

INIGO



Archbishop's Palace

CHARING, KENT
£950,000 FREEHOLD

A Scheduled Ancient Monument, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Palace at Charing is an astonishing survival. Its history can be traced back to the eighth century, although the buildings that make up the site today date from the 13th and 15th centuries. Its significance to medieval and Tudor history cannot be overstated: it is thought that visitors to the palace in the first 500 years of its existence included several Archbishops of Canterbury and two Tudor kings, before it was acquired and subsequently leased out following the 1536-1541 Dissolution of the Monasteries. Also Grade I-listed, the site is currently under the ownership of The Spitalfields Trust, who hope to find this remarkable site's next custodian.

The Archbishop's Palace presents scope for various opportunities – from private residences to event spaces – and is wonderfully close to the village's historic high street. Travel to London is made easy by nearby Charing station, which runs services into the capital in around 90 minutes.

We've written more about Charing Palace in our Almanac.

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Setting the Scene

Charing was a key stop on the medieval Pilgrims' Way between Winchester and Canterbury, roughly one day's walk from the latter. The village had a market recorded as early as 1285, and a fair in the 15th century. Today, it brims with exquisite period architecture and has a buoyant local community.

A spectacular nexus of buildings, the Palace's structures date from the 13th and 15th centuries, though it had been recorded in the 1086 Domesday Book. Encompassed within the site are an archbishop's palace, a former 'great hall', stabling, lodgings and other outbuildings – all enclosed within an exquisite medieval wall.



It is known that there was a house on the site at the time of Thomas Becket in the late 12th century, and indeed, there are salvaged Romanesque architectural details built into the façade of the farmhouse. So elements of the house could be, in part, late 12th century – certainly it has windows which were blocked when the farmhouse was constructed.

The site's earliest history can be traced back to the eighth century, when the land the palace now stands was presented to Christchurch Priory in Canterbury. As Historic England writes in the Palace's listing report, "the records of the convent and the cathedral document a series of building works carried out by subsequent archbishops [...] the Palace is known to have been the favourite residence of several [of them]."

History of Charing Palace

The Archbishop's Palace comprises a set of significant and staggeringly rare medieval buildings. Among these is an archbishop's palace, which Historic England defines as "high status domestic residences providing luxury accommodation for the bishops, and lodgings for their retinues; although some were little more than country houses, others were the setting for great works of architecture and displays of decoration [...] Only some 150 bishops' palaces have been identified and documentary sources confirm that they were widely dispersed throughout England. All positively identified examples are considered to be nationally important."

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During the first 500 or so years of its life, the Palace was visited by some extraordinary figures, including the saint and martyr Thomas Becket, Henry VII, his son Henry VIII, and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. It was acquired by the latter Henry during the 1536-1541 Dissolution of the Monasteries and was subsequently leased to several local farming families.

At this point, the Great Hall was repurposed into a Great Barn, although there is still evidence of a late 14th-century archbishop's dais at one end. From the 17th to the 20th centuries, it was in the hands of the Whelers; its conversion to a working farm during this period mercifully saved the buildings from falling into total dereliction.

The Spitalfields Trust

Established in 1976, The Spitalfields Trust was formed by a group of journalists and architectural historians brought together in a campaign to save the early Georgian houses of Spitalfields, east London. Its original business model remains the same today: to acquire, restore and sell historic properties to protect them, with any profit invested in the next restoration project. The Trust bought the Palace Farm Site in 2023 following the successful renovation of another section of the site, completed in 2014.

Having already done some remedial work to secure the longevity of the site, the Trust now hopes to find the future owner of the Palace. It holds enormous potential: it could be transformed into a private house with large grounds, in its pretty position to Charing's church, or as a set of event spaces. There is also the possibility to create gardens to rival those at Sissinghurst, artists' studios and workshops, and so on, dependent on receiving the requisite planning permissions.

The Grand Tour

Set in a few acres and with over 6,000 sq ft of space across the main house and its outbuildings, the Archbishop's Palace remains an expansive network of interconnected buildings.

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The buildings forming the palace complex enclose a quadrangle, which is entered through the original gateway (at present in separate hands). While the barn, originally the Great Hall, dates from the 14th century, the farmhouse – or the archepiscopal manor house – was begun in the 13th century, and underwent alterations between the 16th and 18th centuries, including the installation of the staircase and new windows.

Despite its age, the archbishop's palace has generous proportions and large sash windows. A solid, grand staircase winds its way to the first floor and likely dates from the late 17th century – probably 'borrowed' from another building locally and installed in what had by that stage become a farmhouse. The top floor remains almost untouched since the 1490s, with lime plaster applied to its lath and plaster walls, a mullion window, wide floorboards and a handsome Tudor fireplace. There is also an apotropaic mark in the house, whilst other more recent wall markings include children's sketches of planes, thought to have been scribbled during the second world war.

The original part of the great hall was likely built by John Stratford, Archbishop of Canterbury in the mid-14th century, who is said to have named Charing as his favourite residence. The barn and its roof were altered in the late 18th/early 19th century, but it remains an incredibly impressive space framed by a towering roof and intricate nests of exposed beams, trusses and rafters. This would make an incredible studio or workshop, or indeed an additional living space.

Other buildings include the bishop's other lodgings, a dairy and stables (home to a charming undated horse drawing).

The Great Outdoors

The house is surrounded on all sides by greenery, from what could become a more formally planted courtyard and garden to the front, to the paddocks to the rear. From many of the windows in the house are restorative and bucolic views, including over the sheep that currently reside in the paddock.

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Out and About

Charing sits at the foot of the North Downs and, as such, is within close proximity to vast swathes of largely unchanged landscape. There are plenty of walking and cycling routes nearby, along with Hothfield Heathlands Nature Reserve and Dering Woods.

There are plenty more delightful towns and villages surrounding Charing. Little Chart is nearby and is home to the Swan Inn, while Pluckley is a short drive away and is known for the Black Horse pub and its local farm shop. Boys Hall is a celebrated Jacobean hotel and restaurant in Ashford, while Smarden is home to the West End House art gallery.

Famed for its English wines, Kent has a multitude of vineyards including Westwell Wines, Chapel Down and Woodchurch.

Charing station runs direct services to London Victoria in as little as an hour and a half. A quick service runs in around 60 minutes, with a change at Ashford International.

Council Tax Band: H (NB: the council tax is in the process of being negotiated and may be reduced)

INIGO



About

Inigo is an estate agency that specialises in selling marvellous historic homes, believing that a beautiful home is a pleasure that never ages. We connect discerning individuals with extraordinary spaces, no matter the price or provenance. Covering urban and rural locations across Britain, our team combines proven experience selling distinctive homes with design and architectural expertise.