



A fine base for Stratford and the Cotswolds

Billesley Manor is a 16th century Elizabethan manor house standing in 11 acres of parkland some miles from Stratford-upon-Avon.

Reference was made to a manor house in the Domesday Book'd *Great survey of England and part of Wales* in 1068.

William Shakespeare is said to have written *As You Like It* while staying at Billesley and the Bard is believed to have married Anne Hathaway in the 11th century All Saints Church in its grounds.

With 72 bedrooms, guests at Billesley Manor can eat in its Stuart Restaurant and Great Hall and have access to its spa.

Billesley Manor provides a base for exploring Stratford-upon-Avon and the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor
AllWays traveller





A short stay in Elizabethan splendour

By Ashley Gibbins

While the images of Billesley Manor on its website (and some shown here) are certainly enticing, our passing through the gates to get our first glimpse of this Elizabethan manor house was even better.

OK, it was a warm and sun drenched, early autumn morning and the house and its grounds were looking at their very best.

If you never get a second chance to make a first impression, Billesley Manor need not worry.

We knew we were in for a great short break.

Here for centuries

As with all historic country house hotels it is well worth taking a few minutes getting to know at least a little of what has happened to the property over the centuries.

In this respect there has been a manor house on the site since the 8th Century, with a property listed in the Domesday Book of 1086.

For the next 400 years the Billesley estate was owned by the Trussel family and then, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1, it passed into the hands of Robert Lee, a Lord Mayor of London.

Lee was responsible for much of the existing south facade of the house we can appreciate today, along with fine interior woodwork

The place, perhaps inevitably, lays claim to a link with one William Shakespeare, who is said to have penned *As You Like It* here and was married to Ann Hathaway in the church that still stands in the grounds.

The fascinating history of Billesley Manor is not confined to the building itself, for within its 11 acres of grounds is an ornate topiary garden planted 100 years ago to replicate a chess board.

Making a stay

I may be stating the obvious but, the key elements when opting for a stay in a country house hotel is the house itself, particularly the reception and bedrooms, and the dining.

While Ann writes about our dining experience at Billesley (below), I am pleased to say the reception rooms are geared to a very relaxing and comfortable experience.

Given the glorious weather we took advantage of the daily newspapers available for guest and basked in the afternoon sunshine in the outside seating area with a beer and wine.

Overlooking the manicured lawns and listening to the birds made for a carefree couple of hours.

Were the weather to demand it, Billesley also offers comfortable lounge areas and a small bar.



The bedrooms

As for the 72 bedrooms, these are located in the manor house itself or in the adjoining Cedar Barns and have all the facilities one would expect.

The spa

The spa at Billesley Manor offers a full range of treatments along with has an indoor swimming pool, fitness suite, steam, sauna a yoga hut.

More information

www.bespokehotels.com/billesley-manor



Dining at this manor exceeds expectations

By Ann Mealor

The dining room at Billesley Manor has everything you would expect from a luxurious country house hotel.

There dark oak beams, original wood panelling hung with gilt framed oils, high backed, cushioned, maroon upholstered chairs, a large stone fireplace, starched white tablecloths, flickering candles, a vase hosting a large, bright yellow chrysanthemum and soothing music.

It all created a relaxed and homely ambience.

Could the meal live up to the plush surroundings of the glorious manor house?

The menu looked promising, with not too many dishes, but enough to give a good choice.

Starters

For the first course, I had the carrot and Thai basil soup and Ashley the goat's cheese pannacotta with Nero chutney and black olive.

Hot bread rolls and butter came first of course, which I always tuck into.

I know it isn't always advised, but such a treat!

My soup was very hot (in temperature) which pleased me as I am not a fan of lukewarm, and there was a great combination of flavours with a tangy kick.

Ashley's pannacotta won the first round though.

It looked a picture with a smooth, white dome, topped by the shards of black olive crisp, edged by bright red, roasted cherry tomatoes and inky black splodges of caramelised beetroot chutney.

Crowned with a delicate tendril of bright green pea shoot, it was a delightfully light and creamy mix of texture, colour and taste.

The main course

For mains I went for the 10oz sirloin steak with cherry tomatoes, sautéed wild mushrooms and chunky chips, which exceeded expectations.

The steak was juicy, succulent and flavoursome – cooked medium-well without being dry. I savoured every mouthful.

The mushrooms were sweet and delicate and made a welcome change from the usual field mushroom.

The triple cooked chips and glistening tomatoes were tasty accompaniments.

Nothing was left on my plate.

Ashley made short work of his sea bass in a creamy sauce on a bed of asparagus, mange tout and new potatoes, presented on a black plate with edible pansies and dainty pea shoots.



Dessert

For dessert I had the recommended light green pannacotta with its savoury hint of basil complemented by the sweetness of fresh strawberries.

Ashley the lime cheesecake with blood orange gel and charred orange, with its richness nicely balanced by the citrus and the sticks of candied peel.

Both were delicious particularly the pannacotta.

The service was prompt, efficient and friendly, making the whole meal a real experience.

Billesley Manor also offers guests full cooked and continental breakfast options to get the day started in the best possible way.



Stratford Gin with an authentic Tudor essence

This was not our first time to the area of Warwickshire known as *Shakespeare's England* and, on previous trips we had seen many of the attractions offered under this branding 'umbrella' writes *Ashley Gibbins*.

But with the surge in popularity for craft gin, we took the opportunity to enjoy a very interesting guided tour around the *Shakespeare Distillery*.

The distillery, run with a passionate commitment to quality by Simon and Peter Monks, is a short drive from Billesley Manor.

It produces small batch artisan *Stratford Gin* using botanicals that would have been available to distillers in the town during Tudor times.

These include rose, lemon balm, rosemary and old English lovage, which are fused with the more familiar juniper, coriander and lemon peel.

Many of the botanicals used would have been grown in a Tudor garden such as Anne Hathaway's and are as near to be authentically Tudor as it is possible to be

Those taking the tour receive a fascinating history on the development of gin before seeing how the gin is made in this distillery.

The tour ends, fittingly, with a tutored tasting of at least three of the Shakespeare Distillery's gins.

www.shakespearedistillery.com

See also

AllWays Traveller to Shakespeare's England :

<https://www.allwaystraveller.com/continents/europe/so-much-on-offer-in-shakespeare-s-england>



A snapshot of Billesley Manor



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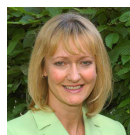
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