

Medieval Memories

This year, the Manners family have been in residence at Belvoir Castle for 500 years. Sarah Winstanley discovers the past and present of this fascinating place.

Words and photographs: Sarah Winstanley

High on a hill with stunning views over the Vale of Belvoir, the magnificent Belvoir Castle has an air of enchantment about it.

Steeped in history and with enviable collections of paintings, furniture and porcelain held within its wall, it is certainly one of the county's gems.

This year, its owners, the Manners

family, have celebrated the 500th anniversary of the castle passing into their family.

His Grace David Manners, the 11th Duke of Rutland, said: "2009 has been an exciting year for my family as we have commemorated the 500th Anniversary of one of my ancestors coming to Belvoir.

"We look forward to our family being at Belvoir for a further 500 years."

The family certainly know how to celebrate in style – this year two aircraft from RAF Cranwell have carried the Duke of Rutland's coat of arms and a family fun weekend was held at the castle during August as part of the celebrations.

The castle itself has a long history. It has belonged to the Duke of Rutland's ancestors since 1509 and was actually built after the Norman invasion by Robert de Todeini who was William the Conqueror's Standard Bearer at the Battle of Hastings.

The male line of Robert's successors, whose surname was Albini, ended in 1247 and at that time Belvoir passed into the family of de Ros when the heiress of the last Albini married Robert de Ros.

When the sister and heiress of Edmund Lord Ros, Eleanor,



married Sir Robert de Manners XI of Ethall in Northumberland, it brought Belvoir into the Manners family where it has remained ever since.

Eleanor and Robert's son, Sir George Manners, inherited the Castle and received the honour of a knighthood. George's son Sir Thomas Manners succeeded his father in 1523 and was created 1st Earl of Rutland by Henry VIII on 18th June, 1525. The title had previously

GUIDES IN PERIOD COSTUME FOR THE ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND





belonged to Edmund, younger brother to Edward IV, and never before conferred upon anyone not of Royal blood. The Manners coat of arms features the Fleur de Lys and lion of England to allude to the Royal connection.

There were nine Earls and the ninth received the title of 1st Duke of Rutland and Marquis of Granby in 1703. The second title was traditionally passed to the eldest son.

The son of the third Duke was a popular soldier who helped many of his men in their retirement – the reason many pubs are named the Marquis of Granby.

The current Duke, David Manners is the 11th Duke of Rutland and his son Charles is now the current Marquis of Granby.

Belvoir means 'beautiful view' in French but the castle's name was pronounced as 'Beaver' by the English who found it difficult to

say the French word.

The present castle is the fourth to have stood on the site since Norman times. It was completed in the early nineteenth century after the previous buildings were either completely or partially destroyed during the War of the Roses, the Civil War and by a major fire in 1816.

Highlights of a visit to the castle include the elegant Elizabeth Saloon, the majestic State Dining

Room, the Regents Gallery and the Guardroom. Visitors can also see what life was like behind the scenes in Regency times with a walk around the Old Kitchen and Pantry.

There are paintings by Gainsborough, Reynolds and Holbein, as well as outstanding collections of furniture, porcelain, silks, tapestries, French furniture and Italian sculpture.

Even the gardens feature works of art with sculptures by Caius Cibber – sculptor to Charles II. In fact the gardens are currently being restored to their former glory by the current Duchess of Belvoir as she has continued the work of her mother-in-law.

The gardens, park and grounds of Belvoir Castle were originally designed and landscaped by Elizabeth, the 5th Duchess in 1799 when James Wyatt was commissioned to build the castle.

Her designs are influenced by the Italian terraced gardens she would have seen during the Grand Tour. She also built a series of summer houses, known as 'root houses', and one of these can still be seen to this day.

The current Duchess of Rutland has also written a book titled 'Belvoir Castle – 1000 years of Family, Art and Architecture' which traces thirty-six generations of the family and takes the reader on a tour of the rooms and collections.

So as the 500th anniversary comes to an end, here's to the next 500 years of the Manners family at Belvoir Castle!



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