

Morning last checked	Afternoon last checked		
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## Chilham Circular

### A climb into the Kentish Downs and a descent to two historic houses

**Length:** 15.4 km (9.6 miles)

**Toughness:** 3 out of 10: gentle climbing, all in the morning

**Maps:** OS Landranger 179; Explorer 137.

### Features

Starting from Chilham station and crossing the **River Stour**, this walk climbs in stages up through a pleasant area of downland and upland fields and woods to the hamlet of Sole Street. The pub here is now only open for lunch at weekends, so **on weekdays** this walk has **no lunch stop**.

The finest section of the walk follows, taking you along a downland escarpment with panoramic views. You then descend to pass through the attractive estate of **Godmersham Park**, a house that was owned by the brother of writer Jane Austen, and where she stayed several times. The walk finishes along a quiet back lane which takes you to the picture postcard hilltop village of Chilham, dominated by the stately home of **Chilham Castle**.

All the climbing is in the morning half of the walk, with the afternoon largely downhill or flat. There are a few small bluebell woods in the central section of the walk, flowering in late April and early May, and some good displays of snowdrops towards the end of the walk in February.

### Walk options

Since this walk shares the same lunch pub (weekends only) as the Wye Circular walk also on this website, it is possible to combine the morning of one and the afternoon of the other to do a **Wye to Chilham** walk of **17.7km (11 miles)** or a **Chilham to Wye** walk of **16km (9.9 miles)**. Of the two, the Wye to Chilham walk is the most scenic. To do this, follow the Wye Circular to the Compasses Inn and then switch to the directions in paragraph 39 on page 4 of this document.

### Transport

Chilham is a stop just before Canterbury West on the line out of Ashford. It is served by one direct train an hour out of **Charing Cross** and **London Bridge**, with a journey time of **1 hour 50 mins**.

However, you can reduce that to **1 hour** by taking a high speed train from **St Pancras International** (supplement payable) to connect with the direct train at Ashford.

If doing the **Wye to Chilham** option or vice versa, Chilham is one stop beyond Wye, so all you need is a day return to Chilham.

When the pub in Sole Street is open (weekends only), take a train that arrives at Chilham **no later than 11am** to get to lunch in time.

## Lunch

**Timber Batts @ The Compasses**, Sole Street (01227 531898), 6.5km (4 miles) into the walk, is the only possible lunch option on this walk and **is only open at lunch time at weekends**: with food served on Saturdays 12-3pm and 6-9pm (and all afternoon for drinks), and Sundays 12-4pm, (with drinks to 6pm). Food is also offered 6-9pm on Friday evenings, and the pub is open 5-11pm for drinks that day and also Thursday. This cosy and quirkily decorated pub offers a short but inventive menu with a selection of homemade burgers and favourites such as ribs. It has a garden.

The best **picnic** spot is the escarpment in paragraph 45 of the walk directions, but there is also a nice bench nearer to the pub indicated in paragraph 40.

## Tea

If you can get there in time (it is open to 4pm daily except Wednesday), the **Church Mouse** tea room in Chilham offers a mouthwatering range of homemade cakes.

Otherwise, of the two pubs in Chilham, the **White Horse** (01227 730 355) has a convenient location in the main square next to the church, and serves tea and sells chocolate bars all afternoon, as well as hot desserts from 5-9pm Monday to Friday and all afternoon to 7pm on Saturday and 8pm on Sunday.

An alternative is the **Woolpack Inn** (01227 730 351), 200 metres down the hill on the walk route, which serves food till 9pm Monday to Sunday and 5pm Sundays. However, this has received some negative reviews from walkers recently.

Note that it is 1.1km (0.7 miles) from the centre of the village and 800 metres from the Woolpack Inn to Chilham station, so leave 15 (or ideally 20) minutes to do this. *There is nowhere pleasant near the station to spend an hour if you miscalculate.*

## WALK DIRECTIONS

### Chilham station to Sole Street (6.5km/4 miles)

1. Coming off platform two (the platform from Ashford) at Chilham, walk down the station approach to the main road and turn left.
2. In 150 metres, at a major road junction, turn left following the A28 to Ashford, Godmersham and Wye.
3. In 70 metres ignore Bagham Place to your left.
4. In 50 metres more, opposite Bagham Lane on your right, turn left up a side road.
5. In 60 metres cross the railway on a level crossing and carry on up the road.
6. In 100 metres curve right with the road across a bridge over a river.
7. Ignore ways off to the left. But in 100 metres more, just after a larger bridge over the **River Stour**, follow the track around to the left. In 20 metres keep to the left of a house along the river bank on a path that soon begins to climb.
8. In 100 metres keep straight on at a crosspath, now on a wooded strip between fields.
9. In 70 metres emerge into the field to your right and keep on along its lower left-hand edge, following it as it curves left uphill in 100 metres.
10. In another 100 metres, at the end of the field, enter a wood. Turn right immediately beyond this onto a track.

