



Ightham Mote, Shipbourne, Fairlawne

Distance: 6 km=3¾ miles

easy walking

Region: Kent

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Refreshments: Ightham Mote, Shipbourne

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

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

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Water, parkland, high hills, views, woodland trails, historic houses

In Brief

This walk is a classic short walk visiting the charming National Trust property of *Ightham Mote*, beginning in a neighbouring village which also possesses one of the great pubs of the district. (To enquire at the *Chaser Inn*, ring 01732-810360.) Instead of approaching directly, this walk takes a roundabout route through the great open parkland of *Fairlawne*. This part is followed by a high path with views and a deep forest.

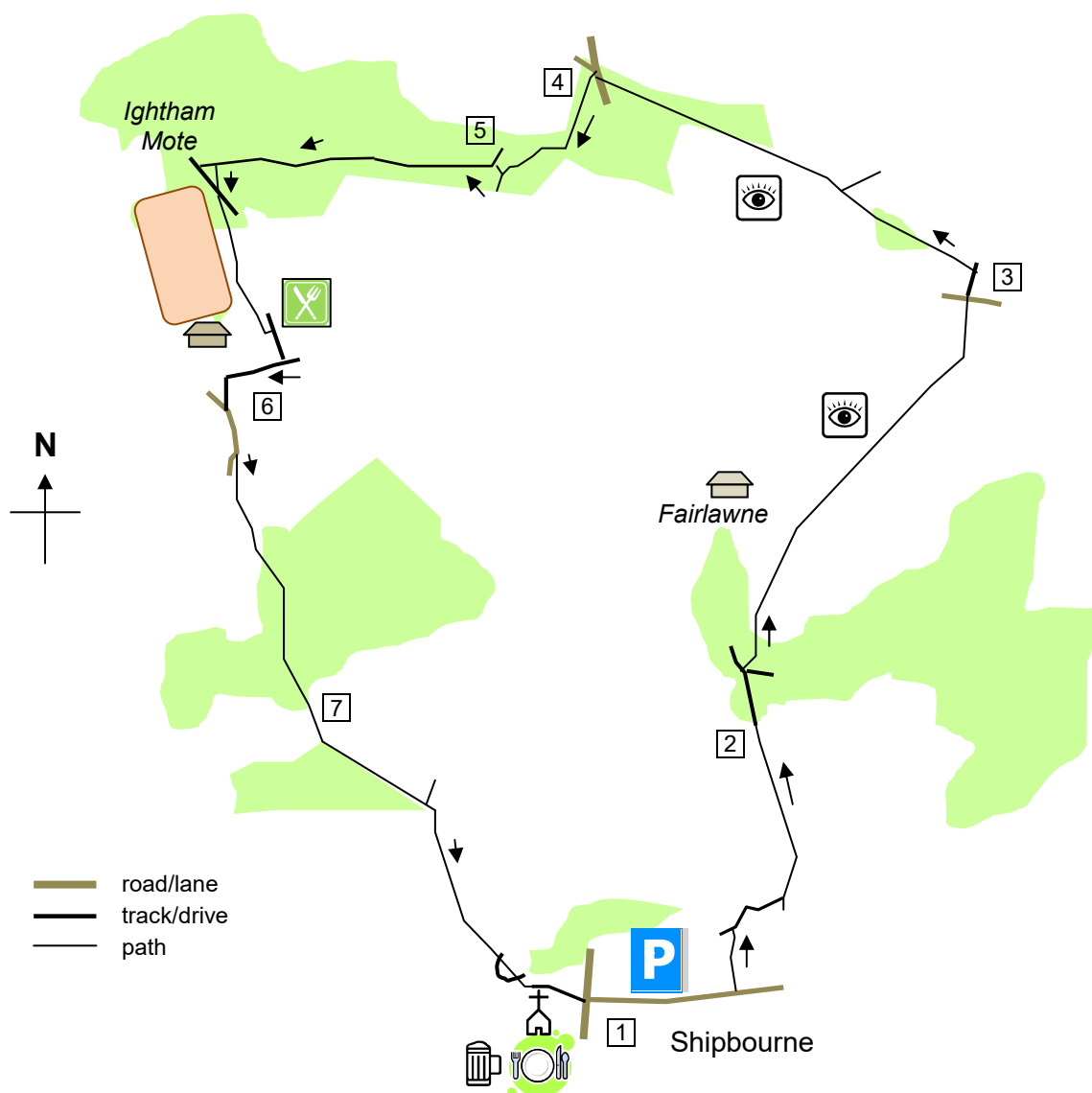
If you already know this site you will see that it duplicates part of the longer walk *Knole and Ightham*. However, the different direction used on this route gives you completely new views all round, plus an atmospheric ramble through the woodland that surrounds the *Mote*.



