

The Castle Keep, Newcastle

Young reviewers say Tyneside's original New Castle is the city's finest museum - what a pity it's not more welcoming.

Young journalists from Children's Express to offer their views on the state of the nation's history and culture for Museums and Galleries Month.

The Castle Keep, Newcastle

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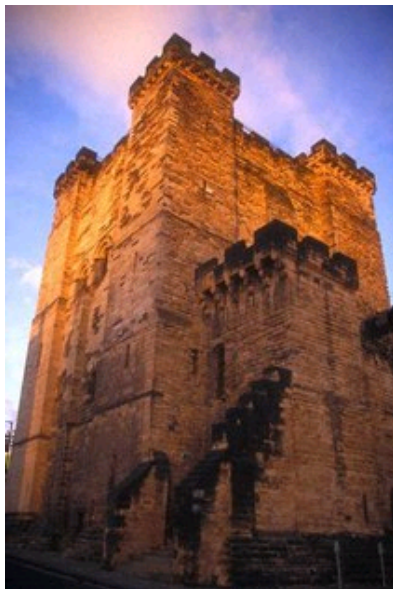
The Castle Keep is one of Newcastle's oldest building and is a great way to learn about the city's history.

Built on the site of an old Roman fort by the River Tyne, a castle was founded in 1080 by William the Conqueror's eldest son. It was this castle that gave Newcastle its name.

The castle's keep, restored in the 1800s and again in the 1970s, houses the museum. The one thing you notice about the the three-floor keep is the amount of staircases leading to places such as the Gallery, King's Chambers, Queen's Chambers, Great Hall, dungeon and a late Norman chapel occupying the ground floor. There are also staircases that lead nowhere.

The first staircase we tried led us to the roof, which is a fairly modern addition to the keep. This provided spectacular views of the Newcastle skyline as well as its famed bridges.

Elsewhere in the museum there were Norman gravestones made before the castle was built, musket balls, cannon balls, the old city arms and plaques from the medieval Tyne bridge destroyed in 1771.



The Keep attracts 16,000 visitors a year, with a bout a quarter of these being young people on school trips. Although it gives us a fascinating insight into Newcastle's history - better than any school history lesson could provide - it was not the most child-friendly place we have ever been to.

This is a fact readily admitted by the museum's curator, James Morrison. "We don't encourage individual children to come in," he said.

"They must be accompanied by an adult. The problem is that there are many things that can be broken, or places where children can fall down and hurt themselves."

The guide boards are not easy to understand either. Words like garderobe and piscina are not exactly well known. It is something the museum's keepers are working on.

There is a lack of interactive displays, and we though having a few actors around the place to make it more real would be a great addition. However, the fact that the museum is run by a charity means it is strapped for cash.

We enjoyed the Castle Keep and think it is probably the best museum in the city. You learn a lot about the history of Newcastle and how the city became what it is today. The biggest shame is that not enough people know about it and that it does not get more financial support.

Fascinating, but not really built for children - Newcastle's Castle Keep.

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About the team

This review was edited by Lindsay Marchant, 18, and Sonia McAthey, 14, with reporter Leanne Park, 14. It was published in the Museums Journal. For more reviews, see column, left.

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