



Knole, Ightham and Fairlawne

Distance 17 km=11 miles or 12 km=8 miles, easy walking

Region: Kent

Author: Malinovka comments please to feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

Refreshments: Ivy Hatch, Ightham, Godden Green

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks)

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Woodland, views, parkland, fine houses

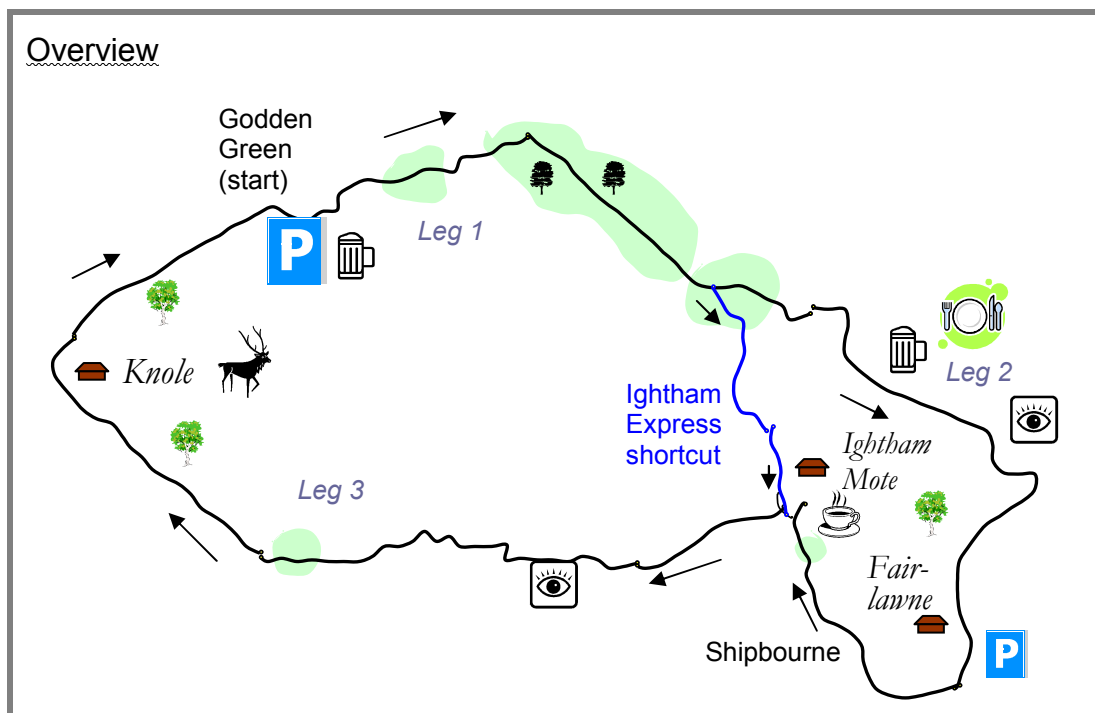
In Brief

Here is the perfect high circular Kentish stroll through forest with views north and then over Greensand hills with views all round. Blazing the way, as though unexpectedly, are three great houses of immense but very contrasting character.

This walk is easy with good paths, so good walking shoes are adequate. There are no nettles on the full walk, just a few on the shortcut. Dogs can be taken, but will need to be on a tight lead in the sheep fields.

A shorter option omits one of the houses, Fairlawne. (See the *Ightham Express* below.)

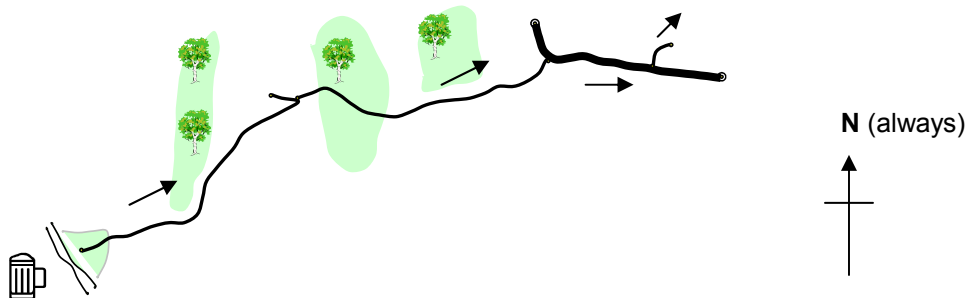
The walk begins at the village green in **Godden Green**, Kent, postcode TN15 0JJ. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



