

ELLIE SEYMOUR



# SECRET SUSSEX

AN UNUSUAL GUIDE



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

## BLAKE'S COTTAGE

⑩

*A seminal Romantic artist's former seaside retreat*

Blakes Road

Felpham, Bognor Regis, West Sussex, PO22 7EE

To view from the outside only



Having created some of the most iconic and influential works of British art and poetry, William Blake, the English painter, printmaker and poet, is now recognised as a seminal figure of the Romantic Age.

According to the Blake Society, he lived in nine houses in his lifetime, only two of which survive: one in London's West End at 17 South Molton Street, and this one in the village of Felpham in Bognor Regis, West Sussex.

In 1800, Blake moved from Lambeth in south London into this humble thatched cottage on the Sussex coast with his wife, Catherine, to escape the city and take up a job illustrating books. The move also marked the start of the most important period in Blake's life and career. It was in this cottage that he wrote some of his best-known poetic works, including *Milton: A Poem* and the words to the hymn *Jerusalem*.

He also depicted the cottage several times in his paintings; for instance, in a rare watercolour landscape showered in sunlight, now held by the Tate Britain. He is also known to have described the house in letters to a friend: "No other house can please me so well, nor shall I ever be persuaded, I believe, that it can ever be improved in beauty or use ... the sweet air and the voices of winds, trees, and birds, and the odours of the happy ground, make it a dwelling for immortals. Work will go on here with God-speed".

The cottage is largely unchanged from when Blake lived in it between 1800 and 1803, with the same beamed interiors and original doors, and even the vegetable patch which can be seen in some of Blake's sketches.

Although the cottage is currently closed to the public, its owner, the William Blake Trust, plans to open it as a visitor centre in the future. The Trust bought the property in 2015, following a two-year campaign backed by comedians Russell Brand and Stephen Fry and writers Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman, a patron of the society. It raised the £520,000 to buy the cottage from its owner, 90-year-old Heather Howell.

Blake spent his last years in Fountain Court off The Strand in London's West End. The apartment block no longer exists having been demolished when The Savoy Hotel was built in the 1880s. He died in London on 12 August 1827, leaving uncompleted the cycle of drawings inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. He was buried in an unmarked grave at Bunhill Fields in Finsbury, London.



## CLIMPING BEACH

11

*Wild, overlooked and unspoiled*

*Climping Street, Climping,  
West Sussex, BN17 5RN*



So much of the Sussex coastline is heavily built up, that it is hard to imagine how it once was. Climping Beach, a magical stretch of beach in West Sussex, is one of the very few places along the coast which is relatively undeveloped.

With its mix of dunes, shingle and (when the tide is out) expanses of sand, Climping Beach makes for an alluring discovery. It feels a million miles away from the busier town beach resorts nearby and also feels like you have found your own secret beach: it is highly likely you will have it almost, if not all, to yourself when you pay a visit.

You will find this piece of south-coast paradise set mid-way between Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, hidden at the end of a quiet country lane. To get to it, turn off the A259 Bognor Road into Climping Street, signposted Climping Beach, and continue along to the end of this country lane, at the end of which is the car park.

What makes the Climping Beach landscape so special is that it is home to one of only two dune systems in West Sussex (the other is at Witterings). Both are heavily protected under the Site of Special Scientific Interest label, which also encompasses its vegetated shingle, sand flats, a small patch of saltmarsh and a nature reserve at West Beach, just east of Climping.

Wildlife-wise, sand lizards and four kinds of Nationally Scarce burrowing bees and wasps are just some of the rare species attracted to the dunes. The vegetated shingle, though common locally, is considered internationally rare, and is also used by a species of ant registered at risk of extinction on the Red Data Book or the Red List of Threatened Species; while the nearby sand flats host large numbers of migratory waders in winter. One of the strangest discoveries you might make, however, might be the black eggs of the thornback ray, known as mermaid's tails, which are easily mistaken for stag beetles.

### *Climping on screen*

One of Climping Beach's claims to fame is that it was used as a location in a couple of episodes of *Doctor Who* in the 1960s and 70s.

### NEARBY

#### *East Beach Café*

For a delicious lunch in a unique architect-designed setting which challenges your notion of seaside café architecture, head towards Littlehampton. The East Beach Café resembles a giant piece of driftwood (or Hobbit house, depending on how you look at it) and serves creative seaside dishes to enjoy with a view over East Beach. See p. 226.

