

national trust smallhythe place

National Trust Smallhythe Place

Nestled in the charming village of Smallhythe, near Tenterden in Kent, Smallhythe Place is a captivating historic house and garden that offers visitors a unique glimpse into England's rich cultural and theatrical heritage. Managed and preserved by the National Trust, this enchanting property was once the home of the renowned actress Ellen Terry, who was celebrated for her captivating Shakespearean performances and her influence on theatrical history. Today, Smallhythe Place stands as a vibrant museum, showcasing her life, work, and the artistry of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. From its historic architecture and beautifully maintained gardens to its engaging exhibitions and theatrical spaces, Smallhythe Place provides an immersive experience for history enthusiasts, theatre lovers, and families alike.

History of Smallhythe Place

Origins and Early History

Smallhythe Place's history dates back several centuries, with its earliest records indicating a Tudor origin. The house was originally constructed in the 16th century and has seen various modifications over the centuries. Its strategic location along the Kent coast made it a vital point for trade and local administration.

Connection to Ellen Terry

In 1899, Ellen Terry, one of the most celebrated actresses of her time, purchased Smallhythe Place to serve as her family home and a creative sanctuary. Her acquisition of the property marked a new chapter, transforming the house into a hub of theatrical activity and inspiration. Ellen Terry's association with the house elevated its cultural significance, and her influence is still evident in the preserved interiors and collections.

Transition to the National Trust

After Ellen Terry's death in 1928, her descendants and admirers worked tirelessly to preserve her legacy. In 1947, the house was entrusted to the National Trust, ensuring its protection and accessibility for future generations. Since then, Smallhythe Place has been maintained as a museum dedicated to Ellen Terry's life and theatrical history.

Architecture and Gardens

Architectural Features

Smallhythe Place is a charming timber-framed building with distinctive Victorian features. The house retains many original elements, including:

- Authentic period fireplaces and woodwork
- Original sash windows and decorative mouldings
- Historic rooms decorated to reflect different eras

The building's layout includes several rooms that have been preserved or restored, such as Ellen Terry's bedroom, the drawing room, and her dressing room, each offering insights into her personal and professional life.

The Garden and Outdoor Spaces

The gardens at Smallhythe Place are a tranquil retreat, meticulously maintained to reflect traditional English cottage garden aesthetics. Features of the garden include:

1. Colorful flower beds and borders
2. Herb and vegetable plots
3. Historic orchard area
4. Secluded seating areas for visitors to relax and enjoy the natural surroundings

The outdoor spaces not only enhance the historic charm of the property but also serve as venues for outdoor theatre performances and community events.

Exhibitions and Collections

Living Museum of Ellen Terry

Smallhythe Place functions as a living museum, with many rooms furnished to showcase Ellen Terry's life and career. Highlights include:

- Her personal costumes and theatrical memorabilia
- Photographs and artwork depicting her stage performances
- Letters, manuscripts, and personal items that tell her story

Visitors can explore her dressing room, which has been preserved as if she had just stepped out of a performance, immersing visitors in her world.

Special Exhibitions and Displays

Throughout the year, Smallhythe Place hosts temporary exhibitions that delve into various aspects of theatre history and Ellen Terry's influence. These may include:

- Displays on Shakespearean and Victorian theatre
- Interactive displays about costume design and stagecraft
- Guest lectures and workshops related to acting and theatrical history

These exhibitions aim to educate and inspire visitors of all ages, celebrating the enduring legacy of performance arts.

Theatrical Heritage and Events

Smallhythe Theatre

One of the highlights of Smallhythe Place is its small but historically significant theatre. This intimate space is used for:

- Rehearsals and performances of classical and contemporary plays

- Educational workshops and drama classes
- Community events and seasonal performances

The theatre's preservation underscores Ellen Terry's lifelong passion for the performing arts and continues her mission to promote theatrical excellence.

Annual Events and Festivals

Smallhythe Place hosts various events throughout the year, including:

1. Summer Shakespeare festivals
2. Historical theatre weekends
3. Family-friendly outdoor theatre performances
4. Art and craft fairs celebrating local artisans

These events foster community engagement and support the local cultural scene, making Smallhythe Place a vibrant hub of activity.

