

KENT LIFE

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£11m
castle

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WELCOME

from the editor

It's no secret that I'm a bit of a 'girly girl.' Growing up I was that (*insert eye roll here*) child who refused to wear jeans, grew my hair until I could actually sit on it and loved anything with a bit of a frill. Or flounce. Preferably in pink.

Being a princess one day was obviously my four-year-old self's major life ambition.

So, when the new chatelaine of Lympne Castle invited me to lunch you can bet I cleared my diary.

And while the ladies at the centre of my childhood stories may have been rather one-dimensional, Dr Ann Kaplan Mulholland is anything but.

While she is one of the stars of *The Real Housewives of Toronto*, vacuous celebrity she is certainly not.

A self-made millionaire (she has a net worth of £500m) she was super engaging, incredibly astute and remarkably humble. And brilliant fun – as you'll clearly see from the photos of her and her husband larking around at their new castle home (P32).

I'll confess I now have total home (castle?) envy and now whenever I hear the phrase 'living her best life', Ann does rather spring to mind.

But Lympne Castle isn't the only far-from-usual abode that we take a look at in this issue (P14). Our county has rather an abundance of unique properties. A refuge for royalty, a PM's pad, oast houses and even a Dutch barge... I'm not even going to pretend that my inner Rapunzel-living-child isn't utterly covetous of the owners of Hadlow Tower!

And with Halloween on the horizon, castles and towers, do really come into their own. None arguably more so Hever Castle – pictured on our cover.

It has a pretty iconic history, once home to Anne Boleyn, who was beheaded under the instruction of her husband, King Henry VIII. So naturally her ghost is reported to have been seen here over the years. You can learn more about her time at Hever in the latest exhibition, *Catherine & Anne: Queens, Rivals, Mothers*. And Hever is also offering plenty of spine-tingling fun over the half-term break, with a giant spider, a spooky trail and creepy costume competition. They're not the only ones though, as our spookytastic



above: Living that castle life: Katy lunching at Lympne



Katy Pearson
Editor,
Kent Life

Halloween pages prove from P38. As for me, my princess play rather evolved into witch wondering (I have Jill Murphy's books to thank for that!) and Halloween is one of my favourite times of year (much to the despair of my mum – the priest).

So if you're visiting a pumpkin patch in the next few weeks, you'll probably find me there. I'll be the one with the witch's hat on and a barrow absolutely full of gourds. Did someone say pumpkin soup...?

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Lympne Castle's *new châtelaine*

Meet the self-made millionaire entrepreneur and reality TV star who now owns the £11m castle near Hythe

WORDS: Katy Pearson

Dr Ann Kaplan Mulholland is not a woman who does things by halves. A self-made entrepreneur, she has a net worth of more than £500m. A household name in her native Canada (she is one of the stars of *The Real Housewives of Toronto*) she is an award-winning businesswoman, mother, devoted wife and author of no less than six books.

She is also the new owner of the £11m Lympne Castle, near Hythe.

And she has plans. Big plans. As I discovered when she invited me to lunch at her medieval castle home.

A historic landmark in the village of Lympne, the castle is located on 139 acres of beautiful countryside, spattered with ancient roman ruins overlooking the English Channel. It has a history that dates back to 1080, but despite its undeniable grandeur, it is a castle in need of some TLC.

And that's something Ann and her plastic surgeon husband [Dr Stephen Mulholland] are fully committed to. They plan to invest £15m undertaking a grand renovation.

'We bought a castle, what we didn't realise we were buying was part of history. We have an obligation to embrace that history,' she says as we look out across Romney Marsh.

'We are refurbishing the castle – the goal is for each piece, each turn, each encounter to be an experience.

'I say that if you are going to buy a castle, go all in!'

King Henry VIII, Sir Thomas Beecham, and the Archbishop of Canterbury all lived at the castle. More recently Paul McCartney >



above: New castle owner Dr Ann Kaplan
top left: Ann and with her husband, Stephen
left: Lympne Castle Photo: The Kensington Photographer

recorded his Wings album *Back to the Egg* in the castle, Mick Jagger was a visitor.

But how did this ‘unhousewife-housewife’ find herself a chatelaine?

It transpires Ann wasn’t actually in the market for a castle at all.

Ann and her husband were intending to buy a British bolthole following their eight children flying the nest.

But their original plan was a London – probably Kensington – apartment.

Yet while the couple looked, Ann had the realisation that she could buy a whole castle for less than a city pad.

And that’s when caution was thrown to the wind. ‘I was drawn to the beauty of its architecture, the magic of visiting (let alone owning) an actual castle (turrets and all) and the beautiful English countryside,’ she recalls.

And while it wasn’t an exactly smooth process, in February, Lympne Castle entered its Kaplan Mulholland era.

The estate has been a whirlwind of activity since. Because of its Grade I-listed status, restoration efforts are undertaken with painstaking attention to detail. Even the floorboards have to be just so (previous owners ripped up floorboards from rooms

We had hog roasts, axe-throwing, archery, we had minstrels and jesters...’

Just what did the community made of this tiara-wearing Tornoto whirlwind, one can’t help but wonder? ‘I was a little worried at the beginning,’ she confesses.

‘With all the Meghan [Markle] reports I just wasn’t sure how welcome we’d be.’

She had expected about 300 people at the themed day, but more than 1,000 turned up. ‘The number of people from the town who stopped me over a six-hour day and just said: “Thank you”, from the community. Not from England, but from a village.

‘I was actually tearful by the end of the day, because I realised the respect people had [for the castle] and how much they embrace somebody coming in from Canada.

