



Doddington and Otterden Place

Distance: 11½ km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: Kent

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Refreshments: Doddington

Map: Explorer 149 (Faversham) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Village, woodland, quiet lanes, historic house, parkland, easy field paths

In Brief

This is a walk waiting to be discovered. The little village of Doddington, one of a group hidden among the hills of central Kent, is a favourite centre for mini-marathons. But this walk finds quiet lanes, wide woodland paths and fields with views where the only other people you are likely to meet will be on horseback. Several surprises await you along the way: beechwoods and mixed woods, a wonderful long valley and a country house with an unexpected scientific story to tell.

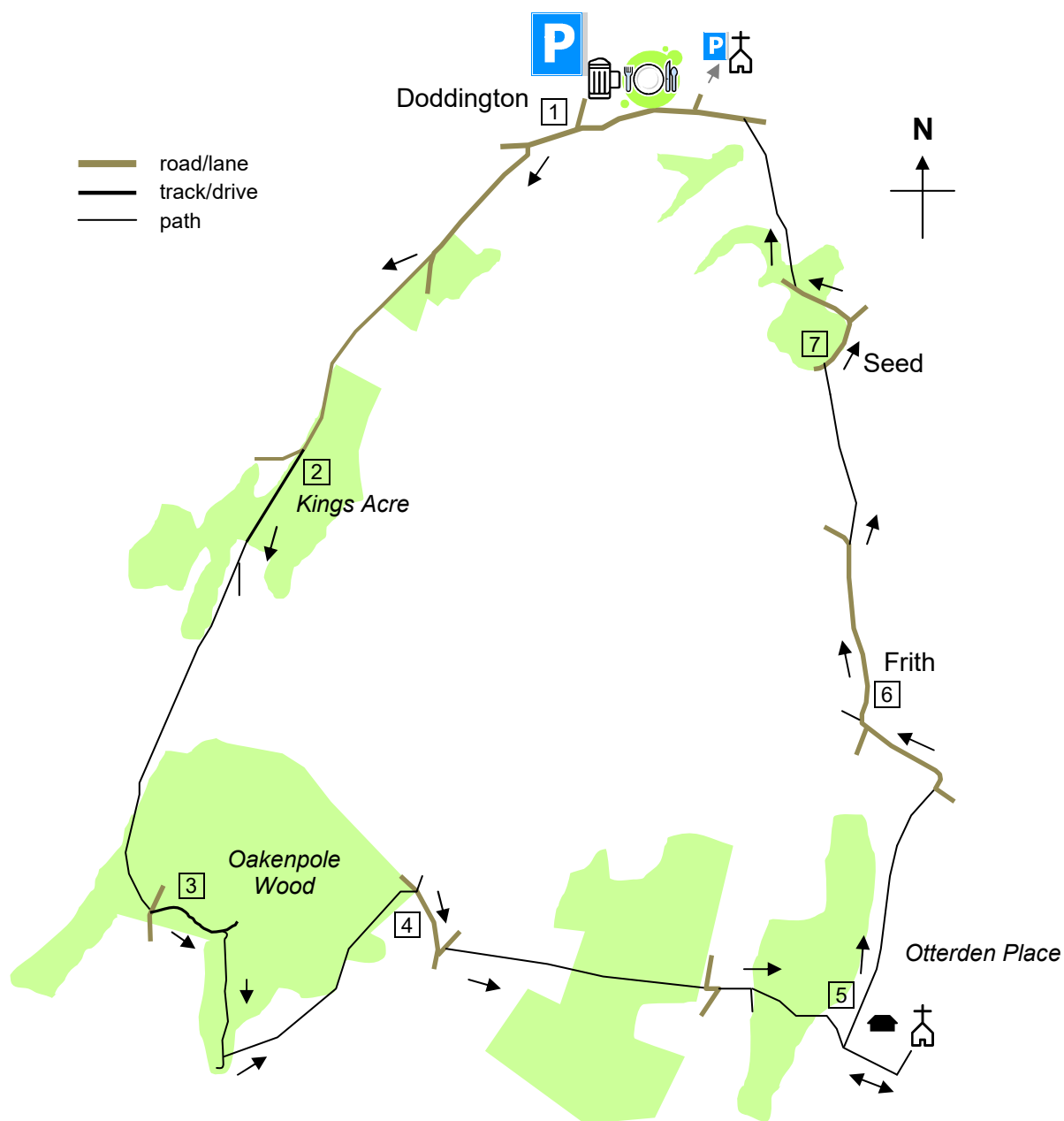
At the start and finish, there is a good pub: *The Chequers Inn* (ring 01795-886366 for info) a Shepherd Neame pub which does good food. This pub is supposedly haunted by a Cavalier from the Civil War. Note that the pub is closed on Monday.



