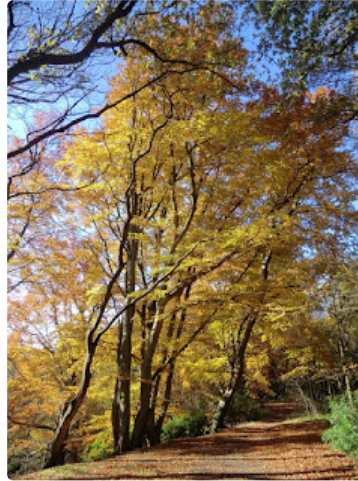




Blackwater to Wokingham walk

A varied walk starting alongside the River Blackwater and taking in meadows, lakes, mixed woodland, pasture and fruit farms before finishing at an attractive market town.



Length

Main Walk: 26 km (16.1 miles). Six hours walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9½ hours.

Main Walk, starting from Crowthorne: 19¼ km (11.9 miles). Four hours 20 minutes walking time.

Short Walk, finishing at Crowthorne: 18 km (11.2 miles). Four hours 5 minutes walking time.

Short Circular Walk, from Crowthorne: 11¼ km (7.0 miles). Two hours 30 minutes walking time.

Direct Walk, omitting Finchampstead: 15¼ km (9.5 miles). Three hours 20 minutes walking time.

Reverse Walk, starting from Crowthorne: 13¾ km (8.5 miles). Three hours walking time.

OS Map

Explorer 159. Blackwater station, map reference SU853599, is on the Hampshire/Berkshire border, 9 km **S** of Bracknell. Wokingham is in Berkshire.

Toughness

5 out of 10 (3 for the Short Walk, 2 for the Direct Walk, 1 for the Reverse Walk).

Features

This walk explores the Berkshire countryside between the **River Blackwater** and **Wokingham**. It starts along the riverside path through **Shepherd Meadows Nature Reserve**, a pleasant 'green belt' between the railway and a busy trunk road. After skirting Sandhurst there is a less appealing but unavoidable stretch along roads before country paths take

you up to the National Trust's **Finchampstead Ridges** and **Simon's Wood**, an attractive area of pine woods, heathland and ponds. Lunch is at a rural pub near Finchampstead church, some way out of the main village. The long afternoon section starts by descending through the village to **Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve**, a landscaped area which has been created from worked-out gravel pits. After another attractive riverside stretch the walk climbs back up the low ridge and goes through **Ambarrow Court Nature Reserve**. It continues alongside the railway to what was originally called Wellington College Station (now Crowthorne) when it was built to serve the nearby public school.

You could call it a day here but the full **Main Walk** carries on northwards across a golf course and then **Heathlake Nature Reserve**, another picturesque lake surrounded by pine woods. More woodland, a large soft fruit farm and pasture eventually lead to **Wokingham**. This attractive market town is in the process of regeneration but has retained many of its historic buildings, notably along Rose Street. There are plenty of refreshment opportunities in the town before the short stroll to its station.

Parts of this walk are in the floodplain of the River Blackwater and so might not be feasible in exceptional conditions.

Walk Options

The full walk is fairly long but the two intermediate stations on the Blackwater Valley line provide obvious drop-in and drop-out points. Sandhurst is not the most inspiring place to start a walk as the first 20 minutes are along roads, but this **shorter start** would be worth considering if you missed a train and wanted to join up with a group starting from Blackwater. An even shorter **alternative start** from Crowthorne station has also been included, although this misses out Finchampstead Ridges.

Crowthorne station is passed about halfway through the long afternoon leg and you could complete a **Short Walk** there. With the alternative start this would make a **Short Circular Walk**.

Another option would be to cut out the whole central loop to Finchampstead. There is very little overlap between this **Direct Walk** and the Short Circular Walk, so they could be treated as two separate walks.

The outward leg from Blackwater to Horseshoe Lake was described in the other direction in an earlier version of this walk (see below), and these directions have been retained as they combine well with the alternative start to make a kind of **Reverse Walk**.

A few short cuts and optional extensions are also mentioned in the directions. In particular, the NT land at Finchampstead Ridges and Simon's Wood is worth exploring more fully, especially when the heather is in bloom.

Additional Notes

The original version of this walk was from Crowthorne to Sandhurst, later extended to Blackwater. It contained a longer central section via Finchampstead and Eversley, as well as an extra loop to an alternative lunchtime stop at Eversley Cross. Its main drawback was that none of the three stations were particularly great places to end a walk, having few

refreshment places and/or an infrequent train service. Wokingham is significantly better in both respects and so the walk was refashioned to end there. As noted above, a shorter version of the original Main Walk has been retained as the Reverse Walk option.

