Fancy Free Walks

point your feet on a new path

Crockham Hill, Chartwell, Westerham
Chart, Churchill and Quebec

Distance: 13½ km=8½ miles — easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Kent, Surrey — Date written: 9-jan-2011

Author: Malinovka — Date revised: 24-apr-2015

Refreshments: Westerham — Last update: 6-jun-2016

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks)

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

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Meadows, views, forest, fine houses, country town, historical associations

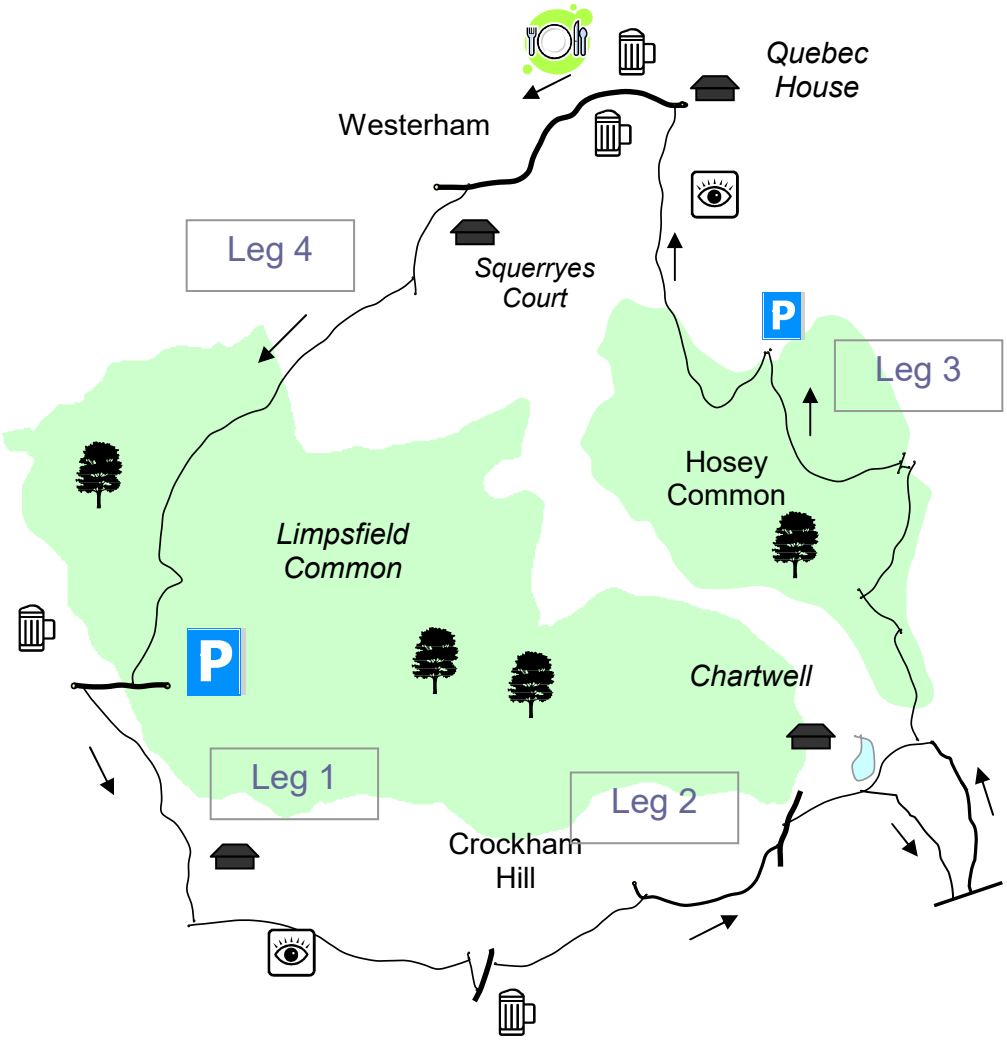
In Brief

This fabulous walk combines the grassy meadows facing south over the Weald at the Kent-Surrey border with the beautiful woodland of Limpsfield Common and Hosey Common. It also passes Winston Churchill's house and visits the country town of Westerham with all its historic associations and two other great houses, not to mention its many good places to eat and drink. (To enquire at the *Grasshopper on the Green*, ring 01959 562926. Note: don't confuse it with the *Grasshopper Inn* which is out of own.)

Most of the terrain is dry and easy but there are one or two places that can be muddy in winter, so boots are usually necessary. There is at least one patch of nettles and scratchy undergrowth, evident in high summer, when you may find shorts uncomfortable. The stile count is average and generally the walk seems fine with a dog.

