

Meeting on 3rd January 2024

Julia Sutton – President of Bosham WI – warmly welcomed members back after the Christmas break by wishing them all a Very Happy New Year.

Frances Farrer-Brown – a Blue Badge Guide – was the speaker and her subject was ‘Hidden Sussex’. She opened her talk by showing a slide of the Belle Tout Lighthouse at Beachy Head which was completed in 1834. The structure is 17m high, weighs 850 tons (made of Aberdeen granite) and the building made national news in 1999 when it was moved 17m back from the edge of the cliff to stop it falling into the sea. This project cost around £250,000 and was paid for by the South Downs Lighthouse Trust. In April 2008 Belle Tout was privately purchased with the intention by the owners of opening it to the public as a bed and breakfast and hotel. This was achieved in March 2010 and in July 2020 it celebrated ten years of welcoming guests to experience the delights of the historic Lighthouse. One visitor had said ‘it was a magical place, I didn’t want to leave’.

Frances showed further slides of the Downs, wooded areas of hazel, horse-chestnuts and oak. There were pink and white orchids, primroses, bluebells and she also explained how dewponds were constructed and their importance to the Downland sheep. We briefly visited Great Dixter, Cuckmere Haven, the long man of Wilmington, Leonardslee, Bateman’s (Rudyard Kipling’s house), West Dean Gardens, Wakehurst Place, Nymans, Highdown Gardens and Denmans.

The Alfriston Clergy House is a Grade II listed building which was built as a residence for the parish priest of the neighbouring 13th century St. Andrew’s Church. It was the first building saved forever for the nation by the National Trust who bought it in 1896 for £10.00 This hall-house is over 600 years old and one of a handful of Wealden Houses remaining in Alfriston. The timber-framed building was built predominantly of young oak which are now known – from dendrochronology work – to have been felled between 1399 to 1407. It is in an idyllic setting with views across the River Cuckmere.

After all that, together with glimpses of Sheffield Park Gardens, Pashley Manor, Charleston, Michelham Priory, it made us realise how fortunate we are to have these wonderful gardens and interesting historic houses, together with beautiful countryside in West and East Sussex to visit and enjoy.

As usual, after the meeting, all members enjoyed tea, cake, and a lot of chatter.

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 7th February at 2.30pm at Bosham Village Hall. The speaker is Helen Poole whose subject is ‘Charles II and His Escape Through Sussex’. If you require any further information please look at the website www.boshamwi.co.uk

Jennifer Fidler