Transport	<p>Blackwater, Sandhurst, Crowthorne and Wokingham are adjacent stations on the Blackwater Valley line between Guildford and Reading. There are two trains an hour on this line, but only half of them stop at Sandhurst and Crowthorne. Wokingham is also on a direct line to London Waterloo via Ascot and Staines, with a half-hourly service taking about 70 minutes. There are three ways of getting to Blackwater, Sandhurst or Crowthorne from central London. The shortest journey time (taking less than an hour with a good connection) is from Paddington, changing at Reading. The other two routes are from Waterloo with a change at Guildford or Wokingham; these are typically 20-40 minutes longer, with the Guildford route being quicker.</p> <p>If you travel out or back via Reading you will need a more expensive “Any Permitted” ticket, which is valid on all three routes. A cheaper “via Ascot/Guildford” ticket is valid only on the two Waterloo routes. With a railcard discount, a Zones 1-6 Travelcard plus an extension to Blackwater (which is valid on all three routes) is good value if travelling via Reading. Otherwise, buy a return to whichever station is furthest along your choice of route, eg. to Wokingham if travelling out via Guildford.</p> <p>There are a few buses along the A321 parallel to the railway but nothing useful on the loop out to Finchampstead, so you would need to call a taxi if you wanted to abandon the walk at lunchtime.</p> <p>If driving, there are large car parks at Blackwater and Wokingham stations and a small one at Crowthorne.</p>
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Suggested Train	<p>For the full Main Walk take the train nearest to 09:00 from either Paddington (via Reading) or Waterloo (via Guildford), depending on your choice of route. Take a train 30-45 minutes later if starting from Sandhurst and at least an hour later for the alternative start from Crowthorne, to avoid arriving too early at the lunch pub.</p>
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Lunch	<p>Except on the Direct Walk, the suggested lunch pub is The Queen's Oak (0118-973 1105; food to 2.30pm, later on Sun & BH) near Finchampstead's parish church (11 km from Blackwater; 7¾ km from Sandhurst; 4¼ km from Crowthorne). In another part of the village The Greyhound (0118-216 1334; food to 3pm, later at weekends) re-opened in autumn 2021 as a Brucan pub.</p> <p>There are no pubs on the Direct Walk between Sandhurst and Wokingham, but you might be able to get a light lunch at one of the tea places near Crowthorne station (see below). If you bring a picnic there are tables and benches at Ambarrow Court.</p>
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Tea	<p>On the Main and Direct Walks there are plenty of pubs and coffee shops in the centre of Wokingham (although none have been tried). As well as the usual suspects such as Costa Coffee (0118-979 9768) and Caffè</p>
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Nero (0118-977 0277), the suggested route goes through a quiet plaza where several places have indoor and outdoor seating, including **Coffee #1 Wokingham** (07483-076396) and the **Blue Orchid Bakery** (0118-350 0505). The onward route to the station is not bereft of pubs either, passing the historic **Queens Head** (0118-978 1221) and the **Station Tap** (0118-977 4548) among others. There is also a **Café Destino** in the station building.

On the **Short Walk** the suggested place is **The Hive** (01344-771199; open to 5pm Mon & Tue, 10pm Wed–Sat, closed Sun), a “craft beer & coffee shop” in the parade of shops near **Crowthorne** station. Apart from a convenience store, the only alternative on Duke's Ride is the **Good Food Deli** (01344-772872; open to 2.30pm Mon–Fri, 2pm Sat, closed Sun), but this closes too early to be of much use.

On the **Reverse Walk** there are several places in **Sandhurst**. Before reaching the station the route passes the traditional **Rose & Crown** pub (01252-285607) and the **Old Mill Coffee Shop & Cafe** (01252-874389; open to 3pm daily), with the **Village Inn** (01252-957265) just beyond it. There is nowhere convenient near **Blackwater** station, so the suggested place on the full walk is **Pistachios in the Park** (01252-878574; open to 4.30pm Mon–Fri, 5pm Sat, 4pm Sun; may close earlier in winter) at the entrance to Sandhurst's Memorial Park. Allow 35 minutes for the final 2½ km to the station.

Help Us!

After the walk, please leave a comment, it really helps. Thanks!
You can also upload photos to the   SWC Group on Flickr (upload your photos) and videos to  Youtube. This walk's tags are:

By Car

Start GU17 9AB Finish RG40 2AP

Help

National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Traveline (bus times): 0871 200 22 33 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