The walk begins at the **Pine Wood car park, Limpsfield Common**. The nearest *very approximate* postcode is **RH8 0TB**, grid ref TQ 429 518. It is on the Kent Hatch Road (B269), on the north side, 1.35 miles = 2 km from the A25 junction, just past some houses and a church. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**). The Hosey Common car park (grid ref TQ 453 530) is also a good starting point, as is Westerham (with a parking charge?). Walkers recommend timing the walk so as *not* to reach Westerham at rush hour on a weekday because of the 300m along Goodley Stock Road which has no footway.

Bird's Eye View

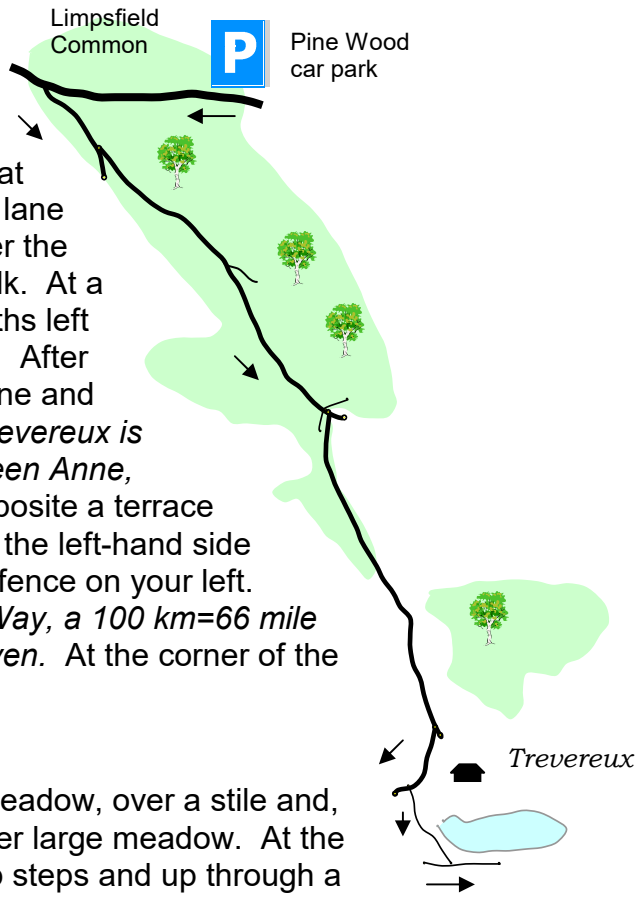


The Walk

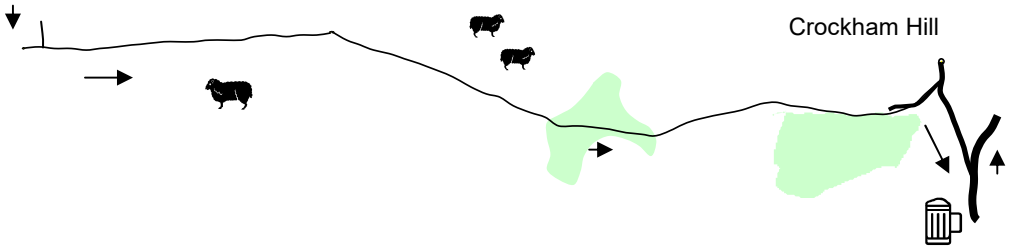
Leg 1: Limpsfield Common to Crockham Hill 2½ km=1½ miles

Limpsfield Chart is the name of the surrounding settlement of scattered houses. 'Chart' or 'Chert' was simply the name of the area, meaning 'rough ground', before it was prefixed with the name of the larger village and parish to the West.

1 Go out of the car park to the road and turn **right** on it. In 200m, at a road junction, turn sharp **left** on a tarmac lane, Trevereux Hill. Keep to the **left**-hand tarmac, ignoring all turn-offs, and avoiding a footpath on the left. In 300m, ignore another wide footpath that forks left and continue downhill on the tarmac lane past more houses. You have views south over the Weald, the first of many on this part of the walk. At a junction before *Grace's Cottage,* avoid footpaths left and right and follow the lane as it curves right. After more than 200m, go past a gate across the lane and veer **right** before the entrance to a house. *Trevereux is a grade II listed manor house dating from Queen Anne, damaged by fire and rebuilt in the 1990s.* Opposite a terrace of cottages, turn **left** over a stile and go along the left-hand side of a meadow, passing a pond, staying near a fence on your left. *You have been walking along the Vanguard Way, a 100 km=66 mile national trail running from Croydon to Newhaven.* At the corner of the fence, at a crossing path, turn **left**.