Educational and Community Engagement

Educational Programs

Smallhythe Place offers a range of educational initiatives tailored for schools, colleges, and adult learners. These programs include:

- Guided tours focusing on history, architecture, and theatre
- Workshops on acting, costume design, and stagecraft
- Theatre history lectures and storytelling sessions

These initiatives aim to inspire new generations of performers, historians, and enthusiasts.

Community Involvement

The property actively promotes community involvement through:

1. Volunteer opportunities in conservation and event management
2. Collaborations with local arts organizations
3. Support for regional theatre companies and festivals

Such engagement ensures that Smallhythe Place remains a lively, accessible, and meaningful part of the local cultural landscape.

Visiting Smallhythe Place: Practical Information

Opening Hours and Admission

Smallhythe Place is open to visitors during specific seasons, typically from spring through autumn. Operating hours may vary, so it's advisable to check the National Trust website before planning a visit. Admission fees are generally modest, with discounts available for members of the National Trust, seniors, students, and children.

Facilities and Accessibility

The site offers several amenities, including:

- On-site shop selling books, souvenirs, and theatrical memorabilia
- Café serving light refreshments and teas
- Accessible pathways and facilities for visitors with mobility challenges

The picturesque setting and friendly staff make for an enjoyable and comfortable visit.

Directions and Parking

Smallhythe Place is accessible by car, with parking facilities nearby. It is also reachable by public transport, with bus routes servicing Tenterden and nearby villages. Walking from the local train stations or bus stops offers a scenic route through the Kent countryside.

Conclusion

Smallhythe Place is more than just a historic house; it is a vibrant testament to England's theatrical heritage and Ellen Terry's enduring legacy. Through its well-preserved architecture, lush gardens, engaging exhibitions, and lively theatre programme, it offers visitors an immersive experience that celebrates the arts, history, and community. Managed by the National Trust, Smallhythe Place continues to inspire and educate, ensuring that the magic of theatre and the stories of remarkable individuals like Ellen Terry remain alive for generations to come. Whether you are a history buff, a theatre enthusiast, or simply seeking a peaceful retreat in the Kent countryside, Smallhythe Place promises a memorable journey into England's rich cultural tapestry.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the opening hours for National Trust Smallhythe Place?

Smallhythe Place is typically open from 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM during the main visiting season, but it's best to check the National Trust website for current hours and seasonal changes.

Is Smallhythe Place suitable for children and families?

Yes, Smallhythe Place offers a family-friendly experience with engaging tours and outdoor spaces, making it a great destination for visitors of all ages.

Are there any special events or exhibitions at Smallhythe Place?

Yes, the National Trust hosts various events and exhibitions throughout the year at Smallhythe Place, including theatre performances, workshops, and seasonal celebrations. Check their calendar for upcoming events.

How can I learn more about Ellen Terry at Smallhythe Place?

Smallhythe Place is the former home of renowned actress Ellen Terry. Visitors can explore her personal collection, period furnishings, and exhibits dedicated to her life and career.

Is there parking available at Smallhythe Place?

Yes, there is parking available nearby, with designated spaces for visitors. It's recommended to arrive early during peak times, especially on weekends and holidays.

Are guided tours available at Smallhythe Place?

Yes, guided tours are offered at certain times, providing in-depth insights into Ellen Terry's life, the history of the house, and its gardens. Booking in advance is advised for these tours.

Additional Resources

National Trust Smallhythe Place: A Historic Gem in Kent

Nestled on the picturesque coastline of Kent, Smallhythe Place is a captivating historic house and garden managed by the National Trust. This enchanting site offers visitors a unique glimpse into England's theatrical and architectural history, set against the stunning backdrop of the English countryside and the nearby coast. Whether you're a history enthusiast, a lover of the arts, or simply seeking a tranquil escape, Smallhythe Place is a must-visit destination that combines cultural richness with natural beauty.

