

GREYS COURT



The manor of Rotherfield Greys, now called Greys Court, was lived in by the Grey family at the time of the Domesday Book; they were descendants of the Norman knight Anchetil de Greye. In 1346, Sir John de Grey, one of the original Knights of the Garter, was given a licence to crenellate the manor house; he also enlarged the property within the courtyard. The estate passed to the Crown in 1485 and was granted to Robert Knollys and his wife by letters patent in 1514.

The estate remained in the family until 1642 and in 1686, Greys Court was sold to William Paul of Braywick; his daughter Catherine was given the house in 1724 on her marriage to Sir William Stapleton. The Stapleton family lived at Greys Court for over two hundred years, during which time the family extended the house and were probably responsible for laying out the Park and building the ha-has. The estate was bought by Sir Felix Brunner and his wife in 1937 and they began the restoration of the house and garden; Humphrey Waterfield helped with the plantings. Sir Felix gave Greys Court to the National Trust in 1969 while Lady Brunner continued to live in the house until her death in 2003.

The house was built during the late sixteenth century, possibly incorporating the earlier medieval manor house. The entrance faces east and overlooks the main courtyard and Great Tower. To the west is the fourteenth century octagonal Keep; built of flint and stone, it is a similar style to the Dower House tower. On the west wall is the entrance to the inner courtyard with the sixteenth century Well House and donkey wheel.

Although the gardens are now looked after by the National Trust, the spirit of the Brunners lives on. Exhibitions are held throughout the year, photographs are on display and on the centenary of the end of WWI, there was an exhibition of 'Sir Felix's experience in the war, and how it impacted him and his family'.

A short walk leads from the car park, up the drive to the main courtyard. The entrance to the garden is in the south-east corner, between the medieval buildings. The garden is divided into different sized compartments, connected by doors and enclosed by nineteenth century walls which probably replaced an earlier framework.

To the left is the garden leading to The Great Tower while straight ahead is the Cherry Garden; the walled kitchen garden is accessed from here. East of the kitchen garden is a turf maze with brick paths designed by Adrian Fisher in 1980 and dedicated by Archbishop Robert Runcie on 12th October, 1981. [There is no exit to the car park from here].

The rose garden lies to the north of the Cherry Garden. It was laid out in 1950s by Lady Brunner following the outline drawn by Kitty Lloyd Jones. The original roses came from Hilda Murrell of Shrewsbury whose murder in 1984 gave rise to a number of conspiracy theories. The Rose Garden has recently been updated while the wall to this part of the garden is also undergoing restoration work having collapsed after heavy rain saturated the lime mortar. Next to the Rose Garden is the White Garden which lies at the foot of The Great Tower.

The magnificent wisteria was planted in 1890s by the Stapletons.