## MILL LANE TREE TUNNEL

14

### *A fairy-tale walkway*

*Mill Lane, Halmaker, Chichester, West Sussex, PO18 0LX*



Sussex has no shortage of magical woodland to explore. There is one particular area near Chichester, however, with a naturally occurring feature that is fun to discover: an ancient path to a windmill with a hobbit-like tunnel of trees at the end.

The tunnel of trees runs along Mill Lane, which you will find on the Windmill Trail, a fully signposted public footpath near Halmaker (pronounced Ha'naker), a hamlet a few miles north of Chichester in West Sussex, in the South Downs National Park.

The lane follows an ancient track along the old London to Chichester Roman road – now called Stane Street. Over the years, it has sunk down, worn away by centuries of footfall. It is not long before you are surrounded by a magical tunnel of trees.

The route then leads walkers through the lanes of Boxgrove, onto Halmaker and footpaths skirting the Tinwood Estate, before crossing onto Mill Lane and bearing left 128 metres up to Halmaker Hill itself, for spectacular views across the countryside and on a clear day, to the sea. It also makes a nice spot for some star gazing on a clear night (see p. 20).

Up here is also where you will find the Halmaker Windmill, built in the 18th century and functioning as a mill until it was hit by lightning in 1905. It lay abandoned for years, but today is gradually being restored to its former glory. The original mill was built for the Duke of Richmond and the Goodwood Estate, and was first recorded in 1540. At the top you will find a bizarre looking structure – a Neolithic earthwork called a causewayed enclosure, which is also home to a World War Two observation point.

Wildflowers carpet the hill in spring, and some of them really rare, including the pyramidal orchid and common spotted orchid. Red admiral, marbled white and common blue butterflies also like to make an appearance at this time of year, as well the odd skylark or buzzard swooping overhead.

### *Branching out: tree tunnels around the world*

The world is full of tree tunnels. Some of the most impressive include one known as “dark hedges” in Northern Ireland, created from a row of 18th-century beech trees surrounding the path to the manor house of the Stuart family, said to be haunted by the Grey Lady; the 800-foot long tunnel of 19th-century oak trees leading up to a Greek Revival house at the historic Oak Alley Plantation on the Mississippi River in Louisiana; a tunnel of mangrove trees shading canals in the fishing community of Roatan in Honduras which can be seen on boat trips, and the otherworldly tunnel of yews at Aberglasney Gardens in Wales, made up of a row of ancient trees knotted together, planted in the 18th century.



## THE POTAGER

20

### *Art of the vegetable*

Woolbeding Gardens

Brambling Lane, Woolbeding, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9RR

0344 249 1895

[nationaltrust.org.uk/woolbeding-gardens](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/woolbeding-gardens)

March to November: Wednesday to Friday 10.30am–4.30pm

With its slightly secret location – in that you cannot make your own way directly there, you must meet a guide in a local car park and get on a minibus – Woolbeding Gardens in Midhurst is a real hidden Sussex gem in itself.

It is also home to an attention-grabbing horticultural feature known as the potager, made entirely out of lettuces.



You will find it inside the formal garden rooms not far from the William Pye fountain. When you spot a particularly impressive vegetable patch that pretty much stops you in your tracks, you know you have found it.

Traditionally, potager is the French term for an ornamental vegetable or kitchen garden, created to make the growing of food attractive and aesthetically pleasing. It is thought to have originated in Medieval France, among the monasteries. "Potage" literally meaning a thick and substantial soup, all the ingredients for which were grown in the kitchen garden or potager.

The central area of the potager at Woolbeding consists of around 1,200 lettuces surrounded by chives – the design is changed three times a year, with each design lasting around 10 weeks until the lettuces begin to 'hearten' and bolt in warm weather.

The designs are created using two or three contrasting varieties of lettuce, such as Nymans, a dark purple lettuce, Lolla Rossa, a frilly loose leaved green variety turning to purple, Tom Thumb, a dark green butterhead, and finally Lettony, which has frilly pale green leaves.

At the centre of the design is a shrub called *buxus sempervirens* which is clipped into the shape of a swan.