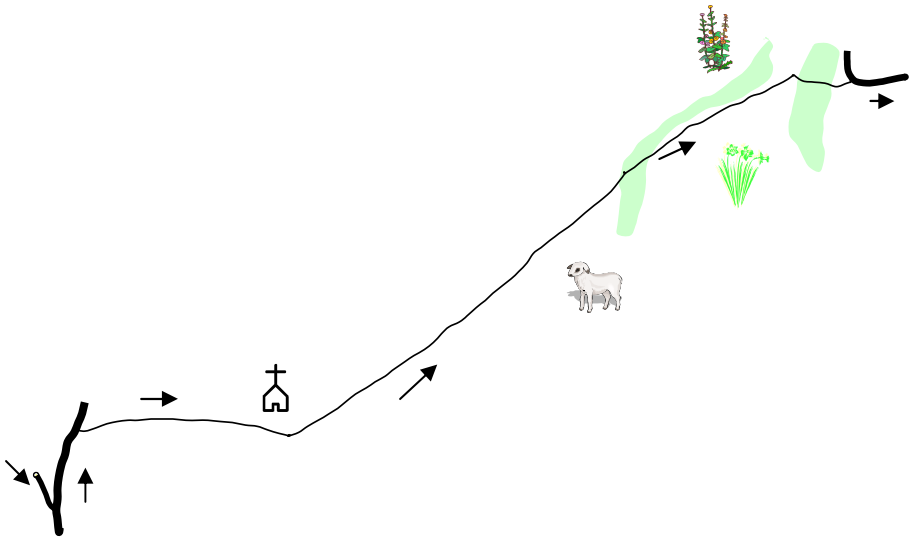


2 Continue along the left-hand side of a large meadow, over a stile and, now in Kent, along the left-hand side of another large meadow. At the end, keep ahead over a stile and a stream, up steps and up through a belt of woodland. The path goes over another stile, uphill along the left-hand side of a smaller meadow and over another stile by a chalet-type house. Continue ahead on a lane past cottages, one of which is a converted oast. At a T-junction turn **right** on Smiths Lane to the main road in Crockham Hill. The *Royal Oak* pub is just 50m on the right, although it would be much too soon for a midday break if you began in Limpsfield Common. *The Royal Oak, an extremely lively pub, has its own brewery, Westerham Brewery (see later), dispensing a range of real ales, some of which can be purchased as "tasters" (one-third size glasses).*

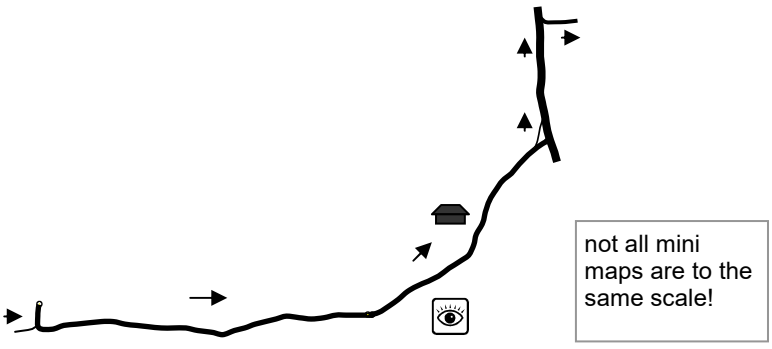


Leg 2: Crockham Hill to Chartwell 2½ km=1½ miles

1 Turn **left** up the main road for 40m and then **right** on a lane signed to the Village Hall. Go past the school with its modern extensions. The Holy Trinity Church, built in 1842 by Charles Warde, is round on your left but your route is straight ahead through a small wooden swing gate and then across the grass with several benches on your left. Go through a small metal gate and keep ahead on a grassy meadow on a slight upward gradient. At the brow of the hill keep ahead over a two-plank bridge and then to a wooden swing-gate in the hedgerow, disregarding a large metal gate higher up to its left. The path goes over a long bridge and up the left-hand side of a sheep meadow. At the top of the rise, go **left** over a stile. On your left is a spring, one of several here from which water emerges to feed the gardens and the hillside. Follow a boardwalk, keeping you quite dry over this marshy area, and then go up a long flight of steps. You reach a lane, Froghole Lane. Turn **right** on the lane in front of a fine converted oast house. Stay on the lane for some distance.

