

A photograph of a park with a stone building, trees, and people sitting on a lawn. The scene is bright and sunny, with lush green grass and large trees. In the background, there is a stone building with a wooden door and a small sign. Several people are sitting on a lawn, some on a bench and others on chairs around a table. The text "UNDERSTANDING THE SITE AND ITS HERITAGE" is overlaid on the image in three white boxes with purple text.

# UNDERSTANDING THE SITE AND ITS HERITAGE

# 2.



## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE AND ITS HERITAGE

This section provides an introduction and baseline understanding of Abbey Fields identifying its location, the physical characteristics of the Fields, as well as the ecological and historical information which influence the current management and conservation of the site.



Fig 2. Aerial photograph of Abbey Fields (By permission of John Cooke, Flight by Patrick Murphy)

Permission sought from KAAC for image use in Conservation Plan



Fig. 2 Boundary of Abbey Fields, Kenilworth

## STUDY AREA

Abbey Fields is located close to the centre of the town of Kenilworth in the County of Warwickshire, Midlands, four miles north-west of the town of Royal Leamington Spa, and five miles south-west of the major city of Coventry. Kenilworth falls within the District of Warwick, within Warwickshire County Council.

Abbey Fields spans an area of 27 hectares/ 68 acres and is the largest green space in Kenilworth. Its main access and address is Bridge Street, CV8 1BP, with an OS grid reference SP28730 72394.

This Management Plan incorporates the whole of Abbey Fields and its boundaries with High Street to the North, Castle Road to the West, Borrowell Lane, Forrest Road and Abbey Hill to the South and Rosemary Hill and Bridge Street to the East.

A location plan is provided in Figure 2, which also shows the boundary of Abbey Fields, site features and built structures identified in Figure 3.



