

British Castles

November 2025



Castles Of The Boleyn Family
Hever Castle & More



EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear all,

Welcome to the November 2025 issue of the British Castles magazine - which this month has a 'Castles linked to the Boleyn family' theme.

The family - during the Tudor times - is most famous for one of its members, Anne Boleyn, second wife of King Henry VIII but they were interesting in their own right.

Our first feature looks at the main Boleyn home: Hever Castle in Kent. Not only does the castle have a large historical past, thanks to the Boleyns, but it's also one of the best castles to visit (especially as a day trip from London).

Our second feature profiles each of the Boleyn family and our gallery is of many of the places linked to the family.

Our lesser known castle this month is Sudeley Castle, part of Henry and Anne's progress tour of England - and also the final resting place of Henry's sixth wife, Catherine Parr.

Our quiz tests you knowledge of Tudor England around the time of the Boleyn's prominence.

Anyway I hope you enjoy the issue

Chris



Anne Boleyn spent much of her childhood at the Boleyn family seat: Hever Castle in Kent (Southern England). Here's our guide to this lovely spot - and one filled with so much Tudor history.

THE EARLY HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF HEVER CASTLE

Hever Castle was first constructed as a fortified manor house around 1270. At that stage, it was not conceived on the scale of royal castles such as Dover, but it nonetheless served both defensive and domestic purposes.

The moat, which survives, was an important feature of its early design, signalling not only the need for protection but also the social status of its owners. The de Hever family, from whom the castle takes its name, were established landholders, and their residence reflected both their security concerns and their wish to project authority locally.

Over time, the structure developed into a quadrangular castle, with the gatehouse forming its most prominent feature. However, unlike some contemporaneous castles built with warfare in mind, Hever balanced practical fortification with residential comfort. That dual purpose—the need for safety and the desire for a hospitable domestic environment—remained a defining characteristic of the site in the centuries that followed.

ANNE BOLEYN AND THE TUDORS

The most significant chapter in Hever's history is its association with Anne Boleyn.

Her father, Thomas Boleyn, inherited the castle in the early 16th century, and Anne spent much of her youth there before her time abroad in the Netherlands and France. When she returned to England, Hever became her family base.

Inside the castle today, there are rooms and displays that connect directly with Anne's life. Her bedroom has been reconstructed, and portraits and personal artefacts are on display, allowing visitors to situate her personal story within the building itself.

The castle also preserves documents and letters that illuminate the Boleyns' position at court. Walking through those rooms, one is reminded that the Tudor dynasty was shaped not only by politics and religion but also by the private lives of individuals, whose decisions carried extraordinary consequences.

In Anne's case, her upbringing at Hever was the backdrop to her eventual rise and fall, and by extension, to the wider shifts in English religious and political life.



Castle Gardens

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES AND GARDENS

From an architectural perspective, Hever Castle combines medieval foundations with Tudor embellishments. The gatehouse, with its battlements and towers, continues to present a defensive appearance, yet the interiors reveal panelled rooms, carved fireplaces, and timbered ceilings that reflect domestic rather than military concerns. This mixture of austerity and comfort is part of what makes the building distinctive.

The gardens, developed much later, add another dimension. Although some planting recalls Tudor styles—herbs, topiary, and small enclosed spaces—the majority were designed in the early 20th century when the estate underwent a major restoration.

The Italian Garden, with colonnades, fountains, and sculpture, was laid out to display a collection of classical antiquities, while the Tudor Garden employs hedges and brick paths to evoke sixteenth-century planting traditions. A yew maze, a rose garden, and the large ornamental lake complete the landscape.

These grounds, carefully designed rather than naturally evolved, create a setting that frames the castle and situates it within a wider narrative of garden design in England.



Castle Entrance

HEVER CASTLE AFTER THE BOLEYNs

Following the Boleyns, the property passed to Henry VIII and later to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, after their marriage was annulled in 1540.

This period added further Tudor associations but did not result in major architectural changes. Over the succeeding centuries, Hever became the possession of various families, none of whom left as prominent a mark. Its fortunes declined, and by the 18th and 19th centuries the castle had fallen into a state of neglect.

What is striking is how this long period of underinvestment both damaged and preserved the site. While the building deteriorated, it was not significantly altered, meaning that many medieval and Tudor elements survived into the modern period relatively unmodified.

This, in turn, provided a foundation for later restoration efforts.

RESTORATION AND THE ASTOR FAMILY ERA

The decisive moment in Hever's revival came in 1903 when William Waldorf Astor purchased the estate.