All the routes used on this walk are either across grass or on well-made paths, through woodland or on good popular trails. Shorts are therefore wearable and boots are optional, though some ramblers will always wear them, especially in damper conditions. The stiles are well-made and easy to cross but there is a flurry of them at the end which were obviously a problem for local people with a large or panicky dog.

The walk begins at the car park in **Upper Green Road**, opposite the church in **Shipbourne**, near Tonbridge, Kent, postcode **TN11 9PE**, [what3words ///shade.spray.issues](#). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).


The Walk






- 1** From near the church and pub at Shipbourne, walk along the minor road opposite, Upper Green Road, passing a car park (where you may have parked) and soon a tennis court. Immediately after the tennis court, opposite a fingerpost, turn **left** on a footpath and keep straight on into trees. At a T-junction, turn **right** on a track. The track leads over a stile into a meadow with great views. Turn **right** along the top and, in 50m, veer **left** downhill on a path down the centre of a crop field. At the other side, go over a concrete bridge and a 3-step stile leading into a sheep meadow. Keep ahead on a path under trees and straight across the meadow to come through a small wooden gate into Fairlawne Park.




Fairlawne House was built in the early 1600s. It was once owned by Sir Henry Vane (or Fane), Secretary of State to Charles I. His son, also Henry, became Governor of Massachusetts but was later executed as a traitor after becoming disillusioned with royalty and supporting the parliamentary cause during the Civil War. The house was probably the model for Shipley Hall, home of Lord Uffenham, one of the characters created by P.G. Wodehouse. In fact, his daughter Leonora lived there after 1932 when she married Major Peter Cazalet, trainer of race horses to both the Queen and the Queen Mother.

 The tarmac path passes some sheds and a pond with a little island and bridge. Shortly you come to a junction where a driveway joins from your right. Leave the tarmac here by veering **right** up a grass bank to a wooden gate. Go through the smaller gate into the wide open parkland. Your path veers a little to the left, then the right, passing a yellow post. These very distinct yellow posts will guide your way through the park. *On your left shortly is a good view of Fairlawne House. Plaxtol church is visible straight ahead. It is worth turning round to take in the great views across the weald of Kent.* Your path goes over a bank and over a stile. Soon you come over another bank into another section of the park. Your path veers **left** shortly over another bank. *To your left is a view of the wrought iron gates at the head of an avenue which used to be the grand entrance to Fairlawne House.* Go over a stile beside a large gate onto the road.

 Cross straight over the road to a shingle track opposite. Veer **left** just before some wooden gates and keep left on a footpath which runs beside a crop field on your right. The path rises and soon becomes a high footpath with great views to your left. In 300m a footpath joins from your right: keep straight on. Soon your path enters a woodland of tall beeches and takes you through the smaller of two wooden gates. Finally you descend to a junction of roads.