Fig 3

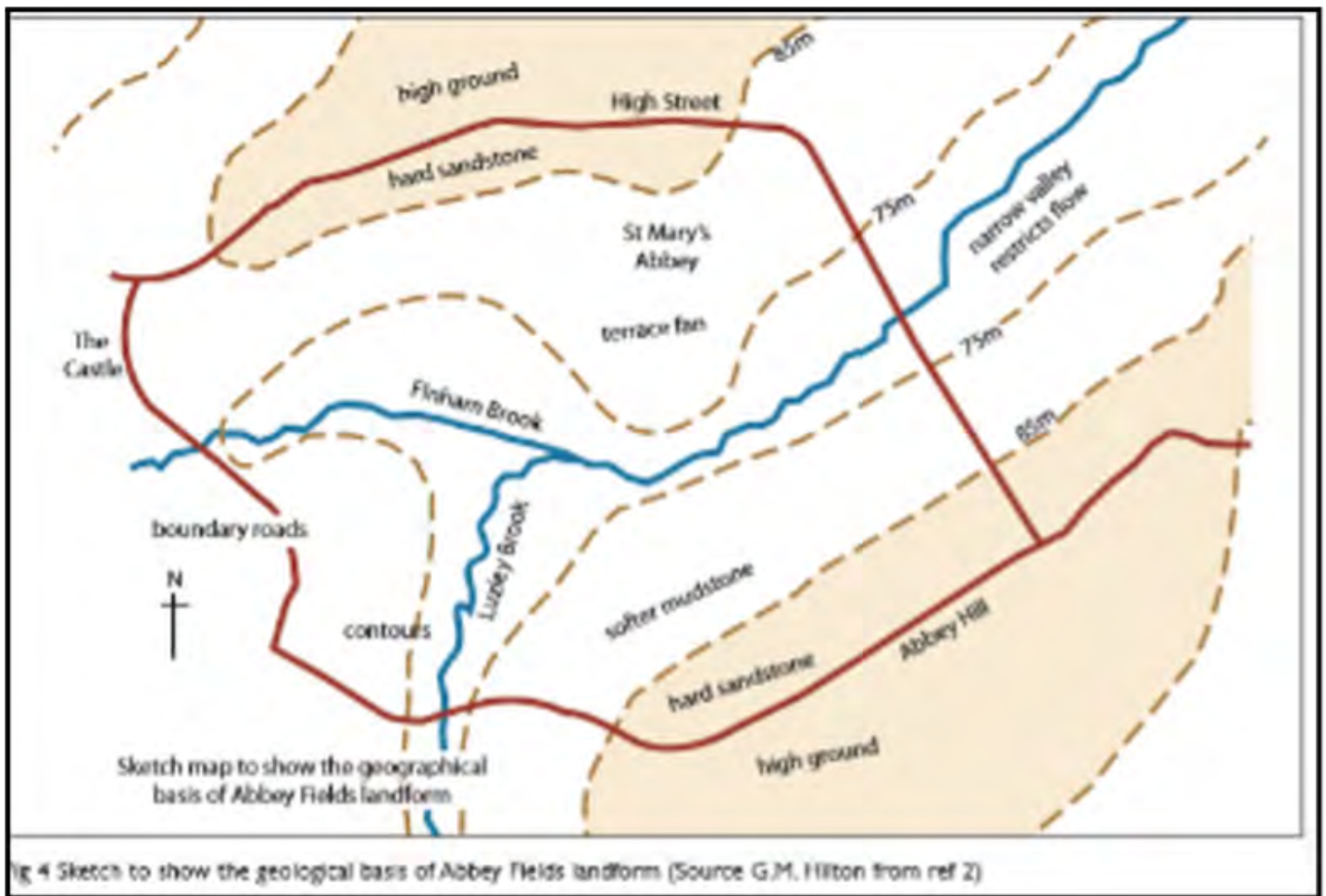


Fig. 4 Geology Map Data from National data information

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

### Geology

Abbey Fields lies upon a bedrock of Sandstone to the north and west with Mudstone to the south within the Kenilworth Sandstone Formation. Towards the valley of Abbey Fields the geology is made up of sedimentary superficial deposits of River Terrace Deposits of sand and gravel and Alluvium deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel. Superficial deposits of Bagington Sand and Gravel are located to the south east of Abbey Fields. (see Figure 4).

### Topography

The topography of Abbey Fields slopes steeply from the North and South towards Finham Brook with a range of between approximately 48 to 96 metres above sea level (MASL). The northern edges of Castle Hill and Southern edges of Abbey Hill are at their highest at 96 (MASL) and the central belt of the field along Finham Brook are the lowest point at 48 (MASL).