11. In 250 metres you pass over the top of a hill and the track starts to descend. In another 150 metres, as you pass a bench to your left, there is a view to the right (slightly backwards) of **Chilham Castle**, a red brick mansion with castle ruins behind.
12. Carry on downhill on the track. In another 220 metres you come to a junction, with one track carrying on ahead, the other turning right, and a footpath post on the left. **Turn left at this post** to find a stile at the top of the bank in another 20 metres.
13. Beyond the stile go half right across a field, aiming for a point two thirds of the way up its right-hand edge.
14. In 230 metres, on the far side of the field, cross a stile to the left of a fieldgate. Carry on along a track beyond, through a wooded strip.
15. In 80 metres cross a stile to the right of a fieldgate and turn left directly uphill along a field edge.
16. In 120 metres cross a stile to the left of a fieldgate (*noting the fine view behind you*) and carry on through a wooded strip.
17. In 20 metres emerge into the corner of another large field and turn right along its bottom edge
18. In 120 metres, by a footpath post in the hedge (not visible when the hedge gets overgrown), **turn about 70 degrees left** (where 90 degrees equals full left), **heading out across the field** and gently uphill.
19. In 170 metres pass through a kissing gate and keep straight on downhill into a tunnel of shrubs on a path that is getting a bit overgrown.
20. In 150 metres pass through a kissing gate, and turn left at a T-junction, on a path overarched with shrubs and with intermittent views to the right (*much clearer ones in winter*).
21. In 400 metres, at the end of the field to your right, and as the path climbs into increasingly large trees, you come to a footpath post. Here **fork right** on a **level** path (*ie, not the path forking more steeply right downhill five metres before the post*), keeping just inside the wood. *This section is rather gloomy, but is a relatively rare wild **yew** wood, proving that these trees don't just grow in churchyards.*
22. In 350 metres you climb a small rise to emerge (*gratefully!*) into the open. Carry on along the right-hand edge of the field beyond (*with occasional glimpses through the hedgerow on your right of a fine view behind you*).
23. In 200 metres cross a track and a stile and follow the path round to the right through a wooded area.
24. In 150 metres at a footpath post, keep straight on, on a path that soon has a field visible through the trees to the left. (*In places this path is hard to follow due to fallen trees, but it runs just inside the wood edge.*)
25. In another 150 metres the path emerges into the field. Turn right along the field edge (ie carrying on in more or less the same direction as before).  
*In December 2024 there seemed to be a continuation of the path along the wood edge, bringing it out right by the mini-pylon pole mentioned in the next paragraph. I am not sure if this is new, temporary or if I have just not noticed it before. Whatever, bear it in mind as a possibility.*
26. In 150 metres you pass a mini-pylon pole with a tree growing in front of it, and the field edge curves to the left. In another 80 metres **turn right through a metal gate** (concealed until you are nearly level with it).
27. Beyond the gate veer slightly left across a field, passing to the left of an mini-pylon pole, and aiming for a metal gate 50 metres to the left of the telecommunications mast you can see on the far side of the field.
28. In 150 metres pass through the metal gate into a wood and keep on along a path with a fence to the left initially. Where the fence ends, the path is indistinct, but keep straight on through the wood.
29. In 200 metres you come to a road, where you turn right (ie more or less the same direction as before).
30. Stay on this road, passing a derelict industrial complex and a house on the right, the latter after 300 metres. After this you have woods to the right and a field just visible to the left.
31. In 300 metres there is woodland both sides. In another 200 metres, opposite the entrance to a gravel parking area on the left, turn *right* up a track signposted

as a byway (ie vehicles or motorbikes may come down this track).

