



Cowden and Dryhill: Three Manors and a View

Distance: 7¼ km=4½ miles

easy walking

Region: Kent

Date written: 28-may-2011

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Refreshments: Cowden

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Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks) *the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Village, woodland, country houses, views

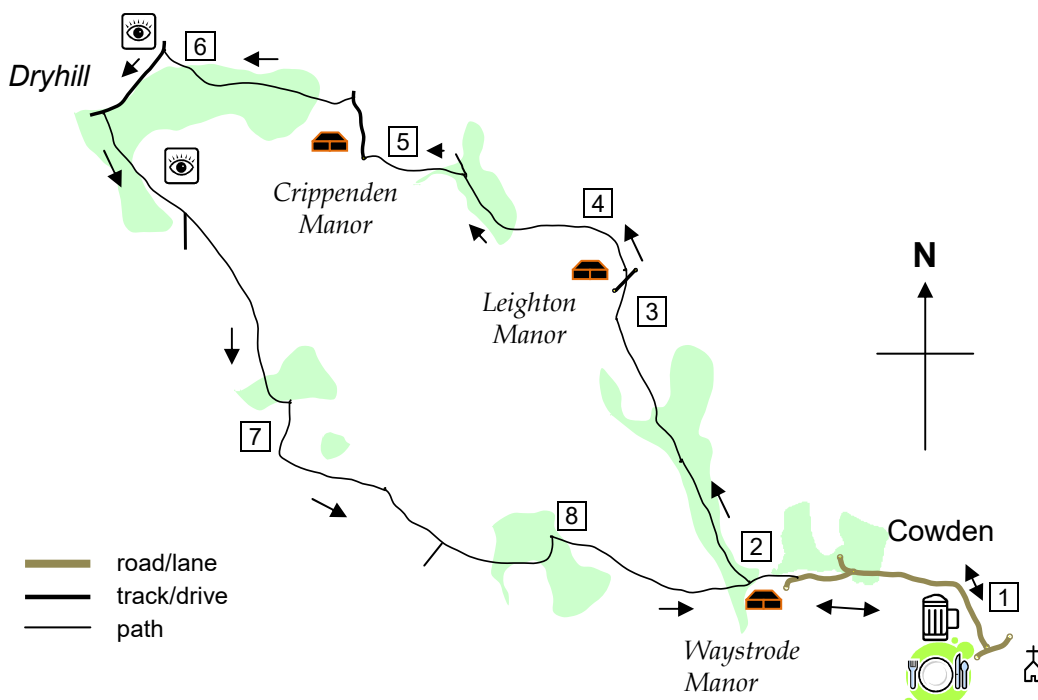
In Brief

This is a gentle, easy walk starting in the peaceful village of Cowden, West Kent, near the Sussex border and visiting three manor houses of great character, before taking in a high viewpoint and returning across grassy meadows. In 2018 there is excellent new signage and no compulsory stiles.



There are one or two patches of easily avoidable nettles. Any stout shoes are fine, except in the wetter months, when mudproof boots are preferable. Your dog can come too.

The walk begins in the centre of **Cowden** (postcode **TN8 7JE** grid ref TQ 465 404). Park considerately in the village. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

If you feel you are in a rare out-of-the way lost gem of a village, this is in a sense what Cowden always was. Even in the more rural middle ages, Cowden was little known because of its situation in 'a deep soil of clay, very wet and miry'. In these modern times it is away from the main roads and is probably best known from its remote railway station and the fatal crash of 1994. The 13th-century church of St Mary Magdalene (much altered in Victorian times) has a slender wooden shingle spire, damaged during World War II and later replaced. If it seems to you that the spire is slightly out of perpendicular, this is not a result of that extra pint in 'The Fountain', but really is so. Inside is a board listing rules for bellringers, including practice times and a ban on alcoholic drink. (In many churches, bellringers were a species that followed their own lore and even had to be pulled out of the pub to attend the services after their function was complete.)



- 1 Coming from the church down the main street, turn **right** into North Street, which soon becomes Spode Lane. After ½ km, where the lane bends right, keep straight ahead on the drive to Waystrode Manor, passing Waystrode Manor on your left.

Waystrode Manor's date of origin is a little vague, although a Tudor historian reports that the first owner was a knight called "Wheystrode" who was given the manor by King John in 1208 "for services rendered". In 1460 it passed to the Style (or Still) family who held it for 300 years (and still lived in Cowden till recently). The original farmhouse, built in the 1400s, was extended in the next two centuries to produce the Tudor property you see today. The estate includes a cottage, a Grade-II-listed, timber-framed barn and a "Sussex style" squared roof oast house (Kent oasts are usually round).

- 2 Where the drive bends left, go through the right hand of two wooden gates ahead, through trees, down steps and onto a woodland path. In 50m, at a junction with a wooden post and yellow arrows, take the **right** fork. Continue along the woodland path. After 400m or so, you go across a small stream via a new bridge with handrail. In another 150m your path winds uphill to take you through a small metal gate, out of the wood, into a sheep pasture. Cross the pasture on a faint path, veering slightly away from the boundary fence on your left, with great views developing. As you reach the brow of the meadow, you will see before you Leighton Manor with its oast and little clock turret.

Leighton Manor is a late medieval Grade-II listed hall house, with an Oast House, landscaped gardens and lakes. The west extension is more modern, in "Georgian" style. In medieval times, the Manor was a meeting place for "court leets", where disputes between the lord of the manor and his freemen and bondsmen were worked out. The house came into the news in 2014 when a garage mechanic Neil Trotter (no relation to Del Boy) won over £100 million on the lottery and purchased the estate. He was panned in the local press for installing an "unsightly" barbed wire fence.