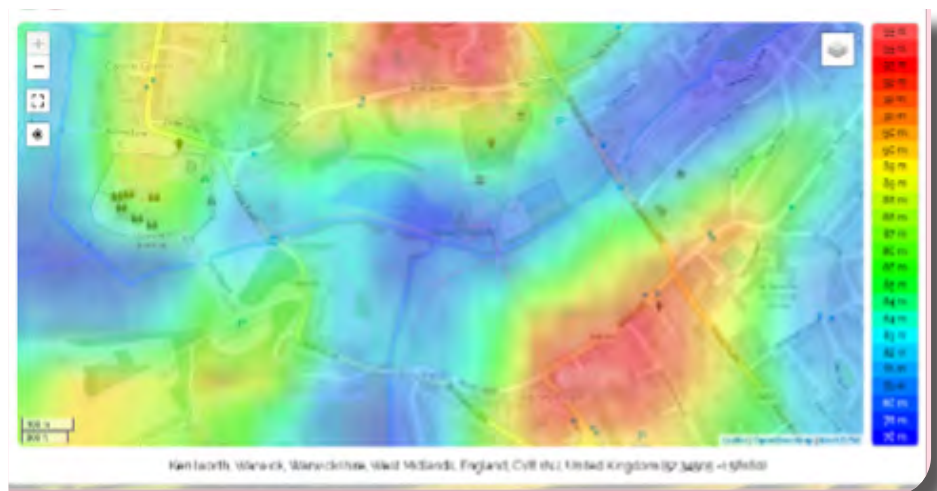
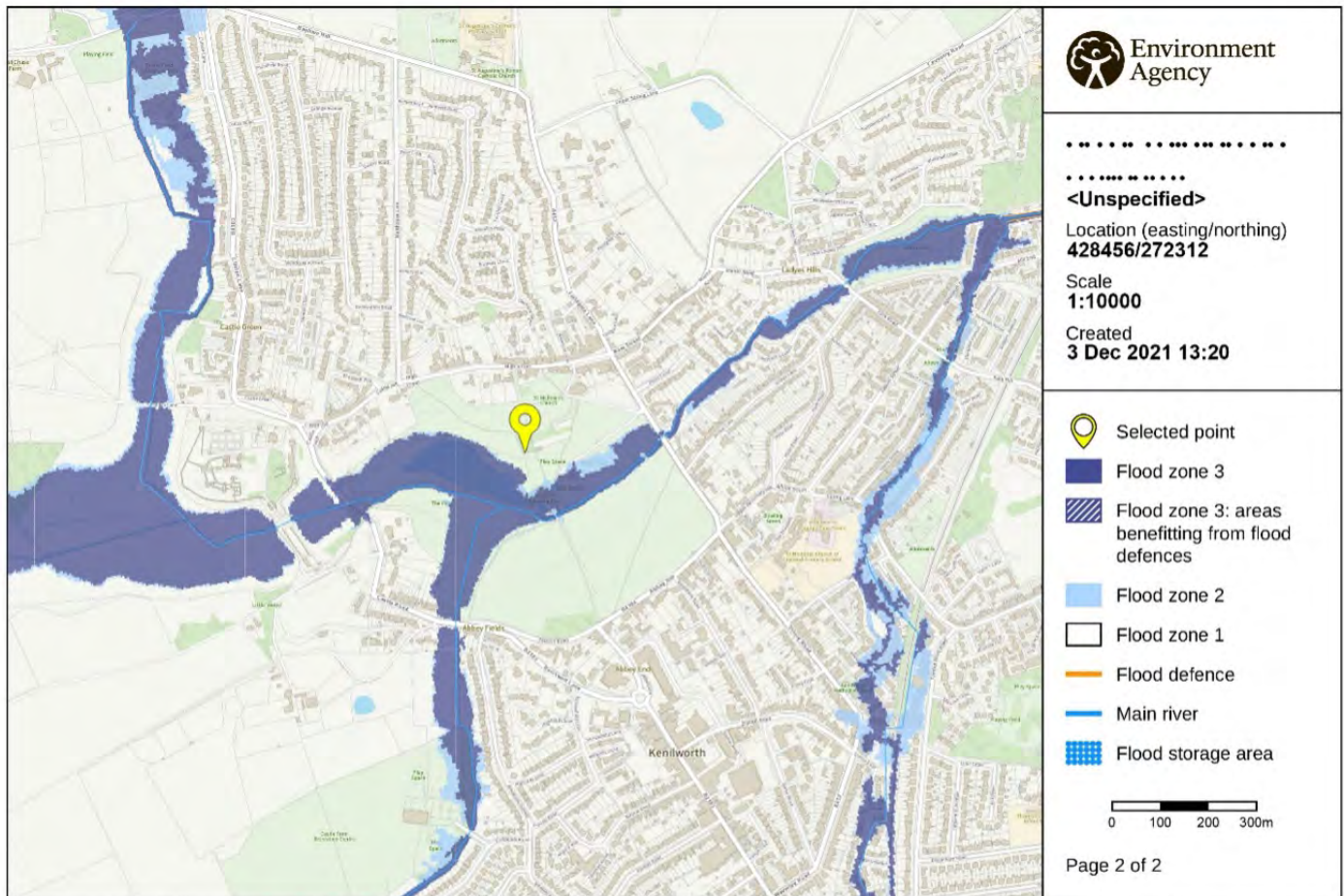


