



Eastling, Newnham, Doddington Three Kentish Villages, Great Pubs

Distance: 8½ km=5¼ miles

easy walking

Region: Kent

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Refreshments: Eastling, Newnham, Doddington

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

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Villages, churches, parkland, woodland, great houses, pubs

In Brief

This walk takes you on a circuit through three communities, situated in a valley between the Kent hills, who were once self-sufficient, whose people lived and worked all their lives in the valley. The villages date back over a thousand years. There was every kind of shop and trade, full of interesting characters. Now, with the arrival of the motor car, all but one shop has gone, but not the country-village atmosphere where families stay together.

One facility which has *not* disappeared, apart from the church, is the *pub*, in two of the villages, each quite different. They are all popular and you may need to book if you want lunch (they all do good food). For the *Carpenters Arms*, ring 01795-890234; for the *Chequers*, ring 01795-886366. This walk used to be called *Three Kentish Villages*, *Three Great Pubs*, but after the closure of the George Inn in Newnham, it had to be renamed.



Shorts are wearable but there is some scratchy undergrowth in the field paths after Eastling which may be uncomfortable in summer. Boots are not necessary on this walk (although always useful). All the pubs have an outdoor space and welcome dogs.

The walk begins in the village of **Eastling**, Kent, postcode **ME13 0AZ**. There is roadside parking here, perhaps the best place being just after the junction with Newnham Lane. There is also the church car park. You could also park in one of the other villages, for instance just up the side road beside the *Chequers Inn* in Doddington. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