The paths on this walk are generally wide and easy-going, but some of the sections across the wheat fields have sharp weeds which might make short trousers uncomfortable. In a high and dry summer, trainers or walking shoes were fine but, because of the woodland and some stony areas, boots should be recommended. There is no reason not to bring your dog provided that he is not too large to hop over some of the stiles; a lead is required because even the crop fields contain ground-nesting birds.

The walk begins in the village of **Doddington**, Kent, postcode **ME9 0BG**. Most visitors park up in the side road beside the *Chequers Inn*. There is a car park opposite the church, extending the walk slightly. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



Doddington's name probably means "homestead of of Dudda's people" (after a Saxon chief). This was a self-contained community until into the 1900s. Then came the motor car and all the shops disappeared, here and in the neighbouring villages. Except for one: S.W.Doughty has been a family butcher for 100 years, with its own slaughter house, also selling eggs and veg and much else. Doddington has its own website www.doddington-kent.org.uk with a wealth of detail about the eccentric people who lived here. Such as Mr Sellen the baker who used to let his pony and cart wander about across the road while he left his loaves in customers' outhouses, as other customers simply collected their bread from his unattended shop.

- 1 With the *Chequers* pub on your right, walk along the main road in the village of Doddington. Go past the butchers and the junction with Hopes Hill, walk another 100m or so and turn **left** at the next junction Old Lenham Road. This is a very quiet lane and you'll be surprised to meet more than one car or two. The lane passes an orchard and a meadow and runs

between hedges, soon with woodland on your left. After 500m on this lane, you reach a fork. Take the minor **right** fork, actually straight on, an even narrower lane. (At the time of writing this lane was closed to motor traffic. It seems to be very little used anyway, with grass growing in the centre.) You have a meadow on your right, woodland on your left, later meadows on both sides and more woodland. After 800m on this side lane, it suddenly curves away right between hedges. **Leave** the lane here by keeping straight ahead on a signposted bridleway into the woods.

- 2 You are in a great bluebell wood known as King's Acre, on a wide easy path. After a charmed 400m, you emerge through a wooden gate into the Long Valley (not its real name, but it's so appropriate). Avoid a left fork indicated by a yellow arrow and keep straight ahead along the bottom of this vast sheep meadow. After about 800m, the meadow narrows and takes you through a wooden gate and along a path through shrubbery onto a new woodland path. This path runs gently uphill, just inside the wood, so that at first you keep sight of the open meadow on your right. (The great spread of woodland in this area is parcelled into little woods with their own names: this is Perch Wood.) After 400m or so through the next section, called Limekiln Wood, you arrive at a tarmac lane.
- 3 Cross straight over the lane onto a unmarked bridleway through Oakenpole Wood. After 200m or so through this bluebell wood, at the bottom of a slope, the wide path suddenly bends left. **Leave** the original path here by turning **right** uphill. *Don't miss this turn!* This path is narrower at first but it quickly widens. Stay on the path as it makes a sudden right turn. In 150m you need to be careful (see the skull-and-crossbones): this is Mad Jack's Lair, a small metal box, and he tends to be rather unpredictable (just joking). In a further 250m, your path comes out into the open and curves away right. **Leave** the main path here by going sharp **left** on a much narrower, rather overgrown, path which quickly leads up to a stile. Cross the stile into a cereal field and take a path straight ahead across the field, heading for the corner of some woodland on your right. As you pass the woodland, your path veers slightly left and continues across the field. (There are a few more field paths like this on the walk, all of them well-made and clear.) In the far corner, go over a stile and follow a path along the edge of woods with a cereal field visible on your right. Your path goes through a gap in a fence and joins a wider path in a woodland tract with the rare name of Frow Wood. The stony, broken-brick surface finally leads to a tarmac lane.
- 4 Turn **right** on the lane, signposted *Warren Street*. In 250m, where the lane curves right, turn sharp **left** on another lane, signposted *Eastling*. But, in only 15m, fork **right** through a wooden gate onto a rider's path, marked with a TROT sign (a Kentish Riders Network). This straight wide path runs in a tunnel of trees. Later there are crop fields on each side before the "tunnel" continues, down a dip and over a crossing path through an area of woodland known as the Otterden Plantation. You come out through a wooden gate beside a large metal gate to a lane at a Z-bend. Go straight over on a wide gravel drive. Where the main drive bends right towards stables, keep straight ahead. Your path bends left, crossing a junction of tempting paths, and curves right uphill. As you come into the open, on your left is a metal kissing-gate: this is your route, but first you will want to go a little further along the track to see a little more of Otterden Place.

