



PRIEST HOUSE

Rather more to do with the supernatural than with priests, this atmospheric 15th-century timber-framed cottage museum (sussexpast.co.uk) in West Hoathly ties in nicely with a visit to nearby Wakehurst Place or Standen; October is the last month to visit, before it closes for winter. Curator Antony Smith showed me the house's profusion of anti-witch devices, installed in an age when people evidently took this sort of thing pretty seriously. A buried bottle by the front door filled with nails, iron and urine apparently kept the witches at bay, but practices varied quite a bit. The Ws scratched into the cottage's front door here stand for Virgo Virginum, or Virgin of Virgins, and inside are all manner of graffiti circles, flower shapes and 'M's etched on and around the fireplace. They're not that rare,' he explained 'but what is unusual is to find this many in one place. That iron doorstep made of local waste iron could be unique.' The cottage, a choice example of an adapted Wealden hall structure, contains an absorbing stash of bygone, many gathered by local man John Godwin King, who acquired the building in 1905 and opened it as a museum before giving it over to the Sussex Archaeological Society in 1935. Antony showed me a handkerchief embroidered with 65 signatures of Suffragettes imprisoned in Holloway in 1912. His predecessor rescued it in the 1960s, plucking it from jumble sale remnants on a bonfire seconds before it was about to go up in smoke.

Open Mar to Oct. Closed Mondays. The Priest House, North Lane, West Hoathly. 01342 810479.

More Sussex pleasures in Tim Locke's Slow Sussex, (£14.99 Skylark, Tourist Info and Barbican House).