Fig. 5 Topography Map Data from National data information

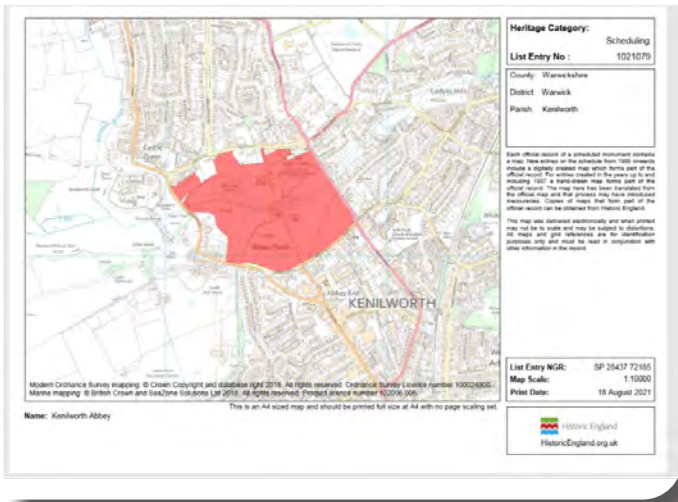


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Fig. 6 EA Flood Risk Map from National data information

## Hydrology

Abbey Fields sits within the valley of Finham Brook which runs through the centre of Abbey Fields and Luzley Brook which joins close to the lake's waterfowl feeding station. Abbey Fields Lake which is roughly 3.6 acres was created on the site of the original Abbey Fishpond and is located on the western portion of Abbey Fields. Finham Brook is categorised by the Environment Agency as a Zone 3 Flood Risk Area.



## HERITAGE DESIGNATIONS

The whole of Abbey Fields is classified as a Scheduled Monument, first listed in August 1923.

Details of the reason for designation are as follows:

*“The Augustinian priory at Kenilworth survives well as both extant masonry and buried remains. The history of the Abbey is well documented, and its unusually close relationship with the adjacent castle and with the growing medieval town immediately beyond its bounds is of particular interest, allowing a fuller understanding of the development of towns and social structure in the medieval period.”*

*The monument includes the known surviving standing, earthwork and buried remains of Kenilworth Abbey and its wider monastic precinct. Kenilworth Abbey is an Augustinian monastery located on gently rising ground to the north of Finham Brook, immediately east of Kenilworth Castle, which is the subject of a separate scheduling. The High Street of Kenilworth old town is located immediately north of the precinct boundary. The parish Church of St Nicholas, which remains open for worship, is not included in the scheduling.”*

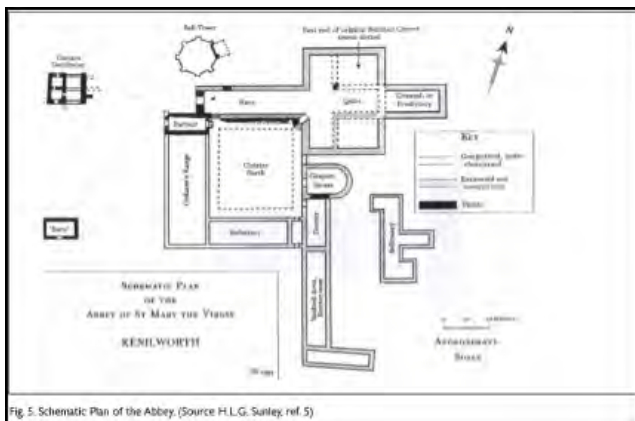
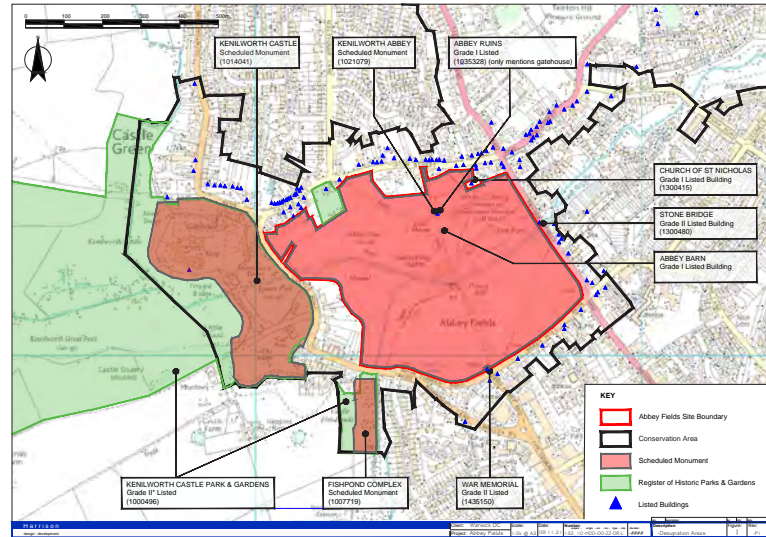


Fig. 5. Schematic Plan of the Abbey. (Source: H.L.G. Sunley, ref. 5)



The FULL Historic England Scheduling can be found in Appendix 1.