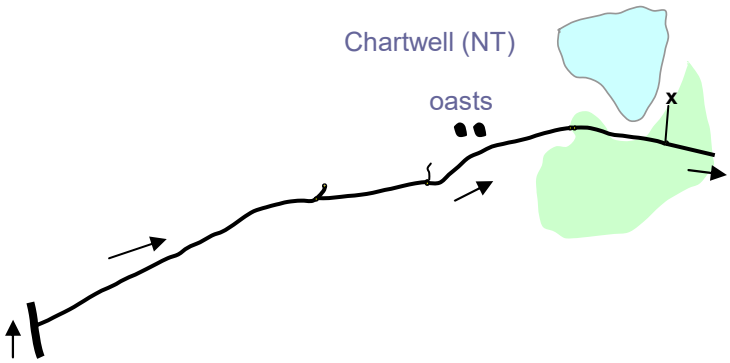


2 As you go, you have fine views right across the Weald and some splendid properties to admire. At a large gate across the lane, go through a small gate beside it and keep right on the tarmac. You pass the fine house *Mariners* with its sculpted waterfowl. Near the end of the lane, bear **left** just before a road and go through a small wooden gate to the road. Turn **left** along the road and, in 70m, turn **right** on a drive signed to Chartwell Farm with great views right over the Weald to the South Downs.

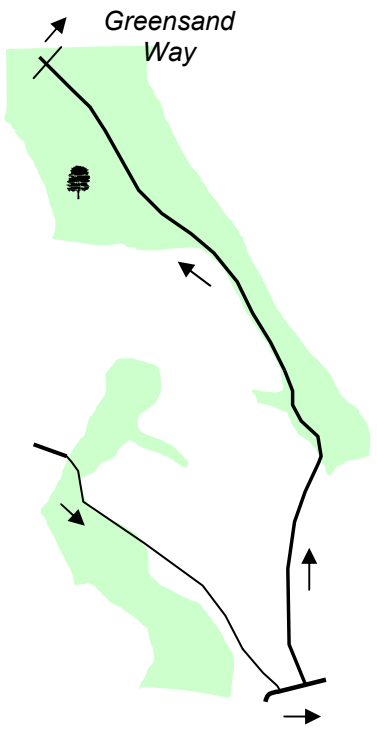


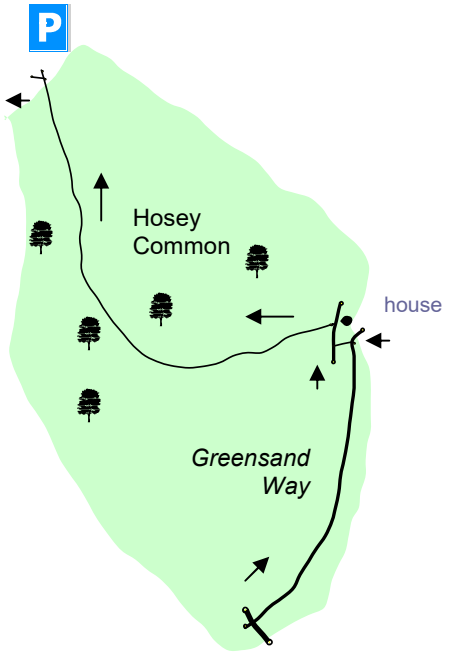
3 At a fork keep **right**, ignoring the National Trust sign for Chartwell. At a junction, go ahead between gates. You are suddenly faced with the magnificent two groups of oast houses at Chartwell Farm. The first group of three con-joined oasts are probably early 1800s and have a drying shed attached. The other group are newer. *Oasts are, or were, kilns for drying hops. The cowl at the top turns with the wind.* Continue through a swing-gate and onto a drive over a stream. *On your left is the garden of Chartwell. If you glance over the big wooden gate, you will see a bronze sculpture of the seated Churchills and some of the garden.* (If you did this walk in an earlier year, you may remember that you went *left* here through the garden. Since 2014, the NT extended the "paying" section to include these woods. Instead, there is a new beautiful route through the valleys.)

