



FIRLE ESTATE

Newsletter Spring 2024

Welcome to the March Firle newsletter and a chance to update you on some up and coming Estate activities

Firle Garden Show

Full preparations are underway for this year's Firle Garden Show 19th to 21st April 2024. Please put this date in your diary as we welcome the village and visitors from much further afield to enjoy the show. The Garden Show has been a regular fixture now in Firle Park for many years and it usually provides something of interest for everyone.

Features this year include artisan designers, specialist growers from Sussex, fine foods and drinks, retailers of garden related goods, homewares, products and fashion accessories. The organisers also have an itinerary of daily talks from experts, with activities for all ages, plenty of expert advice on hand and a variety of music and entertainment.



Pre Booked tickets can be booked in advance at a discount on the organiser's website thegardenshows.com

Lord Gage 90th birthday celebrations

We are excited to wish Lord Gage the happiest of birthdays in this, his 90th year. The Gage family has a number of celebrations planned for him throughout the year and we welcome you to join us:

- **A painting show** of Lord Gage's work will go on display from 26th May at Firle Place on House Opening Days (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday).
- **A village celebration** at New Elms Barn on the 15th June 2024. Please save the date for this special evening at the recently refurbished New Elms Barn. We do hope you can join the celebrations at this beautiful spot. You may notice some activity

around the barn in coming weeks as we finish the repairs and get the barn 'party ready'. The refurbishment has been based on sustainable principles. Most of the work took place last year to secure the future of this beautiful building. Bob said, "Our brief to the architect was that we still wanted 'a light touch' and for it to continue to look and feel like a traditional barn. We didn't want to lose its character and the patina of age, and like many of these buildings the challenge is a renovation that does not cost the earth. We had thought for a while it would be a great space to enjoy a drink and the sunset and Lord Gage seemed to agree!"



Coronation Grove

Spurred on by a rare bright February morning, a number of intrepid individuals and family groups got to work with the planting of a small Grove of trees on land identified by Lord Gage in Firle Park to mark the King's coronation. With a National Lottery grant secured by Firle Coronation Committee, some additional local fundraising, and expertise and sourcing provided by Firle Estate's Chartered Forester advisor Colin Corkill, a total of 18 mixed native trees were planted on the northbound footpath through Firle Park leading to Wick Street. The looming threat of rain helped with the digging but the real challenge and 'team bonding' came from the construction of the meccano like smart metal tree guards. Well done to everyone involved and in particular Mike Hole for all of his hard work and energy.

An Estate Wide Vision

We have listened and heard the feedback from those residents who attended last year's meeting in Firle at the village hall and it is clear that there is some uncertainty about the Estate's future direction. We want to ensure a sustainable vision for the Estate and whilst its landscape and villages are unique, many of the future challenges they must meet and accommodate are not. We want to ensure it remains a living, working landscape for residents and visitors to enjoy alike, whilst continuing to protect and celebrate its sense of place.

A significant level of consultation with the three Parishes and the South Downs National Park went into drafting the Estate's Whole Estate Plan, a document format promoted by South Downs National Park that is intended to set out the Estate's vision for its ownership. As we look to finalise the plan with the National Park we will be scheduling a public drop-in meeting later in the Spring and we will share more information about this in coming newsletters.

Shepherds Cottage, Old Coach Road



We are delighted to have completed the restoration of Shepherds Cottage on the Old Coach Road to create a characterful holiday let and getaway for visitors. Restoring and finding truly viable uses for iconic buildings across the Estate is an important part of ensuring this landscape retains its character, history and relevance. Architects, Rabble Place, who also oversaw the Estate's refurbishment of the neighbouring barn in 2018 said, *"We tried to imagine how the shepherd might have left it when the last big flocks of sheep were moved off the Downs for the last time at the outbreak of the second world war. The use of heritage materials in the restoration was a key part of our brief from the Estate and this has included the lime plastering and lime washing of every wall as well as the use of other traditional techniques and some recycled building materials. The bedroom walls were hand stencilled as a nod to Charleston and a Firle wallpaper and fabric was designed for the Sitting Room to show interesting local barns and buildings on the Estate. We wanted to immerse guests in the history of the place and have some fun."*

Weddings

From 2025 we are very excited to be offering bridal couples the opportunity to stay overnight at Firle Place and we will also bring our wedding catering in house with 'Firle Kitchen'. This continued evolution in our wedding offer will help to ensure Firle Place remains no ordinary venue for a wedding. Bob said, *"When people book their wedding at a country house estate they really do want the true country house experience. A stay overnight was the natural extension of what is already such a unique offer and we felt we could give an even more complete experience whilst delivering a level of service in keeping with the tradition of the English country house."*

A 'Damp' Winter

With February now confirmed as the wettest on record for 250 years and there being no sign of let up in March it has certainly been a damp, if not a wash out this winter. February's rainfall was over twenty times higher than last February and it's easy to start wondering whether it will ever stop. Firle Estate's Clerk of Works comments *"This winter has been a particular challenge to keep older Estate buildings weather tight. Driving rain forced by the wind can be a perennial problem for old houses with their nooks and crannies but this year it seems to be more related to the sheer volume of rain and continued wet weather we have been experiencing. The continual damp and relatively mild conditions have also been particularly problematic for condensation and black mould growth. It is a common issue for cold spots in old houses, but this year it has definitely been more difficult for tenants to manage."* Estate Director Bob Baines said *"We would encourage any tenants with a concern to report it to the Estate Office. We are always happy to advise and investigate any issues as well as how best they can be managed. The winter has exacerbated and made clear some genuine defects we are eager to get on top of."*



Look out for our next newsletter with more details about our Whole Estate Plan drop-in and Lord Gage's village birthday celebration. If you have any news that you would like us to include please send it through to our new team member Helen to HelenT@firle.com