SUDELEY CASTLE

Sudeley Hill, Winchcombe, Gloucestershire GL54 5JD

17th June 2022

I confess I had never heard of Sudeley Castle until I'd been researching places to visit on our forthcoming Cotswolds holiday. I was therefore astounded to discover it was the final resting place of Katherine Parr, the sixth wife of King Henry VIII. Henry himself had visited the castle in 1535 with his second wife, Anne Boleyn.

The origins of Sudeley are mainly lost in time, but being a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon *Sudeleagh*, meaning a south-lying pasture, or clearing in a forest, its name provides a clue. The valley in which the castle is situated has been inhabited since the Stone Age, from primitive hunter-gatherers, to Celts, to Romans, to Saxons.

When the Romans abandoned the British Isles (leaving two villas in the grounds of Sudeley's estate), England returned to being several independent Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Winchcombe was the capital of Mercia, one of the most powerful kingdoms, during the reign of King Offa (757-796). Offa, of course, is well-known for building Offa's Dyke, the defensive earthworks along the Welsh borders, with his kingdom extending from the Midlands to London.

Sudeley's early rise as a royal estate is probably because of its proximity to Winchcombe, but by the late 10th century, England was united into a single kingdom and Sudeley belonged to King Æthelred the Unready. By the turn of the 11th century, it had evolved into a manor house in a royal deer park and was given by King Æthelred the Unready to his daughter, Goda, as a wedding gift. Interestingly, 'unready' derives from the Old English 'unræd', meaning 'poorly advised' – and Goda must have been more than ready to accept her gift.

Goda's descendants managed to hold Sudeley for another four centuries, with the first castle being built there in probably the 12th century. Nothing is known about what the castle looked like, so it could have been either the fortification of an existing manor house, or a completely new structure.

Ruins left and lived-in castle right (photo by Alan Santillo)

On the day of our visit, heatwave temperatures had been predicted, so we left in good time for a half-hour drive to Sudeley Castle, north-east of Cheltenham, in order to be among the first visitors. The grounds were open at 10:00, but the castle not until 11:00, so when we arrived at 09:50 it was an ideal time to sit and drink our own coffee before venturing into the castle grounds.

By the time of the Norman invasion in 1066, the estate was owned by Earl Harold de Sudeley and according to its entry in the Domesday Book completed in 1086, it consisted of 31 plow (plough) villages and was taxed at 12 hides. A hide represented an amount of land, but in this context, it was a measure of value for tax assessment. Almost a thousand years later, nothing remains of the original manor house, but one or two of the Domesday oaks are still in the park.

William the Conqueror's usual practice was to confiscate the estates of Saxon nobles and give them to his followers. However, Earl Harold managed to keep his property, presumably because of his marriage to one of William's great-nieces. The de Sudeleys remained at Sudeley for another 300 years, taking part in the Crusades and other military campaigns throughout those centuries.

Lived-in castle left & banqueting hall ruins right (photo by Alan Santillo)

During the brutal civil war known as The Anarchy (1138-53), between the Empress Matilda and Stephen of Blois, Sudeley had taken Matilda's side. This induced Stephen to seize the estate and develop it into a royal garrison. It was probably the first time Sudeley was fortified, although the forces of Matilda retaliated, attacking and capturing Sudeley and Tewkesbury. Although little is known of Sudeley's fate at this time, it's believed the fortifications were pulled down.

The estate was restored to the de Sudeley family, but a few decades after The Anarchy, William, a younger son of the owner John de Sudeley, took his mother's name of de Tracy. William de Tracy was one of four knights who murdered Thomas à Becket in Canterbury Cathedral and was excommunicated. However, he was never arrested or tried for the crime and his branch of the family still survives. On the other hand, the main branch of the de Sudeley line ended when John, 3rd Baron Sudeley, died childless in 1367, fighting in Spain for the Black Prince.

After John's death, the estate passed to his sister Joan and as was the custom of the era, through her marriage into the Boteler family. A later family member, Ralph Boteler (c.1394-1473), is thought to have begun construction of the castle. During the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), Ralph had served in France under John of Lancaster, 1st Duke of Bedford, who was the third son of King Henry IV and the brother of King Henry V – and he also acted as regent of France for his nephew, King Henry VI. John of Lancaster was an important personage, no less!