‘They welcomed us with open arms.’

Her determination to do right by couples getting married at the castle can only have helped endear her to the community.

Dozens of brides had been left in tears when informed by the previous owners that their upcoming nuptials were cancelled.

Staff sent out emails to couples stating that their bookings could no longer be honoured due to the change of ownership.

‘I think it’s going to be great for Kent and for people that are living in the area’

not in use to replace ones in more needed locations – leaving literal floorless bedrooms in their wake).

Being bound by planning legislations and rules on the renovation front hasn’t dampened Ann’s enthusiasm though.

She’s keen to regularly open up the castle to the public and ensure the castle remains a proper part of the community.

Their grand opening – a themed day for locals for a donation to the town of Lympne and its schools – took place the same weekend as King Charles III’s coronation and was inspired by the royals.

‘I copied King Charles’ outfit,’ she says, with a mischievous grin.

‘I had one made with the fur and the black dots and the cape. I posted it on Instagram and said: “Who wore it better?”’ It wasn’t just her though. ‘Everyone was in medieval gowns.

But within hours of the sale completing Ann was contacting couples to reassure them.

‘We actually just got the keys so we were in a very difficult situation where we couldn’t respond because we actually hadn’t bought the castle yet and those emails went out.

‘But it was always that we were willing to take on all of the bookings, and just go ahead with every bride that wanted to continue.

‘When we found out, we had to move fast because we hadn’t even set up our emails or phone systems yet. We also gave a 20 per cent discount to the existing brides for the price agreed before.’

The castle is set to remain a wedding location – but that’s not all.

Ann’s ultimate ambition is to transform the castle into a one-of-a-kind medieval tourist destination, conference and events venue.

Oh, and then there’s the small matter of a TV series.

Set to be something of a combination of much-loved historical drama *Downton Abbey* and *Escape to the Chateau*, the docu-reality show will focus on the history of the beautiful building.

‘I think it’s going to be great for Kent and for people that are living in the area. It won’t be disruptive, it will be enhancing.’

Whatever is in store, the Kaplan Mulholland reign certainly looks set to be fabulous. And fun. ●



Ann and Stephen celebrate the coronation in style in Lympne Castle



Nice day for a white wedding



PHOTOS: JAMES GRIST/SARAH OLIVER / ALEX KELLER PHOTOGRAPHY/ANN KAPLAN

ABOUT LYMPNE CASTLE

It measures 27,000 sq ft and comes with fortified towers, 20 bedrooms, a wood-panelled Great Hall, a restaurant and kitchens, four cottages, walled gardens, a vineyard, orchard, stables and 139 acres of wood and pasture land.

It is built on the site of a former Roman tower – part of a former fortress known as Stufall.

Paul McCartney thinks he smoked too much 'wacky baccy' while recording his and Wings' final album, *Back to the Egg* in 1979 at Lympne Castle. In *The Lyrics: 1956 to the Present*, Paul added that he liked the castle's atmosphere: 'You'd get these kinds of slightly oddball things happening and oddball songs coming out.'

The West Drawing Room was added by architect Sir Robert Lorimer, and boasts a stunning view from its large bow window facing the southeast coast.

lympnecastle.com



ABOUT ANN

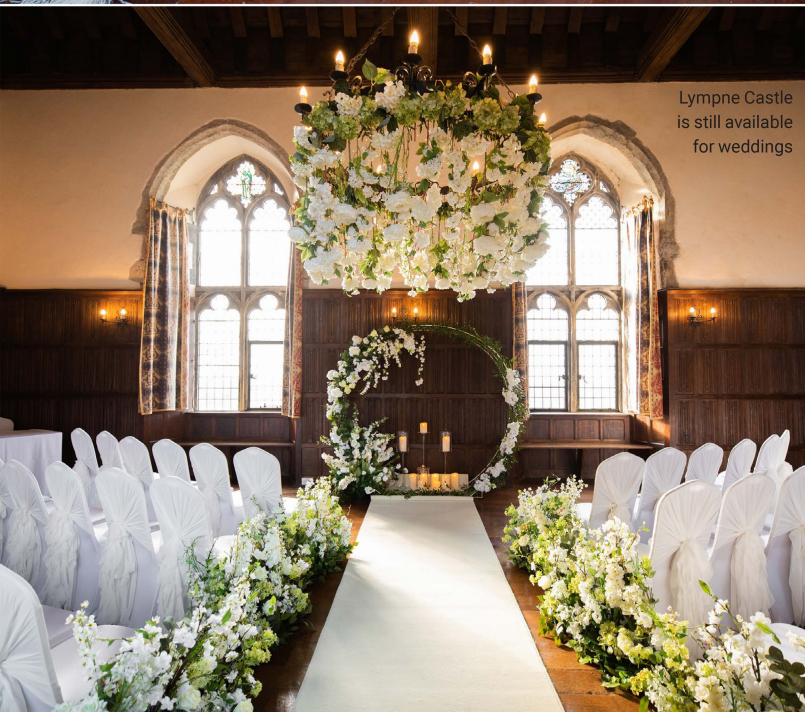
She holds a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Masters In Business (MBA), Master in Science (MSc) and a Corporate Governance Designation (CD.D).

She founded iFinance, a North American consumer fintech company, taking it from start-up to one of the largest consumer finance companies in Canada.

She has a jet-set lifestyle, with 11 homes around the world, including Las Vegas and Hawaii.



Ann in her regal robes



Lympne Castle is still available for weddings