32. In 120 metres the track forks. Take the left fork, straight on into the woods, ignoring the right fork which goes through a car-blocking barrier.
33. In 150 metres the track curves distinctly left and there is then a long straight stretch. *(The trees on either side here are coppiced sweet chestnut, the ones on the right fairly recently coppiced in 2024.)*
34. In 400 metres, with the wood edge visible ahead, a field can be seen through the trees to your right. In another 50 metres, and **20 metres before the path emerges from the wood**, go left up an unmarked footpath that keeps **just inside the wood**, with a field 20 metres to the right. *(Note, this is NOT the unmarked path 70 metres earlier to the left.)*
35. In another 80 metres the path turns right around the corner of a fence and carries on roughly along the wood edge, curving this way and that.
36. In 400 metres the wood ends and you pass through a metal gate to emerge into a field. Here ignore the path slanting left across the field (if any is apparent), and instead keep straight on along the field edge, with a hedge to your right. *(This path is not a right of way, but seems in general use by locals: if this has changed, use the path slanting left to get to a road and then turn right for the pub.)*
37. In 200 metres pass through a metal gate to the right of a fieldgate onto a track. In 100 metres pass to the right of a barn.
38. In 60 metres more pass through a gate to the left of a fieldgate to come to a road, with the **Timber Batts @ The Compasses** pub on your immediate right.

### **Sole Street to Godmersham** **(4.6km/2.9 miles)**

39. Coming out of the pub after lunch, turn right on the road - or carry on past it if not stopping.
40. In 300 metres ignore a road downhill to the left *(there is a bench at this junction with a fine view - a possible **picnic** spot, but a nicer one, if the ground is dry, is in paragraph 45 opposite).*

41. In 170 metres more fork right past a fieldgate up a track into the woods.
42. In 200 metres, where another track crosses the one you are on diagonally, keep straight on, as indicated by a yellow arrow, on a path under trees between two fields.
43. In 150 metres go through a kissing gate to the left, and go slightly left from your former direction, heading through the trees towards an open field 60 metres ahead.
44. Once in the field, keep to its left-hand edge, ignoring any apparent path that contours the slope to the right.
45. You soon start descending and in 200 metres you come to a kissing gate to the left of a fieldgate on the left-hand edge of the field. Go through this and beyond carry on slanting down the slope towards a clump of blackthorn bushes, ie roughly the same direction as before, with a fine view to your left. Anywhere on this next section is a fine **picnic spot**.
46. In 30 metres follow the path through the blackthorn clump and on the far side take the upper of two paths that contour the slope.
47. In 130 metres the path goes back into the woods, but in 50 metres more you emerge again and continue to contour the slope
48. In 180 metres more pass through a kissing gate into the woods again. **In winter at least, the path is initially indistinct**, but keep straight ahead, still contouring the slope. *(More **yew** trees here.)*
49. In 200 metres the path starts to descend. 80 metres after this, and just before the slope suddenly gets very steep, the path makes a turn to the left, along the line of the escarpment. **In winter this turn in the path is not at all obvious**, but as long as you turn left before the slope gets sharply steeper, and keep the steep slope to your right, a more distinct path appears.
50. In 120 metres the path goes into a more overgrown area and in 50 metres more emerges at the top of a large field *(the top of which has been planted with evergreen tree saplings, so it might initially be less field-like soon...)* Your onward route here is half right, diagonally across the field to a stile which you may just be able to see to the

right of a house on the other side of the dip 500 metres away.

51. When you get to this stile, cross it and keep on the right-hand edge of the field beyond, passing to the left of a summer house.
52. In 180 metres cross a stile and 5 metres later a track to keep on along the left-hand edge of a field, with a tree boundary to your left.
53. In 250 metres pass into the next field and keep on gently uphill.
54. In another 100 metres, at the crest of the hill, turn left downhill through the field boundary, following a footpath sign.
55. Follow the path straight downhill across the next field, a distance of 400 metres.
56. At the bottom of the hill cross a stile to the right of fieldgate and turn right on a road.
57. In 450 metres the road turns decisively left alongside the railway line (which is up the embankment to the right).
58. In another 250 metres, at a road T-junction, turn right, signposted to Chilham and Canterbury. **Take care on this road** which has some fast traffic. After the bridge there is a verge and then a pavement to the left.
59. 150 metres after the bridge cross the busy A28 with great care and keep straight up a minor road, signposted Godmersham Church.
60. In 350 metres you cross the River Stour on an elegant brick bridge. Beyond, go straight ahead through the right-hand of the two formal gates (the pedestrian gate is to the right of the main gate) into **Godmersham Park** (see panel), now Abdo College, which trains opticians.
61. **Immediately beyond the gate, go right** through a wooden gate onto a signposted footpath. Keep straight ahead into the park, initially with a metal fence to your left.

### **Godmersham to Chilham village (3.2km/2 miles)**

62. In 170 metres, at a 'Private No Public Right of Way' sign, turn left through a wooden fieldgate onto a grassy track between rather aggressively high hedges. (*To the left just before this gate you have a view of Godmersham Park house.*)

**Godmersham Park** was one of three country estates owned by Edward, the brother of the writer Jane Austen, and as such is depicted on the back of the £10 note. We know from her letters that she made several visits to it, and she describes having dinner with the owners of Chilham Castle, so she would certainly have travelled the route between the two houses taken by this walk. The house is now an optometrists college and its interior is changed from Jane's day, but the exterior is substantially as it was.