Ralph Boteler was also rather an important personage, having been made Captain of Calais. He later became Lord High Treasurer of England in 1443 and was created Baron Sudeley. With such wealth and power, he embarked on building himself a castle worthy of his status and Sudeley Castle today retains its layout from Ralph's plans, with significant elements of the original building still in evidence.

The castle was based on a double courtyard, surrounded by a moat. The outer courtyard was used by servants and men-at-arms, while the inner court and buildings were used by Ralph and his family. Ralph had created a magnificent building, complete with the extravagant luxury of glazed windows, but he had failed to gain royal permission to crenellate the castle and was forced to seek the pardon of King Henry VI (reign 1422-61 & 70-71).

The Portmare Tower and the partially ruined Dungeon Tower both survive from Ralph's time – the former is thought to have been given its name after a French admiral who was captured and ransomed by Ralph! Both of the towers are situated at opposite ends of the present-day restaurant terrace, indicated by the white canvas roof in the photo below:

Portmare Tower left and Dungeon Tower right (photo by Alan Santillo)

The atmospherically-named Dungeon Tower is an ancient monument in its own right. Its basement, although now inaccessible (which is probably just as well), unsurprisingly housed the dungeons, which descended for three gruesome levels. During restoration works, a human skeleton was uncovered, as well as a skull, when the garden next to the Dungeon Tower was dug. Who these bones belonged to and why they were buried where they were, remains a mystery.

In 1449, Ralph's son, Thomas Boteler, had married 13-year-old Lady Eleanor Talbot, but Thomas was killed, leaving no heirs. Eleanor continued to live at Sudeley with her father-in-law. However, Ralph was unable to enjoy his castle for long, as Lancastrian Henry VI was overthrown by Yorkists in 1461 and King Edward IV (reign 1461-83) took the throne. Ralph was punished for his longstanding association with the Lancastrians by being forced to sell Sudeley to the new king. Ralph died four years later, sadly without his castle and without an heir.

As well as acquiring Sudeley Castle, King Edward IV was also attracted to Lady Eleanor and was believed to have had a relationship with her. Shortly afterwards, though, Edward granted Sudeley to his brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

However, the Wars of the Roses (from around 1455-87) were in full swing and nine years after his coronation, Edward was deposed by the Lancastrians, with Henry VI re-taking the crown. Edward and Richard assembled the Yorkist forces and it was from Sudeley Castle that Richard set out to fight at the Battle of Tewkesbury on 4th May 1471. The Lancastrians were roundly defeated, Henry VI's son was killed and Edward was restored to the throne.

Richard owned Sudeley for nine years, before he exchanged it with Edward for Richmond Castle in Yorkshire. When Edward died in 1483, Richard set about using Edward's liaison with Eleanor Talbot to claim Edward's children and heirs with Elizabeth Woodville were illegitimate, citing a pre-contract of marriage with Eleanor. The Bishop of Bath and Wells came forward to claim he had officiated at this ceremony and thus Richard's path to the throne was cleared.

Despite the controversy, Lady Eleanor devoted herself to a life of charity and prayer, until her death in 1468. Some people consider her to have been a secret queen and therefore the first English queen to have lived at Sudeley Castle.

Upon his accession, Richard owned Sudeley again and proceeded to transform it into a home fit for a king. The east range of Ralph Boteler's inner courtyard was replaced with a new suite of rooms, including a magnificent banqueting hall.

Richard III's Banqueting Hall

The ruins of this hall were one of the first sights we noticed, as we expectantly began our wandering around the grounds. It had been built according to the latest fashion of the era, with a ground-floor hall that was used for meeting guests and feasting, and an upper hall that was reserved for the king and his special guests. The king's bedchambers were connected to this room. The thought of what had once taken place in these ruins was fascinating to imagine.

I found the Gothic windows incredible – so tall and airy and a credit to the medieval engineers who had achieved such a level of sophistication. In fact, the whole banqueting hall (with an undercroft running beneath it) was a testament to the masons and still seemed to convey a distinct aura of its past.