## Listed Buildings

There are a number of listed structures in Abbey Fields. These include:

- The Abbey Ruins designated as Grade I listed building
- The Church of St Nicholas as Grade I listed building
- Kenilworth War Memorial as Grade II listed building

## Conservation Area

Abbey Fields is located within Kenilworth Conservation Area. The Conservation Plan (Appendix 2), details the history within Kenilworth and documents key features within Abbey Fields.



### **LiDAR and aerial photography survey**

The following summary is found within the conclusion of the Abbey Fields Kenilworth - LiDAR and aerial photo survey carried out in, 2007

The analysis of LiDAR data has identified a considerable number of areas of ground disturbance on Abbey Fields. The majority appear to be modern landscaping features. However, some features are of uncertain nature and possibly worthy of further investigation, as outlined in the archaeological desk-based assessment.

### **Archaeological geophysical survey**

The following summary is found within the conclusion of the Archaeological Geophysical survey carried out on Abbey Fields, 1997

<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/issue.xhtml?recordId=1066875&recordType=GreyLit>

### **Built Structures**

This list below provides an overview of the principal built structures and facilities that lie within the curtilage of Abbey Fields including:

- Abbey Fields Swimming Pool (Everyone Active)
- St Nicholas Parish Church and Churchyard
- Abbey Barn Museum (KHAS)
- Gatehouse and Abbey Ruins (KAAC)
- War Memorial (Commonwealth War Graves)

Further built structure information is provided in extracts from the Conservation Plan in Chapter 10.



## NATURAL LANDSCAPE

### Ecology

Abbey Fields and the adjoining St. Nicholas Churchyard are designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and Eco-site, respectively. The LWS designation is based on a mosaic of habitats. The 27 ha. site supports woodland, priority grassland, wetlands, scrub, mature trees and those listed in habitats section below, all of which have dependent species. In particular, the site supports acid grassland (a national and local priority habitat) as well as a riparian corridor that links other sites in the area.

### Habitats

Key habitats within the site of particular value for nature conservation, comprise of:

- Semi-natural broadleaved woodland
- Mature and veteran trees (as parkland or avenue trees)
- Acid grassland
- Neutral grassland (amenity grassland)
- Ponds and wetlands
- Built environment (buildings/walls)
- Introduced scrub & natural scrub
- Plantation woodland
- Reed-swamp
- Running water
- Scattered trees
- Species rich hedgerow
- Standing water
- Tall ruderals



### Trees

Trees provide an important framework within the landscape of Abbey Fields.

Mature adult trees are identified throughout the site as either parkland trees, or within wooded areas or avenues. A number of veteran trees are to be found along the edges of Finham Brook (mainly oaks) and along hedge boundaries around the site.

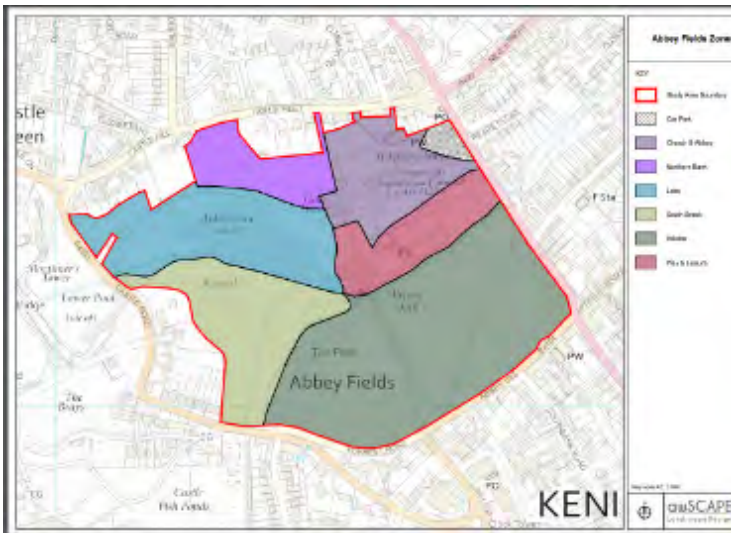


Fig. 10 Character areas

## Character Areas

There are six distinct character areas/zones identified within Abbey Fields which have been used to assist with landscape analysis. The boundaries are broadly defined by the current physical, natural or historical characteristics and use within each area.