Chartwell was Winston Churchill's country home from 1924 until his death in 1965. It is one of the most visited places of the National Trust, yet the house is relatively small. When Churchill first saw it in 1922 it was a much smaller nondescript tastelessly modified ex-farmhouse but his enthusiasm for laying bricks soon created the large west wing and generally transformed it. Inside there are many mementos of Churchill's life, including several of his paintings and a room dedicated to the various honours he accrued from home and abroad. The imprint of his wife Clementine is also evident in many of the rooms. The cottage in the garden was used by Churchill as a refuge for his hobby of painting and after his death it was partly converted into a convincingly cluttered studio-cum-gallery for his many water colours and oil paintings. The garden is something quite special with its ponds, rose garden and orchard. For a war leader born in Blenheim Palace it is surprising to read that Churchill had enormous difficulty raising the cash to buy and convert the property and in 1946 a group of friends had to buy it and rent it back to him for a pittance.



4 **See left-hand map overleaf.** Follow the wide path with a fence on your right, then an avenue of trees. You are now in a wonderful grassy path between sloping meadows. The path leads through a large metal gate and down a path between more pastures with terrific views. At the end, 650m from the stile, go through a new kissing gate onto Puddledock Lane and turn **left** on it. In only 50m, after a white house and before *Windswept*, turn **left** uphill on a narrow tarmac lane, Hosey Common Lane. You now have a long gradual climb on this very quiet lane, with the compensation of great views and, in spring, banks of bluebells. At the top, you have views left across the valley to Chartwell. After a total of 1¼ km on this lane, you will see on your left a metal barrier, a stile and a NT sign for Chartwell. (Funnily enough, there *is* implied public access through here.) Ignore the gate and continue on the lane for nearly 200m to reach a major crossing path with fingerposts. This is part of the Greensand Way (GW), a long-distance path that follows the Greensand Ridge from Haslemere to near Ashford in Kent. Turn **right** on the GW.





Chartwell

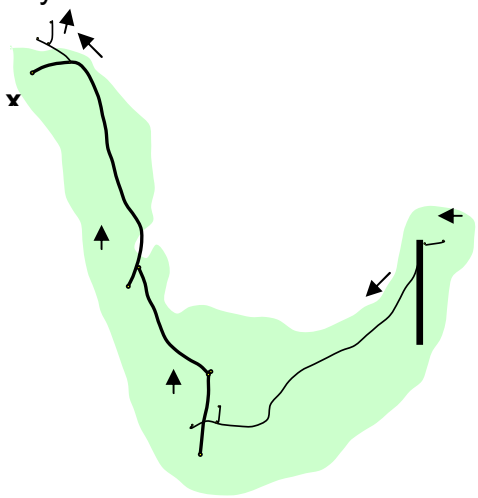
Leg 3: Chartwell to Westerham 4 km=2½ miles

1 **See right-hand map above.** In 50m, keep straight on at a junction, still following the GW arrow. (If you encounter some mud at this point, be assured – it will mostly clear soon.) Roughly 500m after joining the GW, and just after passing a cream sandstone house visible through trees to your left, you reach a junction and a fairly large brick-and-cream house. Turn sharp **left** before the house into trees, thus leaving the GW. In 30m, at a T-junction, turn **right** on a driveway. 5m before the gate to the house, turn **left** on a narrow unsigned path into the great wild woodland of Hosey Common.

Hosey Common is one of the great woodlands of the Greensand Ridge. For centuries, its limestone was mined and the "caves" can still be visited. Now, because of its complex maze of paths and interesting terrain, it is a first choice for orienteers and ramblers.

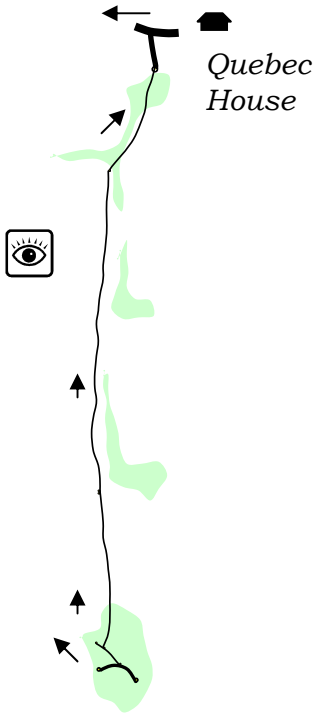
Keep to the narrow path, more or less straight on all the time. Because of the maze of side paths, you need to keep an extra eye open for the posts with yellow arrows, some a bit frayed. You have to veer left and right a little at one point. Do *not* take any paths leading off right. Gradually the path wheels right, changing direction from a definite west to a due north, and also widens. After nearly 1 km in the wood, the route passes by (or near) a large wooden gate and reaches a car park by the Hosey Common Road.