At that point, Astor was among the wealthiest men in the world, and he invested both money and energy in the restoration of the castle.

His approach was not to impose entirely new structures but to restore the existing medieval and Tudor features with care, while also adapting the house to the requirements of an early 20th-century country residence.

At the same time, Astor commissioned the construction of the Italian Garden and the ornamental lake, projects that transformed the grounds into a setting capable of displaying his collection of statuary.

These works required substantial engineering and labour, yet they were carried out with an eye to harmony between building and landscape.

The Astor family continued to hold the castle for much of the century, and their stewardship ensured that Hever emerged from obscurity as a site of historical and cultural interest.

The castle was purchased from the Astors in 1983 by the Guthrie family who run Hever to this day.



Italian Gardens

HEVER CASTLE TODAY

Hever is now a very popular tourist attraction, especially as it's an easy day trip from London. Visitors can tour the castle's interior, moving from the medieval gatehouse to Tudor rooms associated with Anne Boleyn and Anne of Cleves, and then on to later interiors reflecting 19th- and 20th-century tastes.

The gardens are maintained to a high standard, with seasonal displays ensuring that the character of the landscape changes over the course of the year. Additional attractions include a yew maze, children's play areas, and during the summer, activities such as boating on the lake or falconry demonstrations.

For those wishing to extend their stay, accommodation is available in converted estate buildings, making it possible to experience the site beyond the hours of daily opening.

What Hever offers, then, is neither the grandeur of a royal palace nor the severity of a military fortress, but rather a layered history in which domestic life, dynastic politics, and 20th-century restoration intersect.

Well worth a visit.