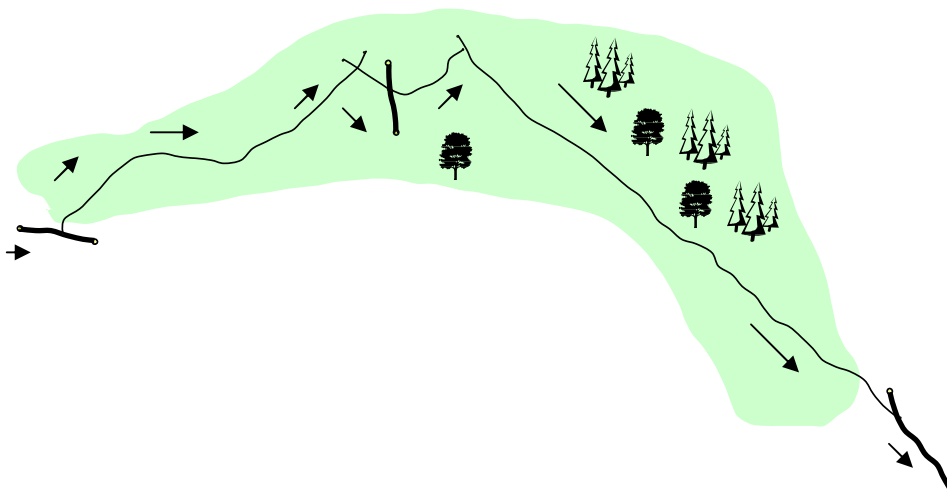
The Walk

Leg 1: Godden Green to Raspit Hill 3 km (2 miles)

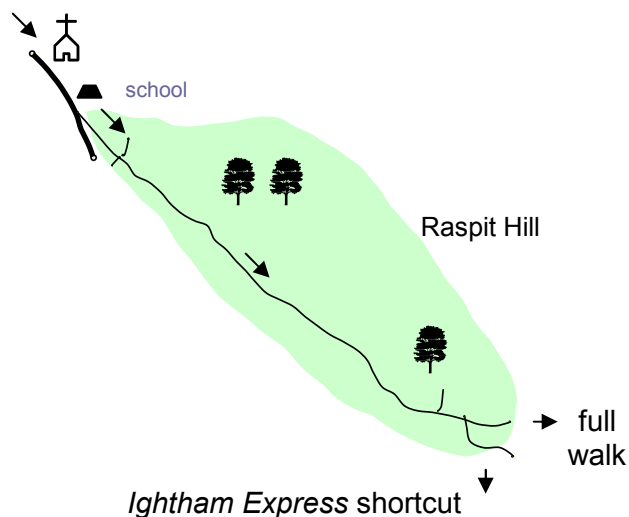
- 1 With your back to the *Buck's Head*, go across the triangular Green and take a track on the other side. The big house up on the right is *Stormont Court*. In 300m, avoid a track sharp left and follow the track downhill as it curves right. The track emerges from woodland and runs beside a field on the left with the wall of *Hall Place* on the right. Exit the field at the end through a swing gate and turn right on the lane, going past the entrance to *Hall Place*. In 120m, turn **left** on a marked footpath beside a metal gate, entering Hanger Wood with its ancient coppice and, in late spring, bluebells.



- 2 In 200m cross a forester's path. In another 150m, you reach a major 4-way crossing under a fine beech tree. Turn **right** here. In 50m cross a lane and take a signposted footpath on the other side. The path leads steeply up into Redhill Wood. At the top, turn **right** on a wide sunken path. (You can instead take the higher path just before it, that runs parallel.) Continue to a gully on the right with a yellow arrow, which you ignore. Stay on the path ahead at all times through Seal Chart Common, avoiding paths that veer off to the left, so that the steep sloping woodland is always on your right. The occasional blue arrow confirms that you are on the correct track. Eventually you reach a lane. Turn **right** on the lane.

