

NEW FOREST
NATIONAL PARK

HISTORY OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

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The Influence of the Tudors



View from Hurst Castle

Introduction

The Tudors were a family consisting of a line of kings and queens who ruled England for the whole of the 16th Century. Sandwiched between the Middle Ages and the Stuarts, the Tudor dynasty began after Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. The story that unfolded left a lasting legacy within the New Forest National Park.

Key Tudor Figures

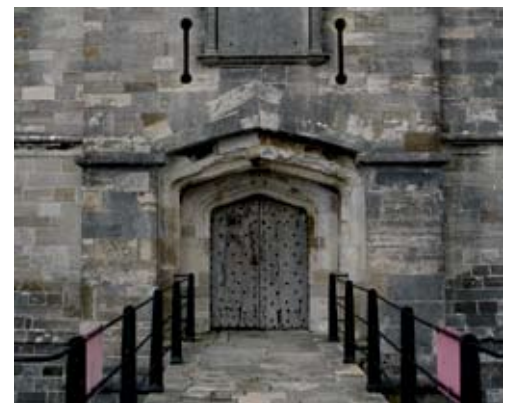
Henry VIII was born in 1491 and reigned between 1509 to 1547. Henry is famous for having six wives but it was the consequences of the end of his marriage to his first wife Catherine of Aragon that had the biggest impact on the New Forest landscape.

Henry married Catherine in 1509 following the death of his brother Arthur, Catherine's first husband. Catherine was part of the Spanish nobility and came from an area of Spain known as Aragon. Following 23 years of marriage Henry was desperate to produce a male heir to carry on his blood line. Unfortunately this did not happen. The marriage did, however, produce his first daughter, later to become Queen Mary I.

In desperation Henry decided to divorce Catherine and marry a new wife (Anne Boleyn) who might give him the much needed son. At that time England was

under the influence of the Catholic Church and divorce was not an option. To overcome this obstacle Henry decided to create his own church, the Church of England, and instated himself as head of it.

This angered key European States including France, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire and resulted in a need to increase the defence along the south coast of England.



Entrance to Calshot Castle



Tudor history is one of the most engaging periods to study and within the New Forest National Park there is plenty of evidence to bring Tudor times to life.

From the imposing forts of Calshot and Hurst Castles and the dramatic remains of Beaulieu Abbey to the history of forest law and the Verderers Court, this factsheet looks at the influence of the Tudors on the New Forest landscape and heritage.

Dissolution of the monasteries

The local monasteries owned a substantial amount of land and were also very rich. Henry VIII's great survey of church finances in 1535 found that Beaulieu Abbey's gross income was £428.

After Henry broke with Rome the monasteries came under increasing threat. They did not recognise Henry as head of the church. This conflict, combined with their readily accessible wealth, led Henry to close them down, steal their treasures and sell their land. This process was called the dissolution of the monasteries. It gathered momentum between 1536 and 1540 as a consequence of the increased threat facing Henry from France and Spain. Beaulieu Abbey managed to survive until April 1538 when it was finally forced to surrender to the government. Despite the fact that the abbey, church and cloistral buildings were virtually demolished many of the monks were granted pensions. Beaulieu Abbey was acquired by the Lisle family in 1538 following the dissolution and was subsequently acquired through marriage by the Montagu family in 1667.



Building the Forts

Calshot Castle

Calshot Castle was built between 1539 and 1540. Its superb position at the head of Calshot Spit ensured that the entrance to Southampton Water was guarded against invasion from French and Spanish troops. It was built using stones taken from Beaulieu Abbey. Lead from the Abbey was also used to build the castle roof. The castle is in the form of a circular blockhouse with a three storey central keep nestled inside.

The design of the castle was developed to counter the growing power of cannon fire. A circular shape was developed to deflect cannon balls whilst providing a sturdy structure to mount the maximum fire power. The circular keep was built not only to mount guns but also to provide accommodation. It was surrounded by the lower curtain wall and moat.