Version

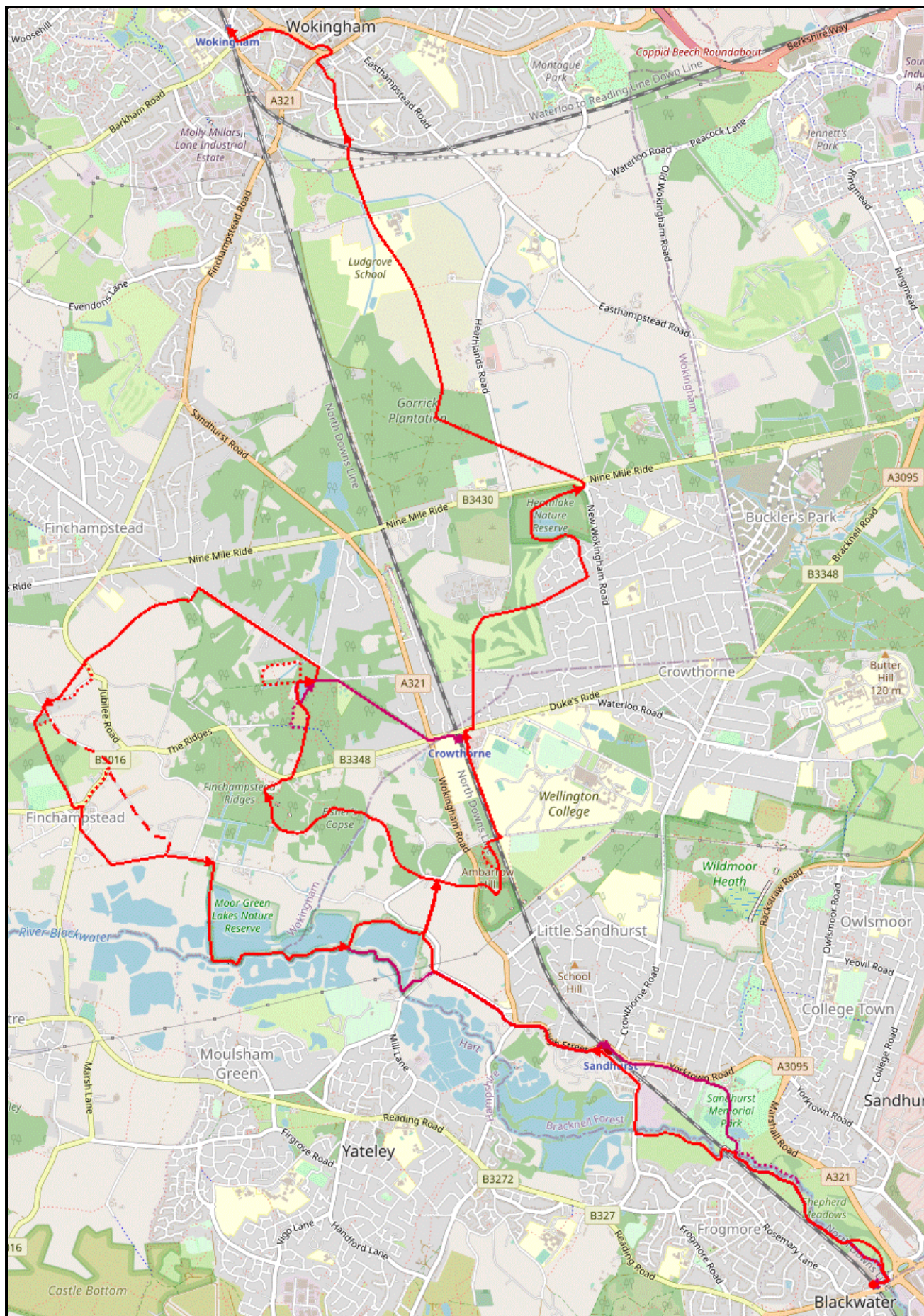
Feb-24 Sean

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Walk Directions

Walk Map



All maps © OpenStreetMap contributors

Walk Options (Main | Short)

M. Main Walk (26 km)

- i. Main Walk, starting from Sandhurst (22¾ km)
- a. Main Walk, starting from Crowthorne (19¼ km)
- b. Short Walk, finishing at Crowthorne (18 km)
- bi. Short Walk, starting from Sandhurst (14¾ km)
- c. Short Circular Walk, from Crowthorne (11¼ km)
- d. Direct Walk, omitting Finchampstead (15¼ km)
- di. Direct Walk, starting from Sandhurst (12 km)
- e. Reverse Walk, starting from Crowthorne (13¾ km)
- ei. Reverse Walk, finishing at Sandhurst (10¾ km)

Walk Directions

If you are doing the shorter start (from Sandhurst), start at [9] in §B.

If you are doing the alternative start (from Crowthorne), start at §E.

A. Blackwater Station to Sandhurst High Street (3¼ km)

1. Arriving from Guildford

Leave the platform near the back of the train and go up steps to the A30 (London Road). Turn left onto the pathway alongside the main road, crossing over the railway and later merging with the station access road.

2. Arriving from Reading/Wokingham

Leave the platform near the front of the train and bear right through the car park. Ignore steps up to the A30 (London Road) and go up Station Approach, merging with a pathway from the main road at the top.

3. Follow Station Approach across the **River Blackwater** and round to the left. Where the road swings right **veer left** past a vehicle barrier into **Shepherd Meadows Nature Reserve**¹ on the **Blackwater Valley Path**² (BVP). In 25m there is a wooden kissing gate on the right. Unless the meadow looks waterlogged, the suggested route is to go through this gate onto a clear path through it.
 - Alternatively you can simply stay on the riverside path and resume the directions at [5].
4. On the main route follow the grassy path in a gentle arc round to the left, going through a gap in the belt of trees across the middle of the meadow. Keep left at path junctions to return to the riverside path through another kissing gate in the corner.
5. After the two routes rejoin follow the BVP across the river on a footbridge and through the rest of the nature reserve, around 1 km. After 400m the path briefly splits and you can take either fork. After they rejoin ignore a footbridge across the river (which leads to the reserve car park) to keep the river on your right.
6. At the far end of the meadows you go through another kissing gate next to a fieldgate and the BVP swings right to recross the river on a footbridge. On the other side **turn left** at a path crossing, staying on the BVP. Follow the path across a side stream and then up an elevated walkway high above and across the railway line. After crossing the main river yet again **keep right** to stay close to the river.

7. Follow the tree-lined riverside path for 750m, later with paddocks behind a long wooden fence on your left. The path eventually comes out onto a road (Swan Lane). Turn right to cross the river for the last time and continue along the road past a large water treatment works, partially screened behind trees.
8. In 400m, just before the road goes under a railway bridge, **turn left** onto a signposted footpath. Follow this alleyway all the way alongside the railway embankment, later below the platforms of Sandhurst station. At the end keep right to go out along a short road to the A321 (Sandhurst High Street). Turn left onto the main road.

B. Sandhurst High Street • Station to Ambarrow Lane (2¼ km)

9. Starting from Sandhurst Station

From either platform go down the ramp and turn left onto the A321, soon joining both the longer start and the **Blackwater Valley Path**² (BVP) from the first road on the left.

