

## **Henry VIII and Tudor Kent**

### ***Fascinating facts about England's most famous king***

Throughout his reign, King Henry VIII had a special relationship with Kent. The Garden of England, on his London doorstep, was an escape and playground, a gateway for royal travels to the Continent, and a first line of defence against invasion. But how much do you really know about England's most charismatic king? Discover the fascinating facts that bring to life his rule and personality, and come to Kent to view the many clues he left behind.

There has never been a better time to visit than 2009, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of Henry's accession!

#### **Castles fit for a king**

1. Henry VIII had a mania for building and acquiring property – at his death in 1547 he owned over 70 residences, more than any other English monarch. Enjoy a 'royal break' visiting a magnificent variety in Kent, where he inherited the medieval castles of Dover, **Leeds** and **Rochester**, and acquired **Hever Castle**, **Knole**, **Oxford Palace** and **Penshurst Place**. Then tour the coastal fortresses he constructed at Deal and Walmer when France and Spain threatened invasion.
2. The King lavished over £170,000 (£51 million in today's terms) on his residences. He was particularly fond of fairytale **Leeds Castle**, near Maidstone, spending £1,300 (£390,000) on it between 1517 and 1523. Admire embellishments that included the reconstruction of the Maiden's Tower, exquisite windows, fireplaces and the banqueting hall with its superb ebony wood floor and carved oak ceiling.
3. Henry flaunted his prestige by surrounding himself with large numbers of courtiers and servants, and his royal palaces were duly designed to accommodate them. Complete ranges were allocated for courtier lodgings – like the Green Court at **Knole**, Sevenoaks. In the Great Hall at **Knole** you can also view a pair of andirons, or firedogs, bearing the initials and badges of the King and Anne Boleyn. They were formerly at **Hever Castle** and would have stood on the hearth to support burning logs.
4. The King's palaces were furnished with unprecedented splendour: expensive carpets (he owned over 800) and tapestries (he had more than 70) showed off his status and wealth. Get an idea of his riches at **Hever Castle**, where one from a pair of his tapestries hangs in the Dining Hall. Henry is believed to have commissioned it from Flemish weavers when he acquired Hampton Court Palace from Cardinal Wolsey, and it features 'Beastes having the Arms of England'. Another tapestry at **Hever Castle**, woven in Tournai c.1525, is thought to depict the marriage of Henry's sister, Mary Rose, to Louis XII of France in 1514. Incidentally, the contemporary method of cleaning tapestries was to rub them with bread and then brush away the crumbs!
5. The number of beds a Tudor noble possessed also indicated his wealth – naturally, Henry owned many! It took ten men to complete the prescribed ritual for preparing the royal bed each evening, and one of their number had to roll on it to check for any harmful objects that might have been hidden. In 1539 Henry sent two of his best beds to **Rochester** and **Dartford** in time for the arrival of his prospective fourth wife, Anne of Cleves (ironically, their marriage was never consummated). Few pieces of furniture survive from the King's vast collection, but in the Henry VIII Room at **Hever Castle** you'll find a magnificently carved oak tester bed dating from c.1540 (although not officially confirmed as part of the Kings furniture). It is heavily carved with the royal coat of arms, medallion heads, foliage, birds and figures, though its exact provenance is unknown.

6. What did Henry really look like? Portraits of the King at **Hever** and **Leeds Castles** provide us with iconic images of a sturdy, bearded Henry – in fact, he was clean-shaven during the early years of his reign and first grew a beard in 1519 as part of a friendly pact with Francis I of France. He later shaved his bristles to please his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, but from c1525 sported a beard permanently. At 6' 2", Henry certainly presented an imposing figure, yet in later life he became rather flabby – his waist measured 54 inches. However, this simply set a new court fashion because gentlemen began to wear padded gowns to look like His Majesty!
7. Only the rich could afford clocks in Tudor times and Henry certainly prized his – he had 17 standing clocks alone. He presented Anne Boleyn with an ornate clock as a wedding gift and you can see a remarkable replica of it at **Hever Castle**.

