

A SUSSEX GUIDE

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AN  
ECCENTRIC  
TOUR OF SUSSEX



PETER BRIDGEWATER



SNAKE RIVER PRESS



## SNAKE RIVER PRESS

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### **DEDICATION**

*To Gerald Woods (1942-2004):  
artist, friend, teacher and inspirational eccentric!*

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# CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION . . . . .	6	HEAVEN'S ABOVE . . . . .	52
CAMELOT ON THE DOWNS . . .	12	GOING NATIVE . . . . .	56
HOUSE VALLEY VIADUCT . . . . .	16	THE BLACK PRINCESS . . . . .	60
BLOOMSBURY WORSHIP . . . . .	20	A BIGGER BANG . . . . .	65
FULLER'S FOLLY . . . . .	24	AIRMAN'S GRAVE . . . . .	70
A PAVILION TOO FAR . . . . .	28	THE CHATTRI . . . . .	74
BIG BROTHER . . . . .	32	MERIDIAN MONOLITH . . . . .	78
BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY . . . . .	36	BLUEBELL RAILWAY . . . . .	82
DOOMWATCH . . . . .	40	HOLLYWOOD-BY-SEA . . . . .	86
HEADY MADNESS . . . . .	44	THE GREAT IHAM . . . . .	91
CULT FICTION . . . . .	48	INDEX . . . . .	95

## CAMELOT ON THE DOWNS

ARUNDEL



### **Where is it?**

Arundel is 90 minutes away from London by train, standing between the Sussex Downs and the sea in the middle of stunning countryside, officially designated as outstanding. It is off the main A27 about halfway between Worthing and Chichester, inland from the coastal resorts of Littlehampton and Bognor (you won't be able to miss the castellated skyline). Straddling the River Arun and boasting a boatyard, pleasure boats, a classic Georgian high street, quaint little side streets and fine town houses, plus a cathedral and magnificent castle, Arundel fully justifies the guidebook cliché of picturesque.

### **What is it?**

A gobsmackingly large and fairytale-style castle that totally dominates the town and which could easily be the film set for a Hollywood medieval costume drama of *Camelot* or *Ivanhoe*. Arundel Castle, built on the site of an earlier Saxon fortification, totally commands the landscape and is one of the most complete and impressive castles in Britain. With its massive scale, striking appearance, theatrical battlements and towers it embodies every schoolchild's image of what a castle should look like. Everyone who lives in Arundel must feel reassuringly safe. The fortification's lofty location on a hill at the top of the town makes it appear completely protective and in charge of the town and all of its

surroundings. The first sight of Arundel Castle must have made potential invaders quake in their boots and turn tail at the prospect of trying to breach it – it looks unassailable. If you haven't seen it before then the best way to enjoy the castle's magnificence for the first time is to drive into Arundel from the east, towards Chichester. As you come over the brow of a hill the castle sits before you in all its dominant splendour. It looks fantastic and if I was a foreign invader, with agitated hordes looking for a fight, I'd creep on past!

### **What else should I know?**

Arundel Castle has the distinction of being both an ancient castle and a stately home and has been home to the Dukes of Norfolk and their ancestors for over 850 years. Its roots go back to Edward the Confessor and William the Conqueror but, as we have limited space, I'll be brief.

Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Arundel, one of William's best mates at the Battle of Hastings, founded it on Christmas Day 1067. He built a stone castle with a motte (central mound) on the site of an earlier wooden one, taking full advantage of this natural defensive site overlooking the South Downs and the Arun across the coastal plain to the sea. Roger was given a third of Sussex in return for building the castle and protecting the approaches to Sussex from enemies. Although a powerful player in the France-versus-England political power game, Roger was mortal like the rest of us and died in 1094 (although it is said that his ghost still walks the castle walls, presumably checking for maintenance). Subsequent battles were waged, deals were done and thus the castle's historic and colourful journey down through the ages began.

Apart from the occasional reversion to the crown, when lines failed, Arundel Castle is now one of the longest inhabited country houses in England. It passed from the d'Albinis to the Fitzalans in the 13th century and then to the Howards of Norfolk in the 16th.

The Howards were at the forefront of English history from the Wars of the Roses (1455-85) through the Tudor period to the Civil War, when General Waller seized Arundel Castle for Cromwell's Parliamentarians in 1643. The defences were destroyed and it remained in ruins until

Thomas Howard, the 8th Duke of Norfolk, started rebuilding in the early 18th century. Charles, the 11th Duke known as the ‘Drunken Duke’ and crony of the Prince Regent, continued these restorations with exuberant enthusiasm in the 19th century.

In 1846, the 27-year-old Queen Victoria and her Prince Albert came over from Osborne House on the Isle of Wight and stayed at Arundel Castle for a few days. There was a major makeover carried out by the incumbent 13th Duke in order to get the house ready. He spared no expense; he built a new apartment block, furnishing it lavishly with fine furniture and art (including a charming newly commissioned portrait of the young queen by William Fowler) and landscaped the grounds. Victoria had a great time and her suite of rooms remain virtually untouched.