One assumes that Jane also walked around the estate and enjoyed its tranquil countryside (then undisturbed by the A28), but in fact her letters – written to her sister Cassandra – never discuss such matters, instead focusing on people and gossip.

Edward owned Godmersham because he had been adopted by the rich Knight family, distant relatives of the Austen's, even though his natural parents were still living. This arrangement – rather odd to us – meant he got the education of a gentleman, went on a Grand Tour, and – crucially – was able to help the rest of his family financially. Edward's eldest daughter, Fanny, was a favourite of Jane's, and in her letters to her the author made several famous remarks about her work which are now much quoted.

However, Fanny secretly found her aunt a bit common. Later in life she described Jane as "not as refined as she ought to have been" and said that had her father not invited her aunts to Godmersham "they would have been very much below par as to Society and its ways". Jane in turn drew on her experience as the poor relation in a grand house in her novels – for example in her depiction of Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*.

63. In 300 metres, at a track crossroads (*another view of Godmersham Park house here*), with a brick house visible ahead, go right, still on a track between hedges.
64. Ignore ways off. In 250 metres you have a wood to your right.
65. In another 300 metres, at the end of the field, ignore a (private) track to the left, and instead keep straight on for 30 metres to pass through a high metal gate (the pedestrian gate is at the left-hand end).

66. Beyond the gate, keep straight ahead at a track junction, now on the North Downs Way. *(To the right on the next section is a view of the hills traversed earlier in the walk - at least in winter. In summer you have to find little gaps to peep through...)*
67. In 300 metres you emerge onto a road. Go straight ahead along this.
68. You now follow this quiet pleasant lane for 1.8 kilometres, *again with some nice views of the hills traversed in the morning*, until it brings you to the centre of Chilham. In 700 metres you start to pass houses on the right, and in another 300 metres or so the high brick wall of the **Chilham Castle** estate starts to your left.

In the 1980s **Chilham Castle** used to stage medieval banquets and jousting. It now leads a much quieter life hosting bespoke upmarket events and "experiences".

The castle has a history going back to William the Conqueror which you can read on [www.chilham-castle.co.uk](http://www.chilham-castle.co.uk), but it has basically always been a family home. The current house dates to 1616, but the keep of the old medieval fortress also survives. One of its more recent owners was Stuart Wheeler, founder of spreadbetting firm IG Index, who passed away in July 2020.

69. In 250 metres more there is a section of wall topped by a metal fence and towards the end of this you get a glimpse of the stately home *(possibly also the castle ruin next to it, though I could not see this in 2024)* on the hill across the lake.
70. Shortly after the view of the castle, the road bends left and in 300 metres more you come to a three way road junction.
- **To go direct to the station** go right at this junction. In 200 metres you come to a T-junction with the Woolpack Inn on your left. Go right here and pick up the directions in paragraph 74.
71. Otherwise, to continue into **Chilham village** for tea (or just to see its very pretty main square), go straight ahead at the three way junction, up School Hill.
- In 150 metres you emerge into the central square of Chilham, with the castle gates to your left. Diagonally

across the square is the **Church Mouse** tea room, and between that and the church is the **White Horse**.

Allow **15-20 minutes** after tea to walk to the station.

### **Chilham village to Chilham station (1.1km/0.7 miles)**

72. To continue the walk, come out of the Church Mouse or the White Horse and turn left (or if coming down the square from Chilham Castle, go to its end and turn right) to exit the square down an unnamed road at the opposite end of the square to the one you used to enter it. (Chantry House is on the corner of this road, and in 20 metres it is named as "The Street".)
73. In 200 metres you pass the **Woolpack Inn** on your right: beyond it keep straight on, ignoring ways off.
74. In 400 metres the main road is just to the left of the road you are on. Turn left up a 10 metre side turning to join this, and turn right (that is, more or less resuming your former direction).
75. In 150 metres cross a side road – the A28 to Ashford – **taking care**, as cars turn at some speed onto this road.
76. In 150 metres, opposite a white house on the left-hand side of the road (the former station inn), turn right up a side road, signposted to Hope View School, which leads in 70 metres to the station.

Cross the bridge for trains to London. Note that **trains to Canterbury sometimes leave at the same time as the London trains**, so do not get confused and take the wrong one.