2 Turn immediately sharp **left** through the top of the car park, cross the road and turn **left** on it. In just 20m, fork **right** at a footpath sign. You are back on the Common. Soon a muddy patch is relieved by a boardwalk and you approach a large pine-wood at a junction. Ignore a narrow path on the right, continue between some wooden posts and turn **right** on a wide path beside tall pines on your left (a drier choice). At a junction with a post and a yellow arrow, keep straight ahead. You have a house, *Charts Edge*, and its large garden on your



right. *(Open to the public Fri and Sun pm mid-April to mid-Sep).* At a definite bend, leave the track as it bends away left uphill and keep ahead through a metal kissing gate leading into a meadow.

3 Immediately turn **right** along the right-hand side of the meadow, very steeply uphill. At the top, continue along the right-hand side of a large grassy meadow. Soon you see the top of the church in Westerham. (There are several paths from here into the town. The route described here shows you the whole town. You could shorten the route a bit by aiming for the western edge.) After a marker post and a crossing path, fork **right** to stay near the right-hand side of the meadow. Go over a stile in the corner by a yellow arrow. Descend a grassy slope, aiming for another yellow arrow on a post barely visible ahead. Veer **right** at the post and follow the left-hand side of a meadow across a bridge over the River Darent, through a metal kissing gate, along an alley with terraced houses and out to the main road. Welcome to Westerham! Opposite you, a bit to the right, is the NT's Quebec House.

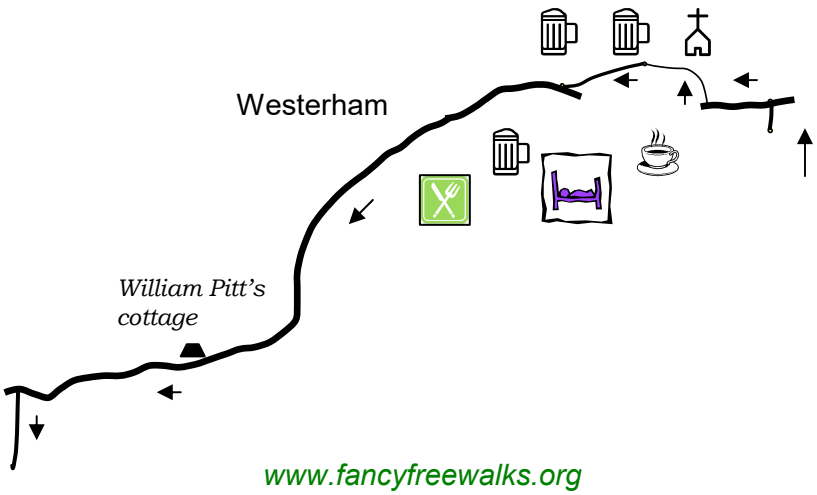


Quebec House was the childhood home of General James Wolfe, of which more later. This small 16th-century redbrick house has enormous charm and the small rooms contain original furniture and many historical references. The small enchanting garden contains features such as straw beehives set into the wall. The house and garden are open most of the year.

Leg 4: Westerham to Limpsfield Common 3½ km=2 miles

Westerham is named in the Domesday book as the 'Hundred of Ostreham', indicating a subdivision of Kent where leaders met regularly. There is evidence of Celtic and Roman habitation here, making the site at least 4000 years old. The River Darent flows through Westerham and in the past powered several mills. Westerham has a long history of brewing beer and its distinctive yeast is still used by the current Westerham (micro-)Brewery.

1 Turn **left** on the main road and cross it with care. In 70m, turn **right** on a footpath at a little fingerpost by a garden fence which leads to the church.



St Mary's church dates from the 1300s. It was here that General Wolfe and three of Winston Churchill's grandchildren were baptised. Inside there are a number of artifacts that commemorate both men and their families, including a Burne-Jones / William Morris window dedicated to Wolfe.