Incredible windows

It had suffered partial destruction from Cromwell's troops during the English Civil War, but the remains of this marvellous 15th-century banqueting hall now provide the setting for the Ruins Garden, one of the ten named individual gardens within the site. Roses and ivy climb the walls, adding to its abandoned beauty.

King Richard III was unable to enjoy his castle for long, as he was killed at the Battle of Bosworth on 22nd August 1485, less than two years after becoming king. The ownership of Sudeley was therefore transferred to his victor, King Henry VII (reign 1485-1509), although he proceeded to pass it to his uncle, Jasper Tudor. However, since Jasper died childless, the castle reverted to Henry and in turn to his son, who became King Henry VIII (reign 1509-47).

After leaving the banqueting hall, we continued up through more beautifully kept garden areas, looking backwards to the castle. There were very long and intriguing double hedges of yew that looked as if they had small tunnels through which one could pass, but we were after people-free photos and continued upwards.

Looking back towards the castle (and St Mary's Church on the right)

During Henry VIII's reign, he only stayed at Sudeley once, in 1535 with his second wife Anne Boleyn, a year before he had her beheaded. During this visit, he put into motion his history-changing Dissolution of the Monasteries. It was also during this visit that Pope Paul III and the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I started to discuss Henry's excommunication from the Catholic Church.

In 1543, Henry married Katherine Parr, his sixth wife, but neglected Sudeley to the extent that it was described as going to ruin. As it happened, Henry was also going to ruin and died less than four years later in 1547. He was succeeded by nine-year-old Edward, his son by his late third wife, Jane Seymour. The Seymours used this to gain power and Jane's brother Thomas procured Sudeley Castle.

In April 1547, Katherine Parr married Thomas Seymour, who had been created 1st Baron Seymour of Sudeley. Katherine's marriage to Thomas may have seemed overly hasty, but she had wanted to marry Thomas before Henry had proposed and refusing the king's proposal could have had dire consequences.

In 1548, a now pregnant Katherine moved with Thomas to Sudeley Castle, after Thomas had spent vast amounts of money to make it fit for a queen. One of her attendants was Lady Jane Grey, who would later be beheaded after a nine-day queenship in 1553. Lady Jane would also be chief mourner at Katherine's funeral.

Katherine died at Sudeley in September 1548 from 'childbed fever', five days after giving birth to a daughter. She was buried two days later at the chapel within the grounds of Sudeley, with the first royal funeral service to use Protestant rites. The chapel itself had been built in the Perpendicular style in the 15th century by Ralph Boteler, with a covered gallery that linked it to the castle.

Very sadly over the next 200 years, Katherine's tomb was defaced and her burial location lost. Then in 1782, a coffin was discovered with a lead plate saying: "Here lyeth Quene Kateryne wife to Kyng Henry the VIII and Last the wife of Thomas Lord of Sudeley … dyed 5 September…". Distressingly, vandals dug up the coffin in 1792, but by 1817, the remains had been safely placed in a stone vault.

When the chapel was restored in 1863, it was re-dedicated as St Mary's Church and Katherine's remains were placed in a neo-Gothic canopied tomb. I found myself filled with anticipation as we approached the church, which sat peacefully within a delightfully planted area known as the White Garden.

We entered the church and were pleased to find we were the only ones there. Suitable church music was playing subtly in the background and as well as exuding an almost tangible sense of history, the atmosphere was calm and peaceful.

This was surprising considering the tumultuous history connected to the castle. For instance, a stained-glass window located behind Katherine's tomb depicted the murder of Thomas à Becket, since a Sudeley ancestor, William de Tracey, had been one of the knights responsible for the murder.

Thomas à Becket's murder (photo by Alan Santillo)

In the main body of the church, Katherine's tomb was to the left of the altar:

"Here lyeth Quene Kateryne..." (photo by Alan Santillo)

It felt right that such care had finally been taken for what is an ornate, but thoughtful, memorial to Katherine's life. A life-size marble effigy was made in her likeness based on contemporary portraits, although it apparently bears no resemblance to those portraits that have since been authenticated. This seems of small import, however, as the whole effect is fitting for a clever, gracious queen.