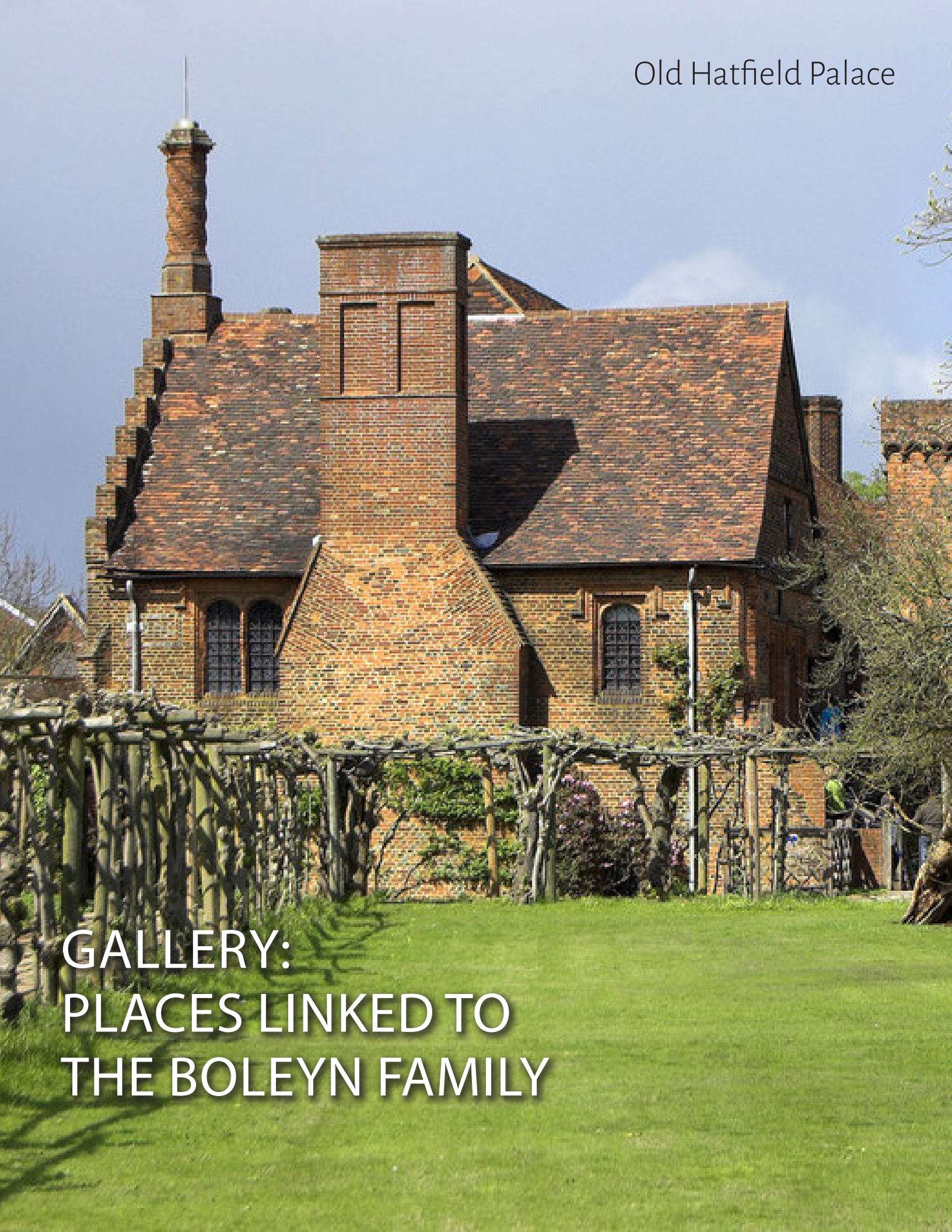


QUIZ: THE TUDORS AT THE TIME OF THE BOLEYNs

How well do you know the Tudors around the time of the Boleyns and Henry VIII? Answers on page 24.

1. In what year did Henry VIII become King of England?
2. Who was Henry VIII's first wife?
3. What was the name of Henry VIII's only male heir to survive infancy?
4. Which English cardinal served as Henry VIII's chief advisor before falling from power in 1529?
5. What was the name of the church Henry VIII created after breaking from Rome?
6. What title was given to Henry VIII by the Pope before his break with the Catholic Church?
7. Which of Henry VIII's wives was executed first?
8. Who was Henry VIII's last wife?
9. What was the name of the palace Henry VIII built on the site of Cardinal Wolsey's residence?
10. Which battle in 1513 saw the English defeat the Scots while Henry was campaigning in France?
11. Who was Henry VIII's only surviving legitimate child with Catherine of Aragon?
12. Which minister was responsible for the Dissolution of the Monasteries?
13. What was the name of the document that made Henry VIII the head of the Church of England?
14. Who succeeded Henry VIII on the throne?
15. What was Anne Boleyn accused of before her execution?
16. What was the name of Henry VIII's court jester, famous for his wit?
17. Which of Henry VIII's wives was known for being previously married twice before him?
18. What illness caused Henry VIII to become increasingly immobile in his later years?
19. Which royal ship, launched in 1511, famously sank in 1545?
20. Where is Henry VIII buried?

Old Hatfield Palace

A photograph of Old Hatfield Palace, a large brick building with a steep, tiled roof and a prominent chimney. The building is surrounded by a green lawn and a wooden trellis structure in the foreground. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

GALLERY:
PLACES LINKED TO
THE BOLEYN FAMILY

Bickling Hall (Birthplace of Boleyn Children)





Blinking Hall (Site Of Boleyn Children Birthplace)

Rochford Hall, Essex
(Mary Boleyn's Final Home)





Eltham Palace Gardens
(Anne Boleyn Was a Frequent Visitor)

Anne Boleyn's Gateway
Hampton Court



St Mary's-At-Lambeth (Boleyn Family Chapel)





THE BOLEYN FAMILY

POWERBROKERS OF THE TUDOR THRONE

The Boleyn family is best known for producing Henry VIII's mistress and second wife Anne. But they were much more, as these brief biographies of the key members of these Tudor powerbrokers shows...

From the patriarch, Thomas, his wife Elizabeth, to their three children Anne, Mary and George, they all made an impact in the turbulent times of Henry VIII's court.

THOMAS BOLEYN (1477–1539)

Thomas Boleyn, a man of remarkable ambition and diplomatic prowess, was pivotal to the Boleyn family's ascent within the Tudor court. Born into a respected noble family, Thomas received an exceptional education, mastering several languages and excelling in courtly etiquette and his early career was shaped by a series of royal appointments, including posts as an ambassador to France and the Low Countries.

His ability to navigate the treacherous waters of European diplomacy made him an invaluable asset to King Henry VIII, who rewarded him with titles such as Viscount Rochford, Earl of Wiltshire, and Earl of Ormond. These honours both recognized his service and further cemented his family's status among England's elite.

Despite his professional success, Thomas's personal life was marked by both triumph and tragedy. He married Elizabeth Howard, aligning himself with one of the most powerful noble families in England.

Together, they had three surviving children—Mary, Anne, and George—born at Blickling Hall in Norfolk (the current hall is built on the ruins of the Boleyn property), before the family moved to Hever Castle in Kent.

