



HENRY 500: MONARCHS, MISTRESSES AND MARTYRS

Tour Kent's magnificent castles and stately houses in 2009 to find the sumptuous real-life settings for the dramatic love intrigues of King Henry VIII in the year of the 500th anniversary of his coronation as King. Here royal romance altered the course of English history.

Day 1

When he became King, Henry inherited a wealth of castles and royal residences scattered around the country. One of these was magnificent fairy tale **Leeds Castle**, near Maidstone, used as a retreat by Henry who invested heavily in improvements, including exquisite windows, fireplaces and banqueting halls still on view today. Henry and Katherine of Aragon spent a night at Leeds en route to the 'Field of the Cloth of Gold', a meeting between Henry VIII and Francis I of France, and Henry also retreated to Leeds to escape the plague raging in London.

After a light lunch at Fairfax Hall, Leeds, travel to the outskirts of Sevenoaks and **Knole**, a beautiful stately home set in a magnificent deer park. On arrival look carefully at the exterior and imagine it lit in darkness: this is London by night in *The Other Boleyn Girl* film. The Green and Stone Court's also transformed into the setting for the arrival of the Boleyn's at Whitehall Palace.

In Tudor times, Knole belonged to Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury who declared Henry VIII's marriage to first wife Katherine void and his marriage to Anne Boleyn valid. Little good it did him, Henry fancied Knole for himself and in 1538 he forced Cranmer to hand it over. Portraits of Tudor monarchs, including Henry and Anne, are just some of the many treasures you'll find here. The superb medieval deer park where Henry hunted is the only one remaining in Kent.

Day 2

After breakfast make for **Ightham Mote**, also near Sevenoaks. Sir Richard Clement, the owner from 1521 to 1538, aimed to keep in well at court by embellishing his home with displays of loyalty to Henry and Katherine: note the Tudor Rose and pomegranate of Aragon in the stained glass of the Great Hall and the barrel-vaulted roof of the New Chapel.

A short distance away is **Penshurst Place**. This medieval home, amid Tudor gardens and parkland, belonged to the 3rd Duke of Buckingham, who lavished £2,500 (£1.2 million in today's money) on a feast for Henry VIII when he visited in 1519. Two years later, Buckingham was beheaded for treason, Penshurst became Crown property and it was used as a hunting lodge.

Anne Boleyn's brother, George, looked after the estate and Henry often stayed here while courting Anne at Hever Castle. Penshurst features as Whitehall Palace in several scenes of the film, *The Other Boleyn Girl* and a number of Penshurst's staff became film extras.

This afternoon visit the real-life Boleyn family home of **Hever Castle**, near Edenbridge, and perhaps the most romantic reason for Henry's frequent visits to Kent.

The King first fell in love with Anne Boleyn at Court in 1526 and visits to Hever soon followed. It was an idyllic backdrop: a moated Tudor dwelling within older stone walls and surrounded by beautiful gardens. Many artefacts mark the unfolding of their romance: see Anne's childhood bedroom and replicas of the elaborate locks Henry brought with him to fix to his bedchamber door to ensure his personal safety when he stayed to woo Anne, and a replica of the clock he presented to her as a wedding gift. Most poignant of all is the Book of Hours (prayer book), inscribed and signed by Anne, that she probably clasped as she stepped to her execution at the Tower of London after being condemned for adultery. Written in her own hand in the book is the haunting plea, 'remember me when you do pray/that hope doth lead from day to day/Anne Boleyn.'

Henry VIII later appropriated Hever Castle following the death of Sir Thomas Boleyn (Anne's father). The king gave the castle to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, when he divorced her in 1540.

Day 3

Today we head for **Rochester** and the imposing fortress of **Rochester Castle** where Henry first met Anne of Cleves, his fourth wife. Anne was taken there shortly after her arrival in England and paraded before the King at the Castle. Henry, bitterly disappointed with Anne's looks, called her his "Flanders Mare" and six months after the wedding, divorced her.

Henry wanted several resting places when travelling through Kent and one of these was the Priory attached to **Rochester Cathedral**. A private lodging was built and attached to the Priory, but on his divorce from Katherine of Aragon he ordered that all reminders of Katherine be obliterated from the Lodging.

Always fearing invasion, Henry constructed the first dockyard at nearby Chatham. **The Historic Dockyard Chatham** tells the story of the vessels and men who sailed the high seas. The 80-acre naval heritage site, the most complete dockyard of the Age of Sail, spans over 400 years of maritime history and was the place where the ships that defeated the Spanish Armada and Napoleon's forces were built. Henry's daughter, Queen Elizabeth I, built nearby **Upnor Castle** to defend warships anchored on the River Medway.

Day 4

In Henry's time **Canterbury Cathedral** was one of the most important religious centres in the world, but the King's break from the Roman Catholic Church to form his own Church of England caused widespread upheaval. The Cathedral had become one of Europe's most important pilgrimage centers after the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket and Thomas' magnificent tomb was visited daily by thousands of pilgrims. On the order of Henry, the tomb was destroyed and

windows and statues were smashed. Fortunately, many medieval stained glass windows survived, and the Cathedral still holds the most important collection of medieval stained glass in the country. A candle marks the site of Thomas' tomb.

Henry's daughter – Mary Tudor, a staunch Catholic known as “Bloody Mary” because of the huge number of people she had put to death for their faith, had Thomas Cranmer the Archbishop of Canterbury burnt at the stake for refusing to become a Catholic.

Also in Canterbury are the ruins of **St Augustine's Abbey** where Henry and his men stayed as they travelled between London and the Continent.

After lunch journey to the coast. Kent's position as England's coastal gateway to Europe has long kept the Port of Dover at the heart of history. For Henry, **Dover Harbour** was the sailing point in 1520 when he headed for France and the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Dover Castle, one of the largest castles in England, is strategically located at the shortest crossing point to continental Europe. The Castle played a significant part in the story of Henry VIII and his wives. Faced by the threat of invasion by Spain and France, the king hastened to strengthen the fort with stone bulwarks and bastions and the remains of a gun platform can still be seen today next to Cannons Gate. When he visited in 1539, concerned both by possible attack and the need to find a fourth wife, he sent ahead of him 19 travelling cases, including 314 rings – three of them wedding rings. He later presented one to Anne of Cleves. The Castle also assumed the role of the Tower of London in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, with the courtyard the venue for Anne's execution.

Day 5

Head further along the coast this morning to two the fortresses Henry had built especially to fend off invasion, **Deal and Walmer Castles**. Explore the huge, rounded bastions of Deal and imagine the castle bristling in readiness to defend the realm. Then enjoy the relaxing contrast of Walmer, long since transformed into the elegant residence of the Lords Warden of the Cinque Ports.

Kent's position as the nearest part of England to France makes it easy to hop across the Channel to the beautiful Nord-Pas de Calais region. Have lunch on board ship or wait and sample French gastronomic delights in one of many outstanding restaurants.

Alternatively head towards the capital and follow the Henry VIII trail to **Hampton Court Palace**. Henry used Hampton Court to impress, after taking the palace from Cardinal Wolsey in 1528, he spent more than £62,000 rebuilding and extending the property in just ten years (approximately £18 million today). All of Henry's six wives stayed at the palace and most had new and lavish lodgings. The palace also provided accommodation for each of the King's children and for a large number of courtiers, visitors and servants.

For more information see www.visitkent.co.uk/trade