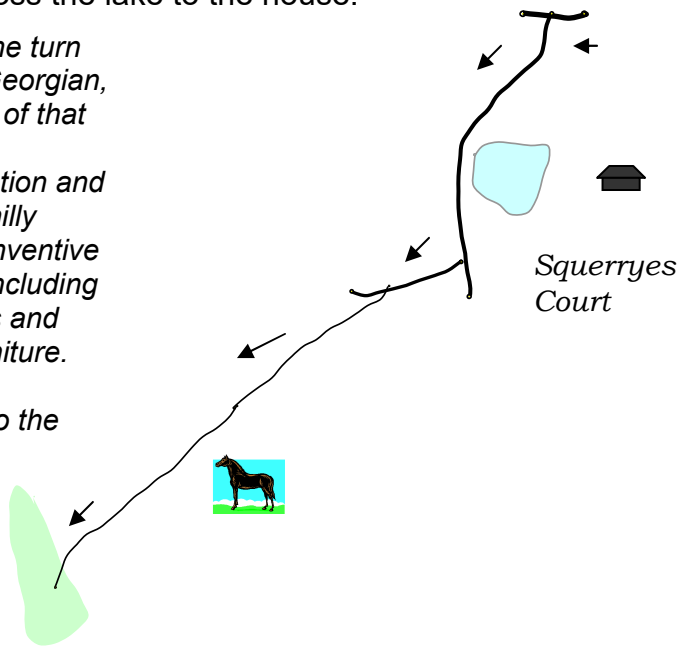
Turn **left** in front of the church and continue to the town square. Around the square there are a number of tea shops. (The *Tudor Rose* is recommended by walkers.) As you proceed, the *Grasshopper on the Green* (a free house) and the *George and Dragon* then, on the other side, the *Kings Arms* which is also a hotel offering rooms with four-poster beds. In the square you will notice a reclining statue of Churchill and one of General Wolfe with brandished sword.

General James Wolfe (1727–1759) was a young soldier and the hero of Quebec. Great Britain in the 1700s was at the peak of an extraordinary period of military power and Wolfe could be said to personify this. He was born here in the local vicarage. He first won distinction in a bloody campaign during the War of Austrian Succession, then in the '45 Jacobite rebellion. During the Seven Years War he took part in a daring assault on Rochefort and came to the attention of William Pitt the Elder who saw in him an opportunity to win eastern Canada for the British crown. The key to this was the taking of Quebec. After a long siege, Wolfe decided the issue by commanding his forces to climb the Heights of Abraham, a line of cliffs that had been left undefended by the French who were expecting an attack by an easier route. Wolfe was felled by a musket ball but lived long enough to learn of the victory. He lies buried in Greenwich, his former home.

As you walk, you will notice how long and narrow this little town is. The pavement switches from left to right. Eventually, after the main road bends to the right and on the outskirts of the town, you pass the little *General Wolfe* pub and the 12th-century cottage that was used by William Pitt the Younger. After a gradual left and right bend, you finally reach a road junction on the left. Turn **left** here on Goodley Stock, a road name that aptly describes the Warde family who have lived for nearly 300 years in Squerryes Court and had a huge influence on the life of Westerham.

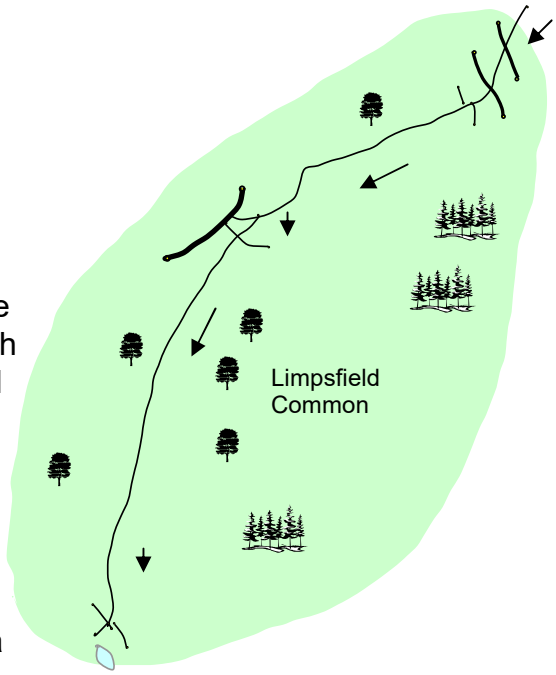
2 Soon you have a fine view across the lake to the house.

Squerryes Court was built at the turn of the 1700s, making it early Georgian, and it shows the best qualities of that period with its elegant well-proportioned redbrick construction and tall chimneys. It sits in a fine hilly garden which contains some inventive topiary. Inside it is a delight, including some fine old master paintings and much porcelain, silver and furniture. The house and garden are unfortunately no longer open to the public.

