

Penhurst Place

At the heart of this great mansion is one of England's finest medieval manor houses. Sir John de Pulteney, four times Lord Mayor of London, built it after he purchased the manor about 1338. His house conforms to the usual domestic layout of the later Middle Ages, the hall being flanked on one side by service rooms and on the other by the solar block.

Porches from both north and south lead into the screened passage of the hall. This magnificent chamber is virtually untouched by time, and its chestnut roof is one of the glories of medieval carpentry. Its main beams are supported on carved figures, other authentic features being the tiled floor, the step up to the dais and the central hearth. The louvre in the roof has been cunningly eliminated.

The carved Tudor screen conceals three doors leading to the buttery, the kitchen corridor and the pantry. The large solar, now equipped as a dining room, lies over a vaulted undercroft of unusual grandeur.

At right angles to the solar is the so-called Buckingham Wing, added to augment the accommodation by John, Duke of Bedford. He bought Penshurst in 1430, while Regent of England, on behalf of his young nephew, Henry VI.

The Duke of Bedford enclosed the manor house within a great square of walls and towers. There were towers at each corner and probably in the middle of each side. The house stood well inside the enclosure so comfort did not have to be compromised.

Eighteenth century demolition has robbed Penshurst of its surrounding curtain, deliberately restoring a domestic ambience. Only four of the oblong towers live on. The western corner towers form part of the present mansion, linked to the older core by long wings of Elizabethan origin. The other two are gate towers.