If you visit the gardens throughout the season, you get to see the potager change month by month. In the summer, you will experience fragrant sweet peas in bloom in a multitude of colours, artichokes that reach incredible heights, runner beans on eight-foot bean poles and asparagus, which once picked by mid-June provides a soft feathery effect. Underplanting varies from season to season.

Frequently used plants include squashes, courgettes, cucumbers, herbs, nasturtiums and marigolds. In the surrounding beds, there is a wide abundance of fruit, vegetables and flowers, including Ballerina apples creating a gateway, and gooseberries fanning the back wall to soften the brick work.

Woolbeding Estate and Gardens was given to the National Trust in 1957 and leased to Simon Sainsbury in 1972. With his partner Stewart Grimshaw, he restored the 17th-century house and worked with contemporary garden designers to create the elegant country retreat and gardens we see today.

As well as the potager, there is a jaw-dropping surprise around every corner on a walk around this magical 23-acre horticultural wonderland.

Highlights include the Tulip Folly which looks like it was plucked straight from a Parisian park, and the Long Walk which features a series of views dotted with quirky artistic architectural structures, like a ruined abbey, a hermit hut and a statue of a river god.

## THE SUGARLOAF

9

### *Built on a bet*

Near Wood's Corner  
Dallington, Heathfield, East Sussex, TN21 9LD



Next time you are driving along the road between Battle and Heathfield (B2096) near Wood's Corner in East Sussex, keep your eye out for a strange architectural sight – the top of a bizarre 10-metre-high conical construction sticking up from behind a hedge surrounding a meadow on Christmas Farm.

This is what is known as the Sugarloaf, a building that it is believed was built as part of a bet at some point in the 1800s. What is also intriguing about it is that, despite measuring only 4.5 metres wide, it was once inhabited, which is impossible to imagine when you are standing inside it – which visitors are free to do.

According to a plaque, which has since been removed, the building was inhabited from the mid-1800s until the 1960s. Local accounts recall that by this point it was in such bad condition it was almost demolished, until a “save the sugarloaf” fund was set up to pay for renovations. After it was repaired, East Sussex County Council took over the ownership and future upkeep of the building.

At one point it had two floors connected by a ladder – the location of the windows outside is a clue. There was also a lean-to kitchen. Information about previous residents is hard to come by, although local records show that the Crouch family lived in it during the late 1870s, while the Lulham family are believed to have been some of the building's last residents.

Known locally as “the sugarloaf” after the way sugar was delivered at the time in cones, it is also referred to colloquially as one of Fuller's follies after an eccentric local man, John “Mad Jack” Fuller (see p. 160), known for several other follies in the area.

He is said to have had this one built one night to win a drunken bet. Fuller bargained he could see the spire of Dallington Church from his house, Rose Hill, in Brightling. As the story goes, being unable to see the spire of the church, he organised for the sugarloaf to be built quickly to replicate it.

Mad Jack is said to have lived life to the full, revelling in his nickname to enhance his eccentric image. He was a member of the Fuller family who were wealthy local landowners at Brightling in East Sussex from the late 16th century onwards: their fortune was built upon iron and the manufacture of iron goods, especially cannons and similar equipment for the British Royal Navy. They also derived a substantial income from sugar plantations in Jamaica.

## BOTTLE ALLEY LIGHT SHOW

13

### Local colour

#### *The Promenade*

*St Margaret's Road, Saint Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN37 6BZ  
Daily at 7.30pm and 9.30pm for 10 minutes, and 30 minutes on Friday evenings*



An alternative to walking along Hastings' seafront next to the busy A259 is to make a detour down to the sheltered lower-deck promenade. It is known as Bottle Alley and it runs 455 metres from Warrior Square in St Leonards to Hastings pier.

It is an incredible feat of engineering made from 42,000 tonnes of concrete that 100 men a day built over six months. Opened in 1934, people soon started referring to it as Bottle Alley because of all the little pieces of broken glass embedded into the concrete wall panels that line the entire walkway.

On rainy days, it is the perfect spot for a seafront stroll away from the elements. Unless the weather is pleasant, though, it can feel a bit like walking through a damp and soulless concrete tunnel.

In the evening, however, the space is transformed when it becomes the setting for an atmospheric light show, known as the Bottle Alley Light Show, which takes place twice a night.

Walking through the tunnel as the colours change is a mesmerising experience, stopping people in their tracks to take in the details.

