



AllWays

Hever Castle, Kent, UK

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History and horticultural heritage at Hever Castle

Hever Castle in Kent offers a history going back 700 years along with splendid grounds and gardens and a host of special events.

Although originally a 13th Century country house, it's the Castle's link to Anne Boleyn, and those tempestuous Tudor times of scheming and treachery, that provides its 'headline' draw.

That said, those visiting Hever Castle find so much more to enjoy here.

There are acres of magnificent formal gardens, expansive grassy picnic areas and a splendid lakeside walk.

The kids will find lots to keep them entertained, with playground areas, spurting fountains and a nine metre tall wooden play castle.

The castle's year-round programme of special events, concerts and theatre performances can also add another layer of incentives to visit.

Finally, Hever Castle offers a genuinely one-of-a-kind bed and breakfast experience for those wanting to make the very most of a visit with an overnight stay or two.

www.hevercastle.co.uk

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor
AllWays traveller





Anne is the lure for all that's on offer at Hever Castle

Our first thoughts of visiting Hever Castle were sowed at Hampton Court Palace, when we learnt more about Anne Boleyn.

From my schooldays, I had known that she was one of the six wives of Henry VII, and one of two beheaded.

And while Hampton Court is more usually associated with Henry VIII, it was hearing of Anne Boleyn's life and times that proved most fascinating.

She was a real tour-de- force in the male dominated Tudor court.

It was no surprise that Henry became besotted with Anne, but she had the savvy to refuse his wish that she become his mistress as she would lose her status at court.

If the King wanted her, it was marriage or nothing.

The obstacle to this was Catherine of Aragon, Henry's then current queen consort.

Henry looked to Cardinal, Wolsey, his Archbishop of Canterbury, to get the wedding annulled so he could marry Anne.

When Wolsey failed to do so, Anne was closely involved in his downfall, and Thomas Cranmer, the King's successor as Archbishop of Canterbury, declared the marriage null and void.

The King married Anne but she failed to give him the son and heir he craved, and she had to go.

Accused of high treason, on largely trumped-up grounds, Anne was tried, found guilty and beheaded in the Tower of London in May 1536.

Anne at Hever Castle

What is now Hever Castle was first built as a country house in the 13th century.

That said it is the period between 1462 to 1540, when it was the seat of the Boleyn family, that provides its historic fascination.

Anne Boleyn spent her early youth there and again as a young woman, when Henry VIII would stay nearby, to make it the easier to visit Hever Castle and woo her.

Like many historic properties, Hever Castle has seen good times and bad over the centuries, and much of what we get to enjoy today is possible with thanks to William Waldorf Astor (see below).

But that should not detract from the castle's historical significance.

We are, after all, on the spot where Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn once stood.

Appreciating this while standing gazing up in the gatehouse area, which is the original part of the castle, one genuinely feels the proverbial *hand of history on our shoulder*.

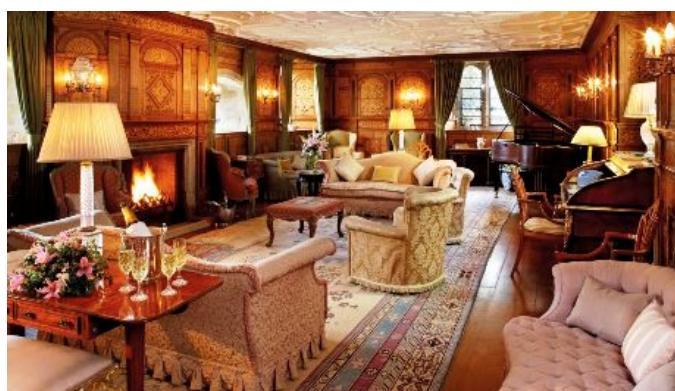
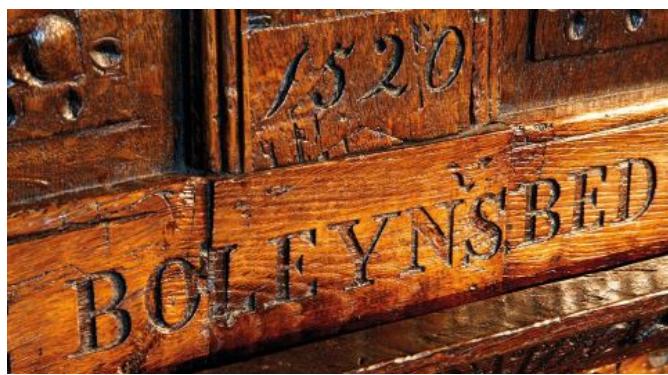


Although Anne Boleyn, and her brother had been executed, the Boleyn family retained Hever Castle for another four years.

