



Medway Ramble

West Peckham, Twyford Bridge, Hadlow

Distance: 22 km=13½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Kent

Date written: 17-sep-2012

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Last update: 31-mar-2022

Refreshments: West Peckham, Twyford Bridge, Golden Green, Hadlow

Map: Explorer 136 (The Weald) and 148 (Maidstone)

but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

Problems, changes? *We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org*

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Villages, woodland, variety, surprises, churches, meadows, river

In Brief

If there's one word to describe this amazing circular walk it's: **variety!** with something new round each corner. The walk starts quietly with gentle meadows, a lost church, woods, streams and gardens. It follows long-forgotten paths and suddenly bursts into a tumult of life when you reach the Bridge at Yalding. From there you have a more settled river walk before you leave it for more meadows, a town and castle, and return to the start for a drink at the iconic *Swan on the Green* with its home-brewed beers.

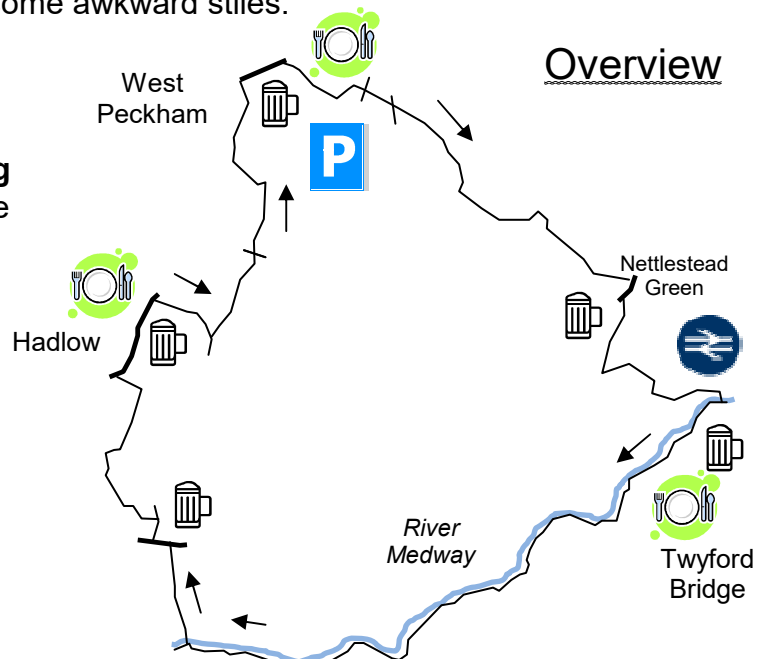


There are some patches of nettles on this walk so shorts are not advisable. Because of the length, you really need to wear boots. This walk is not suitable for a large dog because of some awkward stiles.

The walk begins in **West Peckham**, Kent, postcode **ME18 5JW**, www.w3w.co/nozzle.chops.swooning.