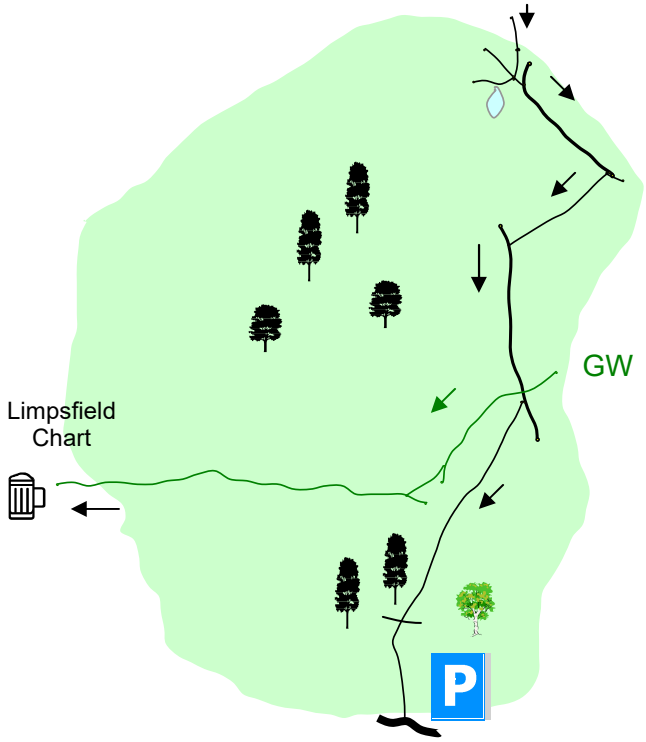


Continue for 300m as far as a house on the left, and turn **right** here on a tarmac lane. In 100m, turn **left** at a waymarker post over small bridge and **right** along the edge of a field (sometimes very overgrown with crops in summer: suggest keeping near the green verge). *Note the biblical exhortation on the grain store to "be sober be vigilant" – against what is not clear.* If the path is ploughed up at the beginning, it soon improves, reaching a stile into a horse meadow. After the stile you will find that the earth is churned up by horses' hooves, a strictly temporary state of affairs. Keep along the right-hand side of the meadow and, in the far corner, go over a stile into woods. Welcome back to Surrey and Limpsfield Common!

3 The next sections navigate you through the beautiful and rather complex Limpsfield Common and you need to be careful not to lose your way. In 30m, go over a wide crossing path and, after another 100m, another wide forestry path. In 100m, ignore posts with yellow arrows pointing left and right and continue on a sunken path. Soon you reach a junction close to a tarmac lane and a large double metal gate, both on your right. Turn **left** at the gate on a wide track, go only 15m and take the **first** path **right** into the woods. You are now walking parallel to that lane on your right through a woodland of majestic tall conifers. In 100m, at a post with a yellow arrow, take the **left** fork, the wider option. In another 350m on this narrow woodland path, you come up to a seat, a National Trust sign and a small pond, at a junction of several much wider paths. (In very dry weather the pond may be just a depression.)

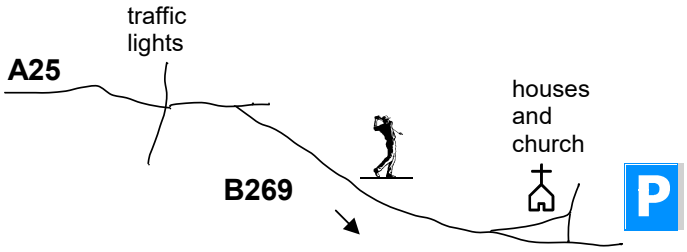


4 Turn **left** in front of the pond and immediately **right** on a wide track. In about 100m, you reach another NT sign. Turn sharp **right** immediately before the sign on a wide rather messy dirt path which soon ascends. In 100m, at a T-junction, turn **left** on a wide path. Soon you reach a junction with the Greensand Way, indicated by the distinctive GW arrows. (If you would like final refreshment, turn **right** on the GW, fork **left** in 30m and, in 100m, veer **right** on a wide track that ends at the village of Limpsfield Chart where the *Carpenters Arms* awaits, just down the road ahead. Go to the main road and turn **left** to return to the car park.) Just 10m after crossing the GW, fork **right** away from the wide path on a narrower path. This path soon widens and goes over other paths before reaching the car park where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: if coming from the London area via the M25, come off at Junction 6, turn right onto the A22 and left at a roundabout onto the A25 through Oxted and Limpsfield and, after some traffic lights, turn half right onto the B269 Kent Hatch Road, signposted Edenbridge.



If coming from the east, again take the A25. From the south, take the B2026 through Crockham Hill.

By bus / train: bus 594 from Oxted station. Various buses to Westerham.

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