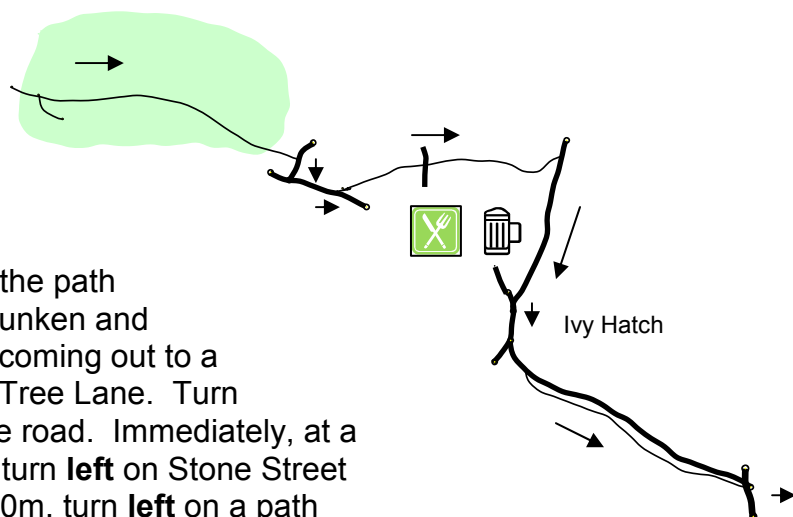


- 3 You soon pass the church of St Lawrence, Seal and, immediately after, the primary school. Just after the school, leave the lane by forking **left** on a wide track. Soon after, ignore a signed brideway left. There are fine views right across the Weald of Kent. Later a bank and a quarry obscure your view. Soon you pass a marked brideway on the left, which you ignore and a 30m further you come to a marked brideway on the right.



Decision point. If you want to shorten the walk and go direct to Ightham, take the **Ightham Express** route described at the end of this text and continue with **Leg 3**. Otherwise, continue with the next Leg of this walk.

Leg 2: Raspit Hill via Fairlawne to Ightham 6½ km (4 miles)

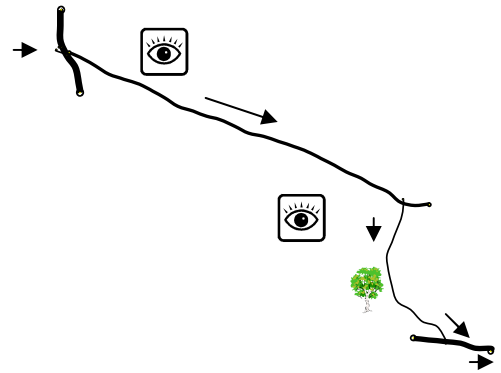


- 1 Eventually the path becomes sunken and descends, coming out to a road, Pine Tree Lane. Turn **right** on the road. Immediately, at a T-junction, turn **left** on Stone Street Road. In 80m, turn **left** on a path signposted to Bewley, fenced but charming. On reaching a lane, cross over to a path on the other side. Go past allotments, cross a track and continue on a zig-zag course down to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane, going past *High Pines* and the fine garden of *White Cottage Farm*. You come to a T-junction by The Plough inn at Ivy Hatch.

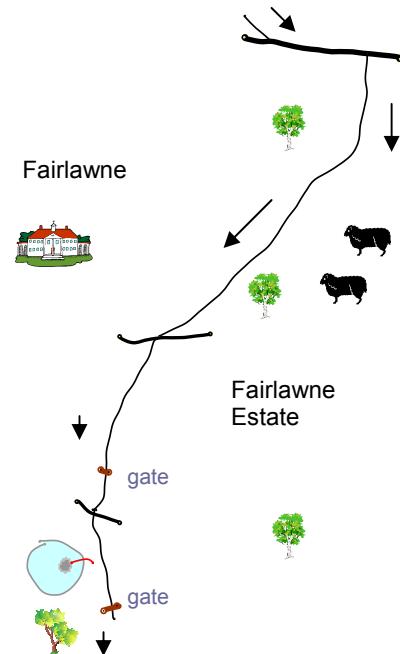
The Plough specially welcomes walkers and provides an excellent lunch menu that includes garlic soup, confit of rabbit and calves liver all at a reasonable price, plus different Harveys brews.