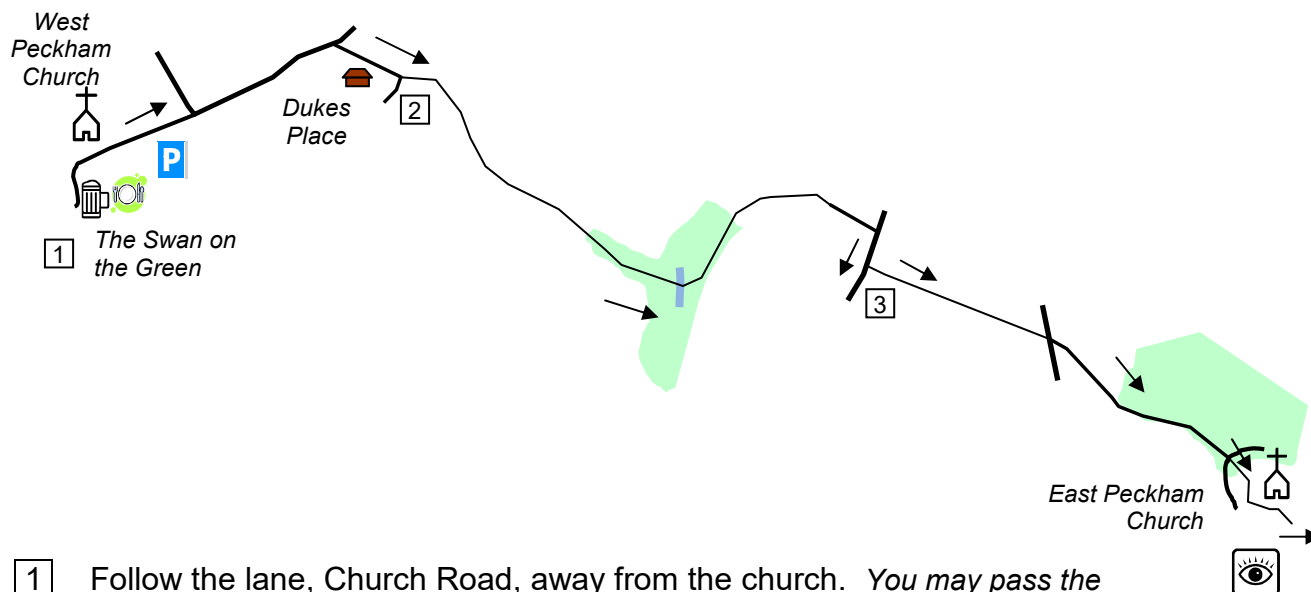
You can also come by rail at **Yalding Station**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: West Peckham to East Peckham Church 2½ km=1½ miles

West Peckham was also called “Little Peckham”, being the much prettier kid brother to East Peckham. The medieval manuscript known as the Textus Roffensis in Rochester Cathedral calls it “Pecham”. “Peck” is simply “peak”, i.e. a homestead at the top of a hill. Before the Conquest, the parish belonged to Leofwine, brother of King Harold, also killed in 1066. It then passed to Odo, bishop of Bayeux, half-brother of William the Conqueror (well, all his brothers were half, of course). Obviously a prize gift for regal brothers. The Norman-Saxon church of St Dunstan is worth a visit.



- 1 Follow the lane, Church Road, away from the church. You may pass the Linton's seafood van, with the sign “turbot charged” (geddit?) and a number plate that could be read as “(h)ell, I (h)ate cod”. Go between some white “gates” that proclaim West Peckham and continue ahead on a major road, Mereworth Road. Note that you are on two long-distance footpaths: the Greensand Way (GW) running from Haslemere to near the Saxon Shore and the Wealdway running from Gravesend to the south coast. After more than 200m on this road, immediately after the entrance to Dukes Place with its clipped hedge, turn **right** on a concrete drive marked as a byway. The drive passes close to this grand timbered house where the occasional glimpse of it over the hedge afford a wonderful impression.

Dukes Place is a Grade I mansion from the early 1400s, built as a community of Knight's Hospitallers, founded by John Culpepper of that enduring Kent family (see the “Offham” walk in this series). But its history was not always so exalted. During the 1700s the house was converted into seven labourer's cottages and after the last war it was semi-derelict. The building is L-shaped with two floors, timber-framed with plaster infilling and the hipped roof is plain tiled.

- 2 Where the drive bends right, leave it by keeping straight ahead on a grassy path, keeping right where the path takes its sunken course. This attractive path runs between fields within a band of trees, then down into denser woodland and crosses a stream by a ford via some natural stepping stones. Your path bends left through more woodland and comes up to a cluster of houses which includes *Beadles Forge* with its collection of old wringers and vices. You reach the main A26 road by the three oasts of Forge Farm. Turn **right** and, in just 30m, cross the road carefully and turn **left** on a tarmac track.

- 3 The track quickly degrades to dirt and takes you by an unneeded stile to another road, the A228, Seven Mile Lane. Cross this road carefully and take a tarmac lane directly opposite. Ignore a footpath on the left and finally, at a road junction, go straight ahead up steps and over a stile into the churchyard of St Michael, East Peckham. You will be immediately struck by the extensive views to the south, best viewed from a bench seat just outside the lychgate. Now walk a little further along on the south side to find the side entrance to the church itself.

