

Society Outing

The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum 28th May 2016

Derek Donnelly



Downland Gridshell Building © Weald and Downland Museum

An 8 o'clock start to what turned out to be a lovely sunny day to the South Downs National Park where the museum is situated about 3 miles from Chichester. Our driver for the day was Ian, who we have had in the past, so we were in very good hands. Everyone was on time at the various pickups giving us a good start to the trip and so we set off past the queues of lorries out of Dover to our first stop at Clackett Lane services. After a short stop we rejoined the M25 and headed, through some slow traffic, towards the A3 junction where we would be turning off to head down to the museum. Coming off the A3 we passed through the lovely countryside and villages and arrived at the museum at midday. Tickets were arranged and guide maps issued and we set off into the open air museum and some refreshments.

The museum was founded in 1967 and is a leading independent museum and charity. Its daily operation depends largely on its

volunteers who form most of its workforce. The buildings on display originate from the Weald and Downland of Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire and are spaced out over the large area (about 40 acres) most with their own period kitchen gardens and some with livestock. There is also a working mill (17th century) which supplies flour to be sold in the museum shop. Strolling around the site you can also see the shire horses that are used to carry out various tasks around the museum during the year.

The nice thing about this type of museum is that you can set your own pace and take your own route around the site, stopping when you want and as long as you want. As the weather was beautiful, hot and sunny with some cool breezes, it was a pleasure just to stroll along and see how they used to live in different times, without being hurried along trying to cram everything in a set time.

Some of the buildings were very interesting and had displays inside, including one with a working Tudor kitchen with volunteers demonstrating cooking, etc. It was in complete contrast to what we have today with all our modern appliances. Also the fact that the privy was outside at most houses was a reminder of the good old days, though we did in one house, in an upstairs bedroom, find an ensuite. It reminded me of a guest house we once stayed at.

During our walk around we came across a family of piglets asleep, top and tail, in the sun at one house, which had a large kitchen garden as well, which would have been a source of food as well as a small income from the sale of pigs and surplus crops in those times.

The Museum's award-winning Downland Gridshell Building was the first timber gridshell building to be constructed in the UK and is a lightweight structure made of oak laths. It is regarded as an iconic building and both architects and other interested visitors travel across the UK (and further afield) to view this unique example of the technique. Completed in



2002, the building was financially supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Visitors to the museum can take a free guided tour round the Downland Gridshell Building and artefact

store each day at 1.30pm.

We all re-joined our coach and set off about 5pm for the journey home via a slightly different route that took us through some lovely villages and scenery. On the way, Ian, our driver, pointed out the amount of properties that were painted in a bright yellow trim, the window frames, doors etc, that all belonged to the Cowdray Park Estate. These properties were spread around several of the villages en-route and on the way we passed the polo fields, where a match had just finished. We cut across to the M2/A2 on the way back to avoid any possible congestion on the M20 and as we didn't stop were back in Dover around 8pm, thanks to Ian's excellent driving.

It now only leaves me to say, on everyone's behalf, a big thank you to Pat for once again organising a lovely day out for us all. Also our thanks to Ian our driver for a safe and informative trip.



Ensuite Bedroom



Market Hall from Titchfield