Turn **left** on the road and in a few paces avoid a road turning off to the right, even though it is signposted Ightham, staying on the main High Cross Road. In just 40m from the junction, by an upside-down SLOW in the road, shift right into a footpath running parallel with the sometimes busy road. Eventually you reach a T-junction with the A227 Tonbridge Road.

2 Go straight over the T-junction and continue on a track opposite. Soon you go through a gate with a sign informing you that you have reached part of the Fairlawne Estate. *There are fine views left to the North Downs.* Eventually the treeline on the right gives way to a fence. Here, go over a stile on the **right** into a charming meadow with fine views all around. [March 2012: a walker reports this path is now permanently **closed**. In this case, simply continue on the main path 200m further and turn **right** on a wide track which leads down to the road, directly opposite the stile at the start of 3.] Go across the meadow, aiming to the left of the big ash tree and then diagonally **left**, aiming for the bottom left-hand corner. Go over a stile and turn **left** on the road.



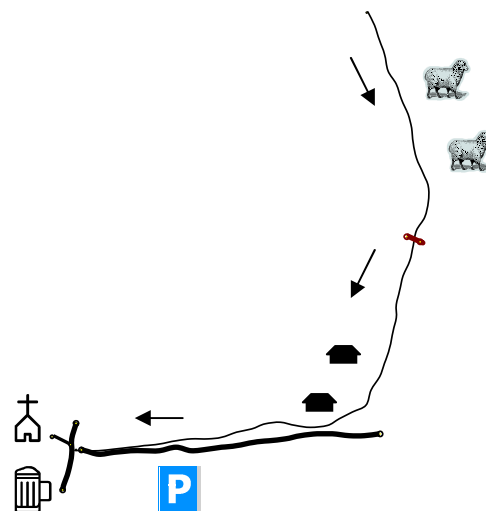
3 In 150m, turn **right** over a stile into Fairlawne Park. Go straight across to a wire fence. Close by on the right is a fine wrought-iron gate leading via an avenue of limes to the house. *Sometimes the route is varied by the park management because of the work they do here on soil maintenance.* Follow yellow-topped stakes marking your direction until you see a stile in the middle of the lower boundary fence. Go over the stile and, keeping the bank on the right, reach another yellow-topped stake. Continue ahead to another similar stake and onwards over a stile in the fence. Thence proceed to another stake by a wider crossing path which you avoid, keeping direction as per the yellow arrow. Fairlawne House with its box hedges, lawns and ornamental shrubs is now in full view.



Fairlawne House, built in the early 1600s, 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 Uffenhams, 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.

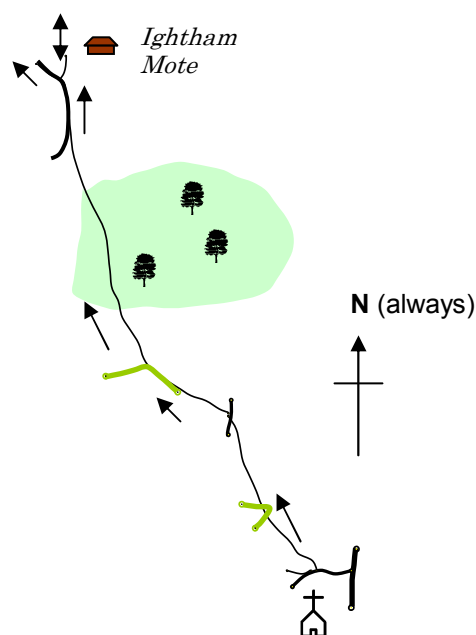
Pass another stake and go down through a small wooden gate beside a larger one. Cross a private drive and go down the drive opposite with a lake on your right. *There is a picturesque red filigreed bridge here leading to a tiny island, although whatever evening trysts took place here would have been in full view.* A little further on, the drive leads off right and you keep ahead through a wooden gate. *The cottonwood poplars here coat the ground in their unforgettable delicate white wool in early summer.*

- 4 Continue along the left-hand side of the sheep meadow and, where the fence beds left, keep straight ahead along the top of a bank. Go over a stile and a steel bridge, across the centre of a field, straight on at the corner and along a fenced path to a lane at Shipbourne. Keep ahead on the lane, past an oast house (which does bed and breakfast), then across the grass with cottages on your right to a lane, then curving right past a hedge and tennis courts. Keep parallel to the road on the left, going across a recreation ground and past a car park (alternative start), eventually reaching the T-junction at Shipbourne opposite the church and the Chaser Inn.