The austere unused empty space and isolation of East Peckham church are an empty echo of times past when it was a centre of life for a large village and rural community whose history is written in the parish records over every century. The earliest parts are from the mid-1100s. Massive changes occurred in 1547 following the Act of Uniformity when mass had to be said in English (as opposed to Latin) and so many decorations and religious images had to be taken down and buried and wall paintings were whitewashed. Just six years later the orders were reversed under Mary Tudor before being reinstated with a vengeance under the Puritans. The churchyard which records so many lives and deaths is often described as a "library" (from the many inscriptions) and a "gallery" (from the headstones). Bodies were wrapped in linen until 1666 when Charles II decreed woollen shrouds to stimulate the wool trade. There are six bells and the church's bellringers were renowned: in 1932 they rang all six bells 5040 times in a different order without stopping. For a wealth of information, the book "For All the Saints" by Margaret Lawrence is available (price £15, ring:01622 871945). The church is normally open from 10 to 4.

Leg 2: East Peckham Church to Nettlestead Green 3 km=2 miles

- 1 Coming from the side entrance to the church, bear **left** a little, take a narrow path through bushes and then go diagonally across a field. Turn **right** along the edge of the field, from where it is worth turning round for a final look at the church. Follow the edge to the left-hand corner where you will find a stile. After the stile, go through a modern kissing-gate by a wooden fence [Mar 2022: fallen: be careful!]. Your path zigzags left-right by a sheep pasture and suddenly comes out into sloping lawn (now gone-to-seed), which may surprise you with some inventive sculpture. The grass belongs to *Dower House*, a 1690-vintage Grade II house, and the landscaping has a chestnut avenue, birches and elegant conifers. Keep straight ahead to another modern kissing-gate and a lane. Turn **right** on the lane, passing on your left *Roydon Hall*, another fine Grade II house, now fully restored.

- 2 Before you reach the entrance to *Dower House*, turn **left** on a signposted footpath, taking you through a line of horsechestnuts. Keep ahead, joining a gravel drive coming from the right, beside a high wire fence enclosing a deer park. Keep following the line of the fence, at one point crossing an access drive via two high metal gates. Keep straight ahead finally on a grassy path, passing an unneeded stile, leading to a wide path through Moat Wood. The path runs by a fence through some fine mixed woods. After some distance, turn **right** with the fence at a corner, following the GW sign. After more woodland, you pass a redundant stile and enter a large field.



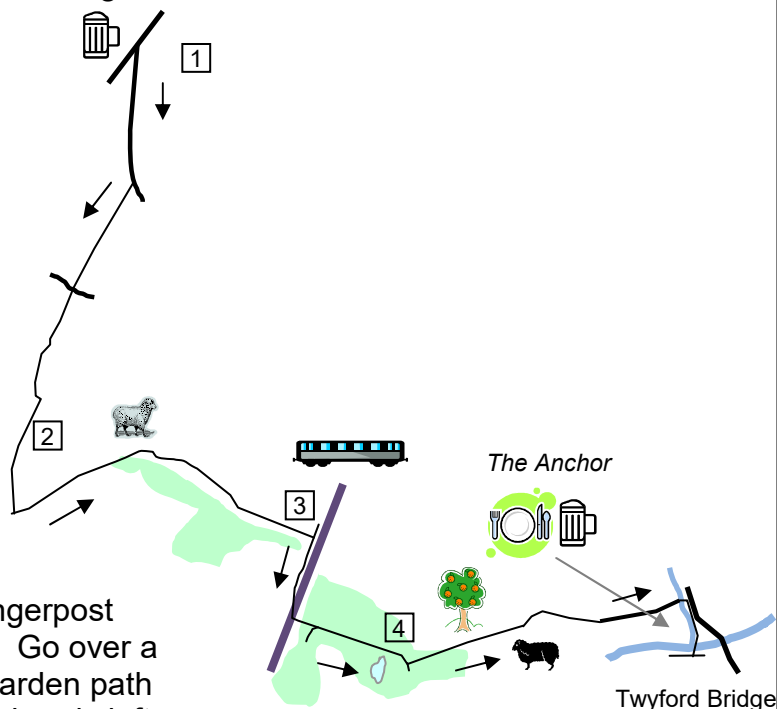
- 3 Go straight across the centre of the field, a fraction to the left, through a neck of woodland and along the left-hand side of the next field. You can now see Nettlestead Green ahead and, beyond it, the large village of Yalding with its distinctive church and group of oasts, which is definitely worth a separate visit. At the next corner turn **left** over a stile and then immediately **right**. You pass many geese and an apiary. A narrow path, via a hoppable stile, leads you down beside a house and out to a road in Nettlestead Green.