As a father, Thomas was instrumental in supporting his daughters' positions at court, especially as Anne drew the king's attention. However, the Boleyn family's fortunes were inextricably linked to the volatile politics of the Tudor court.

When Anne and George were arrested and executed in 1536, Thomas's influence quickly waned. He died a few years later, his reputation forever entwined with the dramatic rise and fall of his children. Yet, his legacy endures, not least through his granddaughter, Elizabeth I, who became one of England's greatest monarchs.



ELIZABETH BOLEYN (NÉE HOWARD) (C. 1480–1538)

Elizabeth Boleyn, born into the distinguished Howard family, carried the weight and prestige of her lineage from an early age.

Her father, Thomas Howard, 2nd Duke of Norfolk, was one of the most powerful men in England during the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

Through her marriage to Thomas Boleyn, Elizabeth became the matriarch of a family that would reach the pinnacle of royal favour. As the mother of Mary, Anne, and George Boleyn, Elizabeth played a significant, if often understated, role in their upbringing and placement at court.

While historical records provide only glimpses of her personal influence, it is clear that her guidance and family ties helped secure her daughters' roles as ladies-in-waiting and her son's advancement.

Elizabeth herself was frequently present at court, and her standing gave the Boleyn siblings access to opportunities that would shape their destinies. However, the family's rapid rise also made them targets for resentment and intrigue, especially as Anne's relationship with Henry VIII became a focal point of national and religious upheaval.

Elizabeth endured immense personal loss during the downfall of her children.

In 1536, she witnessed the arrests and executions of both Anne and George, a tragedy that left her grief-stricken and isolated from the court she had once moved through with such assurance.

She died just two years later, her passing marking the end of an era for the Boleyns. She's buried in St-Marys-at Lambeth, the Norfolk family church.



ANNA BOLINA VXOR-

HENRI OCTA



Anne Boleyn

ANNE BOLEYN (C. 1501–1536)

Whatever fame or impact the other Boleyns achieved and made, they are of course overshadowed by Anne Boleyn, a woman whose intelligence, wit, and charm captured the heart of King Henry VIII and changed the course of English history.

Raised in the cultured courts of the Netherlands and France, Anne developed the sophistication and confidence that would serve her well upon her return to England. She soon became a prominent figure at Henry VIII's court, attracting both admiration and envy. Anne refused to become the king's mistress and instead insisted on marriage, a stance that led Henry to seek an annulment from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and ultimately to break with the Catholic Church.

This seismic event ushered in the English Reformation and established the Church of England, fundamentally altering the nation's religious landscape.

Anne's position as Queen consort was marked by both triumph and adversity. Highly intelligent and politically astute, she was a patron of reformist thinkers and wielded considerable influence over Henry's policies.

However, Anne's inability to provide a male heir—she gave birth to one daughter, the future Queen Elizabeth I—contributed to her eventual downfall. Court factions schemed against her, and Henry's affections waned as he became enamoured with Jane Seymour.

In 1536, Anne was arrested on false charges of adultery, incest, and treason - and on 19th May 1536, she was executed at the Tower of London.



Anne Boleyn's Execution

ANNA BULLEYN, Gemalinne van HENDRIK DE VIII
Koning van Engeland, binnen Londen onthalst.

MARY BOLEYN (C. 1499–1543)

Mary Boleyn, the elder daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth, often lived in the shadow of her more famous sister but led a fascinating life in her own right.

Sent to the French court at a young age, Mary gained a reputation for her beauty and charm, catching the eye of King Francis I. Her time in France, and later at the English court, exposed her to the power dynamics and intrigues that shaped the lives of noblewomen.

Mary became the mistress of Henry VIII before Anne captured the king's unwavering attention.

She married twice: first to William Carey, a courtier, and after his death, to William Stafford, a soldier of relatively modest means.



The match caused her temporary exile from court due to its social implications.

Despite the scandals and setbacks, Mary displayed a resilience that allowed her to endure the volatile world of Tudor politics. She had two children, Catherine and Henry Carey, both of whom would rise to prominence in their own ways—some speculate that Henry VIII may have been their biological father, though this remains unconfirmed.

After her second marriage, Mary largely withdrew from court life, choosing stability and family over the dangers of royal intrigue. She outlived her siblings, passing away in 1543 in Rochford Hall in Essex.

Mary Boleyn's descendants continued to hold significant status in English society, and her life reflects the precarious balance between ambition and survival for women of her time.

