

Wednesday 10 July 2019 Down House and Titsey Place

Today we had a double treat in store: we visited two interesting homes on the borders of Surrey and Kent - Down House and Titsey Place.

Down House, in Kent, was the home of Charles Darwin who lived here for forty years from 1842 to his death in 1882. Set in the rural village of Downe, the house offered the peace and privacy Darwin needed to work on his revolutionary scientific theories. It is full of his works and memorabilia. Through the displays in the rooms and gardens we were able to trace the development of these theories and their publication along with those of other scientists who helped to contribute to them. A tour of the garden was also recommended as it held examples of plants that Darwin used to formulate his theories.

The house is interesting for its own sake as it was built during the early 18th Century. It was successively owned by a businessman, a property developer and a vicar before the Darwins moved in. They further developed the house up to 1876. After Darwin died it became a girls' school. Then, recognising its importance, the Royal College of Surgeons took Down House on in 1929, finally passing it to English Heritage in 1996.

Titsey Place and Gardens

A buffet lunch was served to us at Down House after which we travelled the short distance back into Surrey to visit Titsey Place near Oxted. Titsey Place is one of the largest estates in Surrey. The core of the house is Tudor and was bought by John Gresham, the famous London merchant, in 1534 and, passing through a female line of the family, it has been owned by the Leveson-Gowers until 1992 when a trust was set up to manage the estate.

We had a guided tour which was well received. The gardens, which are continuously being developed, are particularly lovely and extensive. It is possible to walk to the 19th Century local church, and to the beech plantation on the hillside of the North Downs.