Turn **right** on the road, quickly reaching the *Hop Pole* pub. *This is a no-swank friendly 17th-century pub that serves the local community and serves an excellent range of ales, starters and main courses.*

Leg 3: Nettlestead Green to Twyford Bridge 2 km=1½ miles

- 1 Take the lane opposite the *Hop Pole*, signposted *Yalding, Horsmonden*. In 200m, at a bend, go **right** between barriers onto a footpath passing a group of immaculate once-mobile houses. On reaching a lane, cross straight over through the gates of Cronks Farm (not worrying about the *Private* sign – this is a right of way!). Follow the home-made signs, passing some oasts to reach a converted barn. *Note the clock and bell on the front of the barn*. Just after the barn turn **right**, as directed by a home-made sign. Follow this narrow path between hedges, and quickly find a fingerpost almost hidden in a tall cypress hedge. Go over a stile and straight ahead on a narrow garden path with a pond on your left. The footpath bends left and right and takes you through a small metal gate.



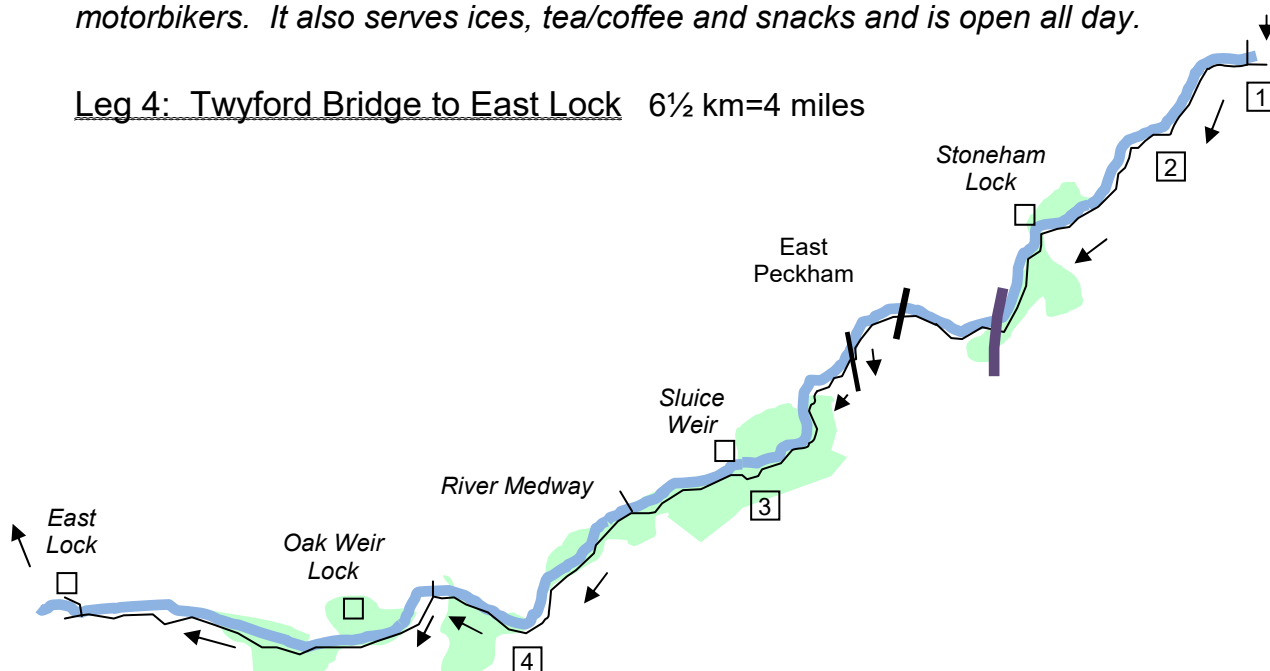
- 2 You are on a narrow path with low-hanging hawthorn trees, often shared with sheep. (Oct 2020-22: a surreal warning appeared in the adjacent property: naked life-size mannequins nailed by their strange heads to the pine trees – beware!) The footpath is bit disused, and you need to persist. When you reach a T-junction of paths, ignore a small metal gate on your right and turn sharp **left** in the sheep field. You pass through the first fence via a new stile. Some of the following fields are scattered with building waste, so always keep close to the **right**-hand side to avoid rubble and occasional incipient construction work, steering your way along an overgrown path past a possible new building site (note for the future).
- 3 Continue straight ahead at all times until, after around 200m, you finally reach the railway at a T-junction. Turn **right** alongside the railway, going over a wide wooden bridge. Your path goes left and right, and **left** over a stile. Cross the railway line carefully and go over another robust stile into woodland. A path joins you from the right. *That path is part of a circular walk which you can certainly try. You are in a nature reserve that was maintained by Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) when they operated the adjoining works. The reserve and its pond have fallen into neglect since those days but it still retains a faded charm.* This path takes you