Introduction to Smallhythe Place

Smallhythe Place is located in the charming village of Small Hythe, near Tenterden, and is renowned for its well-preserved Tudor origins, its association with the celebrated Victorian actress Ellen Terry, and its beautifully maintained gardens. The property has been in the National Trust's care since 1953 and offers a diverse range of attractions that appeal to visitors of all ages.

Historical Significance

Built in the 16th century, Smallhythe Place has witnessed centuries of history, from its origins as a farmstead to its transformation into a theatrical sanctuary. Its most famous resident, Ellen Terry, lived here during her later years, and the house now serves as a memorial to her illustrious career.

Cultural Heritage

The site is not only a preserved historic building but also a vibrant cultural hub, hosting exhibitions, theatrical performances, and educational events that celebrate the arts and history.

History and Architecture

Origins and Development

Smallhythe Place's roots stretch back to the Tudor period. Its timber-framed structure features typical black-and-white façade elements, characteristic of the era. Over the centuries, the house underwent various modifications, but much of its historic charm remains intact.

- 16th Century Beginnings: The original construction was likely as a farmhouse or cottage.
- 17th & 18th Century Additions: Some extensions and renovations were made, reflecting changing architectural styles.
- 19th Century Transformation: Ellen Terry purchased the house in 1899, transforming it into a theatrical retreat and personal residence.

Architectural Features

The building's architectural integrity is a testament to its Tudor heritage, with features such as:

- Exposed timber framing and whitewashed walls
- Leaded casement windows
- A steeply pitched roof
- Original fireplaces and wooden beams

The house has been carefully preserved and restored to reflect its historical significance, offering visitors an authentic experience.

The Ellen Terry Connection

Who Was Ellen Terry?

Ellen Terry (1847–1928) was one of the most celebrated actresses of the Victorian era. Known for her Shakespearean performances and her influential role in the theatrical world, Terry was a towering figure in British arts.

Her Life at Smallhythe Place

Ellen Terry purchased Smallhythe Place in 1899 after her marriage to actor and theater manager George Charles Barnard. She made it her retreat from the bustling London theatre scene, and it became a creative haven.

- Theatre and Arts: The house served as a space for rehearsals, private performances, and gatherings of artistic friends.
- Personal Life: It was her sanctuary during her later years, reflecting her love for the arts and her connection to the Kent countryside.

Legacy and Memorial

Today, Smallhythe Place functions as a museum dedicated to Ellen Terry's life and work. Visitors can explore:

- Her personal belongings
- Costumes and stage memorabilia
- Photographs and letters

The house also hosts special exhibitions and theatrical events inspired by her legacy.

Visiting Smallhythe Place

Opening Hours and Access

The site is generally open from March to October, with specific hours varying seasonally. It's advisable to check the National Trust website for current timings and any special events.

Typical Opening Schedule

- Monday to Sunday (seasonal): 11 am – 4 pm
- Closed in winter months, with occasional exceptions for special events

Accessibility

Smallhythe Place has made efforts to be accessible, with ramps and accessible facilities, though some historic buildings have limitations due to their age.

Entry Fees

As a National Trust property, entry fees are reasonable, with discounts available for members. Non-members can purchase tickets at the gate or online.

What to Expect During Your Visit

- Guided tours of the house and gardens
- Exhibitions showcasing Ellen Terry's life and theatrical memorabilia
- Theatrical performances and workshops
- A charming tearoom serving locally sourced food and refreshments
- A gift shop with unique arts and crafts, theatre memorabilia, and books

The Gardens and Grounds

Design and Features

The gardens at Smallhythe Place are a highlight, meticulously maintained to reflect the historic and natural beauty of the site. They feature:

- Formal flower beds and borders
- A quaint orchard
- A lush herbaceous border
- A secluded woodland area

Special Plantings

The gardens are planted with a variety of traditional and seasonal plants, including roses, lavender, and cottage garden favorites, creating a colorful and fragrant environment.

