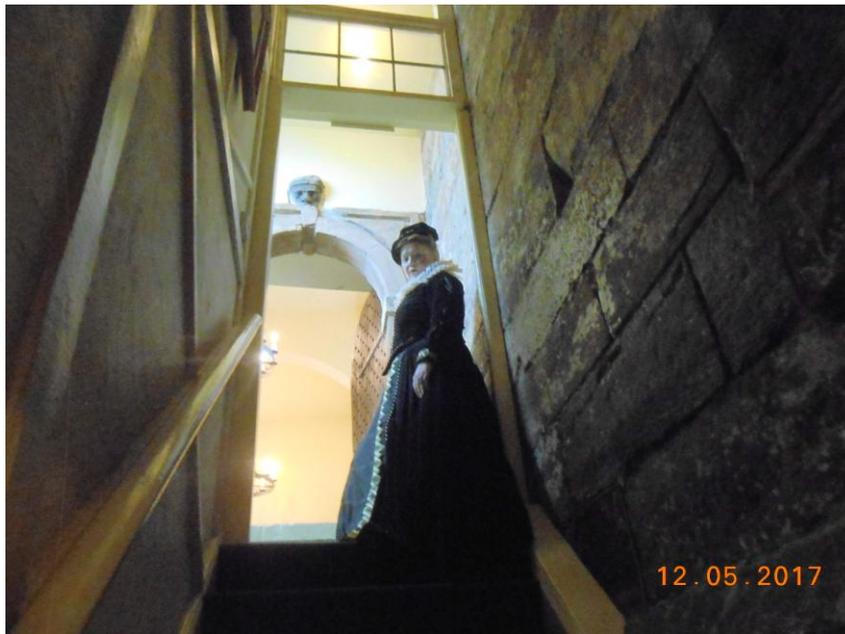


After a light lunch, the Group were privileged to have a presentation by the Castle Curator, Lesley Smith. She explored the story of Mary Queen of Scots, who was held prisoner at this castle four times, the last time very shortly before her execution at Fotheringhay Castle. Lesley presented the history dressed in an authentic outfit of the period, based on an actual costume that Mary, Queen of Scots, wore.



The Presentation was in turns humourous, poignant, bawdy, tragic and interactive and Lesley engaged the audience throughout, as she portrayed Mary, Queen of Scots and delivered her re-enactment in the first person. At the end of the presentation Lesley opened the floor to questions, which again she answered in character, in depth.

Following this excellent presentation there was the opportunity to explore the *Great Hall*, in which Mary, Queen of Scots, had been kept prisoner, and in which there was a display of other period costumes.



History had certainly 'come alive' for the Group in our visit to Tutbury Castle.

Heidy Hague.