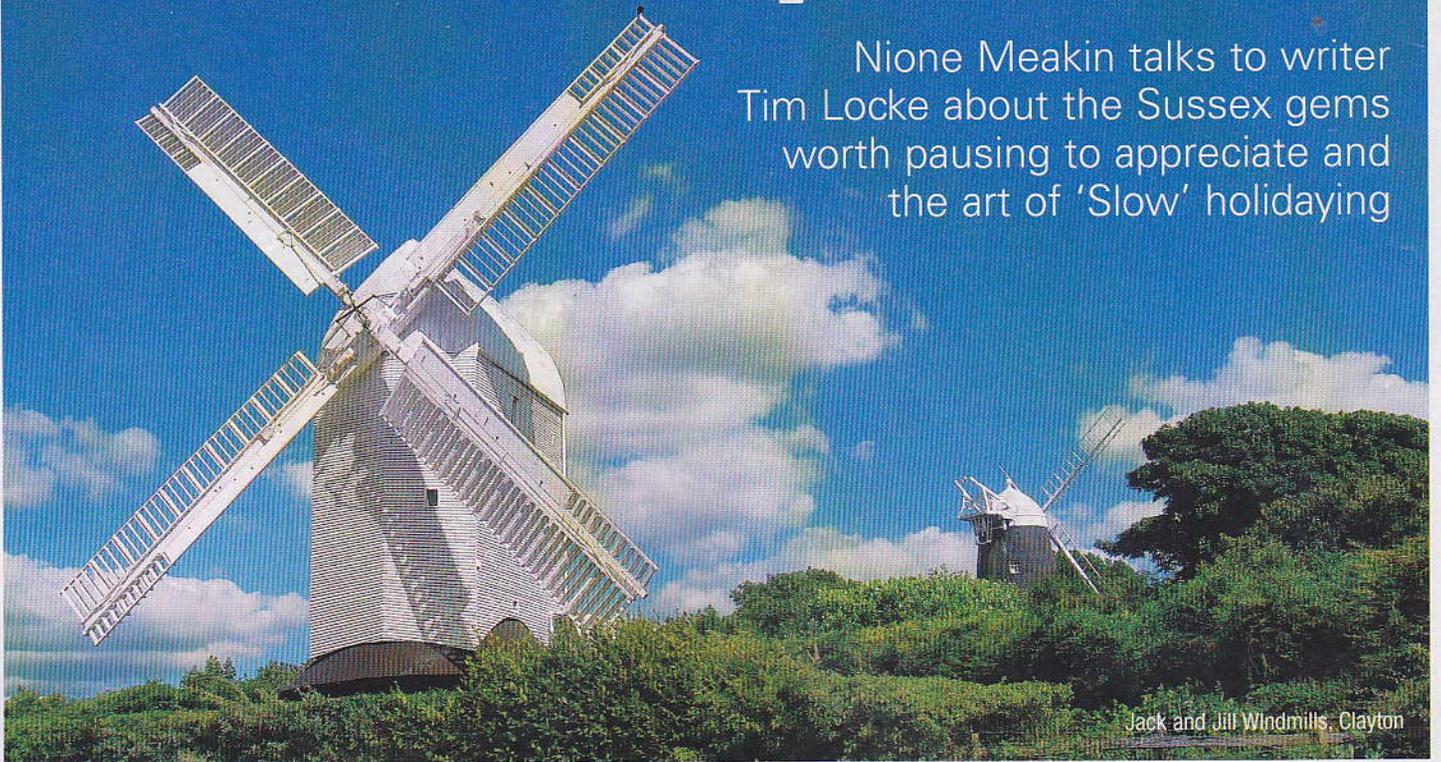


Time is on your side

Nione Meakin talks to writer Tim Locke about the Sussex gems worth pausing to appreciate and the art of 'Slow' holidaying



Jack and Jill Windmills, Clayton

For Tim Locke, the joy of travel is in spending time in an area and getting under its skin. It is about discovering the weird as well as the wonderful, taking time "to stop and stare" rather than just taking photographs and meeting the people who make a place what it is.

It was with this in mind the Lewes-based travel writer created the Slow guidebook series for award-winning travel publisher Bradt. In line with the international Slow movement, which advocates a more relaxed approach to life, the Slow guidebooks encourage travellers

to spend their holidays doing fewer things more mindfully.

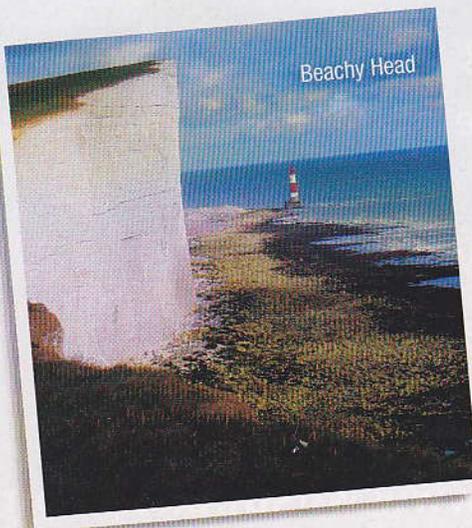
As company founder Hilary Bradt explains: "We wanted to get away from the usual 'top sights' formula and encourage our authors to bring out the nuances and local differences that make up a sense of place – such things as food, building styles, nature, geology or local people and what makes them tick.

"Our aim was to create a series that

variety of experiences in a small area to travelling huge distances and not really 'seeing' anything."

