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We're bringing history to life

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They were symbols of Norman wealth and power originally built and developed over several years, which still survive in varying forms today.

But in a corner of the University of East Anglia (UEA), a computing sciences team is taking just months to create six Norman-era castles.

The 3D models will include four English castles – Norwich, Rochester, Colchester and Hastings – plus Falaise and Caen of northern France, as part of the Norman Connections project.

This is attempting to improve the understanding of Norwich's 11th century castle, improve displays for visitors, while also furthering the knowledge and links between Norman sites in the east and south east of England and northern France.

While many people are aware of 1066 and the basic details of the Norman conquest, museum officials hope to help people understand how the attractions used to look and what life was like in these periods.

The Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service is aiming to provide a 3D virtual tour of Norwich Castle by late summer.

The UEA was successful in securing the estimated £120,000 tender to model six castles on computer and intends to finish them all by the end of November.

David Drinkwater, senior research associate and project manager, said the time it takes to create a model depends on the level of detail required.

While it is possible to create each castle stone-by-stone, with all the interiors lovingly replicated, the level of knowledge about a building's history also influences what can be done.

In some instances, there remain disputes about how to interpret



Recreating castles: Virtual 3D models of castles from across the east and Normandy in France are being put together by a computer sciences team at the UEA including, from left, Prof Andy Day, David Drinkwater, Gemma Clifford and Lewis Knell; Below, David Drinkwater with a 3D model of Norwich Cathedral.

PHOTOS: SIMON FINLAY

the history of a castle, particularly its early years as so little evidence exists.

The team has been working on the six castles for the last three months.

Mr Drinkwater said he has meetings planned with officials from Caen to further discuss how their model will be developed.

He said: "It's easier to start with what you know and work back. Caen has been through so many changes. What we want is them to tell us what it's like and you go to a meeting and they are not sure."

The modellers create a mock-up and then show it to the castle historians and officials. Changes are then made based on the feedback received.

Mr Drinkwater said: "For a lot of the people we deal with, it's a

once-in-a-lifetime project. They have never had to commission a virtual model so they are not knowing what to expect."

Dr John Davies, chief curator at the Norfolk museums service, said of the project: "It will throw new light in looking at these comparable castles at the same period in time."

"We are very fortunate to have the UEA with this specialism on our doorstep."

→ **Two art exhibitions inspired by the Norman Connections project are also set to open at Norwich Castle on March 30. They are: John Sell Cotman: A Picturesque Tour of Norfolk & Normandy, which runs until March 2014; and Gerard Stamp: Conquest – Norfolk's Norman Legacy Reflected in Watercolours, which runs until September 29.**



A £3.5m project

An estimated £3.5m is being pumped into a European project aiming to discover the hidden stories and cultures that link Norman-era castles across the south east of England and France.

And Norwich Castle is playing a leading role in Norman Connections, with in-depth talks ongoing with Colchester in Essex, Hastings in East Sussex, Rochester in Kent and Caen, Falaise and Bayeux, all in the Normandy region of France.

A three-day conference was held in Norwich last year, bringing together experts from both countries.

Lewis Knell, a 3D modeller at the UEA, is dividing his time between Rochester Castle and a separate project to create the former atomic bomb store on Thetford Heath. He said the Thetford Heath facility is harder to do as people are able to still view the site and point out inaccuracies, whereas the history of the castle is less certain.

But Mr Knell also explained as castles were constructed with more individual sections, compared to metal frames for some of Thetford Heath's buildings, it could prove more challenging, depending on the level of detail required for the model.

He said: "The medieval building is probably more interesting as it has a more interesting background."

Fellow 3D modeller Gemma Clifford, is helping to develop a more recent version of Caen Castle and also separately working on Leeds Castle, Kent.

She said the modern version was developed first as it is clearer how that looks.



Stepping into our city's past: 3D computer recreations of medieval Norwich, above, and the Great Hall at Norwich Castle, right.