10. Head **W** along the A321 for 600m, passing a couple of very early refreshment places on the left along the way: the **Old Mill Coffee Shop & Cafe** in a small parade of shops, then the **Rose & Crown** pub. The main road swerves right and left, then comes to a junction with Yateley Road on the left. Cross the side road carefully and **go straight ahead** on a pathway through a small housing estate.
11. Bear left into Lych Gate Close, go past Belfry Mews and up a short slope to come out onto Lower Church Road opposite a primary school. Turn left and go all the way along this lane, soon passing **St Michael's** church up on the right and eventually coming to a T-junction.
12. Do not take either fork but **go straight across** the road, leaving the BVP. This track looks like a dead end but before reaching a vehicle barrier **veer right** past a metal fieldgate onto a path between hedges, shown on an old noticeboard as a permissive horse ride. Follow this path for 250m as it runs parallel to a narrow lane, curving round to the left.
 - If the permissive horse ride no longer exists you can simply walk along the narrow lane (the right fork at the T-junction).
13. After a gap in the trees on the right there are gates on both sides, with the **Three Castles Path**³ (3CP) joining from the left. **Turn right** and cross the lane onto the signposted footpath opposite. Go through a metal kissing gate and head **N** along the left-hand edge of three fields, with more kissing gates between them. In the top left-hand corner of the third field go out through a wooden gate onto Ambarrow Lane.
If you are doing a Direct Walk (omitting Finchampstead), go to §J.

C. Ambarrow Lane to Finchampstead Ridges (1¾ km)

14. Turn left onto the lane, leaving the 3CP. In 150m, as it curves left, go past a private drive on the right and then **immediately turn right** past a metal fieldgate onto a broad track through a wood, signposted as a public footpath. After briefly going gently downhill the track starts to climb steadily. In 200m ignore a fieldgate ahead and follow the path up to the right, along the edge of the wood.
15. In a further 250m the path bends left, now with pasture on both sides. It then enters a wood where you have to follow the right of way up a potentially awkward sunken gully, as a new wooden fence blocks easier side routes. At the top of a short climb the path swings round to the left and continues along the top of a wooded slope.

16. In 250m the path comes to a T-junction with a byway where you **turn left**. Follow this track gently downhill for 400m as it winds its way through the wood, later passing a few houses on the left. Where the track turns sharply left, just after "Rorke's Drift", **bear right** past a wooden barrier into the south-eastern corner of **Finchampstead Ridges**.
- There are many paths through this National Trust woodland and you might like to explore it more fully. If you deviate from the route suggested here, climb to the top of the ridge and turn right to head for its north-eastern corner, by the entrance to a house called "Edge of the Hill". If you do this, resume the directions at [20] in §D.
17. For the suggested route, **turn left** inside the NT woodland. Ignore the muddy bridleway running along the southern edge of the wood but **take the path to its right**, going gently downhill and heading **NW**. After a short piece of boardwalk across a boggy area you come to a wooden bench and **turn right** onto a narrow path, the start of a steady climb to the top of this wooded ridge.
18. In 150m keep ahead (slightly to the left) at a crosspaths to go more steeply uphill on a broad path. At the top you come to a grove of pine trees with a couple of wooden benches and a fine view back over the Blackwater Valley to the Hampshire hills beyond.

D. Finchampstead Ridges to Heath Pond (1¼ • 2 km)

19. From the viewpoint, head **N** (away from the view) towards a road, but in 40m **veer right** past a gnarled oak tree onto a grassy path through heather and gorse, gradually approaching the road off to the left. The path comes out onto this road (the B3348) at a bend, by the entrance to a house called "Edge of the Hill" and with a striking view down **Wellingtonia Avenue**⁴.
20. **Cross the road carefully** and turn right to walk along the pavement. In 50m **turn left** off the road onto a signposted byway, with a NT sign for **Simon's Wood**. Go past the entrance to two large properties and continue on a track downhill through the wood. After it levels out keep ahead at a major path crossing, now with a more open area on your left. In a further 80m **veer left** onto a narrow path across this heathland.
21. In 100m cross a wooden footbridge over a stream at the southern tip of **Heath Pond** and **veer right** to go along its edge. At its north-western corner **turn right** onto a long straight bridleway known as the **Devil's Highway**⁵. Unless you want to do the short extension below (an anti-clockwise circuit of Brook's Heath), go along the northern edge of the lake to a path crossing at the next corner.

22. Optional extension (+¾ km)

- For the extension **immediately turn left** off the bridleway onto a woodland path, heading **N** away from the lake. After a stretch of boardwalk over some boggy ground the path swings left to emerge into the corner of Brook's Heath.
- Follow the meandering sandy path near the heathland edge, soon with garden fences visible off to the right. After briefly going alongside one of these chainlink fences the path bears left away from the boundary, then turns left again to head **S**.
- Follow the path back to the Devil's Highway and turn left. Ignore side paths to return to the north-western corner of Heath Pond and continue along its northern edge to a path crossing at the next corner.

Continue the directions at §F.

E. Crowthorne Station to Heath Pond (1¾ • 2¼ km)

23. Arriving from Guildford/Blackwater

Leave the platform near the front of the train. Go up the station's approach road and bear left onto the B3348.

24. Arriving from Reading/Wokingham

Leave the platform near the back of the train. Bear left through a small parking area and turn left onto the B3348 to cross over the railway.

