

**Launch of *The Buildings of England, Sussex: West*
at Arundel Castle, 11th June 2019**

My parents lived for many years in Henfield and my greatest pleasure on fine evenings was to venture south of the village, out of the Wealden clay to stand on the Greensand Ridge and look towards the the line of the South Downs – ‘a firmer guarantee of the sea than an uninterrupted view’(as Ian Nairn noted). As with much of Nairn’s poetic prose it doesn’t exactly make sense but we know what he means.

In all he wrote for the original *Sussex* gazetteer, the varied and lovely West Sussex landscape is the linchpin. He was sensitive throughout to the setting of buildings and villages within it, from the ‘lush and sequestered’ Burpham to Coombes’ ‘Farms, Dutch barns and tiny church folded into the side of the Adur valley ...directly opposite the cement works’ and ‘splendid jagged hilly heathland’ close to Hampshire/Surrey border at Linch. It is astonishing how many West Sussex places remain remote and little changed, especially in the west of the county where tiny villages like the Mardens lie among spare downland slopes and ‘lovely oak-skirted lanes’. Even in the east of the county, one has only to go a mile or two off the A roads to find a web of winding lanes and villages like Nuthurst, as Nairn says ‘only four miles from Horsham but remote, rolling Weald, thickly wooded’.

Of course, as a hard-hitting journalist, Ian Nairn was often critical, particularly of over-development along the coast, as at Lancing where skyline bungalows were ‘.... a copybook example of how to spoil the landscape’. Many of his most severe judgements have been redressed in the new edition, for there is almost always more to a place than first

acquaintance allows – as all those here tonight can attest. If our changes – and the huge amount of new information gathered since 1965 – have led to what Pevsner acknowledged was his own ‘more cataloguey’ approach, rest assured we have tried to combine the extra detail with the best of Nairn’s poetry. And, of course, have waded into recent controversies with as much enthusiasm as the original authors did.

None of the revisers of this volume are strangers to West Sussex and we have all written about the areas most familiar to us. Through family connections I am well acquainted with the east and centre of the county, including the areas taken in from East Sussex in 1974 and dealt with by Pevsner in the original *Sussex* volume. Tim Hudson, of course, was the exceptionally well qualified to revise Arundel, Midhurst, Petworth and Chichester, as well as places to its S, for he has visited West Sussex since family holidays at Elmer and lived here since 1974, as the editor of the Victoria History of Sussex. Jeremy’s memories of the north-west of the county also go back to childhood. To quote him:

‘I grew up round here, my grandparents had farms in Lurgashall and Fernhurst, in my late teens I used ‘ride out’ on these leafy lanes *totally terrified* on nervy thoroughbreds of vast size, the other horse alongside usually being ridden by a super courageous young woman rider. I remember the minor country houses and farm houses and cottages being handsome but tatty, even falling apart, even if lived in by quite rich stockbrokers with pony-mad children. ... ‘

The ‘tatty’ aspect has of course changed and most new owners have been scrupulous in the restoration of houses in their care. As Jeremy puts it

‘what a revelation driving through this year and last, almost every house in super nick, and owned by enterprising people, mostly using excellent local architects ...’

West Sussex is rich in rewarding houses, not only the great ones the one like Castle, which Tim's description has freed from Nairn's crushingly negative judgements. Then there are the handsome Elizabethan and Jacobean Parham, Wiston and Danny along the foot of the Downs, and smaller C17 houses, such as Barnham Court, in debt to London fashions in bricklaying, and the stone Gravetye Manor, one of the houses built for the Weald's prosperous ironmasters. And there are many middle-sized C18 houses, such as Pitshill and Shillinglee, which Jeremy has been able to show are surprisingly inventive in design.

Nairn was rather dismissive of the county's Victorian and Edwardian houses and yet we have rediscovered and been inside to see richly varied work by many top architects in a range of styles from George & Peto's bombastic Pont Street Dutch Buchan Hill for an ostrich-feather merchant, to the sensible Standen by Philip Webb for middle-class Londoners, and the surreal transformation of Lutyens' Monkton House for Edward James in the 1930s. It was the 1930s that brought adventurous patrons and architects to the Sussex coast to build shocking Modern Movement houses cheek by jowl with the ersatz thatched cottages and neo-Tudor manor houses at Aldwick Bay and East Preston.

The desire for innovative houses has revived with new planning legislation which encourages exceptional design in the countryside. You can see a space-age Downley Place at Harting, an almost Roman family house in brick and concrete at Tillington, but also the fine classical Kingsham Farm by Quinlan Terry and the curious brick Whithurst Park, in an unexpected Tudor style.

But what of the buildings that Nairn and Pevsner saw only briefly and and those they missed? Some of the most moving – as the original

authors found – are the tiny unspolit churches, with remains of the Saxon tradition continued by the Normans and the ‘more than ornamental fireworks’ of the great churches at Old and New Shoreham, Broadwater, and Steyning. An experimental trend continues at the monastic Boxgrove and Chichester Cathedral, which again Nairn sets in a landscape context:

‘Whether one approaches Chichester from E or S the Cathedral spire eventually comes into view, dominating the coastal plain Chichester is, indeed, the only medieval cathedral visible from the sea.’

Changes however have had to be noted as

‘the Avenue de Chartres and neighbouring buildings have robbed us of that wonderful prospect, but a classic view survives over the playing fields of the Prebendal School.’

Most encouragingly for the architectural enthusiast the doors of almost every rural church are open to visitors and many urban ones too, thanks to volunteers. Many have been re-ordered in the last few years, stimulating controversy as well as increased use. We hope that the new Pevsner Guide to West Sussex will not only inspire church visiting but explain houses hidden behind vigorous foliage or locked gates, medieval timber-framing urban and rural, the continuing development of its famous schools such as Lancing and Christ’s Hospital, and the railway stations and early airports that brought change to the county. We hope you will be tempted to revisit places you think you know well. There are discoveries to be made everywhere – from the C13 roof of St Faith’s chapel in the Chichester’s Cathedral Close, to the magnificent Kempe furnishings of St Andrew the Apostle, Worthing, and the innovative structures at the Weald and Downland Museum, at Wakehurst and on the Goodwood estate.

I do hope you will hasten to buy copies of *Sussex: West* and with us

explore again your ‘prosperous and sophisticated’ county. It is still (in Nairn’s words) ‘ a good place both for modern houses and for unpoilt village pubs ... for half-timbered houses in genuine condition and – perhaps now more common than ‘rump steaks in saloon bars’ – delicious local wine and food in quirky cafés. One wonders what Nairn and Pevsner would have made of Heatherwick’s East Beach Café at Littlehampton – a shell-cum-cave and just one of the thought-provoking buildings – and opinions – we hope you will enjoy in our new edition.

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