through pleasant mixed cultivated woodland and round the left of a pond with an observation platform and tables.

- 4 Avoid a path on the left by a table and keep going round the pond until you see some steps and a stile on the left. After negotiating them, you find yourself in an orchard which also serves as a forage for a flock of black Hebridean lambs. *The orchard was also once owned and run by ICI.* Keep ahead to go over a stile near a house. Avoid a metal gate and tarmac drive and veer **left** on a narrow path the other side of a fence. Shortly go over a stile to join the drive. Keep **left** on a tarmac lane which quickly takes you to the Hampstead Road canal of the River Medway just by the Twyford Bridge, probably thronged by eager families, a sudden change from the solitude of the woods and fields. The *Boathouse* pub/restaurant is immediately on your right. *The “Boathouse” is in a perfect spot by a curve of the Medway and ideal for drinking with a small menu for al fresco eating and while you watch families, boats and wildlife, including a bevy of friendly motorbikers. It also serves ices, tea/coffee and snacks and is open all day.*



Leg 4: Twyford Bridge to East Lock 6½ km=4 miles



- 1 Cross the canal, either by the lift bridge or by the raised footbridge [Oct: 2020-2022 closed, whether temporary is not known] by the pub, and turn **right** on the tarmac pathway that takes you across the sluices over the River Medway. *On your left is the medieval Twyford Bridge, with its four pointed arches, dating at least from 1325.* Turn **right** beside the Medway. *On your left is Teapot Island, both a café and a museum boasting 6500 teapots on show. It serves ices and of course teas.* The towpath takes you over a bridge across an inlet. Across the river is a beautiful group of oast houses. Now you are in open country and the route is easy. You will be following the Medway path as far as East Lock, so precise directions are not needed, except to point out the many things you see along the way.
- 2 The river banks soon become heavily wooded and will remain so for most of the way. This is the most peaceful part of the Medway, generally known as Mouse Bay. After one stout bridge and more woodland you pass an old bridge and a lock, Stoneham Lock. There are willows along the bank, with tall ivy-clad ash trees. After a railway bridge, you are soon out of the wood. You pass over a small bridge with a large lake on your left (the remains of old sand excavations). The path runs under the A228 road bridge, past some industrial buildings, and reaches a road on the outskirts of East





Peckham. Cross straight over the road to a path opposite by a metal fence. *A new paddleboard centre is now open with a seasonal(?) café.* After this brief interlude, you enjoy once again the peaceful tranquillity of the river and the wilds of nature and woodland.