Katherine had been one of the few women of her time to be a published author and the first woman to be published in England under her own name. Towards the end of Henry VIII's reign, she had written her strongly anti-Roman Catholic *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, in which she outlined her religious beliefs, including her insistence that all people should be able to read the Bible in English for themselves.

There was still a sense of peace directly outside the church, where I stood in the tranquil White Garden and considered what a special place we had the privilege of visiting. The white roses, peonies and clematis had been planted to symbolise purity. Close by, Katherine in topiary form was happily reading a book.

Katherine

We continued to stroll behind the church, where a 19th-century Cedar of Lebanon was receiving healing treatment in a bed of restorative mulch. There are times when I would like a bed of restorative something, though probably not mulch!

After Katherine's death, Thomas Seymour had not attended Katherine's funeral, but had hastened to London to pursue his chances with Princess Elizabeth, having previously been suspiciously familiar with her. This was to be his downfall, as he was arrested and executed for treason six months later.

Katherine's brother, William Parr, 1st Marquess of Northampton, then inherited the castle. He was a prominent member of the clique who persuaded the young, dying King Edward VI (reign 1547-53) to name the Protestant Lady Jane Grey, who was the granddaughter of Henry VIII's sister, as his successor. However, Henry's Roman Catholic daughter Mary had other ideas.

In less than two weeks, 'Bloody Mary' had rallied support and proceeded to claim the throne as queen. Heads rolled, including that of Jane Seymour's father-in-law and Lady Jane Grey. William Parr managed to keep his head, but lost his title and all his property, including Sudeley. The castle was again in royal ownership.

Queen Mary (reign 1553-58) gave the castle to Sir John Brydges, the Lieutenant of the Tower of London, who had escorted Lady Jane Grey to her execution. He was created Baron Chandos of Sudeley and his descendants held Sudeley for the next century. His son Edmund made numerous alterations and additions to the castle, completely rebuilding the outer courtyard – the part of the castle occupied by the current family – into what it is today.

Queen Elizabeth I (reign 1558-1603) stayed at Sudeley three times – in 1574; in the Royal Progress of 1575 that included her famous 19-day visit to Kenilworth Castle; and in 1592. The 1592 Royal Progress was a particularly grand one, to celebrate the defeat of the Spanish Armada. She stayed at Sudeley for three days, during which Lord Chandos held a three-day party for her, with feasts, pageants, firework and dancing. It nearly bankrupted the family and there were no rewards forthcoming, except perhaps the prestige and good memories?

Looking towards the lived-in part of Sudeley Castle

For the next 50 years, the Chandos family continued to live at Sudeley quietly, slowly rebuilding their wealth. This was obviously achieved, as Grey Brydges, 5th Baron Chandos became Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire and gained the title 'King of the Cotswolds' for his impressive style of living and his generosity.

In 1642, the English Civil War erupted between Parliament and King Charles I (reign 1625-49), with 22-year-old George Brydges, 6th Baron Chandos, declaring for the Royalists. He immediately armed his tenants and servants at Sudeley Castle before marching to join with the king. He took with him 1,000 men and £500 of gold plate, leaving the castle in the charge of his brother.

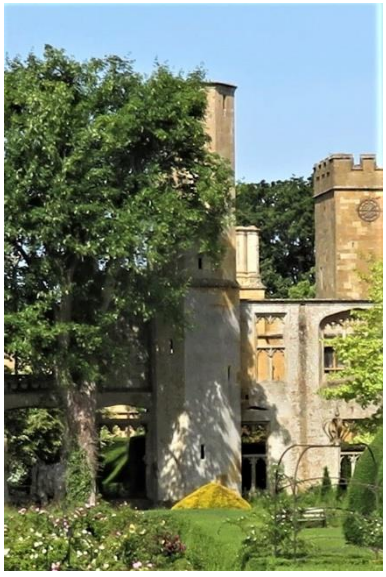
Due to its location, Sudeley Castle became of high strategic importance and Prince Rupert of the Rhine, King Charles' cavalry commander, made it his headquarters.

