

Village Spotlight: Penshurst

The historic and quintessentially English village of Penshurst lies about 5 miles to the north-west of Tunbridge Wells. It occupies a valley on the northern slopes of the Weald near the confluence of two rivers, the Medway and the Eden. The majority of the parish, which also includes the village of Fordcombe, is in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The parish boundaries were defined in Saxon times, but no charters or writings concerning Penshurst survive from this period.

Today, the ancient church of St. John the Baptist stands in the centre of the village, surrounded by a number of historic tile-hung cottages. The village grew up around Penshurst Place, a large medieval manor house dating from 1341. This was the ancestral home of the Sidney family and is one of England's finest country houses. It is open to the public daily throughout the year, with events ranging from music concerts to car rallies held in the grounds in the summer months.

Although not a large village there is a surprising amount going on in Penshurst. Community life is centred around the church, the village hall, the primary school and the village's three pubs. The historic pub in the centre of the village, the picturesque Leicester Arms, was once part of the Penshurst Estate. It has a restaurant which

overlooks meadow land and the River Medway and also has a seven room hotel. Two other pubs, the Spotted Dog and the Bottle House Inn are at Smarts Hill, just outside the village.

The village also has two tea-rooms, Quaintways and Fir Tree House, and a small garage, which used to house the village blacksmith. Today it is known as the Forge Stores and also has a post office and small shop. The only other retail outlet in the village is the Penshurst Place Gift Shop.

Penshurst railway station, which is on the Tonbridge to Redhill line, is actually located in the hamlet of Chiddingstone Causeway, about 2 miles to the north.

Clubs and societies in the village include a dramatic society, a baby and toddler group, a bridge club and a choral society. Sports enthusiasts are catered for by an angling society, a football club and a cricket club. Penshurst Park Cricket Club, situated within the grounds of Penshurst Place, was founded in 1752 and lays claim to being the oldest privately-owned cricket club in the world! Stoolball, a cross between rounders and cricket, is also played in the village.

Steve Shaw



Penshurst Place