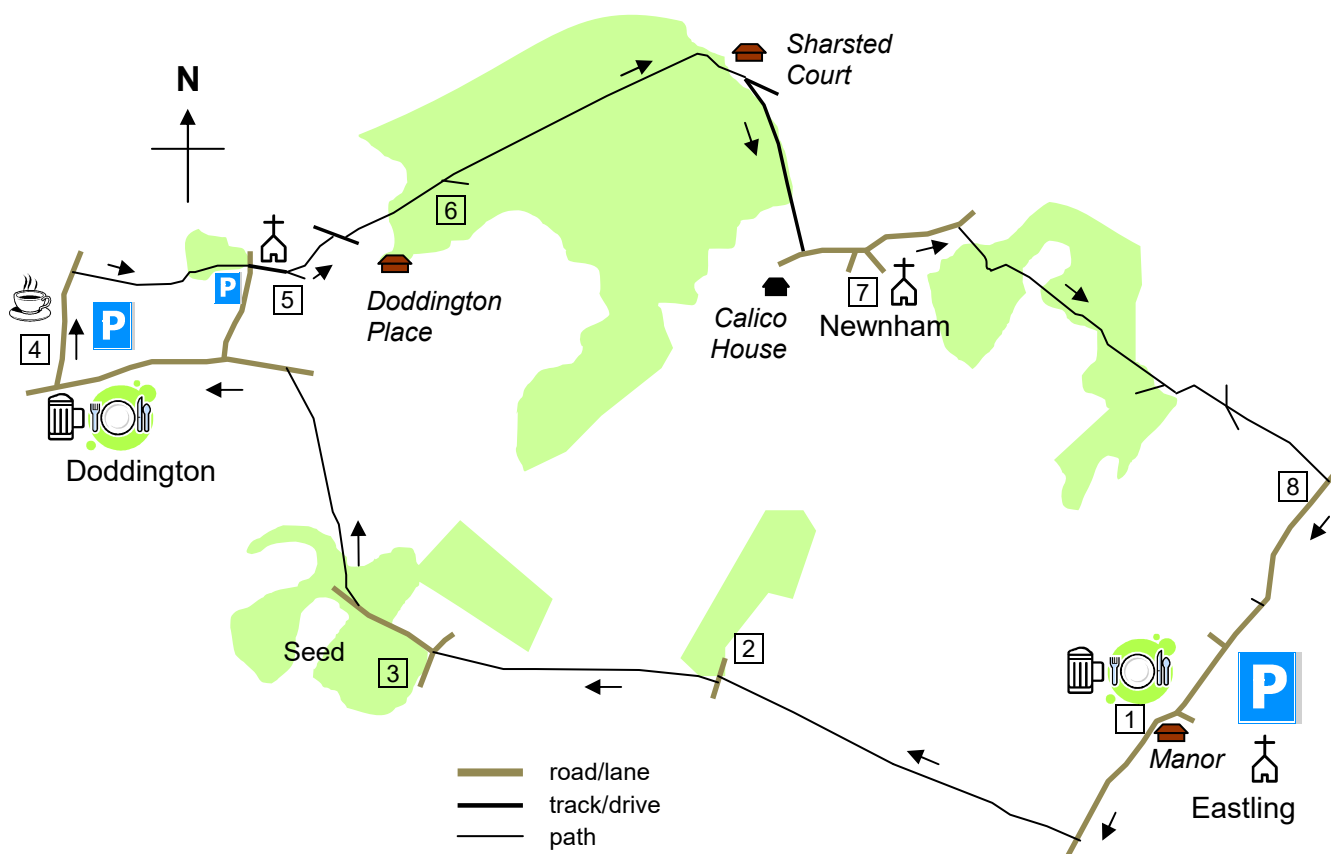
The Walk

The "Eslingas" were a Jutish tribe whose chief was "Esla". Like all the villages you see today, it was once self-sufficient with a host of traders and skilled workers. Now, with the motorcar, the pub and the church are the only amenities. As late as the 1800s, life was harsh for working men of the village who were sometimes sentenced to hard labour simply for "disobeying the commands of their master". One annual event became notorious: the Eastling Squirrel Hunt, held each Nov 30. Historian/antiquarian Edward Hasted denounced it as "a lawless rabble pretending to hunt squirrels, but in reality killing other wildlife, breaking down hedges and heading for the pub". The "Carpenters Arms" is now a more respectable local, and comments are left to the end of this text. Eastling School, founded in 1881, had two remarkable escapes from burning down, thanks to its Head, Mr Fred Pincott: once when a scuttle of hot coals was left on the floor by a cleaner, and once when a lamp fell from its support.

Eastling once had four separate manors. At the junction, Eastling Manor, one of the finest timbered buildings in Kent, dates partly from 1280. It is also famous for its garden which can be visited as part of the National Gardens Scheme, featuring a knot garden, herbaceous borders, ponds, walled gardens, an orchard and extensive topiary.



The Church of St Mary was built some years before the Norman Conquest. The west doorway still dates from soon after 1066.



- 1 With the *Carpenters Arms* on your right and Eastling Manor on your left, walk along the main road out of Eastling village. In 400m, just as the footway ends, after a sign for *Tong Farm*, turn **right** on a semi-tarmac drive. You pass timbered *Tong House* and more cottages. Ignore a footpath right and stay on the cinder track. Where the drive bends left, keep straight

ahead on a path alongside a hedge beside a crop field, soon running between two fields. At the far end, go through a gap in a line of trees and straight ahead on an excellent path through a crop field. At the far side, a gap in the line of trees leads you down two steps to a very dark and quiet tarmac lane.

2 Turn **left** on the lane for 15m, then **right** through a metal kissing-gate into a meadow of waving grass. Your route goes straight at first, then it veers left down the valley and up the other side to a kissing-gate. The path crosses a thin cultivated strip and follows a florid path between crops. At the other side you arrive, via the smaller of two wooden gates, into an apple orchard belonging to Foxenden Manor on your left. Keep to the left-hand side, coming out in the corner through a metal kissing-gate beside a large gate onto a tarmac lane in the hamlet of Seed. Cross straight over the lane to Hopes Hill opposite, signed (on the vintage signpost) to *Doddington*.

3 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 at the *Chequers Inn* in the village of Doddington.



Doddington, "homestead of Dudda's people" (after a Saxon chief), is another once self-contained community. Apart from the pub, just one amenity remains: S.W.Doughty the family butcher, with its own slaughter house, providing much more than meat (including a guide to the church). Doddington has its own website "www.doddington-kent.org.uk" with a wealth of detail about the people who lived here. Mr Sellen the baker, "Old Ern", was bent double with the strain of loading and unloading the oven and his apron, hair and moustache were always white with flour.