Soon after the war began, Prince Rupert and Lord Chandos attempted to capture Parliamentarian Cirencester, but ended up having to retreat to Oxford. While they were away, Oliver Cromwell's commander, Colonel Edward Massey, attacked the castle. The 60-strong castle garrison was vastly outnumbered by Massey's mixed force of infantry, artillery and cavalry, but desperately managed to hold out for two days, before being literally smoked out.

Once inside the castle, the Parliamentarians systematically looted it. They also smashed monuments, dug up graves (including Katherine Parr's, no doubt) and desecrated the chapel, even using the chancel's communion table as a butcher's block. After such dire behaviour, they abandoned the castle when they heard that the Royalist army, with Prince Rupert and Lord Chandos, had finally succeeded in capturing Cirencester and were thought likely to head to Sudeley.

Later that year, it's thought that King Charles I probably used Sudeley as his base when the Royalist army attempted to take Gloucester. This ended in failure and the Royalists retreated to Sudeley. The castle then came under siege for a second time in 1644, when the garrison was again outnumbered, but managed to hold their attackers at bay, despite a great deal of intense bombardment.

There is apparently a hole still visible in the Octagon Tower caused by a Parliamentarian cannonball, which continued in its trajectory to take off the head of a Royalist. We failed to notice the hole, as at the time we were unaware of the history – to be honest, I never focused on the Octagon Tower in particular during our visit, but have located it in another photo. If we visit Sudeley again (and I hope we do), the tower and the hole will be a must. Also, a better photo:



Octagon Tower

Back to the siege and the castle was betrayed when a lieutenant defected and opened the gates to the Parliamentarians. The remaining garrison members and their commander were taken into captivity. As for Lord Chandos, he kept his estates only by renouncing his support for the Royalist cause. This was to little avail, though, since the Parliamentarians ordered the slighting of Sudeley so it could never again be used as a military post. The inner court and royal apartment rooms were dismantled, but much of the outer courtyard was left intact.

At the end of the war, Lord Chandos was fined by Parliament almost to the point of ruin. Things went steadily downhill, when he fought and killed a man in a duel, was imprisoned in the Tower of London for manslaughter and died from smallpox in 1655. Sudeley Castle was inherited by his widow, Lady Jane Savage, but she was unable to fund any repairs and the castle sank into dereliction.

While the castle suffered from the ravages of the weather and the plundering of local builders, the estate changed hands several times. The little that remained of the castle was used by tenants of the surrounding land, who used the ruins as shelter for their cattle and sheep, while rabbits populated the roofless chapel.

The Romantic Movement in the late 18th century led to the castle ruins becoming a tourist destination and even King George III (reign 1760-1820) visited several times. He must have been suffering a bout of his recurrent mental illness when he tried to climb the Octagon Tower, losing his footing and tumbling down the stairs. He was saved from a crash landing thanks to the housekeeper, who threw herself beneath his ample proportions. Good for the king, but how was the housekeeper?

In 1810, the Duke of Buckingham had purchased Sudeley Castle with the intention of restoring it, but had found the cost prohibitive. Instead, he let the buildings to a tenant publican, who then traded as 'The Castle Arms'. It must have been a successful arrangement, because it took seven years for the Duke to agree to sell it to brothers John and William Dent of Worcester in 1837.

The Dent brothers were wealthy glove manufacturers who had been looking for a building project and in their hands, a large part of the castle was again habitable by 1840. However, the brothers decided to leave the medieval buildings of the inner court as picturesque ruins, including King Richard III's banqueting hall.

The building work was directed by George Gilbert Scott, who also restored much of the interior of St Mary's Church, although the exterior dates primarily to the 15th and 16th centuries. As for the castle, the brothers sensitively furnished and filled it mostly with art and antiques that had some bearing on the castle.

St Mary's Church amid greenery (photo by Alan Santillo)

Both brothers died childless within a year of each other and in 1855, the castle was inherited by a nephew of the Dent brothers, John Croucher Dent, with his wife Emma. They continued to improve the castle and add to its collections – it was even said that throughout Emma's lifetime, the builders hardly ceased work. As well as entertaining on a vast scale, Emma devoted much of her energy to improving Sudeley, both the house and also the gardens, planning the layout and supervising the planting. In fact, the gardens enhanced our visit a great deal.