### Royal romance

8. Henry VIII's fondness for **Leeds Castle** may well have stemmed from his great grandparents, whose 15<sup>th</sup>-century romance was possibly played out here and lay at the very root of the glorious Tudor dynasty. Catherine de Valois, wife of Henry V, held Leeds as a dower castle, and when her husband died in 1422 the young widow fell in love with the handsome Clerk of her Wardrobe, Owen Tudor. What more romantic backdrop for a courtship than the castle's beautiful gardens and park? The couple secretly married and it was their son, Edmund, who became the father of Henry VII, first of the illustrious Tudor dynasty.
9. When Henry had his potential rival the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Buckingham beheaded as a traitor in 1521, the Duke's estate at **Penshurst Place** became forfeit to the Crown and was managed by Anne Boleyn's brother, George. It's claimed that Henry used Penshurst Place while he secretly courted Anne at the Boleyn's nearby home, **Hever Castle**, prior to their marriage in 1533. He may also have enjoyed an earlier affair with Anne's sister, Mary, with lovers' meetings at Penshurst. Whatever the truth, if the lusty monarch could return today he would certainly be impressed by Penshurst's new Heraldic Garden replanted in honour of his 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary: its designs echo those Henry knew at Hampton Court, with two lines of heraldic beasts on poles along the length of the garden.
10. Anne Boleyn fended off Henry VIII's amorous advances for around six years before she submitted to the royal will, which says a lot for the King's chivalric nature and Anne's clever game of cat-and-mouse: whenever Henry became too ardent, she would retreat to **Hever Castle** until he begged her to return to court. A portrait of Anne at Hever shows she was no conventional beauty but she obviously possessed sex appeal. Compare Hever's rare portrait of her sister, Mary. As history records, Henry's second marriage ended on the scaffold – there's no more poignant memento at Hever than the prayer book it's believed Anne carried with her to her execution.
11. Henry may have been besotted with his various *amours*, but he never forgot his personal safety. When he went on progress or visits to others' houses he took his locksmith, Henry Romaine, and royal locks to make his bedchamber secure from attack. Replicas at **Hever Castle** show just how elaborate they were.
12. Henry boasted a greater collection of jewellery than any other English king and he heaped clothes and jewels on his wives and lovers – accounts reveal that Anne Boleyn received the equivalent of £165,000 in gifts in just three years. At **Leeds Castle** you can view a jewel casket believed to have belonged to her, though the royal trinkets have vanished.

13. When Henry visited **Dover Castle** in March 1539, he sent ahead 19 travelling cases containing furs, tapestries, 27 pairs of spectacles and 314 rings, three of them wedding rings. He later presented one of these rings to Anne of Cleves, cautiously keeping the other two in reserve.
14. All his life, Henry had a boyish enthusiasm for 'disguisings': on 1 January 1540 when he went to meet Anne of Cleves for the first time, in the Old Hall behind **Rochester Castle** on Boley Hill, he and five of his gentlemen all dressed alike in coats and hoods. After a while he revealed his true identity, then abruptly left. He had taken an instant dislike to his fiancée – he said she smelled – and he didn't even bother offering her the furs he had brought as a gift to 'nourish love'!
15. Henry tried to wriggle out of wedding Anne, the 'Flanders mare', but was duty bound to proceed on 6 January 1540. Six months later, though, the marriage was annulled and, as Anne acquiesced without a fuss, Henry rewarded her generously: including giving her **Hever Castle**, the former Boleyn home that he had appropriated. No longer married to Anne, Henry even discovered a fondness for her and they became friends.
16. Following each of his six marriages, Henry ordered that the new emblems and badges of his latest wife replace those of his previous one in his palaces. Courtiers tried to keep up, but Sir Richard Clement, owner of **Ightham Mote**, clearly fell behind. One of the King's favourite servants, Sir Richard officiated at the royal wedding with Anne Boleyn. Yet tour his home, near Sevenoaks, and you'll still find the Tudor Rose and pomegranate of Aragon (emblem of Henry's first wife, Katherine) in the stained glass of the Great Hall and the barrel-vaulted roof of the New Chapel.

### Eat, drink and make merry

17. Tudor feasts were legendary for their extravagance and Henry's annual hospitality bill equalled around £4 million in today's money. All food was organic and mainly seasonal, and the court's chief contractor for fresh sea fish was Thomas Hewyt of **Hythe**. To this day coastal Kent's reputation for seafood 'fit for a king' thrives and is among the gourmet delights of a visit. Why not enjoy first-class fish dishes at Hythe Bay Seafood Restaurant, which stands right on the beach?
18. During Henry's reign, vegetables, previously considered poor man's food, became increasingly popular with the nobility. The King was especially partial to artichokes, loved fruit and, together with Anne Boleyn, shared a passion for strawberries and cherries. The Garden of England proved a fertile larder for his wants and in 1533 the royal fruiterer, Richard Harris, planted apple and fruit orchards at **Teynham**. The East Kent 'fruit belt' had been born. Fittingly, **Brogdale**, modern home to the National Fruit Collections, is nearby at Faversham, growing over 2,300 kinds of apple, 550 types of pear, 350 plum, 220 cherry and 320 bush fruits. Henry would have approved!
19. Henry was also on the receiving end of sumptuous hospitality from his nobles. On one occasion in 1519 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Buckingham entertained His Majesty at **Penshurst Place** to the tune of a staggering £870,000 in today's money. Two years later, of course, such largesse had been forgotten and Buckingham was executed on a charge of treason.
20. When not feasting, Henry enjoyed hunting in his leisure time and by 1541 he owned 85 hunting parks and forests. This included the superb medieval deer park at **Knole** – the only one now remaining in Kent. Knole had belonged to Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, but Henry took a shine to it and in 1538 obliged the cleric to hand it over, along with nearby **Oxford Palace**.