*The Chequers Inn is a Shepherd Neame pub, described by a user of this guide as "very merry and welcoming", which does a "terrific lunch". This pub is supposedly haunted by a Cavalier from the Civil War. Note that the pub opens at midday and is **closed on Monday**. The Doddington Tea Rooms, just up the hill from the pub, offer a fresh cooked breakfast as well as tea, coffee and snacks.*

4 After your break, turn **right** beside the pub on a lane Chequers Hill, uphill, passing the Tea Rooms. After the road levels out, in nearly 300m, just before the end-of-speed-limit sign, go **right** at a signpost on a wide grassy path. The path runs along the right-hand side of a crop field. At the end, it curves left and right through a wooden swing-gate on a woodland path. After 70m through the woods, keeping straight ahead, go through a wooden swing-gate into a small meadow used as a car park. Continue out to a tarmac lane and cross to a gravel drive with Doddington Church on your left.



Doddington church has an unusual dedication: to the Beheading of St John the Baptist. It is situated in a conservation area. The South Chapel is in Early English style, dating from the 1200s, as is the stained-glass medallion depicting the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt, visible in one of the east windows. The

weather-boarded, white square tower was (finally) re-erected in the early 1800s to replace the earlier tower which had been destroyed by fire in 1643.

- 5 Continue a short distance along the drive and go through an old kissing-gate into parkland revealing a fine collection of mature trees, with sheep grazing beneath them. You are in a part of the estate of Doddington Place with two paths ahead indicated. Immediately take the **left** fork which cuts across the parkland under trees. Your precise direction is not important because your first destination is anywhere on the central driveway. The author passed a horsechestnut on the left and an exotic ash on the right.

*Doddington Place was built around 1860 by the architect Charles Brown Trollope for Sir John Croft (of Croft's Port and Sherry) using red bricks made on the estate. The Crofts had **seventeen** children (although four died young) and, since they were devoted to the village, the church and the village people experienced a never-ending series of weddings and christenings. The gardens, some of the finest in Kent, are open Apr-Sep, Wed, Sun and Bank Hols, for a fairly modest entrance fee.*

When you meet the driveway (on a popular day lined with parked visitors' cars) you will need to turn **right** on it for a short distance. Look left to locate a tall marker post with a yellow arrow, about 20m from the driveway and about 100m from the House's gate posts. Fork **left** across the grass to pass it. Continue on the path to meet an old wooden gate leading into woodland.

- 6 Where the fence on your right ends, avoid a right fork and keep dead straight, deep into the woods. After more than 600m through Sharsted Wood, you come past a large wooden gate and a marker post. Ahead are the wrought-iron gates of Sharsted Court.

There was a manor house here at the time of Bishop Odo (died 1097) but Sharsted Court dates from the early 1300s. As befits such an old house, it is "ancient, romantic, rambling" – and haunted. From one bedroom it is said were heard terrifying shrieks, with guttering candles and a hideous figure. A footman who went to investigate came back blubbering incoherently and died shortly after. As you can imagine, the house was quickly passed on to a long series of interesting owners. Until 1582, when William Delaune, a French Huguenot, physician and cleric, bought the house. His family held it for over 300 years. The last of them, Chapman Faunce-de-Laune, built the famous topiary hedges and founded London's oldest cycling club. In 1966 the estate was bought by the Wade family who still reside. The most famous of them is Virginia Wade, ex-Wimbledon champion.



Your path curves right beside the grass and the wall of the house, giving you a view of the fine topiary. Continue past a large wooden gate and take the **right**-hand of two tarmac drives leading away from the house. The drive goes downhill under the cover of tall trees. Ignore footpaths on your left and go down the main road in Newnham. Turn **left**, passing terraced cottages with front gardens of hollyhocks. Soon, on your right is the church of St Peter and St Paul.

*Newnham goes back a thousand years. The best-known house in the village is medieval Calico House, re-built in 1710. (You would need to turn **right** for 100m instead of left to see it.) No-one knows the origin of the name, although the red and white plasterwork is suggestive. It was owned by the influential Hulkes family who also owned the brewhouse and maintained the church. There was also Newnham Mill (now gone) and a Manor House, now Champion Court, just north of The Street. A famous son of Newnham was James Pimm, inventor of the famous summer drink.*

The church of St Peter and St Paul was built in the 1100s; the porch and north aisle are from the 1200s, the south aisle from the 1300s. By the 1860s, the church was a half-ruin and was completely restored. All except the windows: see how light the interior is? no stained glass.