Between the 1870s and 1890s the house was extensively rebuilt by Henry, the 15th Duke and he turned the castle into what we see today, a glorious ‘Heinz 57’ mixture of Norman, Early English Gothic, Gothic Revival, and Victorian restoration.

### **Why visit it?**

Apart from being a fabulously eccentric-looking castle that conjures up romanticised Pre-Raphaelite images of King Arthur, Sir Lancelot and the sexy Guinevere, Arundel is stuffed with other treasures, including the prayer book and gold-and-enamel bead rosary that Mary, Queen of Scots, took with her to her execution.

A jewel not to be missed is the Fitzalan Chapel, the burial site of all the Dukes of Norfolk. Built in 1380, it is named for Richard Fitzalan, who was given the castle when the d’Albinis ran out of male heirs. The Catholic chapel is attached to the Anglican church of St Nicholas, which has a separate entrance in London Road. A glass wall and iron grille divides the chapel from the church to show that it is a separate establishment. This arrangement has been in place since 1879, when the Lord Chief Justice of England ruled that the chapel was not part of the Protestant church. Don’t miss the twin effigies of the seventh Duke – one showing what he looked like when he died, the other reinforcing the message that we are all dust by showing his body in decay.

There is an equally impressive and over-the-top Gothic style cathedral to the west, opposite the castle – the cathedral of Our Lady and St Philip Howard. In 1868, 40 years after the foundation of Roman Catholic parishes became legal again, Henry Howard, the 15th Duke, commissioned architect Joseph Hansom (1803-82, the man who invented the hansom cab) to design a prominent church that could hold its own against the castle and add yet more weight to Arundel's prestigious skyline.

## Other eccentricities

### CLAPHAM WOOD

For anyone interested in black magic, the spooky paranormal or UFOs, I suggest you don your ram's head and visit the quiet village of Clapham. The wood is said to be haunted (weird night-lights and disappearing vicars). Reputedly cursed in 1288 when a local villain announced:

*I call upon he who knows to damn this accursed village and all its meagre holdings. May the priesthood of this false God soon come to know their fate.*

It has become famous for its oppressive atmosphere, satanic mists, and strange forces affecting drivers' steering wheels, so beware!

### CLIMPING

A nice, rather quirky shingle beach, going west from Arundel on the coast. A great place for a walk or picnic. And just before you get there is Baliffscourt (now an upmarket hotel), an extraordinary medieval fantasy hamlet, built in 1927 by Lord Moyne of the Guinness family as a retreat for his medieval-architecture-loving wife. The diarist Chips Channon, one of the Guinness set, described the interior perfectly:

*Every guest room resembles the cell of a rather pansy monk.*

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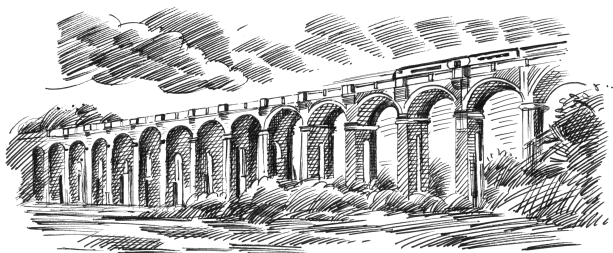
#### Getting there

National grid ref.TQ020074

- ① Car: off the main A27 Worthing/Chichester coast road.
- ② Train: National rail services from London/Victoria, Brighton and Chichester.
- ③ Bus: National Express from Victoria coach station, frequent local services.
- ④ Useful website: [www.arundelcastle.org](http://www.arundelcastle.org)

## OUSE VALLEY VIADUCT

BALCOMBE



### **Where is it?**

Bestriding the Ouse Valley just outside Balcombe village, between Borde Hill, Haywards Heath Golf Club and Ardingly reservoir. It is best approached by taking the minor Haywards Heath road south out of the village for about 3 kilometres, when the viaduct can be seen on the right as you sweep down into the vale. Get up close by following a marked footpath at the roadside, which gives access into the field where some of the magnificent semicircular redbrick arches stand.

### **What is it?**

The Balcombe Viaduct is an eye-boggling marvel of the Victorian Railway Age, built with total confidence by a country at the height of its economic power and dominance.

The birth of the railways opened up the entire country and allowed ordinary people to travel almost anywhere in the land within a single day. The railways speeded up travel and contracted distance; they distributed produce more efficiently, boosted industrial and agricultural growth, enabled coastal and inland towns to flourish and changed the landscape of Britain forever. Sussex was suddenly brought closer to London but to lay the network of lines and accomplish their vision, skilled engineers first had the task of conquering the geography of the land. Armies of labourers had to clear terrain, dig cuttings, construct embankments, blast

out tunnels and build bridges. And one of the most spectacular bridges built anywhere in the country is Balcombe Viaduct, a fantastic achievement and a lasting legacy from the Victorians and their fabulous railway architecture. The fact that the viaduct still carries the Brighton to London line with effortless nonchalance shows just how well it was built.

