

STANDEN

DINING ROOM

Early electric lighting was often associated with dining, as people held dinner parties specifically to show off their new electric lights. However, electricity wasn't always very reliable and there were embarrassing stories of electric lights failing in the middle of the meal. It was important to have a back-up, like candles, in case you were suddenly plunged into darkness. The Dining Room is also another example of the Beales' decision not to have central pendant fittings in the downstairs rooms; instead they installed a series of smaller lights around the room, which were intended to help spread the light more evenly.



When you get to the kitchen corridor, look out for the electrical call board.



This call board was connected to buttons in rooms around the house, which the Beales could use to summon servants. Servants were often nervous about electricity, as accidents were not uncommon. Few

people understood what electricity was or how it worked. As it was the servants who managed the electrical systems they were often the most at risk. Female servants were especially concerned because they were responsible for cleaning the fittings and were alarmed by exaggerated rumours of maids being killed by electricity. However, there is no record of any electrical accident occurring at Standen.

Next, make your way into the Kitchen.

KITCHEN

The light fittings in here are plain and practical. Servants weren't thought to need fancy fittings, but even so it was quite unusual in this period for servants' rooms to have electricity at all. In some houses where the servants' quarters had electric lights, the master of the house could switch them off remotely from his rooms when he went to bed.



Finally, make your way to the Barn Café.

BARN CAFÉ

The generating equipment was probably housed here, and would have been quite noisy. Before the house was connected to the local, centralised supply of the East Grinstead Urban District Council in 1936, Standen, like many houses at this time, needed to supply its own electricity. The National Grid came online in 1938.

HOW IT WORKED

It is not known for certain how Standen's electricity was generated. It is likely that an oil engine drove a dynamo to provide low voltage direct current – between 100-120v. A series of lead-acid accumulator cells, such as the one pictured, would have acted as 2 volt batteries to supply more electricity when demand was higher. This was a common set-up at the time.



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Standen was one of the first houses in the country designed with electricity from the start. This trail picks out some of the most interesting electrical artefacts from around the house, and finishes in the Barn Café, where the original electrical generating equipment was probably located.

ELECTRICAL HERITAGE HOUSE TRAIL

Produced in collaboration with the University of Leeds as part of the 'Electrifying the Country House' project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.



Arts & Humanities
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Start in the Hall.

HALL

The first thing you'll probably notice is that the rooms feel dimly lit by today's standards. This is because the bulbs currently used in the house are the same brightness as those that the Beales would have originally used in the 1890s. However, this was still much brighter than the oil lamps, candles or gas lighting the Victorians were used to. Indeed, the fact that electric light wasn't soft or flickering like these previous lighting methods caused some women to worry about the harsh, glaring quality of the new light. Many women were concerned that electric light was bad for their complexion, or was unflattering. The glass used in these shades here in the Hall was called opalescent or vaseline glass and it was intended to soften the light, protecting the eye from direct exposure to the bulb filament. Most of the light fittings you can see today in the house are original. If you would like to know more about some of the Benson lights in the house, there is a Benson trail available which contains more specific information about these fittings.

Now make your way into the Billiard Room.

BILLIARD ROOM

In this room you can see an example of one of the benefits of electric lighting over its predecessors: it was now possible to direct light much more easily than it was before, for example over a billiard table for an evening game, such as the Beale children often enjoyed.



At this time electric lighting was an expensive luxury, however the years over which Standen was built, 1892-94, saw a dramatic reduction in the price of lightbulbs. Before September 1893 the Ediswan Company had a monopoly on their production, operating under a master patent combining the interests of the American Thomas Edison and the Newcastle-based inventor Joseph Swan. In September 1893 this patent expired, allowing other manufacturers to sell lightbulbs, and as a result prices fell.

After seeing the Conservatory, make your way to the Drawing Room.

DRAWING ROOM

Mrs Beale worked with their architect, Philip Webb, to ensure that the light fittings he was designing worked with the overall aesthetic of the house. In one letter from July 1894 Webb asked for her opinion on a sketch of what would later become the embossed copper sconces of the wall lights in the Drawing Room. These were designed specifically to complement the surround of the fireplace. They also served to hide where the wires came out of the walls.



Webb-designed wall light in the Drawing Room.

The use of the sunflower motif on these fittings was in keeping with the Arts and Crafts style of the house, which used images and materials from nature. In the Victorian period the household was the woman's sphere of influence and decisions about electrification therefore relied largely on female approval.

Next, make your way upstairs to the bedrooms.

BEDROOMS

The central pendant light fittings in the bedrooms have pulley systems to raise and lower them, but they are in an unusual position. Normally these were placed over dressing tables or desks so that they could be pulled down when more light was needed. They may have been placed in the middle of the room to provide more illumination for reading on a daybed, such as the one in the Larkspur Bedroom, placed at the foot of the bed.

In the North Bedroom, behind the bed you can see two cords hanging down with electric buttons at the end. These were called pressels, and they were part of the electrical call bell system. Family members could use these to summon an 'up' or a 'down' servant, for example to assist with getting dressed or to prepare a meal. You can see where these used to hang in other bedrooms, and you'll also see call buttons on the walls in several other rooms around the house.



Now make your way back downstairs to the Dining Room.