The character areas are shown in Figure 10 above and are summarised as follows:

### *Car Park*

This zone is self explanatory and is the main car park facility for Abbey Fields, the Leisure Centre and High Street. Its boundaries are Bridge Street, Church Walk and the churchyard boundary.

### *Church and Abbey*

This zone is defined by the approximate extent of the core of the inner precinct of the former Abbey, with its remaining historical features and includes St Nicholas church, churchyard and Church Walk from Bridge Street, extending to the land north of the swimming pool.

### *Northern Bank*

This zone is the sweeping bank that leads from High Street to the north west taking you via two paths from the high ground down into Abbey Fields. Its boundaries include the gardens of dwellings, the post and rail fence on High Street, mature oaks provide a defining edge to the Lake zone and also a stone wall to the churchyard.

### *Lake*

This zone incorporates Abbey Fields Lake, the paddock to the north west, and the paths leading from Castle Road to the north and the south of the lake upto and including the feeding station near to the Leisure Centre. Its boundaries are defined by Finham Brook, the Leisure Centre, mature oaks near to Northern Bank, and Castle Road.

### *South Brook*

This zone lies to the south of Finham Brook and incorporates Luzley Brook through its centre. Access to South Brook is from Castle Road and Borrowell Lane. Its boundaries are defined by a mature hedgerow to the east, garden boundaries to the west, Finham Brook to the north and Castle Road and Borrowell Road.

### *Hillside*

This zone incorporates prominent high ground leading down into the valley of Finham and Luzley Brooks. Including the War Memorial and Holmes Avenue, as well as the site of the former Mill and interesting land features, this zone's external boundaries are defined by Forrest Road, Abbey Hill and Rosemary Hill, whilst internally Finham Brook provides a defining edge, as does the hedgerow to South Brook.

### *Play and Leisure*

This zone incorporates the Leisure Centre, Main Drive, play facilities, tennis courts and the funfair field. Its boundary to the north is not clearly visible on site in Abbey Fields, but is associated with retaining evidence of former monastic fishponds and associated monastic buildings. The southern boundary is Finham Brook, with the lake to the west and Bridge Street forming the eastern boundary.





## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A brief timeline of the creation of Abbey Fields has been prepared using information provided in the book 'The Abbey Fields' by Robin D Leach, as well as Robin Leach's Rookfield Publications website. It provides an interesting account of how Abbey Fields has formed and how it is so embedded into the local community as a valued asset.

Circa AD 1121 – The castle of Kenilworth and the Priory dedicated to St Mary was founded by Geoffrey de Clinton – the Sherriff of Warwickshire, resulting in the alteration of Finham Brook. In approximately AD 1200 a dam was constructed to create a lake flooding the area upto Castle Ford and Luzley Brook and a Mill was constructed with a mill race near Bridge Street.

There was a Great Siege of Kenilworth Castle in AD 1266 and the Priory was commandeered by the King and used for shelter during the siege. Around AD 1291 the parish church of St Nicholas was known to exist although separate from the Priory.

In AD 1447 the Priory gained more wealth and land, and was believed to own most of the land currently held in Abbey Fields. Its status was

upgraded to Abbey. However in AD 1538 the Abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy and the land given to Sir Andrew Flammock. Parts of the Abbey were dismantled and the carved stones from the Abbey doors and windows were incorporated into the doorway of the new St Nicholas Church installed between 1550 and 1640. After dissolution, land along the enclosing roads was available for building, and cottages were built along the northern edge.