Outdoor Activities

Visitors can enjoy:

- Gentle walks along designated paths
- Birdwatching and nature observation
- Picnicking in designated areas
- Participating in seasonal garden events and workshops

Educational and Cultural Events

Smallhythe Place is active in promoting arts and culture through various events:

- Theatrical Performances: Summer outdoor plays, Shakespeare festivals, and staged readings.
- Workshops: Acting classes, gardening workshops, and craft sessions suitable for families and adults.
- Exhibitions: Rotating displays on theatrical history, Kent's heritage, and Ellen Terry's career.
- Special Events: Halloween ghost tours, Christmas markets, and literary festivals.

These events enrich the visitor experience, making Smallhythe Place a lively cultural hub.

Family and Group Visits

The site is family-friendly, with activities tailored to children, such as storytelling sessions and interactive exhibitions. There are also facilities for group visits, educational trips, and special guided

tours.

Tips for Visiting with Children

- Engage with the house's storytelling corners
- Participate in family-friendly workshops
- Explore the outdoor gardens and woodland walks

Group Visits

Pre-booking is recommended for groups, and tailored guided tours can be arranged to suit educational or interest-based needs.

Conservation and Preservation

The National Trust's stewardship ensures that Smallhythe Place remains preserved for future generations. Ongoing conservation work focuses on:

- Restoring and maintaining historic fabric
- Protecting the gardens and natural environment
- Enhancing accessibility and visitor facilities

Their efforts maintain the site's authenticity while adapting to contemporary needs.

Practical Tips for Visitors

- Plan Ahead: Check opening times and event schedules online.
- Wear Comfortable Shoes: The site involves walking on uneven surfaces and gardens.
- Bring a Camera: The picturesque setting and historic interiors provide fantastic photo opportunities.
- Respect the Heritage: Follow guidelines to help preserve the integrity of the historic buildings.
- Support Local Artisans: The gift shop offers unique items that support local craftspeople.

Conclusion: Why Visit Smallhythe Place?

Smallhythe Place offers a compelling blend of history, culture, and natural beauty. It stands as a testament to Victorian theatre, a preserved Tudor house, and a lively venue for arts and community events. Its connection to Ellen Terry adds a layer of artistic significance, making it a destination that appeals to history buffs, theatre enthusiasts, gardeners, and families alike.

A visit to Smallhythe Place is not just a journey into the past but also an opportunity to experience the

vibrant cultural life that continues to thrive within its historic walls and gardens. Managed by the National Trust, it guarantees a well-maintained, respectful, and enriching experience that promises to leave visitors inspired and connected to England's rich heritage.

Whether you're exploring its atmospheric rooms, wandering through its fragrant gardens, or enjoying a theatrical performance under the open sky, Smallhythe Place remains an enchanting reminder of England's artistic and architectural legacy.

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national trust smallhythe place: *Ellen Terry and Smallhythe Place (Kent)* Joy Melville, 2006-10-30 The half-timbered house, built for the harbour-master in the early 16th century when Smallhythe was a thriving shipbuilding yard, was the home of the Victorian actress Ellen Terry from 1899 to 1928 and contains her fascinating theatre collection. The cottage grounds include her rose garden, orchard, nuttery, a wonderful display of wild flowers and the Barn Theatre, which hold exhibitions and regular performances of plays, music and talks.

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quarter of a century. As an actor, he was strikingly different with his idiosyncratic pronunciation, his somewhat ungainly physique, and his brilliant psychological portrayals of virtue and villainy. As a director of spectacular, and commercially driven, entertainments, Irving anticipated Hollywood directors from D.W. Griffith to Stephen Spielberg. And as manager of the Lyceum Theatre, where audiences included the leading public figures of the day, he controlled every aspect of the performance. This collection of essays by leading theatre scholars explores each element of Irving's art: his acting, his contribution to the plays he commissioned, his flair for the stage picture, and his ear for incidental music. Like Wagner, Irving was a proponent of a holistic approach to the stage, that is, blending together acting, painting, music, and architecture to create harmonious, balanced, and artistic theatre. Irving emerges not only as the peer of such eminent contemporaries as Tennyson, Sullivan, Shaw, and Burne-Jones, but also as a powerful influence on the twentieth-century theatre.

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crossroads.

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