Shipbourne, pronounced 'shibbun', gets its name from the sheep that always formed a major part of its rural economy and from the nearby Bourne river. The Chaser Inn, refurbished since 2003, is an open-air family-friendly pub that provides several real ales and good food, part of the Whiting and Hammond group. The church of St Giles is 'new' having been built by Edward Cazalet of Fairlawne and opened for worship in 1881. The impressive gargoyled tower contains six bells.

- 5 Enter the churchyard via the gate directly in front of the church, continue past the church and exit the churchyard on the other side via a swing-gate built into the wall. The waymarkers indicate a choice of three routes. Take the **right**-hand route, part of the Greensand Way (GW), going through a gap in the hedge. (Your direction from here is roughly straight ahead at all times. The mini-map opposite is accurate, as always, as to direction and distance.) Cross a curving drive twice, keeping close to the trees and hedge on the right. Go over a stile in the far corner of the meadow and, in 12m, over another and out into a meadow where the path is demarcated with a post and wire fence on both sides. Continue straight ahead to a stile in the far corner. Cross a track and go along the left-hand side of a meadow. In 30m, ignore a path forking left and stay next to the meadow. Half way along, turn **right** upwards across the centre of the meadow, as indicated by the GW arrow. Go over a stile (with a look back at Shipbourne Church), along an enclosed path through woodland, over a stile on the other side, along the right-hand side of a meadow and the left-hand side of the next field. Oasts (hop-drying kilns) are visible here up to the left and over to the right. Go over a stile and head along the lane. Soon there are brick pillars on the right leading down to an unused entrance gate for a close view of Ightham Mote. (The entrance to Ightham Mote for visitors is another 300m along the tarmac lane, on the right and through the car park.)



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 (c1360 -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.

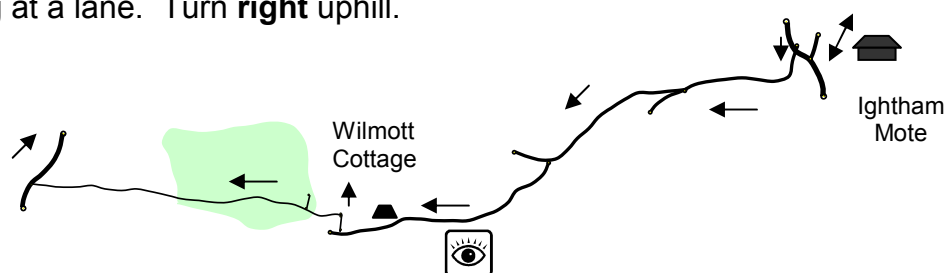


The last owner was an American Charles Robinson who returned to the US and rarely returned to live in Ightham. He did however give the Mote to the National Trust when he died in 1985. Ightham Mote underwent a vast conservation project, beginning in 1988. It is open most days except Tue, Wed and Jan, Feb. There is a restaurant (not requiring an entry fee) plus a snack bar in the car park.

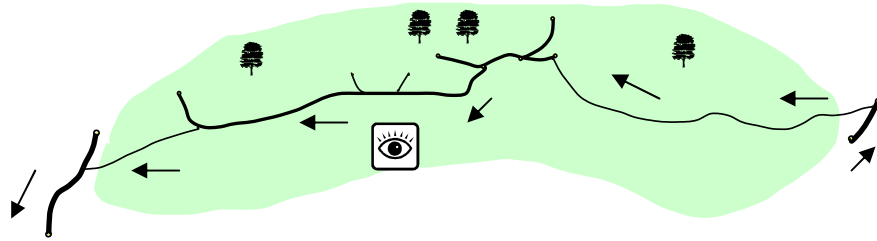
Leg 3: Ightham to Knole and Godden Green 7½ km (4½ miles)

This is also the point where the walk resumes if you took the shortcut, the [Ightham Express](#).