3

The next interesting feature is the Sluice Weir (2022: now under restoration). You can access it via a bridge on the right but you will need to retrace your steps to continue the walk. Like most of the weirs on this river, it has a heavy tidal barrier as well as a sluice and lock. *On a sunny weekend you will see kayakers navigating the narrow sluice on the south side. This requires some skill and results in an exhilarating descent into the turbid waters below the weir, deft handling of the paddle being needed to avoid crashing into the overhanging foliage.* In a short distance, leave the main path by going **right** over a long wooden bridge close to that narrow sluice. The river is now more open, with trees on your side only. There is an open meadow on your left before the path returns to the river bank through more trees. You go over a long wooden bridge across a side stream of the river, pass (without crossing it) a tubular metal bridge, offering a photo opportunity, and cross another long wooden bridge over the side stream. You are back in the meadow on a narrow winding path beside the river. The next large expanse of grass plays host annually to a War and Peace show and other attractions. Beyond it, is the Hop Farm Country Park with a vast collection of oast houses.

4

At a 4-way fingerpost, veer **right**, staying close to the river. You come out into the open again and reach a junction with a bridge on your right. Do *not* take the narrow path straight ahead but turn **left** on a wide path. You now regain the river side and a narrow path on the right leads you back to the tow path and shortly another lock, Oak Weir which is worth a look with its sluice and tidal barrier (2022: under restoration and inaccessible). Continue ahead on a narrow pleasant and easy section, through a modern kissing-gate and along an open meadow. Next are another modern kissing-gate, a steel bridge and a 4-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead through another kissing-gate. *You have joined the Wealdway, a long-distance path running from the Thames to the Sussex coast.* Finally you reach East Lock. Go **right** over the river, thus leaving the Wealdway. Go over the sluice and another bridge.

Leg 5: East Lock to Hadlow 3½ km=2 miles

1

See mini-map overleaf. Leave the lock, zigzagging left-right on a dirt track, passing an old pill box on your right. Where the track curves left, keep straight ahead on a path across a field. Your path goes through a gap in the hedge and to the right of a line of poplars, along the left-hand side of a field. Follow the path through a kissing-gate, along a residential drive and out to the road in the village of Golden Green. Cross the road and turn **left** to reach the *Bell Inn*. *The “Bell Inn” (previously Greene King) is a friendly local that serves the community, especially well regarded for its food. It has tables in front and a pleasant garden in the back. The “Bell Inn” is open all day, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.*