25. Go along the left-hand side of the B3348 to a large roundabout. Carefully cross over both the A321 and the B3348, passing the imposing entrance to **Sequoia Field Farm** and with a striking view up **Wellingtonia Avenue**⁴. From the roundabout take the signposted byway "Unsuitable for motor vehicles" heading **NW**.
26. Follow this long straight track (Heath Ride) for 700m. At the first major path crossing, just after "Heritage", **turn half-left** onto a long straight bridleway known as the **Devil's Highway**⁵, heading **W** into **Simon's Wood** (NT). In 150m you reach a major path crossing at the north-eastern corner of **Heath Pond**.
 - The suggested route continues with a 500m anti-clockwise circuit of this triangular lake, with an optional 500m extension around the patch of heathland beyond it. For a short cut you could simply turn right at this path crossing and resume the directions at §F.
27. For the suggested route keep ahead at the path crossing, along the northern edge of the lake. In the next corner **turn left** onto a path along the water's edge (not the more obvious path rising into the woodland).
28. At the southern tip of the lake follow the path round to the left to cross a wooden footbridge over a stream. Unless you want to do the short extension below (a clockwise circuit of the open heathland on your right), **turn left** to complete the circuit of the lake by returning to the path crossing at its north-eastern corner.

29. Optional extension (+½ km)

- a. After crossing the footbridge **veer right** onto a sandy path through the heather. In 100m turn half-right onto a broad ride along the edge of the heathland.
- b. In 100m turn right at a path crossing onto a track along its southern edge. In the corner of the heathland turn right again onto a path along its western edge.
- c. After a few short stretches of boardwalk taking you over some boggy ground, turn right at a T-junction to return to the southern tip of Heath Pond.
- d. Cross the footbridge again and **turn left** to complete the circuit of the lake by returning to the path crossing at its north-eastern corner.

F. Heath Pond to the Queen's Oak, Finchampstead (2½ km)

Older OS maps show a bridleway and footpath linking Heath Pond to Wick Hill Lane off to the west, but the footpath is not on the local authority's Definitive Map. Finchampstead Parish Council are working to restore this 'missing link', but until this happens the walk route has to take a somewhat less appealing route along byways to the north of the heathland.

30. From the north-eastern corner of Heath Pond take the signposted byway heading **N**, away from the lake. In 100m **turn half-left** at an oblique path crossing onto another restricted byway, at first through woodland but soon with a string of detached properties on both sides. Follow this long straight lane (Heath Ride) for 1 km, heading **NW**.

At one point you pass the abandoned outbuildings of Brunninghams Farm on the left, no doubt awaiting redevelopment into another grand property.

31. Towards the end of this stretch there is woodland on the left. At the end of a long wooden fence **turn left** at a junction into Wick Hill Lane, signposted as another restricted byway. In 125m, shortly after passing a residential cul-de-sac on the right, **turn right** onto what is signposted as the continuation of the byway but is no more than a narrow path.
32. The path soon bends left and climbs gently. In 200m you go past a cottage and continue briefly on its driveway, then **fork left** at a Y-junction onto a signposted footpath. Keep right at the entrance to Warren Crest Farm and follow this enclosed path past two fields, then down the left-hand side of a large field to meet the B3016. Cross the road carefully to a stile just off to the left, the continuation of the footpath.
There is invariably a "Beware of bull" notice here, but the author has never seen one in the field.
- In the unlikely event that the beast is actually present a more circumspect route would be to carry on along the road for 100m and then turn right into Church Lane, passing the exit from the field in a further 300m.
33. If undeterred by the warning notice go over the stile and follow a faint grassy path diagonally across the field to its opposite corner, heading towards the church tower 500m away. Go over another stile in the hedge and turn right onto Church Lane. In 125m you come to the suggested lunch stop on the right, the **Queen's Oak**⁶ pub.

G. The Queen's Oak to Moor Green Lakes (2¼ • 2 km)

The preferred route for this section was a permissive path through Manor Farm, but in May 2022 the landowner closed it "until further notice" because of a dispute with the British Horse Society. The directions for this route have been retained in [35]; they include a link back to the main route if you try it and find it still closed. The main route has more road walking but it does go past an alternative lunch pub (the Greyhound).

34. Main route (2¼ km)

- From the road junction in front of the pub go along the **right-hand side** of a small triangular green and up a slope towards **St James'** church⁷. Go through a gate into the churchyard and follow a path around the church (which is usually locked) to an exit in its south-western corner.
- Go downhill on an enclosed footpath, ignoring another footpath off to the right after 100m. Later there is a large playing field on the right and the path eventually goes out between garden fences to the B3348.
- Cross this main road carefully** and turn left onto its pavement. At the Y-junction ahead **turn right** onto the B3016 (Longwater Road) to come to Finchampstead's other pub, the **Greyhound**.
- Carry on down Longwater Road for a further 100m and **turn left** at a crossroads into Cricket Hill, with houses on the right and later fields on the left. In 300m it swings left and becomes Lower Sandhurst Road; you have a further 750m of road walking, but there is a grass verge and not much traffic.
- Shortly after a slight right-hand bend the alternative route joins from a stile on the left and 200m later you pass Dell Road. In a further 150m (opposite "Blackwater View") there is a bridleway and footpath signpost on the right, next to a small car park.