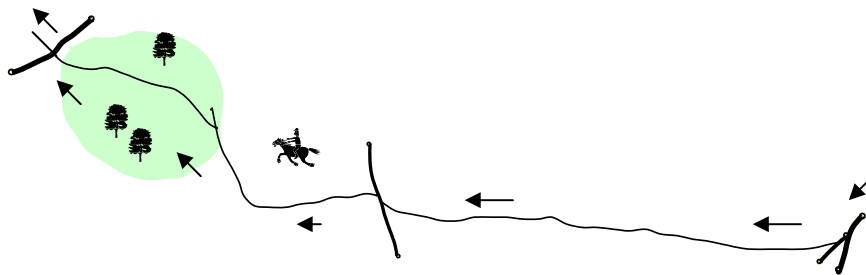
- 1 Retrace your steps through the brick pillars and turn **right** on the lane. In 20m, turn **left** on a farm drive for Mote Farm which bends right. In about 350m, at a fork, avoid the left fork that only leads into a field. 350m further, ignore a sandy bridgeway forking right. The track becomes tarmac for a small stretch and you have views left back to Shipbourne Church and to Tonbridge in the distance. Soon you pass *Wilmott Cottage*, once a wayside inn. Keep ahead here on the track, passing a shed on the right that contains a natural spring. The path then turns **right** up steps and wheels left. Ignore a footpath branching right uphill. This winding woodland path goes past scattered boulders, then uphill through a swing gate by a sign for Ightham Mote. Soon, go through another swing gate, arriving at a lane. Turn **right** uphill.



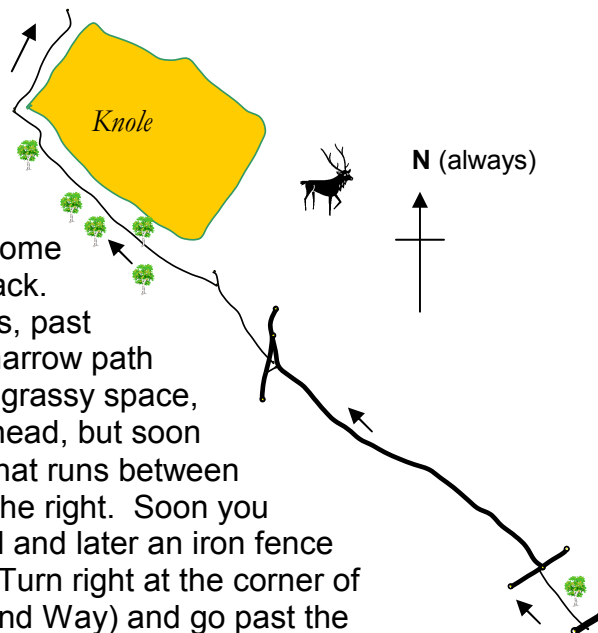
- 2 **See mini-map overleaf.** At the end of the tarmac, go sharp **left** up steps. The path leads uphill into forest which drops away steeply on the left. The path then leads quite steeply uphill in an area thick with bluebells in late spring. Go over a stile by a National Trust sign for One Tree Hill and take a **left** bend by a bench. Ignore a path leading off right behind the bench. 70m after the bend, take the **left** fork (unmarked at the time of writing). *Soon you have stunning views left.* Go past a stone bench on the right and continue straight on as indicated by the GW sign. Where the main path bends right, keep straight ahead on a narrower path. The path leads under a bar to a road. Turn **left** on the road.



- 3 Go downhill for just 50m and fork **right** onto the drive for *Shepherds Mead*. In 20m, turn **right** on a fenced enclosed footpath. At the end, you reach a T-junction with a wide path coming from the left. Turn **right** here and, in 10m, fork **left** and go over a stile by a metal gate into a field used for show-jumping practice. Keep straight ahead along the left-hand side of the field and turn **right** at the far corner. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way along the longer side, fork **left** on a path close to the fence and turn **left** over a stile, through woodland and out to a road.



