



Bletchingley

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles or 6 km=4 miles

easy walking with one modest climb

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Bletchingley

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


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High paths, views, sheep meadows, secret garden, woodland, village


In Brief

This walk of great historic interest starts and ends in a charming Surrey village, taking in some real surprises along the way, including some dramatic landscapes and a secret garden.

 The big village of Bletchingley has at least *three* pubs. The *Whyte Harte* hotel dates from 1388 and is well-known in history. The *Bletchingley Arms* is an incredibly popular large all-pleasing pub/restaurant on the east of the village. The *Red Lion* pub is the notional start of this walk. There is also a village store which remarkably seems to be always open!

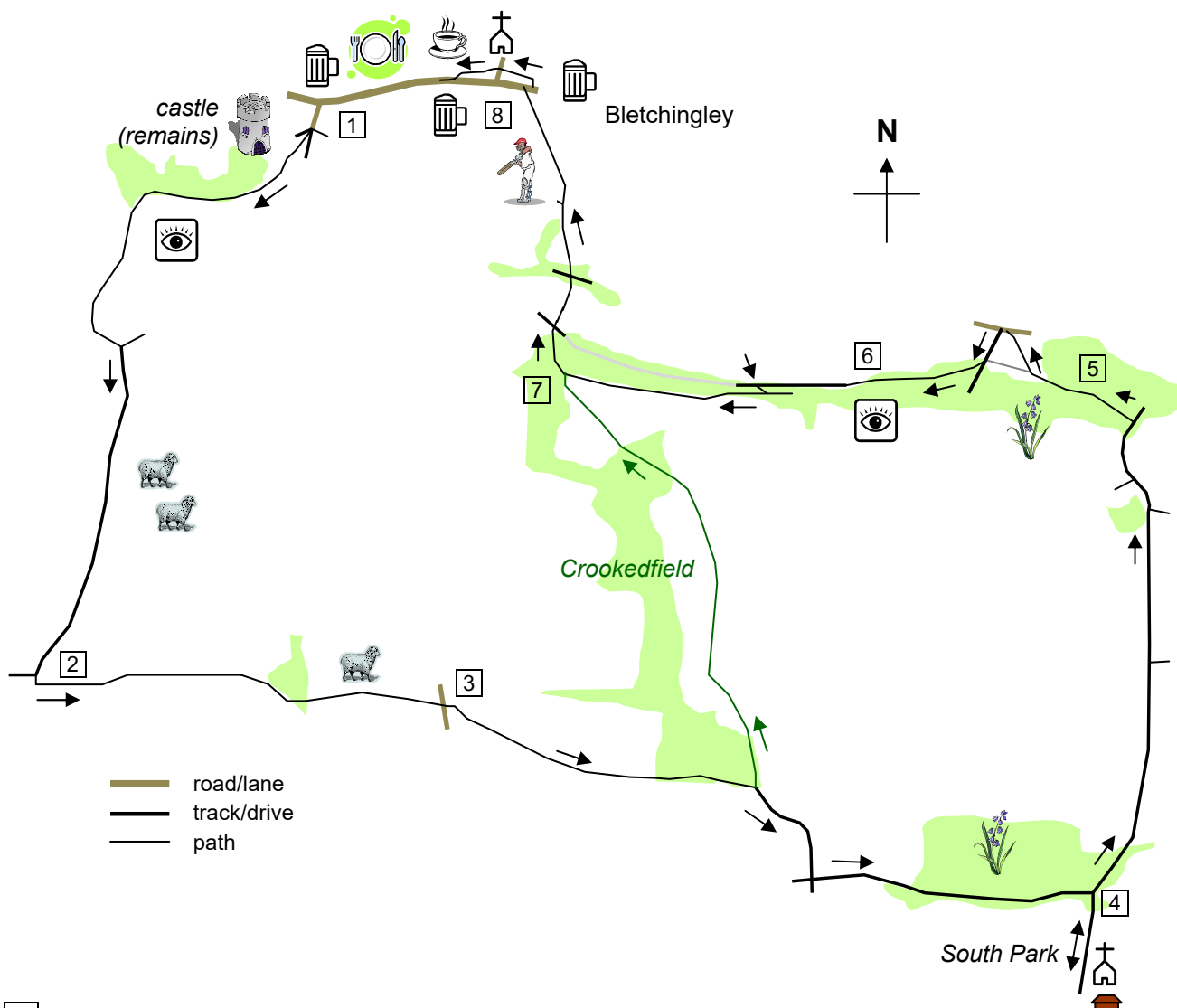
 In spring there were no nettles or undergrowth worth mentioning on this walk, but in summer the vegetation is much more prolific, making long trousers (and maybe long sleeves) advisable. Most of the route is good surfaced paths but there are some exceptions, especially the sheep meadows at the start and woodland at the end. So boots or mud-proof trainers are strongly advised, particularly in the less clement months.

