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ENJOY THIS SCEPTRED ISLE



Henry loved to hunt deer and boar around Windsor Castle's Long Walk

By Kieran Falconer

England will celebrate its national day on Thursday so this week we devote a section to all things English. We begin royally with KIERAN FALCONER's visit to Windsor to see a Henry VII exhibition, staged to coincide with the 500th anniversary of the notorious monarch's accession.

IF all the monarchs of England who have sat on the throne, Henry VIII (1491-1547) is the one most people would opt to have a pint with.

Whether it's because of Sid James playing him in Carry On Henry, or more recently Ray Winstone, everybody seems to be charmed by this larger-than-life character.

With his extraordinary shape, he is arguably the only monarch we recognise from his silhouette.

Sure, he could have done with some marriage guidance and dying at 55, weighing 21 stone, probably meant he neglected his five fruits a day.

Love him or loathe him, he remains one of the country's most notorious and significant royals.

Very few places where Henry resided actually exist today but Windsor is one of them. "Today's old town is what Henry would have known," says guide

Hilary Thompson, from Windsor Welcome. He's referring to the narrow, cobbled streets by Windsor Castle where some old, timber-framed buildings still stand.

Henry may well have quaffed in the Three Tuns just off the High Street and handily opposite what would have been the stocks.

He also probably had a barrel in the Old Kings Head in Church Lane, where Shakespeare is said to have written The Merry Wives Of Windsor.

"The great attraction of Windsor for Henry was hunting," says Thompson.

Walk along Park Street, once a fashionable address for his flunkies, which connects with The Long Walk, a straight three-mile path running from the castle.

The expanse gives an indication of how vast the grounds once were. Henry and his greyhounds would spend weeks here chasing deer and wild boar in between jousting tournaments. It's well worth a wander today.

Hilary leaves me at the castle, which so dominates Windsor that it looms against every street turn.

Its state apartments contain a glittering array of art but my favourite is St George's Chapel. Started in 1478, it was Henry who completed it in 1528 and it's a jewel of a mini-cathedral with frilly Gothic [architecture](#) that creates a cage of stone and glass.

One highlight is the woodwork. It's crisp and florid in dark chocolate tones and attached to the panelling behind the choir seats are more than 1,000 brass plates of the coats of arms of all the Knights of the Garter.

This chivalric order admitted Henry in the 1490s, aged four, and you can see his brass plate with its inscription in Norman French.

I am here for evensong. With dimmed lights, the boys' choir singing and dusk falling behind the stained glass, I feel as if I've been transported back 500 years. From my seat, I can see the simple black slab in the aisle that marks Henry's resting place alongside his third and favourite wife, Jane Seymour.

To commemorate Henry's ascension, the castle is exhibiting a fascinating collection of memorabilia and art associated with him in the Drawings Gallery.

Pencil sketches of the king's courtiers by Hans Holbein appear like photographs. His work was life-like and, consequently, unflattering; Anne Boleyn has a double chin, Jane Seymour has thin lips and Thomas More has a formidable hooter.

Also in the room are exquisite painted miniatures of the monarch and his children, including his illegitimate son Henry Fitzroy, and a gold enamelled hunting sword.

Pride of place goes to a painting of the king in all his pomp.

You leave Windsor Castle through King Henry VIII Gate, a solid edifice built by the man himself in 1511 to celebrate his love for Catherine of Aragon.

The pomegranate that you can see in her coat of arms on the gate is a symbol of faithfulness, not something that Carry On Henry knew much about.

GETTING THERE:

Henry VIII: A 500th Anniversary [Exhibition](#) (020 7766 7304) opens daily 9.45am to 5.15pm, until April 18, 2010. Tickets £15.50 per adult, £9 per child, including admission to Windsor Castle.

Windsor Welcome [Blue Badge Guides](#) (01753 857885) offers Henry VIII tours of Windsor from £5pp.

Windsor and the [Royal Borough](#): 01753 743900.