



Leigh and *The Plough*: a country foray

Distance: 7½ km=4½ miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Leigh

Map: Explorer 146 (Reigate) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Green meadows, field paths, view, pub, historic houses, country avenue

In Brief

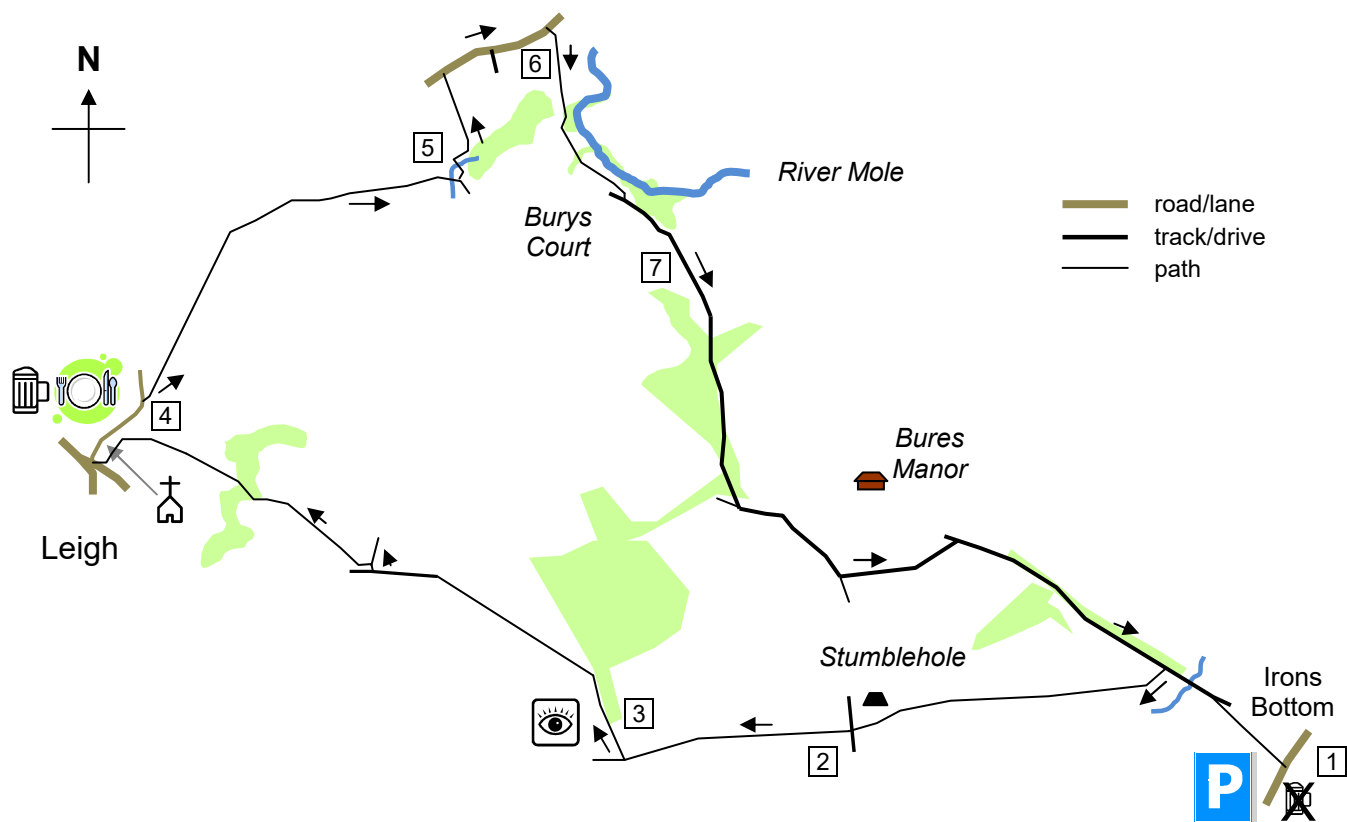
This is a walk with a scenic start and a remarkable ending. It would have been a pub-to-pub circular, except that the defunct *Three Horseshoes* at Irons Bottom is now just a jumping-off point. The centre of the walk finds the best part of the village of Leigh, next to the church, the timbered *Priest's House* and an excellent pub. (To enquire at the *Plough*, ring 01306-611-348.) The final stage of the walk is along a country highway, gated against all but traffic to the manor, with blossom or autumn colours as to season, ending in a long avenue under lime trees.