It was installed in 2017 to replace the old strip lighting and can produce all kinds of effects, from those resembling a subtle wave to a riot of colour. Looking back at it from the pier and seeing the whole tunnel lit up gives a sense of the light show as a whole.

This lower promenade was built as part of a revolutionary double-deck promenade in the 1930s by the borough engineer Sidney Little, who became known as the "concrete king". It was originally built as an undercover walkway for people to use to escape the bad weather and once had shutters. Although these shutters are no longer in place, the tracks can still be seen.

Information boards added after a recent revamp of Bottle Alley tell the story of the promenade's construction between October 1933 and April 1934, and include some eye-opening snippets. For example, 15 tonnes of broken glass pieces were set into 320 concrete panels made from 4,360 tonnes of concrete.

Further along the promenade towards Hastings pier is the entrance to the old White Rock Baths under the promenade, originally built in the late 1800s. They were revamped by "concrete king" Sydney Little in the 1930s into a complex including an ice rink, swimming pool and Turkish baths. Today it is an underground skate park (see p. 168).

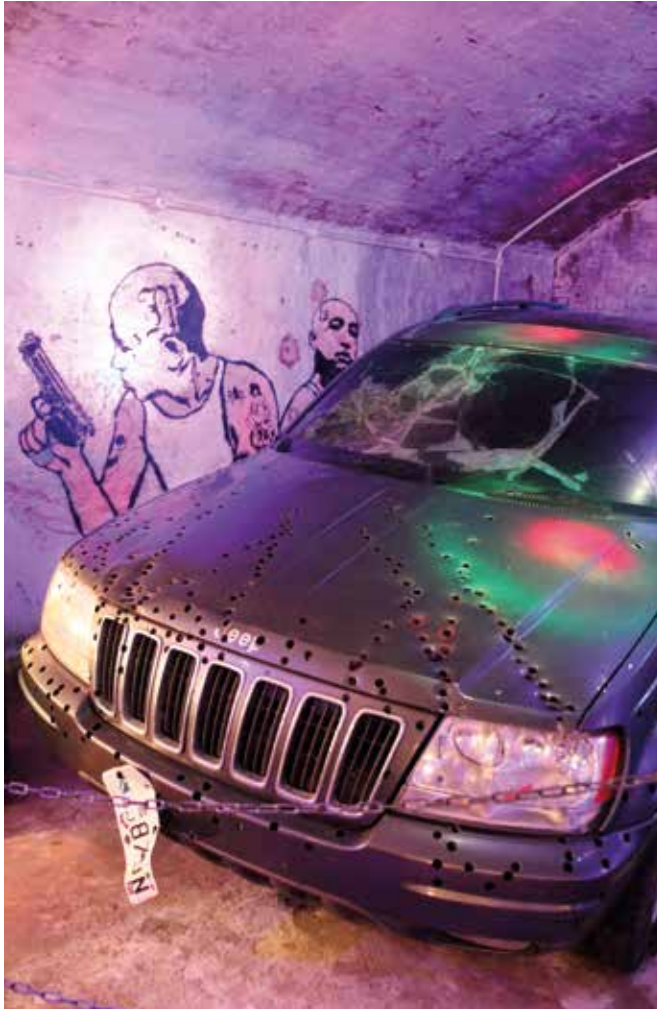


# TRUE CRIME MUSEUM

15

## *Morbidly fascinating*

Palace Avenue Arcade  
 White Rock, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 1JP  
 01424 420115  
[truecrimemuseum.co.uk](http://truecrimemuseum.co.uk)  
 Daily 10am–5pm



Set in a series of caves underneath the former Palace Court Hotel building is a bizarre museum filled with “murderabilia”. That is, memorabilia and forensic evidence relating to murders and violent events.

The growing collection is vast, covering all aspects of true crime: from the Mafia, drug lords and serial killers, to football hooliganism and armed robbery. For an hour or more, you will be totally gripped, surprised, sickened and morbidly fascinated in equal measure, at every turn.

Visitors are eased in with the gruesome, yet familiar story of Jack the Ripper on a timeline peppered with facts and anecdotes relating to the Victorian era. Turn the corner, though, and you are met with the sight of a real electric chair, which you can sit in and pretend you are next for the chop.