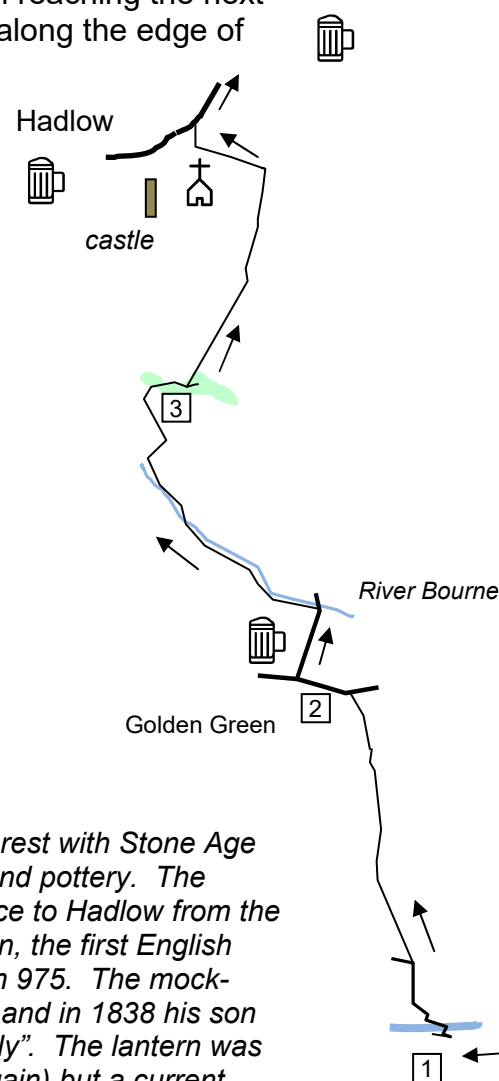


2

Turn **right** just before the pub on Victoria Road. Just before a bridge over a stream, turn **left** at a fingerpost and a yellow arrow on a narrow path following the stream on your right. *The stream is in fact the River Bourne which flows through Ightham, Basted and Hadlow before emptying into the Medway. You are on part of the 10-mile Bourne Valley walk.* Ahead of you

soon is the historic Goldhill Mill and, just before the mill house, the path goes **right** over the stream and along the edge of a field. *The Hadlow Castle folly, with its lantern hopefully now complete, is now in sight.* At the end of the first large field, at a T-junction, turn **right**. On reaching the next field, turn **left** along the edge. At the corner, turn **right** along the edge of the field.

- 3 You reach the start of a wire fence and a post with yellow arrows. Turn **left** here into trees on a wide woodland path. You soon come to a new metal kissing-gate on your left. Turn **left** through it, to find that the folly is once again in sight. Keep straight ahead along the right-hand side of the field and then go through another new metal kissing-gate. As you join a tarmac path, veer **left** on it. Avoid a wooden swing-gate on the left (part of a conservation walk) and continue to meet a residential road. Keep **left** on the road and, at a T-junction, keep straight ahead on a tarmac path which runs past Hadlow Church. Turn **right** with the path to reach the High Street in the large village of Hadlow. A Portuguese restaurant is on the left and further on, past the entrance of the Castle, is the *Prince of Wales*. Your route, however, continues **right** along the main street, now called Maidstone Road.



*Hadlow was one of the first settlements in the Wealden forest with Stone Age implements evident within the parish, plus Roman coins and pottery. The *Textus Roffensis* (mentioned above) has the first reference to Hadlow from the year 975. Hadlow may be the birthplace of William Caxton, the first English printer. The parish church of St Mary's dates at least from 975. The mock-Gothic Hadlow Castle was built by Walter May from 1790 and in 1838 his son Walter Barton May added the tower, known as "May's Folly". The lantern was removed after the hurricane of 1987 (health and safety again) but a current restoration project has rebuilt the lantern. The restored tower offers ultra stylish accommodation and possibly Bed and Breakfast for visitors.*

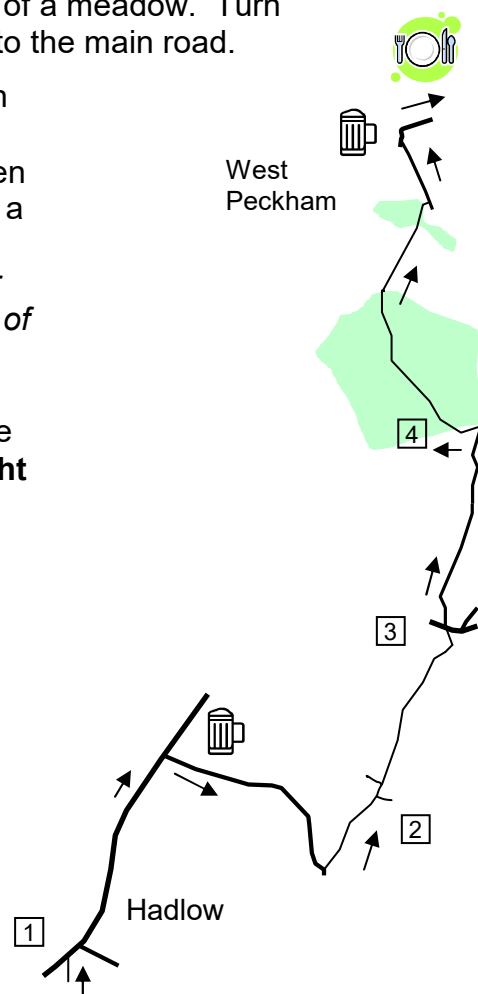
Leg 6: Hadlow to West Peckham 4½ km=2½ miles