Calshot Castle has seen much change since Tudor times with the outer walls being lowered in 1774. The most dramatic changes took place around the turn of the 20th Century and the castle was later used as a Navy and RAF base. Nonetheless there remains a clear image of the original Tudor fortification.

Hurst Castle

This was one of the most sophisticated of all Henry VIII's stone artillery fortifications. Completed in 1544 it stands at the tip of Hurst Point guarding the entrance to the western Solent. The castle itself is built in a clover leaf pattern and includes a four storey round tower. At the centre of the castle is a 12-sided tower surrounded by three semi-circular bastions. The bastions project outward from the main enclosure of the fortification. This design allowed the defenders of the castle to cover adjacent bastions with defensive fire and thus made the whole structure easier to defend.

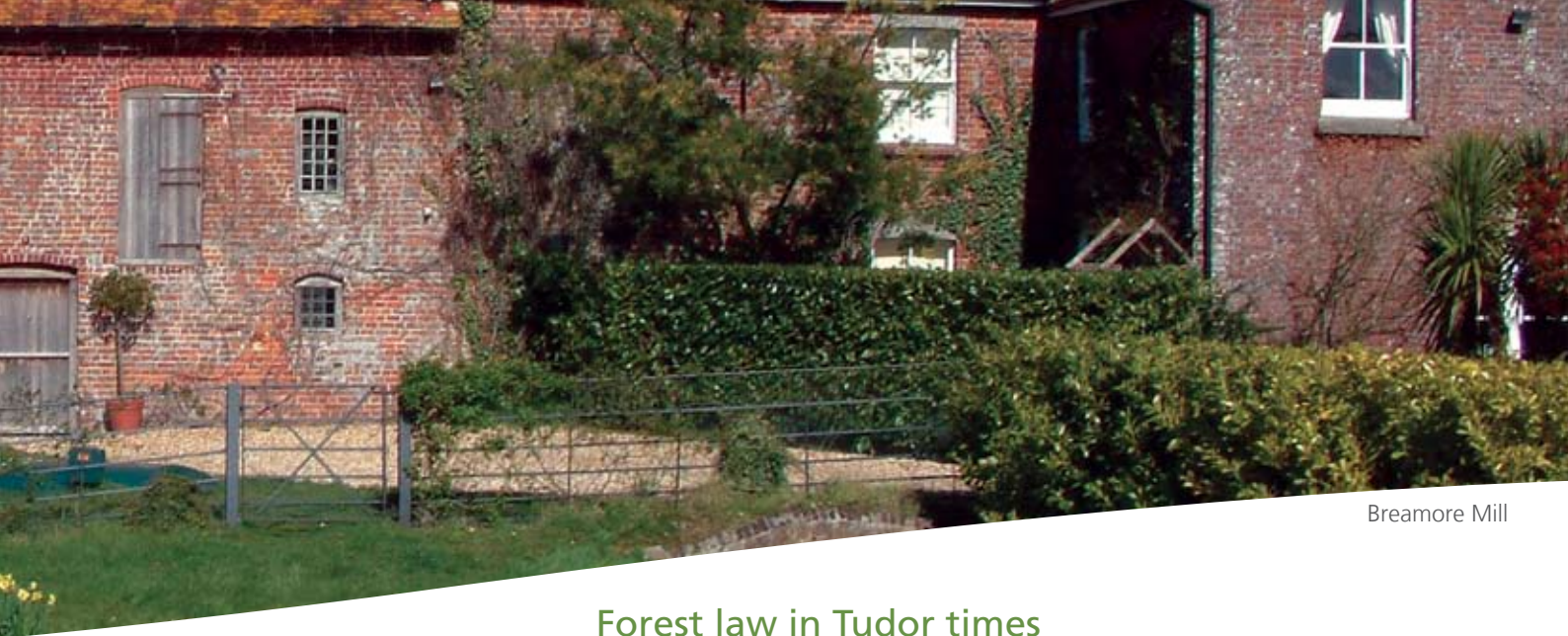
Calshot and Hurst Castles are now owned and managed by English Heritage and are open to the public from April to October.