A fascinating story is told in every cabinet. There is one filled with homemade weapons confiscated from Bangu Tres in Rio de Janeiro, one of the world’s most dangerous prisons. In another is a Victorian bodice, belonging to Amelia Dyer, a baby farmer, who adopted orphaned children for money before murdering them. In one corner, a bullet-riddled car (pictured) tells the story of the Mexican cocaine king Heriberto Lazcano.

Slightly less stomach-churning is a cabinet filled with recognisable items like a packet of cigarettes, a £10 note, and a bottle of Chanel Number 5 perfume – but can you tell whether they are real or fake?

Elsewhere, in the “death chamber” is a real lethal injection bed, complete with a description of how the system works. If your nerves can take it, a short film in the screening room shows actual serial killers discussing the murders they carried out.

This bizarre, but brilliant collection of murder-related memorabilia is curated by collector Joel Griggs, who became interested in murderabilia aged eight when he witnessed a bank robbery carried out by a man called John Childs, who later became one of the UK’s most prolific contract killers. Childs killed six people and cut up the bodies into tiny pieces in his bath, before burning them in his fireplace.

“He lived four doors down from my great uncle in Poplar, London, who worked for the council’s civic amenity department”, he says. “They cleared Childs’ flat and took the bath to the Poplar refuse depot, where it was planted in a garden of remembrance. When the depot closed down, my uncle took the bath to his allotment in Walthamstow, where he used it as a water trough. Now, it’s in the museum!”



## MANOR ROAD GARAGE

18

### *A striking Art Deco reminder*

17 Manor Road  
East Preston,  
West Sussex, BN16 1QA



If there is one building that stands out among all the others in the Sussex village of East Preston, it is the old Manor Road Garage.

With its whitewashed Art Deco façade, its swaying palms and its perfectly preserved set of four brightly coloured Shell petrol pumps, it looks like it has been plucked straight from Miami in Florida, famous for its historic Art Deco architecture.

The Manor Road Garage dates back to 1919, when the central part of the workshop is said to have been built. It is thought to have been extended in 1930 by a firm called Boulton and Paul, and the façade added in 1934, although it is not known by whom.

According to Historic England, a 1937 estate agent's guide contains an advert for the Manor Road Garage giving details of sales, services, repairs, cars for hire and a garage with room for 50 cars.

It was a fully operational garage until 1973, and records show it was owned and run by a man called John Lillywhite. It remained closed and abandoned for almost 40 years: the whitewashed façade left to crumble, the original curved windows taken out and boarded up, the once gleaming forecourt becoming overgrown with weeds. It stayed like this until developers bought it in 2011, and discovered several vintage Rolls Royces, MGs, and a grey Massey Ferguson tractor inside, in various states of disrepair.

The building has since been converted into apartments, which saw the back of the building knocked down and rebuilt. The Art Deco façade was preserved and listed by Historic England along with the set of four petrol pumps which are thought to date back to the 1940s or early 1950s, and are considered rare. They light up at night.

Historically, the building represented three phases of early motoring, while the Art Deco frontage continues to be of architectural interest in that it is substantially intact.

The style now called Art Deco originated in France in the early 20th century. Its heyday was from 1920 to 1940 when it became widely known following the great *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (*Exposition des Art Deco*, in short), held in Paris in 1925. Typical features include geometric and angular shapes, and fabrics like chrome, glass and mirrors.

Other examples of preserved Art Deco buildings in Sussex include the Worthing Dome (see p. 216) and Brighton City Airport, formerly known as Shoreham Airport (see p. 206).

ELLIE SEYMOUR

# SECRET SUSSEX

AN UNUSUAL GUIDE



Discover the setting for secret feasts in the forest, peek inside a glamorous *Vogue* war photographer's surreal Sussex home, wander through a forgotten village by the sea, stumble on a fairy-tale folly and a tomb shaped like a Pyramid, uncover a hidden Bond-movie location, hunt out little-known Sussex wineries, track down Sherlock Holmes' fictional country cottage, take a safari through an African-inspired landscape, tour Led Zeppelin's former mansion, lose yourself in a museum about murder and true crime, and hang out with a mob of wallabies ...

Sussex is filled with well-hidden treasures to discover that take you off the beaten path. Secret Sussex is the ultimate travel guide to Sussex unknown, designed for lifelong locals, curious visitors and armchair travellers alike, looking to move away from the tourist crowds in search of the unique, unusual and overlooked.

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