21. Behind Henry's hale and hearty exterior, there lurked a hypochondriac with an excessive fear of sickness. He often concocted his own remedies, using ingredients that ranged from plants, wines and rosewater to crushed pearls, worms and even lead monoxide. If plague or the sweating sickness hit London, he quickly escaped into the countryside, including to **Penshurst Place**.

### Diplomacy, dissolution and defence

22. Throughout his reign, Henry played diplomatic games with France and Spain. Kent, the closest county to Continental Europe, was his gateway to missions and military operations abroad, keeping the port at **Dover** at the very heart of history. On 2 October 1514, Henry stood at the waterside in Dover to wave off his sister, Mary, as she travelled to meet her new husband, Louis XII of France, following peace negotiations between the two countries. The youngest maids-of-honour in her entourage were Mary and Anne Boleyn. In 1520 Dover also witnessed the glorious departure of Henry and his court on their way to the Field of the Cloth of Gold, where pageantry and celebrations sought to warm relations with Francis I of France.
23. Just before Henry sailed to parley with Francis I in 1520, he met Charles V of Spain at **Dover Castle** and they went to **Canterbury** to pay homage at the shrine of St Thomas Becket. Their piety served as a cover for talks behind the French king's back, and the pair later signed a treaty, much to the disgust of Francis.
24. Until his break with Rome, Henry remained a dutiful son of the Roman Catholic Church, made donations to shrines and dispensed alms generously – today his largesse would tot up to around £46,800 a year. He made several pilgrimages: his very last one, in the late 1530s, took him and third wife, Jane Seymour, through Kent via **Rochester** and **Sittingbourne** to **Canterbury**. Here he made offerings at Becket's shrine. It would soon be destroyed in the wreckage of the Dissolution.
25. During the Dissolution the King was in the habit of appropriating treasures from the religious houses he ruined. Among the coffer loads he laid his hands on was a ruby given by Louis VII in 1179 to decorate Becket's tomb in **Canterbury**. Henry had the choice jewel (the 'Regale de France') set in a thumb ring. It took 26 carts to move the gold and jewels taken from Becket's tomb!
26. Proceeds from the Dissolution doubled royal income and marked the greatest shift of land ownership since the Norman Conquest. Henry gave around one third of confiscated lands to the nobility and gentry to 'keep them on side' and retained just a few religious foundations for himself. These were mainly sited on the London-Dover route that he used for his travels abroad and included **Dartford Priory** and **St Augustine's Abbey**, Canterbury, whose ruins you can admire today as part of the city's World Heritage Site.
27. As a prince, Henry had been Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, overseeing the coastal ports of Kent and Sussex charged with providing the King with ships and men in return for special privileges. To find out more, tour Kent's Confederation of **Cinque Ports** and enjoy a thrilling journey into England's maritime heritage: Faversham, Margate, Ramsgate, Sandwich, Deal, Dover, Folkestone, Hythe, New Romney, Lydd and Ten Terden.
28. The concept of the Cinque Ports was a forerunner of the Royal Navy. King Henry, later celebrated as the 'Father of the English Navy', built up a major fleet that laid the foundations of England's subsequent naval dominance. In all he constructed 46 warships and 13 galleys, bought 26 vessels and captured 13 more.

29. In 1547, Henry rented a storehouse to service his fleet at anchor on the River Medway. The dockyard that grew up at Chatham built and repaired many of the vessels that helped seal victory against the Spanish Armada in the reign of Elizabeth I. Discover more when you embark on your own adventure into 400 years of maritime history at today's **Historic Dockyard Chatham**.
30. When invasion by Spain and France threatened, Henry developed his famous chain of coastal fortresses. He took a close interest in their design and at **Deal** you'll find a castle at the cutting edge of Tudor military architecture: squat, multiple bastions cluster around a central keep, their low walls minimizing the target available to enemy fire. The tiered layout allowed for 66 guns to be mounted and it was virtually impregnable, one of England's finest Tudor artillery fortresses. Neighbouring **Walmer Castle**, though much gentrified over the centuries, also displays the unmistakable Henrician design.
31. King Henry loved maps and, with national defence a worrying concern in the latter part of his reign, he commissioned a plan of Dover and a map of England's coastline. The royal fascination with cartography prepared the ground for the eventual mapping of the whole of the country in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Inspired by Henry, pick up a map and come and explore Tudor Kent!

For further information see [www.visitkent.co.uk](http://www.visitkent.co.uk)