- 1 **See mini-map overleaf.** Continue **north** along the Maidstone Road out of Hadlow. You pass the *Two Brewers* pub on your right. After 700m, you pass a new development and bus stop named after the defunct *Harrow* pub. Immediately after that, turn **right** on narrow Cemetery Lane. After ½ km, the lane bears right past the entrance to Little Gobland Farm. Just before the lane bends right again, turn **left** at a fingerpost onto a footpath over a 3-plank bridge and through a small metal gate and left alongside a field.
- 2 The path passes the farm on your left and joins a farm track coming from the right. Where the track bends left, leave it to go straight ahead across the field. Your path takes you over two stiles [Nov 2020: the first of which is broken], across a rough pasture, over a stile and along the left-hand side of a pasture, followed by another stile and pasture. The next stile leads into a garden with greenhouses belonging to *Bluebell Barn* on your left. Veer

right as indicated by a yellow arrow, along the edge of a meadow. Turn **right** on the drive and **left** on a tarmac lane leading to the main road.

3 Cross straight over the road and through the wooden gate of *Goose Green Farmhouse*. (The catch is on the right and a bit tricky.) Go through another wooden gate, zigzag left-right round the barn and go through a small metal gate onto a path between fields, soon joining a farm track. *This open space is looked after by the RSPB and you will often here the familiar call of the lapwing here.* After nearly 600m between the fields, as you reach a gap in the trees on your left, turn **left** as indicated by a yellow arrow and follow the edge of the woods on your right. After 80m, turn **right** into Hazel Wood.

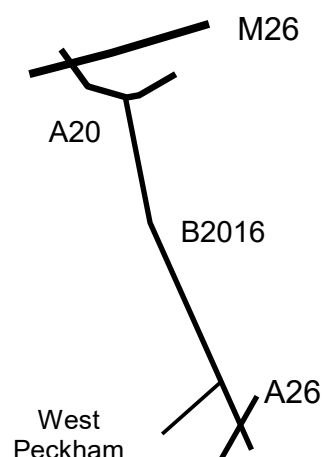
4 This stony woodland path takes you past a cleared area on the left and evidence of an old coppice on your right. After a heavenly walk, you emerge onto a path running between fields, then between posts on a narrow path with woodland on your left. Your path joins a farm track. Suddenly, by a large gate you are at the green in West Peckham. The oasts of Court Lodge Farm are visible on your left. Ahead of you is the church of St Dunstan. Turn **right** beside the church to the point where the walk began.



For final refreshments, the “Swan on the Green” is one of the most celebrated pubs in the region. It was originally built in 1526. The Swan’s own micro-brewery is in the building and produces, at various times, **ten** different brews, including *Whooper Swan* and *Bewick Swan*. Banquet-style dishes are served in the restaurant area (but not late on Sunday). Note that the Swan is **closed** mid afternoon until 5.30.

Getting there

By car: West Peckham is signposted west off the B2016 Seven Mile Lane. Take the M26 and turn off at **exit 2a**, signposted *Wrotham*. Pick up the B2016 here, following signs to *Wrotham Heath*, *Sevenoaks* and then *Paddock Wood*. The B2016 is the **right** turning off the A20 after the *Vineyard Restaurant*. Follow the Seven Mile Lane for about 3 miles=5 km where West Peckham is clearly signposted **right** at a crossroads. At a sign proclaiming **West Peckham**, where the main road bends right just before the “white gates”, if you keep **straight on** past the white gates, there is a layby immediately on your left.



By bus/train: **Yalding station** is close to the walk; turn **right** over the level crossing and, in just 70m, between a redbrick house and a bungalow, turn **left** on a narrow signed footpath to join the walk in Leg 3 section **3**. Buses 6 and 266 go to Nettlestead Green. Check the timetables.

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