### **Who built it?**

Queen Victoria (1819-1901) came to the throne in 1837 at the age of 18 and ruled for almost 64 years, the longest reign in British history. This period is associated with Britain's great age of industrial and economic expansion and when Victoria died, it was said that Britain had an empire on which the sun never set. And of all the endeavours that the Victorians embarked upon, the railways were one of their greatest. Within 50 years, between 1825 and 1875, the rail network spread throughout the country like a spider's web, as rival investors built competing lines.

Brighton's fortunes first changed in the early 18th century when the Prince Regent went down there to bathe and have fun and games with Mrs Fitzherbert in his exuberant Palace (*see p.28*). By the 1830s it had become the busiest seaside resort in Britain, with over 2,000 visitors a week enjoying its sleazy amusements. After the runaway success of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway, Brighton became the obvious next stop for steam travel and profit-hungry speculators. Constructing railways was a risky and costly business and it took 10 years of arguing over different proposals and surveying alternative routes before the London & Brighton Railways Company (an amalgamation of contending investors) was finally established and given permission to begin their epic undertaking.

The London to Brighton line was finally given the green light by Parliament in 1837, when railway mania in Britain was at its height. The plan was to connect 41 miles (66 kilometres) of new track from an existing London to Croydon line and take the train down to the coast. The task was monumental and the journey took the company four years to complete. It was full steam ahead for the London & Brighton Railways Company; at its peak, it employed a tough workforce of over 5,000 men

armed only with brute force, shovels, picks, wheelbarrows, horses and dynamite. It is now impossible to imagine how remorselessly gruelling and dangerous the work must have been but during those four years this army of navvies sculpted the landscape, laid track, blasted out five tunnels (totalling over 3 miles, 5 kilometres), built 99 bridges and created two amazing viaducts – the Preston Viaduct in Brighton (now mostly obscured by office blocks) and our masterpiece at Balcombe. Phew!

The architect for the viaduct and all the stations along the line, including Brighton, was David Mocatta (1806-82), supervised by company engineer, John Rastrick (1780-1856). The viaduct runs straight, is 450 metres long, nearly 30 metres high, has 37 tall, elegant semi-circular arches (each spanning 9 metres), gracefully tapering piers, stone balustrading and two decorative Italianate pavilions crowning both ends. It is a listed building (recently restored) and remains virtually unchanged since its construction between 1839-41. It is simply a marvel.

The London to Brighton railway reached its seaside destination in 1841, with the first steam train puffing into Brighton Station on September 21 (fastest journey time of one and three-quarter hours).

### **Why visit it?**

The Ouse Valley Viaduct is one of the wonders of Sussex. It is a daring, elegant and inspirational engineering achievement and an important example of Victorian railway architecture. However, travelling across the bridge by train gives little insight into the fabulous architectural accomplishment beneath. The views from the window as you rattle across the valley at Balcombe are glorious (I always want to stop the train and get off) but the views from underneath the edifice are staggering. The sight of the viaduct's 37 graceful red-brick arches, rising upwards and stretching across the lush fields of the Ouse Valley make you feel happy. The scene has a mysterious feel-good factor; spirits are lifted and you feel better for being here. This spot is hypnotic and when you're below, gazing upwards, this supernatural sight is overwhelming.

The Ouse Valley is wonderful anyway but the viaduct, confidently snaking its way across the landscape, compliments and enhances the picture.

It is an example of human endeavour improving the landscape. The bridge fulfils its function perfectly but it is built with more grandeur, grace and architectural flourishes than it needs to have and it is impossible to describe in any way that does it justice. You have to go and see Balcombe Viaduct for yourself to appreciate the dynamic and eccentric lengths that Victorian entrepreneurs were prepared to go to in order to fulfil their unstoppable aspirations. Within 50 years, Victorian ingenuity had changed people's perception of distance and spread a network of lines flamboyantly across the country, indeed the world. Nothing stood in the railway's way. Determined and skilled engineers met every challenge with daring imagination and the Ouse Valley Viaduct, with its reflections of classical Roman aqueducts, is one of their great achievements.

## **Other eccentricities**

### **LINDFIELD**

A genuinely pretty village with over three dozen architecturally fine houses (suspiciously immaculate) lining one street. It must constitute some sort of preservation record. Pevsner described Lindfield as having 'the finest village street in East Sussex'. The wide tree-lined High Street is a graceful curved gradient with a pond at its foot and a church at the top. Bordering the pond is a memorable and eclectic array of houses and by the church is an even more remarkable group, including Church Cottage (15th century) and Old Place (late 16th century). The Victorian stained glass artist, Charles Eames Kempe lived in the latter and although not all authentic, the combination of three gables, bargeboards, timber framing and brick nogging is magical just the same.

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#### **Getting there**

National grid ref. TQ311292

- ① Car: off the B2036, midway between Haywards Heath and Crawley.
- ② Train: National rail services from London/Victoria and Brighton, 2-mile (3-kilometre) walk.
- ③ Bus: local services to Balcombe.
- ④ Useful website: [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/RABrighton.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/RABrighton.htm)