

## Question 2: How accurate is this painting as an interpretation of the Great Hall during the Middle Ages

Ivan Lapper is a world-leading historical reconstruction artist, who has worked with English Heritage as well as The Royal Armouries. He drew an interpretation (painting) of the Great Hall, which was published in the Kenilworth Castle guidebook / advertisement booklets. Obviously then people are going to see this picture, and want to see something that will attract them to come to the castle. But where did he get his information? He could have based it on information from other sources or visit the site himself – or both.

The painting clearly shows that the Great Hall was designed to impress guests in the Middle Ages, a prime example being the style of windows. They are perpendicular style and there is also an oriel window in the painting. This proves that they are for decoration, thus to impress guests. There is also a fireplace in the photo, with decorative stonework, as well as a decorative doorway. I think Lapper included these features because they do in fact make the picture seem impressive. (Especially to people with little or no knowledge of what a typical Great Hall would have been like.) The perspective of the painting makes the Hall look significantly bigger than it appears in reality, and the people in the painting are made to seem quite small up to the Hall and again making it look bigger, to make it more impressive. These are exaggerated features, which is similar to being biased which makes Lapper slightly unreliable in that respect.

Some of these features were not at the site – the people, the tables and food, the flags hanging from wall, the floor, the roof, most of the top quarter of the wall and the glass in the windows. But Lapper's actual structuring of the building is quite accurate (which I personally witnessed at the site). At the site there were remains of the two left windows, the wall that holds the fireplace, and half of the window third-in. (these things were what I could see from the same viewpoint as in Lapper's painting.) Thus then, his picture is quite accurate in that respect. However, as for the other features (previously mentioned) Lapper must have either done his research from other sources or simply made them up. A good example is the marble floor, and I know that at that time this kind of technology (to hold such a heavy material) was not available.

In the picture, the roof is one of a 'hammer beam' design. There was no roof at the site but there were putlog holes / slits that did resemble the positioning of the beams in the painting. A hammer beam roof was the most architecturally advanced style of roof, and these were typical of the time, as seen in the Great Hall at

Edinburgh castle, Westminster Hall and the Great Hall of Winchester around the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This makes the source more reliable and thus making Lappers painting more accurate. Also there is a source that mentions a hammer beam roof too, stated by John Drew, "Among his works was the building of the Great Hall with its fine hammer-beam roof,". Now, Drew is a local historian and has written several books on Kenilworth, and he is well known to exaggerate interesting features of the castle. His work is biased, as I can see from the source, which states, "John of Gaunt transformed the Castle into a fine palace". This proves that he is biased making the source unreliable, therefore making Lappers painting seem less accurate. Drew has even said that he "just looks for the good things" so that the castle sounds good.

The window glass is no longer there at the site, but Lapper has drawn clear-glass windows with simple cross tracery designs. He could have used his imagination, or used source information. There is a source by Drew that states, "four large windows, filled with beautiful tracery and rich stained glass". Stained glass was also typical of the time, as seen at Caerphilly Castle in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This completely disagrees with Lappers interpretation, making it again less accurate. But this is only one source so I would need more to make a definite judgement. And I know about Drew, again he is biased in this source - "with a beautiful enriched doorway," Thus the source is unreliable and makes the painting less accurate. The structuring of the windows are of a perpendicular style, and Lapper has been reasonably accurate with this since this style of window was typical of the time, as seen at Bath Abbey, Caerphilly Castle, the Great Hall of Winchester, Westminster Hall and Carisbrooke Castle. On a small note, at the site there were putlog holes around the windows, a set for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> rows, but in Lapper's painting there are only shutters on the 1<sup>st</sup>/ bottom row. The only reason I can think for this is that just having one set made the picture look better, which is probably true, as I mentioned the painting is aimed to impress. But again this makes the painting less accurate.

The flags on the wall were not at the site, so again must have been made up or from a source. There are no sources that mention tapestries, so I can't criticise Lapper on that part, but I do know that tapestries were very bright and colourful, and this disagrees with the plain flags in the painting. The most logical explanation is that Lapper did this to keep to his 'colour scheme' of the painting (notice the plain coloured rays of light in the painting. Once again this makes the interpretation less accurate.

As for the tables, food and people these features are totally fictional. They are arranged to resemble some sort of gathering in the hall, although the food is quite large. (Possibly to impress again.)

From this evidence I have decided that Ivan Lapper has made a very inaccurate interpretation. The majority of the sources (and their authors) have poor reliability and this is partially the reason for the inaccuracy. The fact that Lapper even ignores the (although not many) factual sources just makes the reliability of painting awful, thus leading to awful accuracy.

However, this is a historians opinion, and what 'bothers' me certainly will not bother a non-historian / tourist. I think this painting is more reliable to some people than it is to others. To a historian, I think this picture would be an insult, but that may be because historians are precise people. On the other hand, anyone (non-historian) who looks at the site after the picture will be impressed due to Lapper's clever accuracy on the structure of the building, but he clearly exaggerates the 'good bits' to impress the reader. Being aimed at tourists as well, the more impressive the picture, the more visitors the castle will have thus more profits, which is obviously the main goal.

Conclusively, this painting to me is not a valid interpretation of the Great Hall because of the lack of accuracy, and I don't like the way the painting is made false just to get more profits.