



The Other Boleyn Girl in Kent

Go behind the scenes of blockbuster novel and new film *The Other Boleyn Girl*, on a set-jetting tour of Kent's dazzling castles and historic houses.

If you think stately piles are grand but a trifle dull, think again! Push open their doors and discover tales of burning passions and courtly intrigues. Step across thresholds to hidden worlds where rare treasures still whisper of personal triumphs and tragedies.

The Other Boleyn Girl, adapted for the screen from Philippa Gregory's best-selling novel, was shot on location in November and December 2006, with Kent in a starring role. Come and follow the sumptuous tale of the beautiful sisters Anne (Natalie Portman) and Mary (Scarlett Johansson) Boleyn, driven by their family's blind ambition to compete for the love of dashing King Henry VIII (Eric Bana).

While both women share the king's bed, only Anne ascends the throne as queen – until her reign is cut short by the executioner's sword. The stormy royal romance alters the course of English history, and in Kent you'll find key places where fact, fiction and film breathlessly merge.

Day 1: Hever Castle and Penshurst Place

First, we set the scene at **Hever Castle, Edenbridge**, real-life home to the upwardly mobile Boleyn family. In Gregory's novel, Mary constantly yearns to escape from the pressures of London's court to be with her illegitimate royal children at this 'fairytale palace' and to stroll the apple orchards of Kent. Share her anticipation as you trace her steps across country and through Edenbridge. Then breathe in the scent of Hever's roses, as she did, and imagine her sitting on her favourite seat looking towards the moat and castle walls.

Both Anne and Mary were ladies-in-waiting to Henry's wife, Katherine of Aragon, both became her rivals: meet their gaze in rare portraits at Hever. History adds that the Tudor dwelling in enchanting gardens became the idyllic backdrop for King Henry's courtship of Anne. Walk from room to room and find the treasures that tell how their relationship unfolded: from the replica of the clock Henry presented to Anne on their wedding in 1533, to the prayer book that she clasped on her way to the executioner's block in 1536 after she had failed to produce a male royal heir. www.hever-castle.co.uk

After lunch at Hever Castle, we travel the short distance to **Penshurst Place**, Tonbridge. Now, it's lights, camera, action: because this spellbinding stately home amid Tudor gardens became the film double for Whitehall Palace, with author Philippa Gregory on hand to watch the actors at work.

Follow the movie's royal entourage into the magnificent medieval Baron's Hall, the big screen stage for one of Henry's lavish banquets. When Anne returns to court after exile in France, she catches the king's roving eye – and their fateful romance begins. Their wedding feast, seeming to seal Boleyn victory in the marriage stakes, is held in the Baron's Hall, and Penshurst's giant 16th-century trestle tables made perfect props for the celebrations. Later, the historic house becomes the setting for the announcement of Anne's second pregnancy.

However, before the action races on, hit the pause button, rewind and reflect. Step into the beautiful Tudor gardens with King Henry and Mary, to the South Lawn and stunning Italian Garden where the couple exchanged knowing, romantic glances. How was Mary to guess she would lose the fickle king's heart to her sister in such spectacular style?

A number of Penshurst's room guides had a break from their usual duties to become film extras for three days – have a chat and share their experiences. Trish Evans (normally a guide) recalls being 'costumed' in velvet and rich brocades decorated with pearls and jewels, her hair scraped back under a gable (Tudor headdress) – and all this by 7.30am!

Discover the real-life role of Penshurst Place in the tumultuous reign of Henry VIII, too. He beheaded its owner for treason, took the property as his hunting lodge, and sometimes stayed here while nipping off to woo Anne at Hever. www.penshurstplace.com

After our day at two of the county's most magical locations, enjoy dinner and overnight stay at Hotel du Vin or The Spa Hotel, Royal Tunbridge Wells – both used by the film's cast. www.hotelduvin.co.uk and www.spahotel.co.uk

Day 2: Knole and Ightham Mote

After breakfast, we head north to **Knole** in Sevenoaks. As you arrive, half close your eyes and imagine the exterior lit in darkness: this is London by night in *The Other Boleyn Girl* film, the shadowy edifice standing in for the stone buildings of the capital in the Tudor period. Then, positions please, in the inner courtyards: cleverly transformed into another movie setting for Whitehall Palace. Comings and goings from court include Anne heading for exile in France, Mary riding off in a carriage with her baby, and Anne and Henry leaving together on horse back – while poor Katherine watches them from an upstairs window.

Knole witnessed plenty of behind-the-scenes action, too. A special team of 25 volunteers plus staff oversaw filming to protect Knole's ancient fabric. With winter weather so bad during shooting, their duties included making sure the stars wiped their feet before stepping inside! Volunteers also took lengthy turns holding candles in specific rooms to illuminate windows for night sequences – it was too risky to leave naked flames unattended.