There are no nettles or undergrowth on this walk and the only livestock are a donkey or two and a brace of alpacas. Boots are recommended unless the weather is very dry, because one short section of field may be ploughed up. Your dog is welcome.

The walk begins in the parking strip opposite the (closed) *Three Horseshoes* pub in **Irons Bottom**, Sidlow, near Reigate, Surrey, postcode **RH2 8PT**. (The custom seems to be to park in "herringbone" formation if your car is not too long.) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 From the parking strip opposite the ex-pub, with the road on your right, walk a short distance to the bus stop and go through a gap in the hedge onto a (currently unsigned) clear footpath across a field. The path continues through a strip of grass and joins a tarmac drive, taking you over a bridge. **This is a wildlife conservation area and this long lime avenue will be your return route at the end of the walk.** In 30m, at a 3-way fingerpost, turn **left** across a small field, over a 2-plank bridge into another crop field. Cross the field diagonally **right**, heading for a low brown roof in the distance. Go over a stile into a green meadow and veer a fraction more to the right to cross this meadow diagonally to reach a stile on the other side. Go over this stile (**careful! wobbly**), a plank bridge and another stile into a pasture grazed by a wonderful collection of horses, goats and alpacas. Keep to the **left** side to go over a (partly broken) stile in the corner. Follow a narrow path with a horse exercise area on your left to come out to the tarmac drive of *Little Stumblehole* by a 4-way fingerpost.
- 2 Cross straight over the drive, through an untidy farmyard, and straight ahead on a rough track leading away from the farm. *The lake visible through the fence on your right with its little island and pier was purpose-built a few years ago.* The track becomes grass and you are in the open country again. Where the track turns left, keep straight ahead on a grassy path leading into a grass meadow. Go straight across the centre and, in the corner, keep right over a stile into a sheep pasture. Suddenly you have a terrific view of the pleasant Surrey countryside leading to the North Downs.

- 3 Turn **right** along the edge of the pasture keeping a bluebell wood on your right. In the corner, go over a stile and take a path diagonally across a sheep pasture. Go over a stile in the fence and continue along the left-hand side of the next meadow. In the corner, go **left** through the smaller of two wooden gates and follow a wide green bridleway. In 150m, just after an oak tree, look right for two planks and a stile. *Don't miss this junction!* Go **right** over the stile into a field and turn **left** along the edge. Follow the edge of the field round to the **right** and keep to the edge. [Apr 2019: the field had been ploughed close to the edge leaving very little margin to walk but the path soon reappeared.] Just before the far corner, your waymarked path goes **left** over a 3-plank bridge and stile and **right**. A long bridge takes you over a creek, followed by a clear path across a cereal crop. After a modern kissing-gate, the path runs between fences into the churchyard of St Bartholomew's church in Leigh.



The village of Leigh is pronounced "Lye", just like its medieval spelling. It goes back at least to Roman times and a hoard of Roman coins was found there. Ben Jonson, poet and playwright of Shakespeare's time, rented a farm here. Another famous resident is the great conductor and pianist André Previn ("Mr Preview" as Morecambe and Wise mis-called him). The village is blessed with two pubs, the other being "The Seven Stars". The "Plough" dates from the late 1300s and has kept its venerable atmosphere with low beams. Sarah keeps the pub open all day, offering home cooked food and H&W ales plus guest. The pub often serves as ad-hoc reception area for weddings (being opposite the church) and you may have to elbow your way through to the bar.