35. Alternative route (provisional) (2 km)

- At the road junction in front of the pub veer left to go along the **left-hand side** of a small triangular green, soon passing the churchyard on your right; this is the continuation of Church Lane, which you will be following to the B3348.
 - Alternatively you could detour through the churchyard, looping all the way around **St James'** church⁷ to come out at another gate further along Church Lane. However, the church itself is usually locked.

- b. After leaving the churchyard behind you have a slightly awkward 500m along this winding lane before it goes up a small slope and comes to a T-junction with the B3348. **Cross this main road carefully** and turn right onto its pavement. In 30m there is a stile on the left into Manor Farm.
 - If notices show that the permissive path through this fruit farm is still closed, carry on down the main road for 300m and then fork left into Longwater Road. Go past the Greyhound pub and resume the directions at [34·d] above.
- c. To continue along this route go over the stile to follow a well-waymarked path for 800m through this large farm. You start by bearing right down a broad farm track, with large fields of soft fruit on the left.
- d. Keep ahead at path crossings, eventually going past a pond and some large barns on the left. **Veer left** as indicated to continue with a hedge on your right and a yard in front of the outbuildings on your left.
- e. At the next path junction **turn right** and follow the broad track past a final set of polytunnels. At the end of the farm go over a stile and turn left onto a lane (Lower Sandhurst Road).
- f. Go along this quiet lane, passing Dell Road on the left after 200m. In a further 150m (opposite "Blackwater View") there is a bridleway and footpath signpost on the right, next to a small car park.

H. Moor Green Lakes to Horseshoe Lake (1¾ km)

The bridleway and footpath run side by side all the way to the River Blackwater. The bridleway starts at the road and has views off to the right (where gravel extraction might still be taking place in the distance); the footpath starts from the back of the car park and has better views across some attractive lakes.

- 36. The suggested route is to go through the car park for **Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve**⁸ onto the footpath, but there are several places further on where you can switch between the two paths. You soon come to the first of the reserve lakes on your left, **Colebrook Lake North**, with a wooden viewing screen and a (members only) hide at the far end.
- 37. The two paths merge briefly to cross a backwater on a wooden footbridge and you have the same choice of paths alongside **Colebrook Lake South**. At the end of this lake the two paths meet the **Blackwater Valley Path**² (BVP) in front of the river. **Turn left** onto either the footpath or the bridleway, separated by a hedge.
- 38. In 100m you need to **keep left** by an information panel for the nature reserve, staying on the BVP and also joining the **Three Castles Path**³ (3CP) from the bridleway across the footbridge. You now simply follow the broad riverside path for 1 km, at first alongside **Colebrook Lake South** and then **Grove Lake**, with periodic gaps in the undergrowth giving views across the water.
- 39. Towards the end of this stretch there is another wooden viewing screen looking across to Grove Lake Island. In a further 250m there are two gates on the left, the first leading to a (members only) hide and the second a wooden kissing gate by a sign for **Horseshoe Lake**⁹.

If you are doing a Reverse Walk to Sandhurst or Blackwater, go to §N.

I. Horseshoe Lake to Ambarrow Lane (1¼ km)

- 40. **Turn left** through the kissing gate onto a fenced path around Horseshoe Lake, leaving the BVP and initially heading **N**. Stay on the perimeter path as it curves round to the right at the north-western corner of the lake, ignoring paths off to the left. After going along its northern edge and passing its horseshoe-shaped island you come to a sharp right-hand bend at the north-eastern corner of the lake.

If you started from Blackwater or Sandhurst you now repeat a short stretch of your outward route.

41. **Turn left** off the perimeter path at this bend, going through several gates and across a lane onto the signposted footpath opposite. Go through a metal kissing gate and head **N** along the left-hand edge of three fields, with more kissing gates between them. In the top left-hand corner of the third field go out through a wooden gate onto Ambarrow Lane.

J. Ambarrow Lane to Crowthorne Station (1¾ km)

42. Turn right briefly onto the lane but where it bends left **go straight ahead** on a footpath signposted to Ambarrow Court. At the far end **take care as you cross the busy A321** into the car park for **Ambarrow Court Local Nature Reserve**¹⁰. Unless you want to extend the walk, take the tarmac driveway from the back of the car park.
- An information panel in the car park shows two short circular trails around this reserve: one around the grounds of Ambarrow Court to the right and the other around Ambarrow Hill to the left.
43. On the main route **bear right** after 50m onto a side path, which leads to a small picnic area with an information panel about the history of **Ambarrow Court**¹¹. Follow the path round to the left to briefly rejoin the driveway, heading away from the car park. After going round a right-hand bend **turn left** onto a path waymarked with a red arrow, joining the NT's Ambarrow Hill Circuit. Keep ahead at a three-way footpath signpost. *At the end of 2019 Network Rail closed the pedestrian level crossing off to the right and the right of way has been permanently diverted to use a bridge 350m ahead. Unlike many such closures, this is actually an improvement on the previous route.*
44. Follow a clear woodland path heading **N**, roughly parallel to the railway and climbing gently to a small ridge. Unless you want to compensate for the lack of Munros on this walk by tackling the south face of **Ambarrow Hill**¹² up to the left, keep ahead down the other side of the ridge to go along the side of the hill.
- There is a nicely-decorated bench at the top of this conical hill, though not much of a view through the pine trees. A less precipitous descent down a flight of log steps on its north side and curving round to the right would lead you to the railway bridge.
45. On the main route the path forks after passing the hill. Ignore the red arrow pointing left and go straight ahead to come to a track at the northern end of the reserve. Turn right and cross the railway line on Kiln Bridge, heading towards a back entrance into the grounds of **Wellington College**¹³.
46. Before reaching the college gate **turn sharp left** at a footpath signpost to double back towards the railway, leaving the 3CP. The path swings round to the right to continue between the railway and college grounds for 600m. At the far end follow the path through a small housing development, leaving via a pedestrian side gate if the main gate is closed. If you are finishing the Short Walk, Crowthorne station is on your left.