  Cross straight over the main road to the start of a minor road opposite, but immediately go **left** through a wooden gate onto a wide woodland path. After 150m under this thick wooded canopy, your path crosses a farmer's path and continues in more dark wood. The twisty descent leads through an old coppice. After 150m, as the path curves left downhill, an open meadow comes into view. Leave the path here by forking **right** between posts by a NT badge to meet a T-junction by a marker post. Welcome to Ightham Mote! (although you have some way to go yet).

 Turn **left** as a red arrow (the sign *disabled route* may, or may not, be reassuring). Follow this nice easy woodland path through Scathes Wood. In 300m or so, there is a bench seat with views. In 250m you see a large wooden gate ahead leading to a tarmac drive. Turn **left** shortly before the gate on a narrow path through trees and descend to join the drive. There are various paths labelled at various points to add to the adventure, but this walk takes a straightforward route through car parks, to the café and round to the front. The garden is on your right as you pass through car park 4, then between brick pillars through car park 3 to the café. Turn **left** and **right** in front of the café, through a small car park, to the front of the *Mote* where you fully appreciate the charm of this old place (→ picture overleaf).



Ightham Mote is a rare example of a moated medieval manor house dating from the early 1300s. The earliest surviving elements include the Great Hall, the Crypt, Old Chapel and two Solars. The first known owner was Sir Thomas Cawne (1360? -1374). The house has since been altered by its various owners, who enclosed the courtyard, constructed the cottage range, embellished the house with Tudor symbols (oriel window barge boards, the Great Hall's stained glass and the unique Chapel ceiling) and developed the drawing room and the adjacent range. The last owner was an American Charles Robinson who returned to the US and rarely returned to live in Ightham. He did however give the Mote to the National Trust when he died in 1985. Ightham Mote underwent a vast conservation project, beginning in 1988. It was open at the time of writing despite the 2020 restrictions. See the NT website for latest dates and times.



- 6 Turn **right** around the frontage and, at the corner, turn **left** away from the building, arriving at a large iron gateway. Slip past the gateway to a tarmac lane and turn **left** on it. *You are now on the Greensand Way (GW) long-distance path and it will guide you for the rest of the journey.* Continue, passing the oasts of Mote Farm on your right. In 100m, at a kink in the lane, go **left** over a stile, still on the GW. This grass path runs along the right-hand side of a sloping meadow, through a line of trees and along beside wire fence with a sloping meadow on your right. You come over a stile into a wood of tall pines, some of which may be harvested. A good easy surface through the wood leads out over a stile into a field with the top of St Giles church visible.
- 7 Go down the left-hand side of the field on a wide grass margin. At the bottom, veer left on an even wider grass strip. At the end of the field, keep ahead over a greystone patch and go over a stile. Bear **right** to take a wire-fenced path beside a sheep pasture. At the end, under a wild cherry tree, go over a stile and over another stile into a sheep pasture. Go past a grid on the left beside ornate gates and a house and over a drive to a stile near the church. Go **left** through the little circular gate, past the church, and out through the lichgate, past the *Chaser Inn* and out to the road in Shipbourne where the walk began.



Shipbourne, pronounced "shibbun", is named after the local sheep and from the Bourne stream. St Giles church was built by Edward Cazalet of Fairlawne and opened for worship in 1881. The gargoyled tower contains six bells.

Getting there

By car: Shipbourne is on the main **A227** road. Coming from the south or west London Area, the easiest way is via the M25 and the A25 passing north of Sevenoaks, through **Seal**. 2 miles after Seal, where the road wheels left, filter **right** and turn off in the direction *Ivy Hatch*. Go straight through the village and turn **right** soon to join the A227. Park in Upper Green Road, opposite the church and pub, where there is a free car park.

Because of the plethora of walks around Shipbourne, this area gets crowded with cars. If you find the car park full despite arriving early you may wonder if you can park on the roadside. But, returning in the evening, you will find a whole line of cars stretching from one end of the road to the other!

By bus/train: bus 222 from Tonbridge Station to Shipbourne, not weekends. Check the timetables.