

Hever Castle

Hever Castle, beside the River Eden, two miles east of Edenbridge, is set within a wet moat between beautiful gardens and what appears to be a Tudor village. Gardens, "village" and the splendid interior of the castle are all the creation of a rich American, William Waldorf Astor. He purchased the castle in 1903 and immediately set about its transformation, which thus went on at the same time as Lord Conway was restoring Allington Castle. To his credit, Viscount Astor did not interfere with the exterior, which remains largely authentic.

There is some doubt as to the original builder. William de Hever obtained a license to crenellate in 1340 and Sir John de Cobham obtained another in 1384. The latter date is favored, though Sir John may just have added the gatehouse. The castle is a simple, square enclosure its embattled curtain enlivened by Tudor windows, chimneys and gables.

Square turrets project at each end of the entrance front and between them is a handsome, oblong gatehouse. This dominates the rest and is no doubt an echo of the old keep-gatehouse theme. The gateway, surmounted by carved tracery and a row of machicolations, is placed off-center so that there is a large room on one side of the gate passage but just a tiny chamber on the other.

Two original wooden portcullises, one still in working order, hang in the gate passage; the drawbridge is a restoration. Timber-framed ranges occupy three sides of the tiny courtyard, early Tudor in origin but heavily restored by Viscount Astor. They recall the castle's famous association with the Bullen family.

It was here that Henry VIII came to court Anne Bullen, who changed her name to Boleyn. Her life as queen was cut short by the executioner's sword and her dynasty-making father, Sir Thomas, died soon after.