The Queens' Garden

John and Emma had no children and Sudeley was inherited by Emma's nephew, Harry Dent-Brocklehurst. World War I naturally changed much and in 1927, Harry handed Sudeley over to his eldest son, Jack. Death duties and the impact of the Great Depression in the 1930s led to straitened circumstances, with the added moral dilemma of needing to economise with staff.

Much of the land had to be sold, so much so that the estate is now a tenth of its former size. World War II also saw changes, with Land Girls taking over the dairy and part of the Tate Gallery's art collection being moved into the castle itself, safely away from the London Blitz. What is now the visitors' car park became the location of a prisoner of war camp (Camp 37) for captured German and Italian soldiers. The POWs worked on local farms until the camp was closed in 1948.

Jack died in 1949, but his wife Mary continued to live in the castle while it fell into an increasingly sorry state, as no work had been carried out since the 1930s. In 1969, Mary handed over the castle to her son Mark and his wife Elizabeth, who decided that in order to survive, Sudeley needed to be opened to the public. This was achieved in May 1970, although more acres of the estate and some family treasures had to be sold to finance this decision.

Mark died suddenly in 1972 and in 1979, Elizabeth married Henry Cubitt, 4th Baron Ashcombe, the uncle of Camilla, Queen Consort. They decided to keep Sudeley open to the public and embarked upon further major refurbishments in the early 1980s. Henry Cubitt died in 2013, but the family is committed to the continuing preservation of the castle and all it involves.

The time was 11:00 and we were able to enter the castle rooms open to the public. Disappointingly, but also understandably, no photography was allowed. I must confess I was surprised so little of the interior was open to public view, but it *is* a family home after all and there were some fascinating items on display. I wish I could remember what I'd seen, but it has become a bit of a blur.

As far as I can recall, we walked into a lobby, along a corridor, saw a sitting/dining room, climbed some stairs to a bedroom, a dressing room, a bathroom and another bedroom, before going down more stairs and outside again. Looking at the guide book, I think there may have been a separate exhibition that we didn't see for one reason or another. On a future visit, I would take my time, suss everything out and definitely pay more attention.

However, the outside was still looking simply lovely in the sunshine. Of the ten separate gardens, the centrepiece is the Queens' Garden, named after four of England's queens: Anne Boleyn, Katherine Parr, Lady Jane Grey and Elizabeth I. In Tudor times, it would have been planted with herbs and probably vegetables and flowers. Having been redesigned over the years, it now has 80 varieties of roses, with the large yew hedges surrounding it dating back to 1860.

I'm not sure how it happened, but we failed to visit each of the ten gardens. This may have been because we decided it was lunchtime and had noticed an unoccupied wooden bench in the Secret Garden. However, an oversight meant our lunch was still in the car, so we decided to go and collect it.

On our way, we encountered a Roman mosaic floor on the terrace and learned that two Roman villas had been discovered within the Sudeley estate in the 19th century, when the fields had been ploughed for the first time. The view across the Isbourne Valley has changed little from when Romans settled in the Cotswold hills.

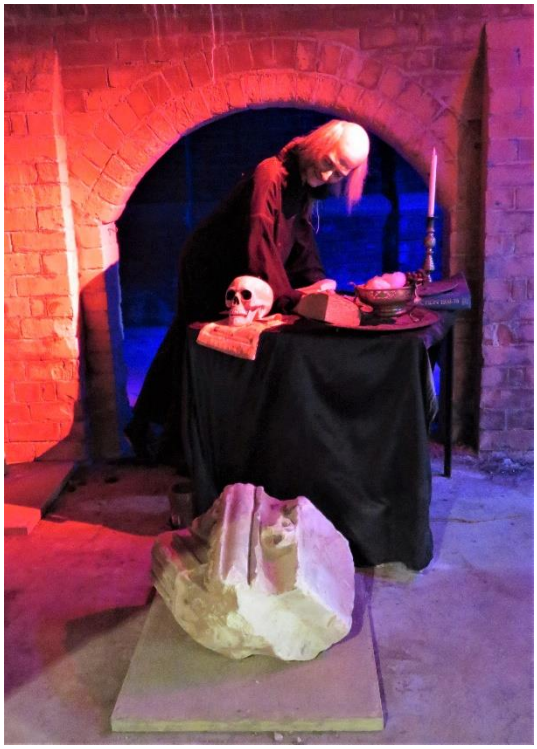
Replica of a mosaic floor found in a Cotswold villa