When Thomas Boleyn, Anne's father, died, the property passed to Henry who, ironically, gave it to Anne of Cleves as part of his multi-property settlement to her, following the annulment of the King's then fourth marriage.

As for Anne?

It is said that 'with her head tucked underneath her arm', Anne's ghost relentlessly walks the Bloody Tower.



Astor's dollars come to the rescue

Following the turbulent Tudor times, Hever Castle went into a slow but gradual spiral of decline during the next 350 years.

In a bad state of repair by the early 20th Century, the property could well have been lost to us were it not for William Waldorf Astor.

The then richest man in America acquired the property in 1903 and set about restoring Hever Castle to its former glory.

Absolutely no expense was spared, as Astor employed the most skilled tradesmen to repair the castle structure and the finest artisans to restore and refurbish the rooms in lush fabrics and furnishings.

He also stocked the place with a huge collection of art and artifacts, antique furniture and tapestries.

Once all this was complete, Astor used his Hever Castle for entertaining, the 'great and the good' of the time on a lavish scale.

His legacy, however, is that it allows us to tour the three splendid floors of panelled rooms that are open to visitors today.

This includes viewing one of the finest collections of Tudor portraits and, in the *Book of Hours Room*, two prayer books which belonged to Anne Boleyn and show her inscriptions and signature.



More information

www.hevercastle.co.uk/visit/hever-castle/rooms-exhibitions/



Glorious gardens and a leisurely lakeland walk

While the Castle itself makes for a fascinating couple of hours, one can spend the whole day enjoying the 150 acres of glorious formal gardens, grassy picnic areas and a woodland and country walk around the lake.

And many do, time and time again.

While we were there, I spoke to one family who had toured the house once but picnicked in the gardens several dozen times.

One has, once again, to thank William Waldorf Astor for 'sowing the seeds' of what we have today.

Astor established the formal Italian garden for classical statuary and introduced the loggia with its grand fountain.

He also had built the 38-acre lake that today offers a wonderful woodland walk around.

In more recent times the gardens have been enhanced with towering trees, rose gardens and a topiary.

Opting for an overnight stay at Hever Castle proved an excellent decision.

Our first day, a Sunday, was glorious and we spent nearly four afternoon blissful hours outside.

And as bed and breakfast guests, we were able to stroll the grounds at sunset, when the castle was closed to the general public.

The rain arrived on our second day but no worries. We toured the castle itself.





Special events and activities year-round

While the house and gardens offer much to entice visitors, Hever Castle also stages a year-round special events and activities.



While *Dazzling Daffodils*, *Tulip Celebrations* and *Hever in Bloom* speak for themselves, there are also jousting tournaments, historical re-enactments along with birds of prey display weekends and craft fairs.

The open-air Hever Festival Theatre stages performances in three different spots in the gardens, with the *Summer Festival* presenting an annual programme of plays, films, classical concerts, opera, jazz, comedy and musical tribute performances.

The grounds also provide a very popular venue for vintage and classic car rallies, and there are seasonal events at Easter, Halloween and for the Festive Season.



More information

www.hevercastle.co.uk/whats-on
www.heverfestival.co.uk

Staying overnight at Hever Castle



An overnight stay makes the most of Hever Castle

Opting for an overnight stay or two's bed and breakfast at Hever Castle one can make the absolute most of what is on offer here, and get to look around the grounds in the evening when the day visitors have gone.

Hever Castle, as Ashley has explained, dates back to 1270 and was the family home of Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII and mother of Queen Elizabeth I.