 There's no reason to leave your dog at home but he will need a short lead (and worming) because of the sheep.

 The walk begins in the large village of **Bletchingley**, Surrey, postcode **RH1 4NU**, www.w3w.co/coffee.couch.assist. There is plenty of roadside parking but this walk starts near the *Red Lion* pub at the west side of the village where there is parking in a parallel side road by the grass. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Bletchingley is most famous for its castle (see below), its kingly connections and its undemocratic supply of prime ministers. The Saxon manor of Bletchingley passed from the Normans to various owners including Edward Stafford 4th Duke of Buckingham, a highly accomplished man, always flamboyantly and expensively dressed, which must have irritated the young Henry VIII, resulting in a trumped-up charge and execution in 1521. The estate was then given to Anne of Cleves as a sop after Henry's disastrous foray into Tudor-style speed-dating. (The site of the lost manor is north of the village.) Bletchingley was another of those "rotten boroughs" which returned two MPs from an electorate of just ten landowners. Two of these MPs went on to become prime minister: Lord Melbourne and Lord Palmerston.



- 1 The walk begins near the *Red Lion* pub at the west side of the village. Cross the main road and go down a side road, Castle Square, passing the village pond and some venerable cottages. The road shortly ends and you see ahead a descending tarmac lane with a footpath on either side. Take the **right**-hand footpath, part of the Greensand Way (GW) long-distance footpath. *This path will take you along the boundary of Bletchingley Castle. The best views of the ramparts and earthworks are unfortunately along the private drive just to the right.*

Bletchingley Castle was built around 1170 and occupied by the Norman de Clare family. Among its first visitors were the four knights on their way to Canterbury, who were to kill Thomas à Becket after mistaking the petulant King Henry II's intention. The last owner, Gilbert de Clare, took up Simon de

Montfort's cause against Henry III and, after the Battle of Lewes, saw his castle reduced to a ruin by the king's victorious army.

Instantly you have terrific views ahead and to your left over the Weald. The castle is through the trees on your right. In places the path is so narrow that you have to walk in single file. Sheep fields and the M23 motorway are visible ahead. Your path bends left and goes downhill, levelling out, to become a sunken tree-lined path. There is a pasture with cattle on your right (although this walk does not go through them) and you may pass a muddy patch or two in the wetter months. After going over a stile, keep **left** on a farmer's track and, in 50m, at a junction, keep **right**. Go through a small metal gate beside a larger one onto a made-up track across a sheep meadow with a wire fence running along the left-hand side. After a small metal gate, your path crosses the centre of another sheep pasture, going over a stream. You quickly reach a junction with the sound of the M23 motorway close by on your right.

