

Little Dane Court.



as a port was brief, its connection with the railway system was even shorter.

The light rail line only opened in 1900 and had almost run out of steam by 1954, when the section of line to Headcorn closed. In 1961, when the remaining line to Robertsbridge met a similar fate, three Maidstone schoolboys, inspired by the opening of the nearby Bluebell line, set up a preservation society to save the Kent and East Sussex Railway.

Today the line carries more passengers than it did during its original incarnation, and in addition to families enjoying a nostalgic jaunt, it lays on Pullman trains for diners and has driving-experience days for a chance to get grubby on the footplate.

We settled in for a relaxing excursion to Bodiam, chatting to a farmer from Margate, who explained the gently undulating landscape we passed through.

"We're a bit too late for the linseed flowers," he explained, passing a crop

turning to seed. "They were a beautiful blue a few weeks ago."

At Bodiam, where sunlight lit the ancient castle standing below oast houses, we strolled down the lane alongside a very pretty wood rail fence, silvered by the sun and decorated with wild flowers.

The castle, reflected picturesquely in its moat, is remarkably intact. After enjoying views over the surrounding landscape from the tower, we chatted to Anja White and Jill Jempson, dressed in mediaeval costume.

Anja was making laces for a dress.

"It's like French knitting, but with two prongs instead of four," she explained.

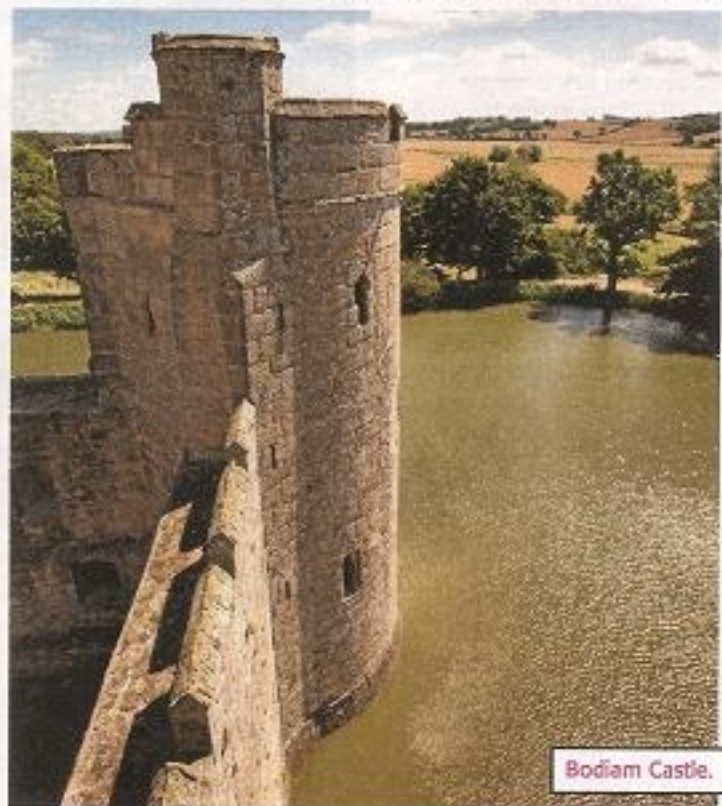
Jill was making a new veil, her needles held in a little pouch around her neck.

"Women could only buy needles and pins on two days a year, which is where we get the phrase pin money," she told us.

In summer, trains run every hour or so, allowing visitors to spend time in Bodiam, or walk between stations, before returning to Tenterden. Here, a delight for enthusiasts waits at the end of the line – not the display of Morris Marinas, but the Colonel Stephens Museum, named after a man who devoted his life to building and preserving 16 light railways around Britain.

In 2014 this was voted Britain's best railway museum. It's a fascinating place to spend an hour, examining displays which vary from collections of tickets and ephemera to a carriage recreation and splendid old loco.

Sissinghurst Castle.



Bodiam Castle.

The Tenterden Museum, just up the road near the car park, opens in the afternoons – you can't miss the huge steam boiler outside.

Manned by friendly volunteers, this is an interesting place which is an ideal first call to understand a little more about the town.

Many fascinating facts were gleaned by me, not from days of tireless research, but from a single hour's investigation here. One unusual highlight is the Tenterden Tapestry, a collage created in 1974 by school children, which colourfully illustrates a thousand years or so of history.

I learned something else I hadn't known – that the use of wood and hanging tiles to clad so many of the

houses was a result of a brick tax.

Another consequence was the development of mathematical tiles, which are oddly shaped, wide tiles that linked together, giving the appearance of brick, but weren't taxable.

Because they do their job so well, it is difficult to tell them from real bricks, but the high street's Laura Ashley shop is one such building.

Talking of shops, the high street is packed with some super independent shops. Whilst I wandered with eyes upwards admiring the architecture, Hazel's were focused on little clothes emporia, quality house shops, cafés and antiques dealers.

One advantage of Little Dane Court, apart

Tenterden Station Signal Box.