GEORGE BOLEYN (C. 1504–1536)

George Boleyn, the only son of Thomas and Elizabeth, was a gifted courtier whose career flourished alongside his sisters' rise at court. Well-educated and eloquent, he held the title of Viscount Rochford and was entrusted with diplomatic missions by Henry VIII.

George was known for his intelligence, wit, and close bond with his sister Anne, often serving as her ally and confidant during the tumultuous years of her queenship. Like his father, George was a patron of the arts and an advocate for religious reform. He was married to Jane Parker, whose later testimony would contribute to his downfall.

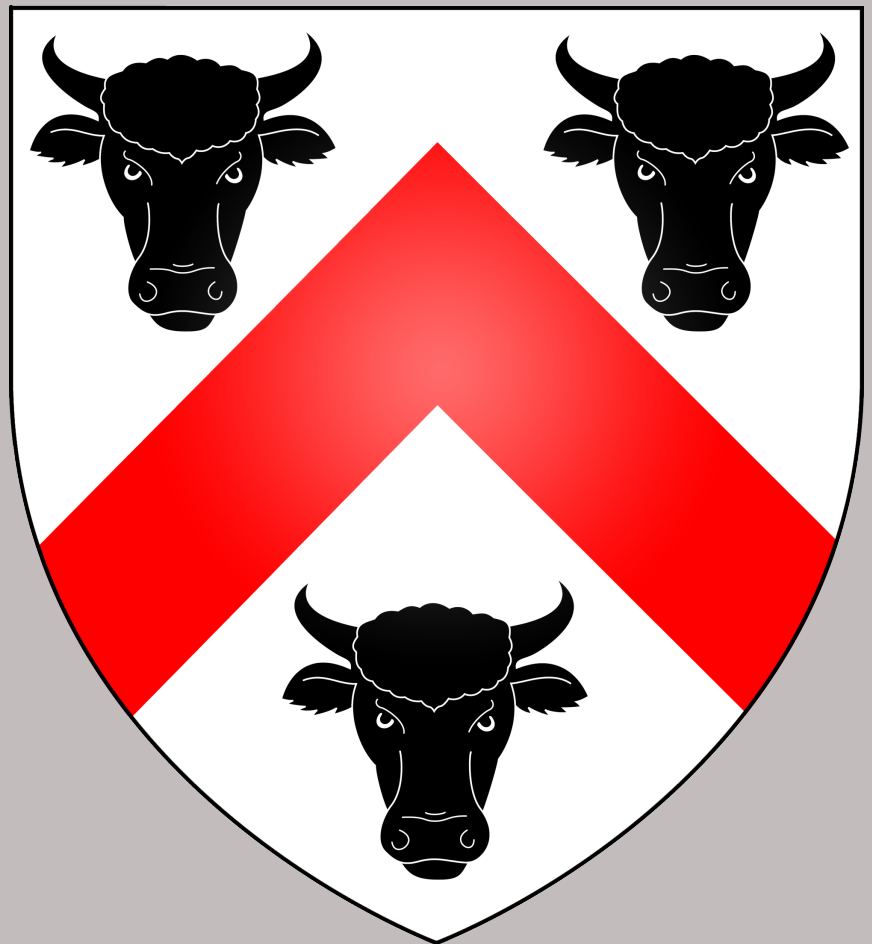
However, George's fortunes were deeply entwined with those of his sister.

When Anne fell out of favour with the king, George was caught in the wave of accusations that swept through the Boleyn family. In 1536, he was arrested and charged with treason and incest, charges widely regarded as baseless and politically motivated.

Despite a spirited defense, George was found guilty and executed alongside Anne.

His tragic end underscored the dangers of ambition in the Tudor court and the speed with which favour could turn to disaster.

George Boleyn's life, though cut short, was marked by loyalty to his family, commitment to reform, and the enduring complexities of power during one of England's most turbulent eras.



Boleyn Coat Of Arms



LESSER KNOWN BRITISH CASTLES

SUDELEY CASTLE

Sudeley Castle in the Cotswolds is both a great place to visit, and one linked to the Boleyns and the Tudors. It was a stopping off point for Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII's tour of England after they were married, and also the final home and resting place of Catherin Parr, Henry's sixth wife. Here then in more about this lovely place.

CASTLE ORIGINS

The origins of the castle can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when it was constructed during the late fourteenth century under the ownership of Ralph Boteler, a knight who held the post of Lord High Treasurer to King Henry VI.