Since those times, it fell into hard times and disrepair before being sympathetically and luxuriously refurbished by American millionaire William Waldorf Astor.

Astor bought the crumbling castle, which was also once owned by Anne of Cleves, Henry's fourth wife, in 1903, restored it and made it his family home.

Despite the many changes, Hever Castle still retains its Tudor grandeur, character and charm.

The accommodation

The Edwardian, Astor and Anne Boleyn wings of the castle are used for bed & breakfast guests.

Linked to the main castle, they are built in Tudor style.

Our room in the Astor wing was large, richly furnished and looked out across the gardens and grounds from one leaded glass window, and over the castle roof tops and chimneys, the *Mary Poppins* view, from the other.



The walls were papered in pale green with climbing pink roses, the furniture was antique in style and the sofa and large bed soft and very comfortable indeed.

There was plenty of tea, coffee, biscuits to enjoy whilst gazing out at the views. The bathroom had a large walk-in shower with fragrant English Noble Isle toiletries.

As no evening meals are available, guests are given recommendations of where to eat.

Before setting off to the local pub, we sat outside in the pretty, cobbled courtyard for a relaxing pre-dinner drink.



Sipping wine, soaking up the sun, listening to the gentle splash-splash of the fountain, we couldn't have had a better start to our evening.



Making the most of Hever Castle

On returning from our tasty fish and chip supper, we took a walk around the castle grounds.

Guests are given special access to roam even when the gardens are closed to the public.

It is a privilege to have this space to yourself and we enjoyed the serenity of a stroll at dusk to the sound of the last birdsong of the day.

Before heading to our room, we decided to try a game of snooker on the full-sized table in the splendid Billiard Room.

It took us well over an hour to complete just one frame but was good fun!

The breakfast

Breakfast took place in a magnificent wood panelled banqueting hall with a high vaulted ceiling and a huge, majestic fireplace at one end.

Dining in such magnificent surroundings amid gold framed oil paintings and intricate carvings turned breakfast into a real occasion.

We tucked into fruit juices, cereals, yoghurts and pastries from the buffet and also chose a hot dish each.

My Eggs Royale (poached eggs and smoked salmon on a toasted English muffin with hollandaise sauce) was delicious as was Ashley's smashed avocado on sour dough with poached eggs, tomato and mushroom.

The eggs were perfectly cooked, with golden yolk oozing out when gently pierced by the knife.

We finished our coffee and earl grey tea in the cosy lounge area, sinking into the sofas and reading the papers whilst we waited for the Castle to open and the rain to stop!



All guests get complimentary entry to the Castle during their stay. We had made the most of the estate the previous day when the weather was glorious.

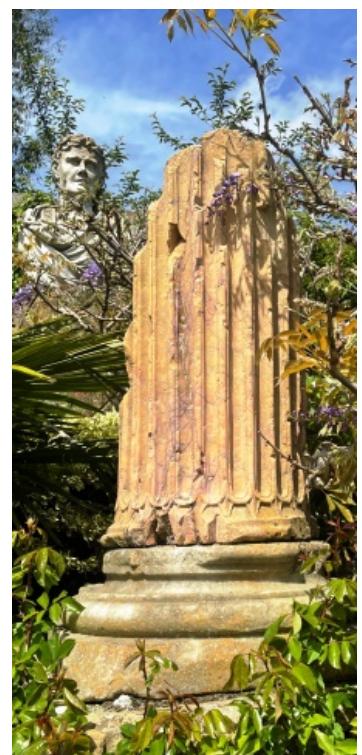
Our time at Hever Castle came to an end with a fascinating castle tour followed by a takeaway latte from the café for the rainy journey home.



Thinking back, our one-night, two-day trip to Hever Castle really did enable us to appreciate its historic past and get a real feel of Tudor times.

One can live the history and almost hear the swish of a Queen's skirt in the hall, urgent footsteps on the courtyard cobbles and furtive whispers in the corridors.

A snapshot of Hever Castle



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Ann Mealor is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Editor of *AllWays Traveller*



Ashley Gibbins is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Director of the International Travel Writers Alliance.