- 3 Continue towards the house, where the pathway sweeps **right** beside the boundary fence on your left. Go **left** through a small metal gate and cross straight over the driveway, with a stone bridge on your left. Go across a patch of grass to cross the stream by a long bridge with handrails. Climb a slope on the other side and go through a small metal gate into a small meadow. Go straight across the meadow, with the boundary fence on your left. At the other side, go through a small metal gate adjacent to a large

(possibly open) metal gate and go straight across the centre of the next field.

- 4 At the other side, go through a small metal gate adjacent to a large metal gate into a downward-sloping pasture. Go down the grass, heading slightly to your left, passing to the left of a nearby oak tree, as indicated by an arrow on a wooden post under the tree. At the bottom of a fairly steep slope, go through a small metal gate straight ahead into woods. In 20m veer **right** at a waymarker and continue through the woods for about 150m to meet a new wide surfaced track. Cross straight over the track and immediately turn **left** next to a marker post on a narrow path through trees. Cross a bridge with handrails over a small stream and go over a (just squeezable) stile into a horse pasture. Keep to the boundary fence on your left at first, heading for the redbrick manor house. As you come over the crest of the field, veer **right** towards the adjoining farm buildings, with Crippenden Manor and its haha to your left.

Crippenden Manor is a grade-II-listed property, built around 1607 by Richard Tichborne, a relation to the many other Tichbornes who appear on these pages. He was a successful iron founder, an industry on which much of the prosperity of Cowden depended.

- 5 As you approach the farm buildings, go through a large metal gate and keep **left** on a concrete driveway between outbuildings. You have another view now of Crippenden Manor on your left, with its pond straight ahead. Turn **right** on the first driveway and go through the new electronic gates (there is a **green** gate release button on a post in front of the gates), shortly passing the stables of a large equestrian centre on your right. In 150m, just before a right hand bend, look for a wooden markerpost. Go **left** here, leaving the driveway, through double wooden gates up an unmade track. Immediately keep **right** beside the hedge, ignoring a small overgrown wooden gate, and follow the dusty track as it sweeps **right** into woodland. Stay on this woodland path and in 300m ignore a metal gate on your left which only leads into a field. You shortly have views on your left but you still have nearly 200m to go. Finally, at the top, with a large pond visible on your right, your path comes out of the woods to reach a T-junction at Dry Hill with great view of the Kent-Surrey counties before you.



Dry Hill is an Iron Age Hill Fort on a 24 acre site dating back to about the 1st Century BC, 170m=550 ft above sea level. For more details, see the sister walk "Marsh Green and Dryhill".

- 6 Turn **left** enjoying the views. In 250m, at the next waymarker, just before the path bends right, turn **left**, back into the woods. In nearly 150m, you come out of the wood onto a path with woodland to your right and a field and boundary fence on your left. (You may brush against nettles and brambles in high summer, but the path is quite walkable.) Another small wooden gate leads into another meadow where you see two coloured blue arrows. Ignore the blue arrow which points straight ahead along the edge and instead follow the **yellow** arrow which directs you diagonally **left** across the centre of the pasture. [Aug 2019: Care! a walker went astray here: the gates may have changed.] In the far left-hand corner, go over a wooden stile, or through a metal gate, into the next meadow. Keep ahead along the left-hand side and through a metal kissing gate to find a marker post [Sep 2020: rotted through. broken off and "resting" in the shrubbery] and a grassy diagonal crossing path. Cross straight over through a similar kissing gate into a patch of woodland, passing a pond on your right. At the end of the

woodland path, go through a metal kissing gate out into a large grassy meadow which has a copse in its centre.

- 7 Many local walkers now seem to take a diagonal path through the central copse corner-to-corner; but this text keeps to the marked path. Turn **right** along the edge of the meadow and turn **left** in the corner along the long side. In 200m, avoid a wide gap and a large metal gate on your right and stay in the meadow, now beside a new metal fence. Your exit is just before the far corner where you find a small metal gate beside a large gate, taking you into the next meadow. Go down the left-hand side, with good views ahead and go **left** through another small metal gate beside a large gate. Continue down the right-hand side of next meadow. In 80m, ignore a signed path on your right. Go through the next metal gate beside a large gate into the next field. (2018: A soil management project has carved out new tracks round the fields here.) Follow a newly-made wide track down the left-hand side of the field and, in 150m, stay with the track as it bends **left** through trees. In about 50m, look to your **right** for a marker post and turn **right** through a patch of scrub to a small metal gate leading into a large meadow.



- 8 Cut across the middle of this open grassy field, down towards a gap in the trees at the bottom, where you can see a large new metal gate. When you reach it, go through an adjacent kissing gate and down the centre of the next grassy meadow, with the rooftop of Waystrode Manor visible ahead. Aim for a marker post about 40m from the bottom right-hand corner where a pathway leads you into the woods. Your path crosses a wooden bridge with metal handrails, across a small stream, and leads up through woodland. At a T-junction, turn **right** on a path which may be familiar from your outward journey. Go up a few steps and through a wooden gate with a yellow arrow. You are now back at Waystrode Manor. Go up the driveway, keeping Waystrode Manor to your right. Turn **right** into Strobe Lane, leading into North Street, and thence into Cowden's main street where the walk began.



For final refreshments, "The Fountain" (Harveys) a friendly pub-restaurant with a big garden is on the right.

Getting there

By car: the village of Cowden is signposted from the B2026 south of Edenbridge.

By bus: route 234 from Tunbridge Wells or Edenbridge (check timetables).

Not by train: note that Cowden Station is 2 km=1½ miles from the village, making it unsuitable as a starting point.

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