Bradt has just published Locke's Slow guide to Sussex and the South Downs National Park (hot on the heels of it officially becoming Britain's newest National Park at the beginning of April). From historic gardens to a tunnel of yew trees, Roman villas to houseboats, early wall paintings to

"I prefer the idea of getting a wide variety of experiences in a small area to travelling huge distances and not really 'seeing' anything"

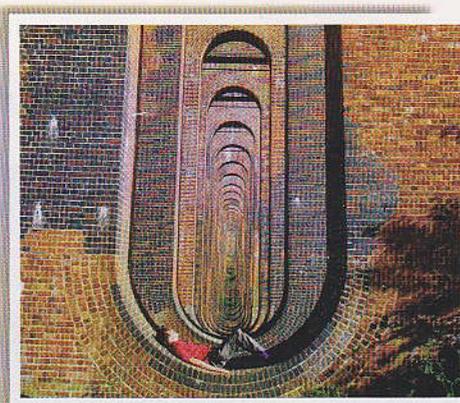


celebrates the present, focusing on sustainable tourism, rather than taking a nostalgic wallow in the past."

Locke recalls chatting to an Australian couple while staying at a Lake District B&B once: "I asked them what they planned to do that day and they told me they had arrived in the Lake District the previous day, had a look around and were off to Carlisle – as if you can see the Lake District in a day! That really stuck with me. I prefer the idea of getting a wide

modern art, the book paints a fascinating picture of the area, as seen by the people who know it best.

"I have lived in Lewes for over 15 years," Locke writes, "And while researching this book realised that this wonderfully diverse corner of southeast England seems to expand as you get to know it. For all its centuries of civilisation this mere smudge at the bottom of the map of Britain is quite extraordinarily hard to know in its entirety. For me Sussex and the South



Lock at Ouse Valley Balcombe Viaduct

Downs have no equal among lowland landscapes in their abundance of delights and idiosyncrasies – seemingly made for savouring slowly and returning to again and again.”

There is plenty to pique interest. Did you know, for instance, the pretty village of West Hoathly displays a huge selection of paraphernalia designed to ward off witches, from an iron doorstep on the door of the village's Priest House to a cat's paw poking from a chimney in a nearby cottage?

Have you visited Kingley Vale, one of Europe's largest yew forests? "I think it's the oldest one as well," Locke adds. "It cloaks the South Downs above Chichester Harbour and no one knows why it's there. When yew trees fall they don't necessarily die but send out new shoots and they often live to an immense age. Here, they have formed a tunnel of branches that's like something out of Tolkien or Harry Potter – it's so eerie."

Locke was thrilled to discover the Shirley Leaf and Petal Company in Hastings Old Town – "another place straight out of Harry Potter's Diagon Alley", where staff have been making artificial flowers and leaves for theatre and film for decades. The shop supplies national theatres and fashion designers, Glyndebourne and Hollywood and is well worth a visit he says.

Amberley is a very "Slow" place in Locke's view: "It's a beautiful thatched village, there are hardly any tourists there and it's right on the edge of a wonderful marsh called Amberley Wildbrooks. Plus, it has one of the best industrial museums I've seen anywhere with craftsmen demonstrating everything from wood-turning to bicycle repairs."

Even in Brighton, a city so popular one might not think there was much yet to be discovered, Locke singles out gems including St Michaels and All Angels Church, where he was given some binoculars and a complete history of Victorian stained glass, and Hove Museum, with its collection of early films by the city's silent movie pioneers George Smith and James Williamson.

The book also encourages readers to experience places from a different perspective. Why not mingle with

locals and nibble samples of local cheese at a farmers' market, see the South Downs on horseback or take a guided walk with a naturalist to find wildflowers and butterflies?

Locke was struck by how many workshops and courses are on offer in the area – choose from learning Bear Grylls-style survival techniques at locations such as Wilderness Wood (Hadlow Down), yoga at Tilton Farmhouse near Lewes, wildlife photography at WWT Arundel or how to identify trees and fungus with the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

His favourite Sussex location is of course his home town Lewes which, even after 15 years, is capable of throwing up a few surprises. "I visited Lewes Priory last winter when I was looking at the proofs for the book and it had completely changed. It used to be fenced off and look like wasteland but now the fences have been taken down [by Lewes Priory Trust with grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage], interpretive historical panels placed all over and you can walk among the ruins. I thought 'Golly, I have to shoehorn this in to the book!' That was an amazing discovery and it's a big plus for Lewes."

It isn't a comprehensive guide to the area and Locke apologises for the many wonderful places he was forced to omit. "But I've tried to really give a feel of what Sussex is about and bring out its many qualities and I hope in that I've succeeded."

 **factfile**

Slow Sussex & South Downs National Park is published by Bradt and costs £14.99. For more on Tim Locke, visit www.timlocke.co.uk.



**A few Sussex gems
Tim Locke "discovered"
while writing the book:**

- "Two very contrasting and memorable boat trips: Chichester Harbour by solar powered craft and an exhilarating whiz along the foot of Beachy Head from Eastbourne's Sovereign Harbour."
- Pallant House Gallery, Chichester and the new Towner gallery, Eastbourne: "Wonderful treasure houses of modern art, among the finest outside London."
- The very early wall paintings at Hardham church, near Pulborough.
- The Brighton sewer tour (visit www.southernwater.co.uk) which takes in the city's award-winning Victorian sewerage system.
- The award-winning and historic family-run Bardsley's fish and chips in Baker St, Brighton
- Lewes Priory – "Recently opened up for visitors and completely transformed. A real discovery!"
- The English Wine Centre, near Alfriston – "Very erudite staff, and a heart-warming story about how good English wines have become."
- Borde Hill and High Beeches Gardens – "Just two of Sussex's world-class gardens".