Circa AD mid 1560s – The Abbey land was sold to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, who had been given Kenilworth Castle and in AD 1642-1644 a Civil War in Kenilworth led King Charles' army to lodge in St Nicholas Church, and the following year Cromwell's Army

In circa AD 1650 Abbey Lake was drained and a new course for Finham Brook created on north side with a dam to prevent permanent flooding of the former lake. In 1673AD Abbey Bridge was destroyed in flooding and later replaced by the current Iron Bridge. By 1700AD the Abbey was a ruin. The fields were used by local farmers for grazing and paths were established across the fields with a North-South path from High Street to Abbey Hill. A branch led from this to St Nicholas

Church. A diagonal path from Abbey Hill led to the bottom of Rosemary Hill and was used to 'cut the corner'. This is known as Holmes Avenue. By the 18th Century a diagonal path was created from Bridge Street to St Nicholas Church.

AD 1834 floodwater carried away part of the mill dam in the centre of the fields. And in AD 1840 the extension of the churchyard led to a full archaeological dig. As population expanded in AD 1866 a further extension of the churchyard westwards was granted. Abbey Fields became part of people's daily lives and people saw them as their 'village green'. 1878/89 ice skating was known to exist on the flooded Oxpen Meadow and this appeared to continue on an annual basis.

AD 1882 – the Earl of Clarendon put Abbey Fields up for sale prior to the Settled Lands Act becoming law. In AD 1883 the Kenilworth Local Board hoped to purchase The Fields and to sell development plots to pay off the debts. However they could only afford to purchase over a half of the fields and Abbey Fields was sold in three sections, with the Local Board purchasing a central 40 acres of land with a covenant for its sole use as 'public walks or pleasure grounds'. One area of land was then conveyed to St Nicholas church wardens but was allowed to form part of the park. It allowed the churchyard to be further extended and the church and churchyard were segregated from the rest of Abbey Fields by a stone wall. Burials were delayed as Abbey remains were uncovered.

1889 the Local Board purchased land around the churchyard to add to the park. However by 1891 there were no signs of any park-like developments. In 1894 Kenilworth Urban District Council (KUDC) replaced the Local Board, and soon after pushed for opening up the Fields and building a swimming pool. 1896 the first swimming pool is opened and water was taken from the brook. However it was in a publicly inaccessible location which led to the creation of The Park i.e. the fields accessible from The Church and the Iron Bridge. In 1897 a new footpath was built to provide access from Bridge Street to the swimming pool. Also bye-laws were compiled for the use of the fields by the public. In 1902, avenues of trees were planted from Bridge Street to the swimming pool, Iron Bridge to the Church and from the Church back to Bridge Street, creating a triangle of avenues. In 1910 the first football match was granted permission in Abbey Fields and in 1913 the bowling green was opened.



During the First World War, Abbey Fields was used for growing food and in 1917 Gertrude Evans donates her land to the park. In 1920 the children's play area was constructed and the War Memorial Cenotaph was agreed. In 1922 the war memorial was unveiled and built within the highway as opposed to within Abbey Fields. This was to 'sidestep' the covenant preventing structures being built within this part of the Abbey Fields. It was built with the widening of the Abbey Hill junction.

In 1922, Abbey ruins were excavated to provide work for many unemployed. This continued for approximately 18 months. In 1923, the Kenilworth Abbey gateway and buildings were worthy of preservation and of national importance.

In 1923 the first two grass tennis courts were opened and these were increased by another 3 in 1925. In 1923, public conveniences were added to the Fields. In 1925-26, a replacement tennis and bowls pavilion was built, formerly thatched. It still stands today. The field between Luzley Brook and The Bungalow (Ford House) was used as a playing field particularly for St Nicholas School. Putting greens were constructed on land behind the tennis courts (now a children's meadow). The ruins were recovered up others fenced to protect them.

In 1927, Kenilworth held its Carnival within Abbey Fields and in 1929, football posts were installed off Bridge Street creating a new permanent football pitch in Abbey Fields. In 1932, the 'Friends of Kenilworth Abbey and its Surroundings' were formed to help preserve the Abbey ruins within the churchyard and to care for the churchyard itself.



Around 1932, two hard tennis courts were added north of the grass courts and in 1934 a drinking fountain was installed north of the swimming pool path. In 1935 the new enlarged swimming pool/lido was opened, with thatched changing rooms. Additional football pitches were introduced alongside Luzley Brook.