- 4 Cross the road and go through a metal gate opposite into Knole Park. Keep the same direction until you reach the head of a T-junction of lanes and join the lane directly ahead. After some distance you come to a prominent straight crossing track. Go straight ahead across the grass, past a post with yellow arrows, onto a narrow path opposite. Keep ahead across the grassy space, aiming for the corner of the wall ahead, but soon veer **left** on the main sandy path that runs between two lines of trees with the wall on the right. Soon you pass wrought iron gates in the wall and later an iron fence giving you a view of the gardens. Turn right at the corner of the wall (thus leaving the Greensand Way) and go past the entrance to the house.



Knole was built by Thomas Bouchier, Archbishop of Canterbury, between 1456 and 1486, on the site of an earlier house, and passed on his death to the church. In 1538 King Henry VIII persuaded Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to give it to him. It was altered and enlarged up to the early 1600s, but its appearance has hardly changed since then. In 1566 it came into the possession of Queen Elizabeth I's cousin Thomas Sackville and his descendants, the Earls and Dukes of Dorset and Barons Sackville, have lived there since 1603. One of these was Vita Sackville-West whose 'Knole and the Sackvilles (1922)' is a literary classic. Her lover Virginia Woolf wrote the novel 'Orlando' drawing on the history of the house and its inhabitants.

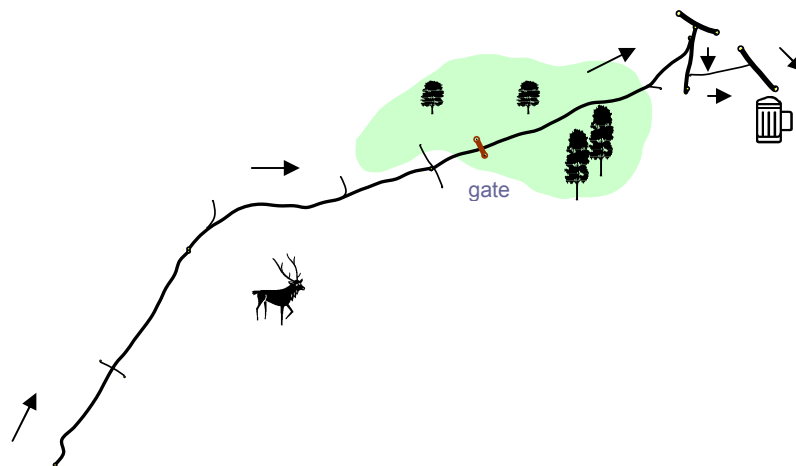
Knole stands in the middle of a 1,000-acre (400 ha) deer park. It is said to have 365 rooms, making it a 'calendar house' (because one could sleep in a different room each day of the year). It also boasts 52 staircases, 14 entrances and 7 courtyards.



Knole is in the care of the National Trust, though ownership is shared with the Sackville-Wests. Its many state rooms contain a superb collection of 17th century royal Stuart furniture, three state beds, rare silver furniture, outstanding tapestries and textiles, together with portraits by Van Dyck, Gainsborough, Sir Peter Lely, Sir Godfrey Kneller and Joshua Reynolds.

A visit to Knole is a life changer. It is open daily in the warmer months except Mon and Tue.

