

Eltham:

A Tudor Palace, the Bob Hope Theatre and a magnificent garden

By: Karen Dabrowska

Eltham, a quiet, delightful suburb in south-east London, is only a twenty-five minute ride from Charing Cross Station, less from Waterloo East or London Bridge.

Bob Hope theatre



Just 15 minutes from the station and its gardens is a stunning masterpiece of twentieth-century and ocean liner style. The palace combining art deco

design. Textile magnates Stephen and Virginia Courtauld built their glamorous Art Deco London showpiece in 1936, next to the remains of a medieval royal palace which was originally Henry VIII's boyhood home.

The dining room features stylish pink leather upholstered chairs and black-and-silver doors, portraying animals and birds from London Zoo. The Courtaulds' home movie is another delight. Even more exotic is Virginia

Courtauld's vaulted bathroom, complete with gold-plated bath taps. Luxury also emanates from the centrally-heated sleeping quarters of the Courtaulds' pet ring-tailed lemur, Mah-Jongg. Equipped with all the latest modern conveniences, the house featured under floor heating, a centralised vacuum cleaner and a built-in audio system.

There are many enticing features in the nineteen acres of surrounding gardens, including a sunken rose



Boudoir



Entrance hall

Eltham palace today

garden and medieval bridge.

The original palace was given to Edward II in 1305 by the Bishop of Durham, Anthony Bek, and used as a royal residence from the 14th to the 16th century. According to one account the incident which inspired Edward III's foundation of the Order of the Garter took place here. As the favourite palace of Henry IV it played host to Manuel II Palaiologos, the only Byzantine emperor ever to visit England, from December 1400 to January

1401, with a joust being given in his honour. There is still a jousting tilt yard. Edward IV built a Great Hall in the 1470s, and Prince Henry also grew up here.

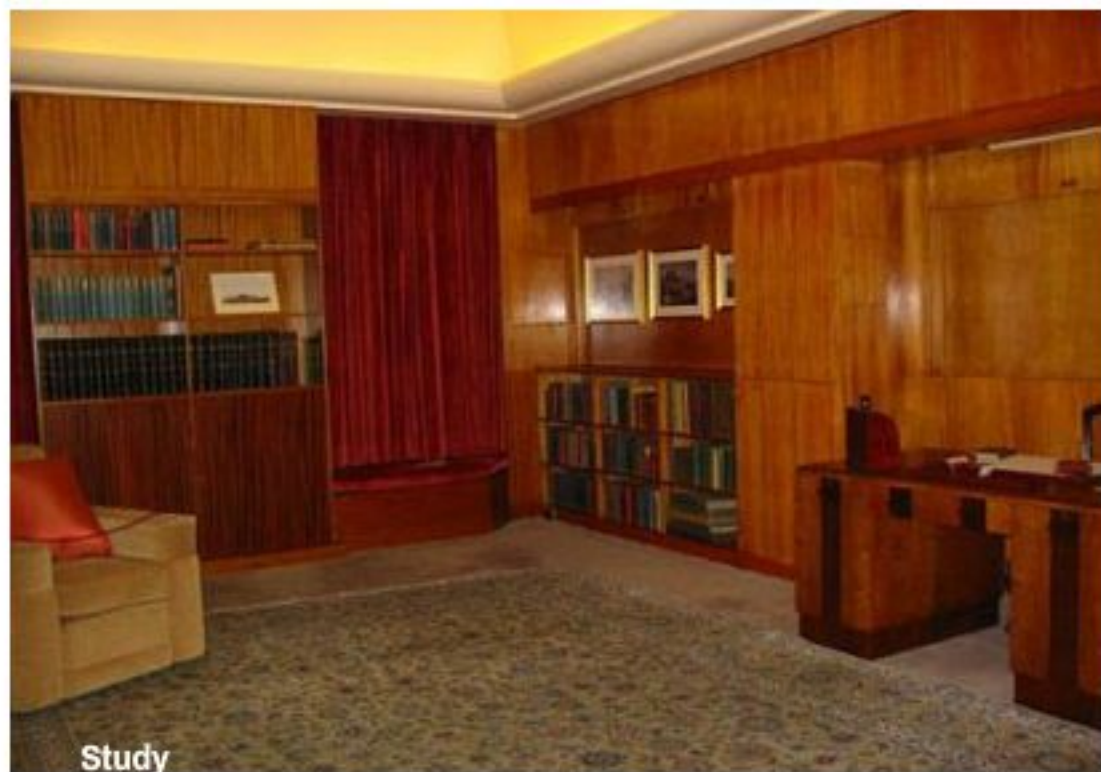
Tudor courts often used the palace for their Christmas celebrations. With the grand rebuilding of Greenwich Palace, which was more easily reached by river, Eltham was less frequented, save for the hunting in its enclosed parks, easily reached from Greenwich. The deer remained

plentiful in the Great Park, of 596 acres the Little, or Middle Park, of 333 acres, and the Home Park, or Lee Park, of 336 acres.

In the 1630s the palace was no longer used by the royal family and Sir Anthony van Dyck was given the use of a suite of rooms as a country retreat. During the English Civil War, the parks were denuded of trees and deer. John Evelyn saw it 22 April 1656: «Went to see his Majesty's house at Eltham; both the palace and chapel in miserable ruins, the

noble wood and park destroyed by Rich the rebel». The palace never recovered. Eltham was bestowed by Charles II on John Shaw and—in its ruinous condition, reduced to Edward IV's Great Hall, the former buttery, called «Court House», a bridge across the moat and some walling— remained with Shaw's descendants as late as 1893.

Not far from the palace is the Bob Hope theatre. Hope was born Leslie Townes Hope at 44 Craighton Road, Eltham. The family immigrated to America in 1920 but



Study

Great hall



Pleasaunce and the Tudor barn. In 1414 Henry V called his new summerhouse and water garden at Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire, «Le Pleasaunz en Marys», meaning the pleasure house on the water; so the parallels with the Well Hall Pleasaunce are two-fold; a house surrounded by water and the Tudors.

Today the pleasaunce is a haven of formal gardens, ponds and woodland. It contained a manor

house at the time of Henry V 111 and more recently was the home of Railway Children author E Nesbit.

The 16th century Tudor Barn has now been renovated and is now open as a first rate venue for functions, an evening restaurant, traditional Sunday roasts and day-time heritage café with delightful homemade cakes and a friendly, relaxed atmosphere.



Tudor Barn