2 Continue **straight ahead** here through a small metal gate, thus **leaving** the main track (which curves right to go under the M23). Now turn immediately **left** along the edge of the meadow. In the first corner, go through a small metal gate to cross a stream lined with trees, into a new sheep meadow. Your route is straight ahead, merging with the left-hand edge. *In wet conditions, you may need to probe for a path which is less squishy.* At the far side, go through a small metal gate and continue straight ahead in the next sheep pasture. Bear right, hugging the edge beside a small wood, with Sandhills Farm visible on your left. Just after the small wood ends, go **left** through a small metal gate into another pasture and follow the left-hand edge. In the corner, a narrow section leads over a stream and through a small metal gate. Follow the left-hand edge of the next pasture and, at the other side, go through a small metal gate to a road.

3 Cross the road to a track directly opposite which leads past a house and bungalow. Continue on a path between a field and a woodland strip. Your route goes over a stream and takes you on an attractive path through an oak wood. At the end of the wood, you meet a marker post with a path into the wood on your left.

Decision point. *If you are doing the shorter 4-mile walk, skip to the end of this text and do the **Crookedfield Shortcut**. Note: this route is best in *dry conditions!**

Ignore the path on your left and continue on the wide track. As the track bends right, ignore a footpath on your left. You pass a house and a bench seat on your right and reach a crosspaths with a 3-way fingerpost. Avoid the path ahead to Cucksey's Farm and instead turn **left**, past a large metal gate, on a surfaced track. The track leads through a wood which in late spring is ablaze with bluebells. As you near the end of the wood, you pass a house on your left and finally reach a T-junction. Your eventual route is **left** on the tarmac drive, but first turn **right** for a quick excursion to St Mark's Chapel, South Park and the Secret Garden, a central highlight of this walk.

The little old building, the first thing you see, is the private St Mark's Chapel, used for some public services, visitable on Fridays, and of great interest inside. It dates from about 1650 but was originally a stables. It was converted to a chapel by the local historian Alfred Uvedale Miller Lambert in 1909 in thanks for the birth of his only child. The west door came from Hever Castle in Kent. The crucifix was carved by Anton Lang of Oberammergau. Fire partially destroyed the roof in 1912 but it was restored using contemporary timbers. A flying bomb



seriously damaged it in 1944 (see the "Abinger Villages" walk in this series) and again it was restored. St Mark's Foundation, current occupier of the big house, is a charitable institution, dedicated to research and treatment of bowel disease, "to fund what the NHS can't".

Passing the house, on your left is a door into the garden. If the notice on the door indicates, you can go into the garden which is delightful. The main lawn and the path around the pond on your right form the visitor's trail. Just beyond, you can see the airshaft of the Bletchingley railway tunnel.

- 4 Retrace your steps after your visit and continue straight on along the tarmac lane across open country. You pass Prickloves Farm on your right and more houses, then the entrance to Wychcroft House, a training centre of the Southwark Diocese. After passing a fingerpost on your right, the lane starts to rise gently. After a wonderful timbered house from the 1600s, *Rabys*, there is a fingerpost and bridleway on your left. Ignore them and continue on the lane up into the woods. (The left turn is the GW which you will re-join later after a more stirring venture.) Just 30m into the woods, go **left** at a fingerpost over a low stile [May 2021: with its cross piece missing] and follow a rising path into the bluebell wood.



- 5 The path rises between two steep clefts and soon you are on a dramatic path beside a steep bank. At the top, a stile takes you into a small meadow where the path forks. Take the **right**-hand path downhill. (The left-hand fork leads directly to the tarmac drive but you need to limbo under some plastic tape.) At the bottom, go over a stile by a road and immediately turn sharp **left** uphill on a tarmac drive, as directed by a fingerpost. Just after the end of the meadow, immediately after the entrance to *Highcroft*, on your right, fork **right** on a narrow high path running beside a slatted fence. Once again, there is a steep drop on your left where the path seems to be sustained by the beeches alone. A short distance further, suddenly you are out of the woods to a vantage spot with a bench seat and wide open views of the country below. (Your route will continue sharp **left** just before the viewpoint.) *The green expanse just below to your right is the disused Bletchingley quarry workings, now nicely landscaped.*



- 6 After a short break to admire the view, turn round, retrace your steps only 5m and fork **right** (i.e. *sharp left* from your original direction) downhill on an unmarked woodland path. The 100m descent is fairly steep but it's made pleasant thanks to a thick layer of leaf fall. At the bottom the path veers right to come down to a footpath beside a new wooden fence. [Care! Some walkers did not find the GW?] Turn **right** on this path, now back on the GW. The path runs through woodland with fields and views on your left. After about 500m, at the last of a series of solid utility covers, ignore a narrow footpath on your left.