47. Finishing at Crowthorne Station

Trains to Blackwater and Guildford leave from Platform 1 on this side. For trains to Wokingham and Reading you need to cross the railway on the road bridge and go down steps on the left to Platform 2.

- There are two refreshment places less than 100m away, ahead on the right on the other side of Duke's Ride. **The Hive** is in the parade of shops before reaching Ravenswood Avenue, the **Good Food Deli** in the group beyond it.

K. Crowthorne Station to Nine Mile Ride (3 km)

48. Turn right onto Duke's Ride and cross over at the pedestrian lights. If you want to break for refreshments before the final leg to Wokingham, **The Hive** is on the left just before Ravenswood Avenue and the **Good Food Deli** is in the next parade of shops. To continue the Main Walk turn off Duke's Ride into Ravenswood Avenue, signposted to East Berkshire Golf Club.

49. At the end of this residential street keep ahead on a right of way across the golf course, initially through its car park and then on a tarmac driveway (taking heed of the prominent warning notices before each of the fairways you have to cross). On the far side turn right as indicated to continue on a tree-lined path alongside a fairway, heading **E**.
50. In 150m ignore a signposted footpath on the left. The path eventually crosses one more fairway and reaches the eastern edge of the golf course. Go out between wooden barriers to continue through a belt of trees between housing estates. In 75m ignore a path on the left leading into a cul-de-sac and continue on this long straight path for a further 350m.
51. **The next turning is not signposted**. About 100m before the path comes out onto a road, **turn left** onto a narrow path between garden fences. At the end go straight across a residential street (Merryman Drive) onto a grassy strip between more houses.
52. At the end of the estate follow the path round to the left in front of a wood, merging with another path from the right. The path soon swings right and goes past an electricity substation and a wooden noticeboard for **Heathlake Nature Reserve** to come to the south-eastern corner of **Heath Lake**.
53. You will be leaving the nature reserve in its far right-hand corner, but for the best views of this picturesque lake **turn left** (away from a wooden footbridge) to head **W** through the pine trees alongside the southern edge of the lake. At the next corner turn right to head **N** along its western edge.
54. At its north-western corner **turn right** again (by Floss's Bench) onto a path which gradually moves away from the lake, heading **ENE**. The woodland path becomes less distinct but essentially you need to maintain direction for 400m to the north-eastern corner of the reserve where there is an exit onto a roundabout, the junction of New Wokingham Road with the B3430 (Nine Mile Ride).
 - If you stray too far to the left there is a clear path along the northern edge of the reserve (parallel to the B3430) which also leads to this exit.

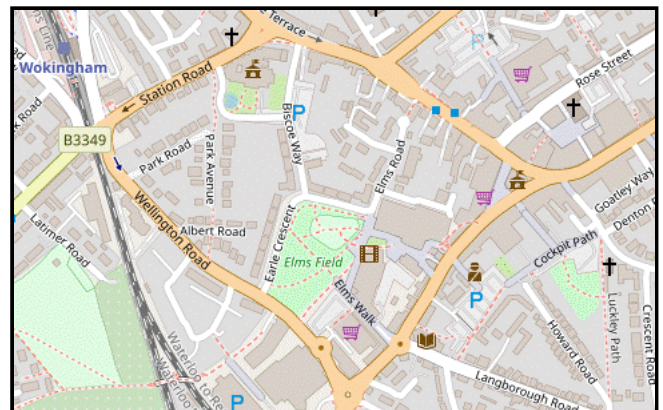
L. Nine Mile Ride to Langborough Recreation Ground (3½ km)

55. The continuation of the walk is a byway on the far side of the roundabout, so you need to cross some fairly busy roads. From the 'proper' exit it is best to go straight across New Wokingham Road at the traffic island, turn left and then cross Nine Mile Ride. A faded Public Byway sign on a lamppost indicates the path into the trees, between the roundabout and a minor road (Honey Hill).
 - If you have come out directly onto Nine Mile Ride from a different exit, cross this road carefully and turn right onto a surfaced path; just past the roundabout turn sharp left onto the byway.
56. The byway starts as a woodland path, heading **WNW**. At the end of the trees it passes the entrance gates to Heathland Riding Establishment on the left and becomes a lane. At the end go straight across Heathlands Road onto the continuation of the byway, a broad straight track through **Gorrick Plantation**.
57. In 200m keep ahead at a path crossing. In a further 250m, shortly before the track bends slightly right, **turn right** at the next path crossing (away from a metal vehicle barrier). Follow this woodland path for 200m, heading **ENE**. A few plank bridges take you across some ditches near the edge of the wood and the path emerges onto the edge of a large soft fruit farm.
58. The right of way goes straight through the middle of this farm for 750m, on a broad track between rows of polytunnels slightly to the left of your previous direction. At a path crossing near the far side there is an information panel for **Heathlands Farm**, promoting its biodiversity features. After a final stretch on a grassy strip you leave the farm via a gap in the fence ahead.

