This week’s Tudor Time Traveller location is the Privy and Goodly Garden at Thornbury Castle in South Gloucestershire.

I was lucky enough to stay overnight in the Duke’s Bedchamber at Thornbury Castle last year. This is the exact bedchamber used by Henry VIII during his stay at the castle in the summer of 1535. He and Anne Boleyn spent 10 days at the castle and were visited by the Mayor of Bristol and a deputation of the city’s leading burgesses. *A Brief History of the Manor and Castle of Thornbury* states that during the visit Henry was presented with “tenne fat oxen and fortie shepe towards his hospitality” (pg. 12).

It is difficult to describe how I felt knowing that I was sleeping in the exact octagonal bedchamber that once housed a slumbering Henry! Climbing the original circular stone staircase that leads to the bedchamber, the same staircase that Henry and Anne would have ascended when retiring for the night, felt unbelievable.

My entire stay felt like time travel. Walking the grounds where Kings and Queens had walked before, warming myself by the roaring fires, exploring the ancient ruins and losing myself in the ancient yew-hedged gardens.

The castle owners claim that these are the earliest Tudor gardens in England! It is easy to lose yourself here and imagine Anne and her ladies-in-waiting enjoying the peace and privacy of the gardens.

Described by King Henry’s commissioners as ‘a proper garden’ around three sides of which ran ‘a goodly Gallery conveying above and beneath from the principal lodgings both to the Chapel and Parish Church, the outer part of the said gallery being of stone embattled and the inner part of timber covered with slate” (*Brief History of the Manor of Thornbury*, pg. 7). Although the gallery has long disappeared, the embattled walls to the south and west of the gardens remain along with the windows where kings, queens and courtiers would have paused to enjoy the view of the Privy and Goodly garden.

To the east of this garden, also surrounded by high-embattled walls, is another garden described by Henry’s commissioners as “a goodly gardeyn to walke ynee.”

One of the great things about staying at Thornbury Castle is that you can wander the corridors and grounds of this 500- year-old castle almost uninterrupted. I left Thornbury vowing to return and I aim to keep that promise.

References

*A Brief History of the Manor and Castle of Thornbury: With a Guide to the Grounds*, 1989.