Beaulieu Abbey



Tudor section of Hurst Castle



Breamore Mill

Tudor Ponies

Henry VIII ordered the removal from the Royal Forests of all horses of less than 14½ hands and the slaughter of mares which were thought unsuitable for breeding. However, local people favoured the smaller ponies as they were proven to thrive better in the New Forest landscape. Because of this, Henry's law was difficult to enforce and was therefore unsuccessful.



Foal close up, Milkham

Despite this the Tudors imported larger ponies and continental horses from Europe (particularly Spain and Holland) in an attempt to 'improve' the local stock. This was before the better land was enclosed for timber production, and therefore the Forest at that time was thought to support these larger animals.

Forest law in Tudor times

The Order and Rules of the New Forest, 1537, outlined the management of the Forest and described common practices (latterly formalised as common rights). It also gave detailed instructions for dealing with felons including those guilty of 'vert and venison' (or offences against trees or deer). Those charged with offences against the forest law were held in the King's prison at Bartley and then transferred to the King's Gaol at Lyndhurst to await trial.

The felons were tried by two Verderers in the Court of Swainmote and if they were found guilty they were committed to a prison in Lyndhurst called the Blindhouse. The term Verderer comes from the English forest law that required them to look after the vert and venison of the forest. The ancient Swainmote Court of the Forest Verderers dates back to the 14th Century. The Verderers Court still has sections of Tudor architecture remaining as well as a Tudor stone floor. The Verderers' Hall, now a part of the King's House, is in origin a much earlier building. In fact the first records of it go back to 1388, whilst the lower walls and porch are of Tudor date.

The Hall still serves as the meeting place of the Verderers Courts of Swainmote and Attachment, and is open to the public. The court contains an old wooden prisoner's dock, old tables and chairs, and a stirrup in an early Tudor pattern. It is said that this was used for measuring dogs to see if they were large enough to hunt deer. Any which were too large to wriggle through the stirrup had to have their claws cut.

Nowadays the court is more of an open forum. The court of Swainmote, where the Verderers sat as a magistrates' court and judge alleged offences against the forest, has not sat for many years.

Breamore village

Breamore village is a typical village that existed in the Tudor period. It is relatively unspoilt with many old thatched cottages and an extensive common. The Elizabethan Breamore House was completed in 1583 and houses a large collection of paintings, tapestries and period furniture along with many other interesting items.

The Breamore Countryside Museum provides a full size replica of a farm worker's cottage, blacksmith's shop, dairy, brewery, wheelwright's shop, saddler's shop and cobbler's shed.



Breamore Mill

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Timeline of major events in the Tudor New Forest history

Tudor Dynasty begins with Henry Tudor's victory over Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field

1485

1483

The New Forest Act is passed: Inclosures were created to allow timber to be produced for ship building and other purposes

Henry VIII conducts the Great Survey of Church finances

1535

1534

Act of Supremacy: Henry VIII declared Head of the Church of England

The Order and Rules of the New Forest are published

1537

1536

Dissolution of the monasteries begins under the direction of Thomas Cromwell

Calshot Castle is built using the stones from Beaulieu Abbey

1540

1538

Beaulieu Abbey is dissolved and passes into the Montagu family

Hurst Castle is built to protect the western shores of the Solent

1544

Breamore House is built

1583

Tudor Dynasty ends with the death of Elizabeth I

1605

Broomy Inclosure



Verderers' Court, Lyndhurst © Forestry Commission

Further reading/ useful information

Other New Forest National Park Authority fact files

New Forest Centre Library

The Abbeys and Priors of Medieval England: Prof. Colin Platt, Secker & Warburg, 1984

The Cistercian Abbeys of Britain: ed David Robinson, Batsford, 1998

A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume II, The Victoria County History, 1973

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk Factsheet available on CD, in large-print, or Braille on request

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