Boteler built the castle as a symbol of wealth and influence, complete with defensive walls and a tower, though it was also designed for comfortable living. Like many aristocratic houses of the time, its fortunes shifted according to the political tides, and eventually the estate was confiscated and changed hands several times.

This sense of survival through fluctuating fortunes is something you notice when walking around the grounds, as parts of the medieval walls still stand beside later architectural additions.

ROYAL CONNECTIONS

The Tudor connection, which gives Sudeley particular historical significance, is one of the most compelling reasons to visit. The castle became a royal residence under the ownership of the Crown and was granted by Edward IV to his brother Richard, later King Richard III.

More importantly, it was here in the mid-sixteenth century that Catherine Parr, the sixth wife of Henry VIII, spent her final months. After Henry's death she married Thomas Seymour, the Lord High Admiral, and they lived at Sudeley.

Catherine Parr died in 1548 shortly after giving birth to her only child, and she was buried in the chapel within the castle grounds. This makes Sudeley unique, since it is the only private castle in England where a queen of England is buried.

The chapel of St Mary, where Catherine Parr's tomb lies, is a small, beautiful building within the grounds, restored in the Victorian period, but still containing fragments from earlier centuries. The tomb itself was discovered in the eighteenth century after years of neglect,

Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second queen, is also linked to Sudeley, though more indirectly. She never lived there, but the castle was a place visited by Henry himself during his reign, and Anne's story is bound up with the Tudor transformations that shaped England at that time.

At Sudeley you find references to her and the other queens in exhibitions and displays, as the castle presents itself as a place where the wider Tudor story can be explored.

It allows you to think about how these women were connected not only through marriage to Henry but also through the shared turbulence of politics, religion, and personal tragedy.



The Castle Through The Trees

CASTLE ARCHITECTURE & GROUNDS

Sudeley's architecture reflects the patchwork of centuries. The outer castle walls and some of the ruined sections show the defensive character of the original design. In contrast, later rebuilding, especially during the nineteenth century, introduced elements of domestic comfort and romanticised Gothic style.

The nineteenth-century Dent family, who acquired the castle after it had fallen into ruin following the English Civil War, invested heavily in restoration. They were wealthy glove manufacturers from Worcester who wanted to rescue the estate and create a family home. While they repaired and rebuilt much of the fabric, they also chose to leave certain sections in ruins, so that visitors could experience the contrast between decay and renewal.

The grounds of the castle are extensive and well worth exploring. They include a variety of gardens that have been laid out and developed over the centuries. There is the Queen's Garden, named in honour of the four Tudor queens connected to Sudeley – Anne Boleyn, Katherine Parr, Lady Jane Grey, and Elizabeth I – and it is planted with roses and formal arrangements that reflect the Tudor aesthetic.

Other areas of the grounds feature water gardens, wildflower areas, and topiary. The design of the gardens illustrates the Victorian taste for variety and for creating a sequence of different experiences within a single estate. For visitors, this means you can spend a considerable amount of time wandering through contrasting landscapes, all within the same enclosure.



Sudeley Castle



Sudeley Castle

THE CIVIL WAR & BEYOND

Sudeley also has an interesting role in the Civil War. During the seventeenth century it was held by Royalist forces, but after the Parliamentarians gained the upper hand the castle was slighted – that is, deliberately damaged – to prevent its further military use.

This act left significant portions in ruin. The ruined banqueting hall remains a visible reminder of that episode, offering a dramatic backdrop that contrasts with the restored wings. In this sense the castle embodies the turbulence of English history, where political conflict left lasting scars on the landscape.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Dent family continued to maintain the property, opening it occasionally to visitors while preserving it as a private home. Later generations developed the site as a heritage attraction, combining private residence with public access. This balance gives Sudeley a slightly different feel from some of the larger heritage sites managed entirely by state bodies or charities. It remains a lived-in place, but one that also presents exhibitions, artefacts, and historical interpretation.

Quiz Answers: 1. 1509; 2. Catherine of Aragon; 3. Edward VI; 4. Cardinal Thomas Wolsey; 5. The Church of England; 6. *Defender of the Faith; 7. Anne Boleyn; 8. Catherine Parr; 9. Hampton Court Palace; 10. The Battle of Flodden; 11. Mary I; 12. Thomas Cromwell; 13. The Act of Supremacy (1534); 14. Edward VI; 15. Adultery, incest, and treason; 16. Will Somers; 17. Catherine Parr; 18. Likely chronic leg ulcers (possibly from a jousting injury) and obesity; 19. The Mary Rose; 20. St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.



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