A short distance further, after a line of whiteboard houses, you arrive at a building which used to be the *George Inn (closed in Jan 2024)*.

- 7 Continue along the main road in Newnham, till just before the last house. Turn **right** here by a signpost on a grassy footpath, squeezing past a large metal gate. The path leads up into woodland. Keep straight ahead, steeply uphill, as indicated by a yellow arrow on a post, crossing under wires. Follow this path, fenced with wooden stakes on both sides, until it comes out into a lighter area, a favourite spot for blackberries in late summer. Ignore a path on the right here just as your path goes straight on into darker woodland. You come through a small wooden gate and your path runs alongside a fence on your right, with a field visible through trees on your left. At the next marker post, you are joined by a footpath from the right. Suddenly, your path takes you **left** over a bank and **right** again. In 100m or so, at a marker post, ignore the right fork and keep straight on. (The right fork seems like a short cut to the next village but it is hemmed in by fences.) Follow the path for another 250m, with a field visible on your left and the woods, later a water treatment plant, on your right. A metal barrier leads out to the main road in Eastling.

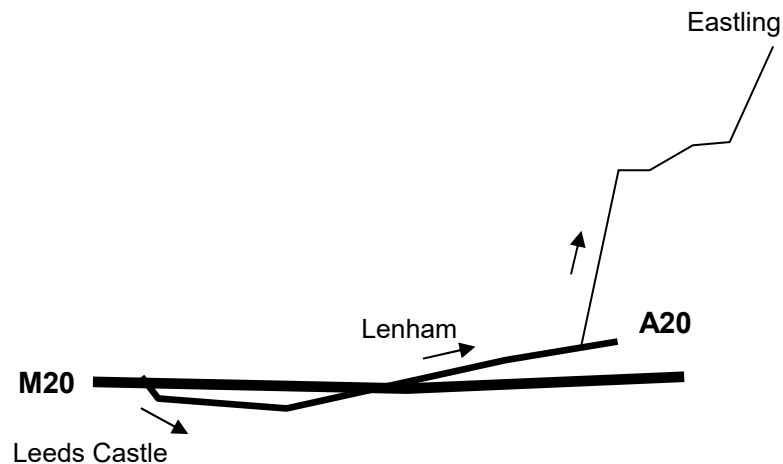
- 8 Turn **right**, using the footway, passing modern houses at first, soon entering the old village, passing more hollyhocks and Newnham Lane on your right. A path on your left, though not part of this walk, will lead you to the church which is worth visiting. Soon you reach the *Carpenters Arms* in the centre of the village, where the walk began.



The Carpenters Arms (Shepherd Neame) is a great attraction because of its situation on the central junction and because of its charming garden on the side with its little “stable house” and usually a summer tent. The garden is so small (but quite adequate), that you feel you are in a kind of garden party, rather than a pub lawn. So you are bound to chat with the adjoining tables. A good selection of real ales includes Midnight Sun and Master Brew. There is also food of course, and – is it just imagination? – an informal table service to bring you the next pint as well as the dish of the day.

Getting there

By car: Eastling is at the end of a “scenic” drive if you are coming from the London area on the M20. Come off as for **Leeds Castle** to continue on the A20. After crossing under the M20 and going through Lenham, look for a junction on the left signed *Warren St, Otterden*. Take this lane and keep to the marked major road through Warren St. After passing the entrance to Otterden Place, you will be following signs for Eastling. The “orthodox” route (for goods vehicles) is through Faversham, using your map or satnav. A similar route to Doddington, plus a route there via the M2, is described in the neighbouring walk *Doddington and Otterden Place*. There are many ways.



By bus/train: bus 660 runs from Faversham Station to Eastling, not Sun; bus 344/345 from Teynham Station to Doddington and Newnham, not Sun; bus 662 from Faversham Station to Doddington and Newnham, Mon and Tue only . Check the timetables.

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