



ENGLISH HERITAGE

## NEWS RELEASE

# THROUGH, AROUND AND BELOW – 2009 GUIDED TOURS OF WITLEY COURT

Through, around and below – every aspect of Witley Court will be examined in a series of guided tours around Worcestershire’s finest Victorian ruin and its extensive gardens.

On Friday 22 May and Friday 5 June, it is Witley Court’s gardens and landscaping that will come under the spotlight, as its gardener leads a green-fingered tour through the site’s extensive rhododendron collection and the informal woodland walks of the North Park, and into the formal gardens overlooked by the ruin. Currently underway is work to restore the East Parterre, which should be returned to the formal glory of the original Nesfield designs. Witley Court’s gardener will show visitors many of the different flower, tree and shrub species around the grounds, as well as answering questions from participants on how the gardening team deals with issues from weeds to garden pests.

“We’ve had a real mix of weather so far this year, which has brought the gardens on fantastically – short spells of sunny weather followed by a few rainy days, which is ideal for encouraging the spring growth,” says Sales and Marketing Manager, Lucy Dhiman. “This year, more than ever, visitors are promised a riot of colour as they wander through the gardens.”

The garden tours take place at 11.00am and 2.00pm on 22 May and 5 June, with each tour lasting approximately 90 minutes. Pre-booking advised.

Every Tuesday until the end of September, Witley tour guides will be taking visitors around the usual cordons on the site, and into areas not normally seen by the public, in a series of hard hat tours around the stable block. “Much of the public area of Witley Court shows them how the wealthy owners would have lived – you can see the public areas of the house and the remains of the Orangery – but it gives the visitor no idea of what life would have been like for the domestic staff who worked in and around the house,” explains Lucy. “The Stable Yard Tours incorporate the less glamorous side of the house, where the horses would have been kept and also where the kitchens, coal house and laundry were located.”

The Stable Yard Tours leave at 11.00am every Tuesday May – September and lasts approximately 90 minutes. Visitors are advised to wear sturdy footwear, and are required to wear a hard hat (provided by English Heritage). Pre-booking is strongly advised.

The final tour takes visitors below ground, and into the dark cellars below Witley Court in a special Behind the Scenes Tour, taking place at 11.00am and 2.00pm on the first and third Saturday of every month until September (6 & 20 Jun, 4 & 18 Jul, 1 & 15 Aug, 5 & 19 Sep) – if the resident bat population obliges! As Lucy explains, the site has to be examined ahead of each visit to determine the best route for visitors to take so that they do not disturb the protected bats who roost in the cellars: “We’ve got some wonderful colonies of bats in the cellars which, by law, we must not disturb, so we can allow visitors to take a tour of the cellars only when the bats are inactive – seeing the wine storage spaces and some of the food storage and preparation areas under the house. This visit really does give a unique and fascinating insight into the social history ‘below stairs’.”

Places on all of the tours are strictly limited, so should be booked in advance by calling 01299 896636. Tickets are £11.00 for adults, £8.00 for concessions or £6.00 for children, or £28.00 for a family ticket (two adults and up to three children). English Heritage members receive discounted admission of £5.50/£4.00 / £3.00 and £14.00 respectively.

For more information or to book a place, please call Witley Court on 01299 896636 .

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**Tour dates:**

Garden Tours	22 May, Fri 5 June
Stableyard tours	Every Tue May - Sep
Behind the scenes tours	Sat: 6 & 20 Jun, 4 & 18 Jul, 1 & 15 Aug, 5 & 19 Sep

For further media information, please contact:

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