[The Crookedfield Shortcut re-joins the main walk here.](#)

- 7 The path rises and curves right to arrive at a 4-way junction with a large metal gate leading into farm land on your left. Go straight over, keeping to the narrow path uphill. At the top, you come to a wide crossing path. Go straight over this path and continue ahead over a bank, then down through a metal barrier into a small grassy meadow. Cross the meadow diagonally, heading for another metal barrier at the other side, in preference to a small metal gate further to the right. After the barrier, descend a narrow winding path downhill through trees, with the village and its church now visible. Continue down until your path comes out near the buildings and car park of

the Grange Meadow playing fields. Cross the playing fields diagonally to exit through a kissing-gate in the far corner, out to the main road. (If there is cricket in play, you may need to make a detour.)

- 8 The walk is not finished without a look at the village. Cross the main road, a fraction **right**, to a private driveway and immediately turn **left** on a tarmac passageway running past small houses. At the end you reach the church, turning right and left up steps into the churchyard.

The Church of St Mary the Virgin is notable for its great Norman tower, 5ft thick in parts. The reredos (carved screen above the altar) is Victorian and incidentally shows Samuel ("Soapy Sam") Wilberforce (see the "Abinger" walk in this series). On the wall by the font is a small model of a boat in a glass case which was donated by people from the South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha who were evacuated to Bletchingley in 1961-2 under threat from volcanic eruption. In the north aisle is a plaque commemorating Wilfred Dunderale, a naval officer who helped capture a German Enigma machine during WW2. Ian Fleming based his hero James Bond on him. The most striking thing in the church is the Clayton Memorial, unmissable on an east side wall. Sir Robert Clayton came from humble stock but amassed a huge fortune in the City by underwriting loans and then in the country by landowning deals.

Exit the churchyard to the left of the church opposite the entrance and turn **right** along a narrow alley, Church Walk, passing some historic houses and re-joining the main road. Continue to reach a raised pavement, leading shortly to the *Red Lion* where the walk began.

Crookedfield Shortcut

Follow this section if you are doing the 4-mile=6 km shorter version of this walk.

Turn sharp **left** at the waymarker, staying inside the wood. The path is muddy in winter but the fringe of undergrowth should keep you dry. The path goes over a plank bridge and finally comes out into a field. Go diagonally **left** across the field, heading for a gap in the left-hand hedgerow about 100m from the corner. Go through the gap and turn **right** along the edge of the next field. Follow the edge of this long narrow field for 400m to the far end of the field. Here, follow a yellow arrow [May 2022: care! the arrow may be fallen or lost], passing a redundant stile showing one small and two large metal posts. Now veer **left** across the next field, cutting the left-hand corner, into a wood. Your path through this bluebell wood takes you hopping over a lively stream and up into a field. Take a path straight across the centre. At the other side, ignore a crossing path (a favourite dog walk) and continue up to meet a wide path by a solid utility cover. Turn **left** on this path.

Your walk now resumes at section [7](#).

Getting there

By car: Bletchingley lies squarely on the A25 trunk road. (In fact the main road rather spoils the village.) The nearest big town is Redhill. However, the easiest way by road for most people is via the M25 and Godstone, even if coming from the west. Leave at Exit 6 ("A22 Eastbourne"), take the "Godstone" exit at the roundabout and from Godstone take the A25 west.

By bus: buses 410 and 774 run from near Redhill Station to Bletchingley. Check the timetables.

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