The Friends submitted to KUDC a list of work required in the Barn and as works were undertaken it was believed that many relics were destroyed. In 1936-7 a path was made to the Barn entrance. The Museum was opened in 1937.

In 1938, Gertrude Evans donated an area of land alongside High Street, now the north west entrance. And air raid shelters were dug across the Fields, and in 1939 three were made into concrete shelters. In 1940, during the war effort, 11 acres of Abbey Fields was used for arable production and other areas used for allotments with some restricted grazing. Following the war, Oxpen meadow was drained fully and was used for the annual Agricultural Show.

A bus layby and park shelter were constructed in 1950, to ease congestion on Abbey Hill. The shelter was not included within Abbey Fields but retained

as part of the highway 'sidestepping' the restrictive covenant. In 1963, steps were introduced providing access to Abbey Fields from this location.

In 1952 the car park was opened to the public in its current location. 1954 the Agricultural show moved to the bottom of the Memorial Field where the ground is levelled and continues to be used today. 3 football pitches were in use on Abbey Fields, one near to the war memorial, one at the bottom of the hill on the showground and one adjacent to Luzley Brook.

In 1959 future plans were drawn up for the development of Abbey Fields that included improvements to the Lido, a paddling pool, a lake on the Oxpen Meadow, a footpath around the lake with seats and shelters, and a carriageway from Abbey Hill with parking around the pool, as well as cleaning the brook, flower beds and rockeries and a miniature golf course between Abbey Hill and Finham Brook. In 1960 a permanent bridge was accepted over Finham Brook for Carnival procession near to Bridge Street.

In 1962 Kenilworth Society advised that the lake should be for wildlife and not for boating. The pitch and putt course is laid, and Punch the Council's

last cart horse dies, leading to grazing in the Fields ending in 1963. In 1962 the Historical Study Group was formed and in 1972 changed its name to Kenilworth History & Archaeology Society (KHAS). Around this time the swimming pool changing rooms were reconstructed.

In 1965, post and chains were installed between the car park and the path to the church (Church Walk) and 16yards from the church boundary to limit disturbance of church services. In 1971 improvements were made to the play area, and the public conveniences replaced. Vandalism was becoming an increasing problem, byelaws were being broken and 'no cycling' was painted on all entrances. In 1973 KHAS documented all the relics stored in Abbey Fields 'Barn'. The Agricultural Show moved their show from Abbey Fields and the Lions Club held their first event.

In 1974 The Paddock, currently fenced from the public, was purchased. And a corner of a field owned by Councillor Whiteman was exchanged for a strip of land between Abbotsfield and 39 High Street. And in 1974 KUDC was ended and Warwick District Council formed taking on the ownership and management of Abbey Fields.

In 1974 the Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee was created following discussions between KHAS and the newly formed WDC to halt the deterioration of the Tantara Gatehouse. In 1977 the Barn was opened as a museum by KHAS.

In 1985 football in Abbey Fields ends, with Castle Farm facilities being fully open. The indoor pool is opened in 1986. In the mid 1990's the Friends of Abbey Fields (FOAF) were formed. In 1995 Oxpen Meadow failed to drain, the drainage systems believed to have been damaged during the swimming pool construction and it was agreed to create a permanent lake. Work commenced in 1997 on the lake formation.

In 2003 the whole of Abbey Fields becomes a Scheduled Monument and in 2005 KAAC published the Conservation Plan for the Abbey Fields. It was adopted at the time by WDC as a reference and foundation for the future Abbey Fields policies. In 2008 water appears at the bottom of the Hillside zone. Its investigation reveals potential historical drainage and the wet area is left for a marshland landscape. FOAF surveyed the trees in the park in 2010 and produced a leaflet listing 64 types of

trees. In 2011 meadows were re-established with great success within the Fields following an initial attempt in the late 1990s that were unsupported. 2013 the play area is upgraded and expanded onto the former bowling green and pitch and put location, fenced in for younger children. The car park is upgraded and tarmacked and made Pay and Display. In 2021 plans were unveiled for the new Leisure Centre replacing the lido and indoor swimming pool, and due for construction in 2022.