The elaborate mosaic floor, made with traditional Roman techniques using hand-cut stone (tesserae), was an exact replica of a floor in one of the Roman villas in Spoonley Wood, originally made by mosaicists working in Corinium (Cirencester).

Carrying on towards the Dungeon Tower, we noticed there was an exhibition of medieval stonework in the old Victorian coal cellars, which had come from nearby Winchcombe Abbey. The abbey had been built in 798 by King Kenulf of Mercia, starting as a nunnery. In 985, it was re-founded as a Benedictine community and became one of the most powerful Benedictine monasteries in England.

While Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn stayed at Sudeley in 1535, Thomas Cromwell was staying at Winchcombe Abbey to confer with the king about the Dissolution. When the abbey was demolished, the stonemasons' acclaimed work was eagerly 'recycled' by local townspeople. Later, much of the remaining stone was used to fill in the castle's moat and construct an underground water system.

The exhibition was fascinating and well-presented, although somewhat strangely lit. One section illustrated how the seemingly tranquil life of the monks was on occasion disrupted by a dreadful coughing disease that was caused by damp rising from the River Isbourne, as well as a plague of lice and rats, which thrived in the rushes strewn across the clay floor – although another display was more obscure:



Strange practices in the abbey?

We continued back towards the car park and then came across the remains of a 15th-century tithe barn that had been built by Ralph Boteler. In the Middle Ages, landowners and farmers had to hand over a tenth of their produce to the church and the barn had been built to store Sudeley's produce. The barn had been destroyed by Cromwell's troops in the English Civil War, but its ruins still gave an indication of its enormity, measuring at nearly 180 feet/55 metres long.

The tithe barn was now a specially pleasing backdrop for one of the ten Sudeley gardens, with a mix of planting and ruins that would have pleased any admirer of the Romantic Movement. Flowers in season include roses, hollyhocks, hydrangeas and wisteria, although there are plenty more varieties.

Inside the tithe barn

There was a great view of the castle from this area and to enhance it even more, there was a large koi carp pond in front of the pond – with polar bears enjoying a paddle. That's not a sight you see every day and of course, they weren't real…

The tithe barn, complete with polar bears (photo by Alan Santillo)

In fact, we'd noticed various animal sculptures almost as soon as we'd arrived at the castle, which were all part of the 'Sudely CoExistence Sculpture Safari', spreading a universal message of peaceful coexistence with nature. The Queen Consort's late brother, Mark Shand, founded the charity 'Elephant Family', which is the charity behind the CoExistence initiative.

It had been an exceptionally interesting walk back to the car! When we returned, we headed to the Secret Garden and spent a most tranquil half-hour sitting on a wooden bench, largely undisturbed (as the garden name suggests). This walled garden had been replanted in 1979 and then further replanted in 1998.

The Secret Garden

Reluctant to leave, we continued to wander around, although many more visitors had arrived and it was becoming increasingly hot. Mainly due to ornithophobia (mine), we eschewed the Rare Breeds Pheasantry and instead found ourselves heading towards the café for an ice cream, before finally leaving at 13:30. It had been a wonderful visit filled with several surprises and despite the somewhat random features, there was a harmonious feeling to the entire place.

It was only later that this harmonious feeling ebbed slightly when I realised I hadn't seen, or noticed, a certain artefact in the house that interested me greatly, namely a love letter belonging to Katherine Parr. Had we missed the exhibition and if so, *how* had we missed the exhibition? Was the exhibition even open? There is more to Sudeley Castle than met our eyes on this visit, which makes me think a follow-up visit is definitely desirable! Still, I had seen Katherine Parr's tomb…