

History Group Visit to Berkeley Castle 11-07-17

Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire proved to be a fascinating venue, with much to recommend it for the History Group. The two Guides who took the members round the Castle were extremely knowledgeable and highlighted some of the many treasures that this venue contained.



The History Group entering Berkeley Castle.

The Castle dates from the 12th Century and is situated on a rocky outcrop, overlooking the River Severn, although there was a Saxon Church on the outcrop before the Castle was built. The site of the Saxon church is now the site of the parish church, with the Castle slightly below it. There are some distinctive features to the Castle, including a 12th Century circular Keep, a 14th Century extension enclosing the Inner Bailey, a breached Keep wall dating to the Civil War, and a 20th Century Entrance Tower in the Gothic style. The Castle is almost unique in that it has remained in the ownership of the same family for nearly 900 years.

Many Royal personages have owned or visited the Castle, including King Henry VII, Queen Elizabeth I, and King Edward II, who was imprisoned and later murdered here. Their stories were told and their artefacts were displayed, including an exquisite embroidered bed covering belonging to Queen Elizabeth I, Royal portraits and the Royal Gallery in the former Chapel.

The Castle also has an outstanding collection of British and Dutch Master paintings, including some by Willem van de Velde, Stubbs and Reynolds. It also contains some magnificent Belgian wall tapestries from the 16th Century, which adorn the walls of some of the Castle rooms. Other artefacts include a chest used by Sir Francis Drake; silver tableware dating from the 17th Century; a King James' Bible and a superbly

preserved medieval book of Gregorian chant. Also on display was the actual dungeon room in which King Edward II was imprisoned for 6 months and later murdered.



Page from a book of Gregorian chant in Berkeley Castle.



16th Century Belgian tapestry at Berkeley Castle.

Beneath the Castle and surrounding it are the beautiful gardens, which contain a lily pond, abundant and colourful herbaceous borders, and well tended terraces. The Castle towers above the gardens, imposing in its height and solidity.



Views of Castle and Gardens



Close to the Castle is The Chantry (or Dr Jenner's House), the home of Dr Edward Jenner, who pioneered smallpox vaccination and is the Father of the vaccination technique. His home contains his books, drawings, his reconstructed study and some graphic illustrations of the effects of smallpox, which was only completely eliminated worldwide in the 20th Century. The Garden of The Chantry has recently been restored to a 'Physic Garden' with plants and herbs which would have been familiar to Dr Jenner, when he was practising as a country doctor in the 18th and early 19th century.



The Chantry, Dr Edward Jenner's home in Berkeley.

Next to the Chantry lies Berkeley Parish Church, which contains some fine medieval wall paintings; magnificent alabaster tombs of knights and their ladies, dating back to the times of the Battle of Crecy; the Jenner Family grave, Dr Jenner's father being the Vicar of Berkeley in the 1720's; and the Edward Jenner Memorial stone.



Alabaster tomb of a Knight from the time of the Battle of Crecy.



Interior of St Mary's Church, Berkeley, with medieval wall painting.

The Butterfly House contains many species of butterfly, which are allowed to fly free in a specially constructed building. The variety of plants and butterflies in this 'House' makes a visit an especial joy.

Altogether, a visit to Berkeley provided much to inform, entertain and enjoy for the whole Group.



Some of the Group finishing their tour of Berkeley Castle.

Heidy Hague.