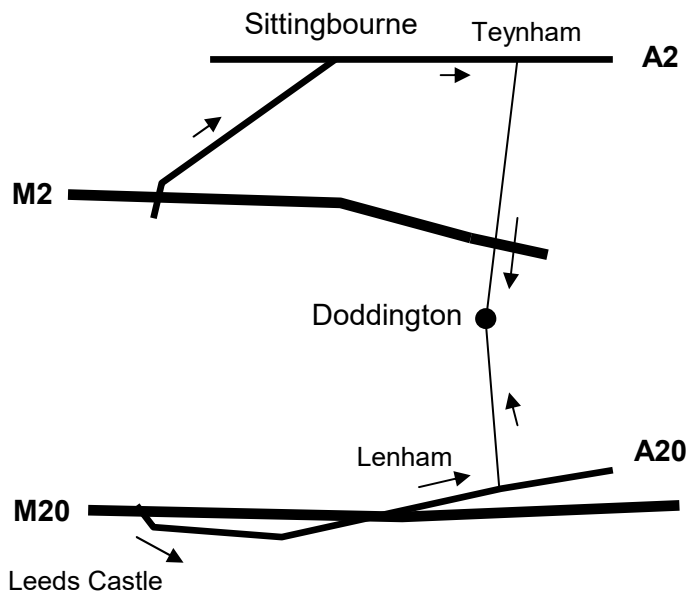
*Otterden Place is where, in 1729, electric current was discovered. Electricity had been known since ancient times, but only as **static**, produced by rubbing a piece of amber or polished wood. The owner of the house was Granville Wheler. He invited his Royal Society colleague Stephen Gray, an older, relatively poor scientist, to set up his experiments, using metal wire stretched out around the house, which proved that electricity was a kind of fluid. This great country house which served as such an unlikely laboratory was built in the early 1600s. The long stable block is even older. The chapel, built in 1753 on the site of a much earlier church, was once the parish church of the village of Otterden. Services are still occasionally held there.*

You can walk past the long stable block, over a grid (care! use the stile?) to a junction with a fine beech avenue, then **left** on a short driveway to the Chapel of St Lawrence from where you also have a better view of the house and garden.

- 5 Having turned **left** through the kissing-gate (that is, **right** if returning from viewing the estate), follow a path down the long green parkland, keeping generally to the right-hand side. You pass a crop field on your left, after which your path veers very slightly left heading for electricity wires near a thatched house. Go through a large metal gate here and ahead along a cinder track. You pass the timbered house of Snoad Farm and the track ends at a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the bendy lane and continue to a junction in 350m. Ignore a shingle track ahead and stay on the lane as it bends right.
- 6 The lane is bordered by some exotic conifers as you pass the entrance to Frith Farm House and its Oast. Ignore a footpath on the left, after which the lane dips, passing a junction on your right regardless. Nearly 300m after the junction, the lane curves left. Look for a gap in the hedge now and go **right** onto a signed footpath across a cereal field. *Don't miss this turn!* Your path curves left as it passes the corner of a paddock and passes under power lines. It goes over a grassy crossing path and continues on a clear path through the wheat, heading for a line of lombardy poplars and a large house. At the far side, make your way through a patch of undergrowth and out to a tarmac lane in the hamlet known as Seed.
- 7 Turn **right** on the lane, passing several houses, ending at Foxenden Manor, and arriving at a road junction after 200m. Turn **left** in the direction *Doddington* on the vintage signpost, onto Hopes Hill. As woodland begins on your right, the lane starts to descend. In 100m, turn **right** by a signpost and a stone waymarker on a path into woodland. Where you meet a path coming from the left, veer **right** and immediately fork **left**, through the remains of a metal kissing-gate into a cereal field. Take a clear path across the centre of the field. *The large house on the hill is Doddington Place.* At the other side, go through a gap in the trees and cross the centre of the next field on a good path. *The little white tower of Doddington Church is visible ahead.* At the other side, go through a patch of undergrowth and across a third field similarly. You arrive at a road just outside Doddington. Turn **left** using the footway to arrive in ½ km or so back in the centre of the village where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Doddington can be reached from the M2 motorway and the A2 trunk road or from the M20 motorway and the A20 trunk road. From the **M2**, come off as for **Sittingbourne**, taking the A249 to continue on the A2; come off at **Teynham** and go south for 4 miles. From the **M20**, come off as for **Leeds Castle** to continue on the A20; come off at **Lenham** and go north for 4 miles.



By bus/train: bus 344/345 from Teynham railway station, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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