St Bartholomew's church can be entered by the main west door which is usually unlocked. It dates from the 1400s, built of local Reigate stone. The Priest's House, one of the most perfect timbered buildings in Surrey, dates from the 1400s.

- 4 After your possible break, turn **right** before the pub on a side lane, passing the church on your right and some interesting cottages. On a bend, just 15m after the entrance to *Willow Cottage*, go **right** through a wooden swing-gate on a signed footpath and take a wide track across a cereal field. (If the field is bare, simply follow the wide tractor marks.) *Over on your left, the house with the clock turret is the 15th-century moated Leigh Place.* Continue along the left-hand side of the next field. Ignore a stile on the left and stay on the field edge all the way to the corner. Go over a (bypassable) stile here and keep **left** along the left-hand edge of the next field. Go over a long bridge across a stream into a small green meadow.

- 5 Ignore the right-pointing arrow and instead turn **left** into the corner. A stile, another long bridge and a horizontal bar take you back over the stream into a rough meadow. Your path winds its way right and left around a fenced area and finally by means of a (bypassable) stile to a road. Turn **right** on the road, soon passing the entrance to Burys Court, site of Moon Hall School, a private school for dyslexic children. 100m or so further, go **right** over a stile into a green bowl-shaped meadow. (The bank where you stand which encases the meadow give it a kind of pudding-dish-like shape.)

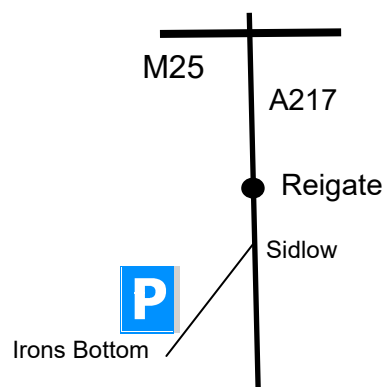
- 6 Go down the bank and turn **right**, keeping the bank on your right. The wooden bridge that you have to cross is visible just ahead. Go over the bridge which has a stile at each end. (The bridge crosses a tributary of the River Mole which flows close by on your left.) Keep straight on, through a gap in the trees, and across the next meadow. Go over a (partly rotten) stile in the corner and turn **left** on a concrete drive, passing the *Keepers*

Cottage of Burys Court. This excellent country highway will take you all the way back to the start of your walk, with birdsong and seasonal blossom. In Birchett Copse on your left you may hear the first cuckoo of spring.

- 7 Follow the concrete drive, soon bypassing a large metal gate using the stile on the right. The drive becomes gravel and bends left where a bridleway joins you from the right. *Note the ancient oak on your left.* Keep to the main track which curves right. You pass some woodland on your left and your path becomes concrete anew. You reach a 3-way signposted junction. (*On your left, just before the junction, are two small (presumably) private wooden gates leading to a sacred gothic iron fountain, acting as a vista from Bures Manor, a rare surprise.*) Keep **left** at the junction, soon bypassing another large metal gate using a stile. At a T-junction with *Bures Manor* on your left, turn **right** on a tarmac drive and follow this lime avenue. You eventually pass the footpath on your right where you turned on the outward journey. After the bridge, fork **right** across the grass and the field, leading back to the parking strip in Irons Bottom where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Irons Bottom lies on a branch road from Sidlow, which is on the A217 Sutton-Reigate-Gatwick road. If you are coming from the general London area, the M25, take the A217 through Reigate and, 2½ miles after Reigate, just after the Mole Bridge and before the church at Sidlow, turn **right** as for *Norwood Hill, Leigh*. In less than a mile, park on the right in dirt strip, opposite the *Three Horseshoes*.



By bus/train: “Buses4U” run a service Mon-Thu to Irons Bottom. Check their website for a timetable.

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