Property manager Steven Dedman reveals that in frequent breaks between filming Natalie (Anne) and Scarlett (Mary) were keen to find out more about Knole and how its inhabitants lived. In Tudor times it belonged to Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury who supported Henry VIII's divorce of Queen Katherine and marriage to Anne Boleyn. Little good it did him. Henry fancied Knole and snatched it for himself in 1538, making the most of the hunting in the superb medieval

deer park. You can browse Tudor portraits and other artefacts that recall those heady days when the fortunes of courtiers rose or fell at the wave of a royal hand. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/knole

After light refreshments at Knole, we make for **Ightham Mote**, also near Sevenoaks, for another historical interlude. In the film and book, plot and counter plot conjure up the feverish atmosphere of intrigue in the Tudor court and show how quickly allegiances changed to curry favour and win social position. At Ightham, you can get insights into the way one real-life courtier kept up with King Henry's torrid affairs of the heart.

Firstly, owner Sir Richard Clement decorated his home with Tudor Roses and pomegranates of Aragon to flatter Henry and Katherine – see their emblems in the Great Hall and New Chapel. Once royal passions had wandered, though, he equally readily officiated at Henry's marriage to Anne. Fortunately, perhaps, he didn't bother to give his home a makeover to celebrate the new match – by the time Sir Richard died in 1538, the king had already been through a third wife. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ighthammote

We round off this day of tangled politics and court whispers with dinner and overnight stay at The Royal Oak, Sevenoaks – used by crew from *The Other Boleyn Girl*. www.brook-hotels.co.uk

Day 3: Dover Castle and the White Cliffs of Dover

After breakfast, we journey to **Dover Castle** – the film's brooding Tower of London where both George and Anne are held before they are executed. Make your way to the Great Chamber on the first floor of the castle, historically a place of entertainment for the king or high-ranking visitors. With the addition of a fake wall, the filmmakers created Anne's prison bedroom here, also the venue for her tearful meeting with Mary. Although Anne has lost Henry's love, both sisters still hope she will be spared, and Anne asks Mary to look after her daughter Elizabeth. As we know, there is no mercy. Downstairs in the courtyard, the executioner's sword delivers its chilling final blow to Anne's neck.

In fact, filming such dramatic moments turned out to be more challenging than anyone had bargained for. Bleak winter weather wreaked havoc, causing parts of the set to repeatedly fall off! But cast and crew were determined to make the tragic scenes work. It took three long weeks to prepare the shoot, which then lasted five days from 6am to 8pm. Some 150 crew and 260 extras were involved. The result is unforgettable.

You'll soon discover that in reality Dover Castle played a significant part in its own right in the story of Henry and his wives. It was a frontline defence against invasion by Spain and France, who were united against the English king after he divorced (Spanish) Queen Katherine and broke with the Roman Catholic Church. And the amorous sovereign came here while on the hunt for his fourth wife in 1539. Share the excitement and upheaval of his visit in the exhibition, A Castle Fit for a King. www.english-heritage.org.uk

After lunch in the Castle Keep restaurant, stretch your legs along the **White Cliffs of Dover** where fresh sea breezes carry a tale with a happier finale. In 1532, Gregory's novel tells us, Henry, Anne and the royal retinue ride to Dover 'like emperors' for an extravagant expedition to Calais – the

crossing from Dover is the shortest from England to the Continent. For Anne, it's a chance to prove her ascendancy over Queen Katherine. For Mary and William Stafford, the new man in her heart, the episode ignites a passionate courtship – which eventually ends in marriage and a contented life together.

As you stroll, the same salty air on your face that stroked those royal travellers, the same mighty cliffs before you that are the gateway to England's seductive history, you might ponder the triumph of 'the other Boleyn girl' who never sat on the throne.

For more information see www.visitkent.co.uk

Other locations around the UK used for filming include **Great Chalfeild Manor**, near Bath, which was used as the country home of the Boleyns. **Lacock Abbey** was used as the gardens, cloisters and rooms of Whitehall Palace, where Queen Katherine first confronts the Boleyn sisters and Anne plays with young Henry to remind the king of his desire for a son and heir.

Saint Bartholomew's Church, in the Smithfield area of London, was the scene of both the trial of Queen Katherine and the grim wedding of pregnant Anne Boleyn and King Henry. Mary's journey on horseback takes her through **Derbyshire and the Peak District**, showing the spectacular countryside around Dovedale and beneath Stannage Edge. As she arrives at the home she shares with William Stafford and her children, we see the exterior of **North Lees Hall**. Rooms within **Haddon Hall** were used as other interiors of the Boleyn family home.