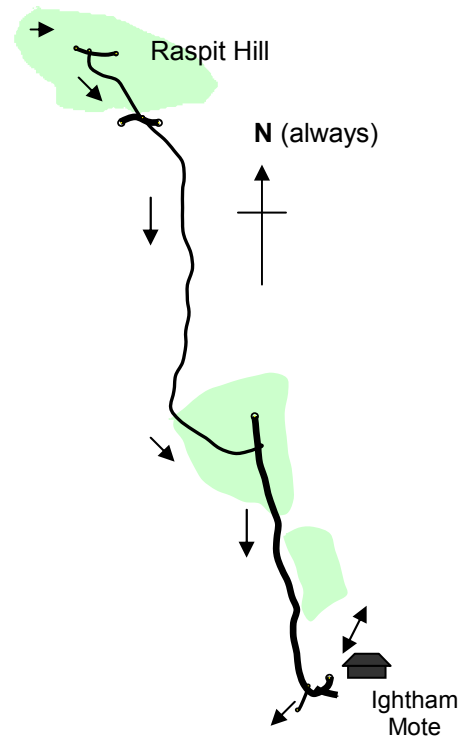
- 5 At the next corner, leave the wall by keeping straight ahead on a track that goes down an avenue of trees, past a small enclosure on the right. In 150m, cross a track and, in another 300m, ignore a lesser fork left and follow the main track as it wheels right. Stay on the main track, ignoring several lesser paths branching off, passing a group of trees on the left and eventually reaching a gate. The gate takes you out of the park and into woodland. Keep to the main track until you come out to a lane, with a road Blackhall Lane a few metres ahead. Turn sharp **right** on the lane. In 100m, turn **left** through a metal gate, next to a larger metal gate with a sign that reads *Private No Access*. Go through the *Old Stables*, through a one-bar gate which must be kept *tightly closed* and reach the road at Godden Green. The *Bucks Head* is immediately on the right.



The Ightham Express 2 km (1 mile)

This shortcut reduces the walk by 5 km=3 miles by going direct from Raspit Hill to Ightham Mote, omitting Fairlawne. Continue afterwards from **Leg 3**.

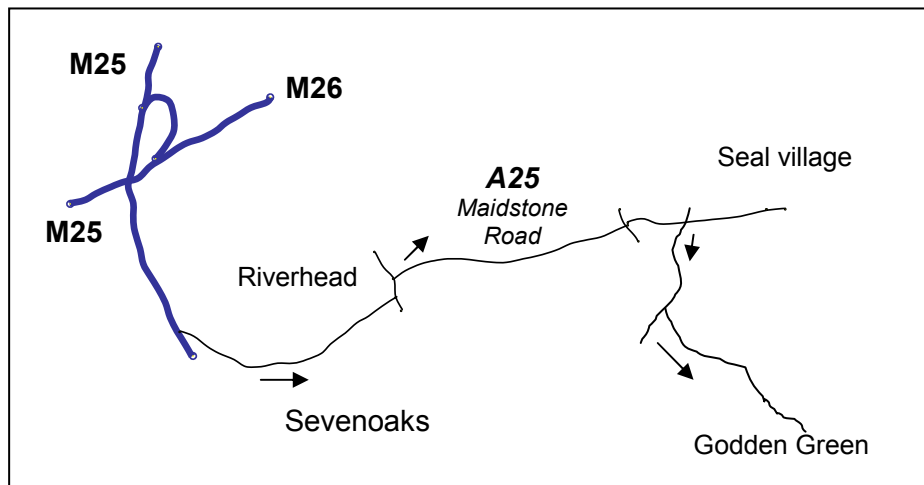
Turn **right** on the bridleway which curves left along the hillside and goes down shallow steps (just think, this is also a horse path!) and reaches a road. Cross the road to a bridleway opposite. The path follows a wall then a fence and orchard on the right and finally descends to a road. Turn **right** on the road. *Opposite the next bridleway, beside a house on the left is a path which takes you to the car park and a quick entrance to Ightham Mote.* Continue along the road, passing the house and gardens on the left and the outhouses. Continue past a brick building of Mote Farm on the right and turn **left** through brick pillars down to Ightham Mote.



Getting there

By car: if coming from the M25, follow signs to the A21 *Sevenoaks*. After a short distance on the A21, take the first exit signed *A25 Sevenoaks, Riverhead*. Merge into the A25 eastbound and continue to follow signs for the A25, shortly passing through the village of Bessels Green. From here continue, always on the A25, for 4km through the left-right staggered junction at Riverhead to traffic signals at Seal Hollow Road (B2019), signed **right** to *Godden Green*. Continue on Seal Hollow Road for 1 km and turn **left** at the junction with Blackhall Lane signed to *Godden Green*. Park just off the Green.

By rail and bus: the no. 222 from Tonbridge Station goes to Shipbourne and other places on the walk. Check the timetable as it is not frequent. Sevenoaks station is 1½ miles (2½ km) from Knole but several buses will take you to the entrance to the Park.



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