59. Maintain direction on a tree-lined path, with another fruit farm on the right and later a school playing field on the left. In 250m, where the path ahead is blocked by a metal fieldgate leading into the school grounds, **bear left** as indicated to continue on a narrow path alongside the boundary of **Ludgrove School**¹⁴.
60. In 350m go straight across the school driveway onto the continuation of the footpath. In a further 500m you reach the Reading-Ascot railway line and cross it on a footbridge. Follow the path out between houses on the outskirts of Wokingham and **turn left** onto a narrow lane. In 50m **bear right** onto a tarmac path running along the right-hand side of a recreation ground.

M. The Recreation Ground to Wokingham Station (1½ km)

61. At the end of the tree-lined path bear right onto Fairview Road. At a junction go straight across a residential street onto the narrow lane opposite (Howard Road). Where this turns half-left, keep ahead on an alleyway. In 150m **turn left** into Howard Palmer Gardens.
62. Follow the path through these small gardens, curving to the right. On the far side go straight across a car park to continue on a passageway, signposted as a footpath. This leads into Denmark Street, with **Wokingham Town Hall**¹⁵ opposite in the town's Market Place.
63. There are several pubs and coffee shops nearby. For a pleasant spot with outdoor seating off the main streets, turn right and go along the road (which becomes Peach Street) for 125m, passing **Costa Coffee** and **Caffè Nero**, then **turn left** into a broad passageway. This leads into **Peach Place**, with a choice of refreshment places.
64. The station is just under 1 km away. For a straightforward route passing several pubs, leave Peach Place in its north-western corner and turn left onto the historic **Rose Street**¹⁶, lined with attractive old houses. At the end turn right onto Broad Street, heading **NW** away from Market Place. Cross over to the left-hand side at the pedestrian lights.
65. In 150m fork left at traffic lights, passing the prominent **Tudor House**¹⁷. At the next junction (with the **Queens Head** pub on a terrace off to the right) **bear left** into Station Road. In 250m you pass the **Station Tap** by the crossroads in front of the railway line.
66. The unusual **railway footbridge**¹⁸ alongside the level crossing is worth a closer look, but to complete the walk **turn right** into Station Approach. There is a **Café Destino** inside the station building, which leads onto Platform 1 for direct trains to London Waterloo (and trains to Blackwater and Guildford along the Blackwater Valley line). For trains to Reading, cross the footbridge to Platform 2.



N. Horseshoe Lake to Sandhurst Station • Yorktown Road (2½ km)

67. Ignore the kissing gate and continue along the riverside path for a further 600m. Just before reaching a gate leading out to a road, **turn left** through a wooden gate onto a path leading to a car park. At the far end turn right to go out to Mill Lane and turn left onto the road. In 100m **turn right** into Lower Church Road and go along this long straight lane for 600m.

68. Shortly after passing **St Michael's** church up on the left, and where the road bends slightly left, **turn right** into Lych Gate Close. Follow this round to the left, past Belfry Mews and then **bear right** along a short cul-de-sac to a road junction. Cross Yateley Road carefully and head **E** along the right-hand pavement of the A321.
69. After the road has swerved right and left you pass a couple of possible tea stops on the right: the **Rose & Crown** pub and then the **Old Mill Coffee Shop & Cafe** in a small parade of shops. Later the A321 swings left and right under the railway bridge (where there are ramps on both sides leading up to the platforms of Sandhurst station) and becomes Yorktown Road.

70. Finishing at Sandhurst Station

There is no footbridge linking the two platforms. For trains to Wokingham and Reading, go up the ramp on the Rose & Crown side of the bridge to Platform 2. For trains to Blackwater and Guildford, go up the other ramp to Platform 1.

- Another refreshment place nearby is the **Village Inn**, 125m beyond the railway bridge on the other side of a mini-roundabout.

O. Yorktown Road to Blackwater Station (3 km)

71. To finish at Blackwater carry on along Yorktown Road, soon passing the **Village Inn** at a mini-roundabout. You have a further 600m through the town before you pass a petrol station and **turn right** into **Sandhurst Memorial Park**. The final refreshment place along the route is the park café here, **Pistachios in the Park**.
72. The walk continues on the tarmac path heading **E** past a skateboard area. Bear right in front of the Council Offices (where there are public toilets) onto a broad surfaced path alongside a water channel, leading to the park's "Balancing Pond". Keep right to go around its edge, soon passing an information panel about it.
73. Just before the pond's outflow **veer right** down the slope on a broad track signposted to Shepherd Meadows. At a path crossing keep ahead to cross the River Blackwater on a footbridge, the start of a pleasant riverside path through **Shepherd Meadows Nature Reserve**¹.
- You could also take the path across the outflow on the left, which goes through the meadows on the other side of the river. If you do this, cross the river at the next footbridge, 500m ahead.
74. After the second footbridge the riverside path briefly splits and you can take either fork; they rejoin 150m later. In a further 400m the path swings left and a footbridge takes you over the river onto the other bank. Unless you want to divert through a meadow on the left, follow the riverside path all the way to a busy road junction.
- The alternative route through the meadow (a gentle arc round to the right on a clear grassy path) is not much longer and swings back to rejoin the riverside path just before the exit.
75. At the junction follow the roadside path round to the right, crossing over the river. For trains to Guildford and Redhill stay on the road as it goes down towards Platform 1 of Blackwater station. For trains to Wokingham and Reading **fork left** off Station Approach onto the pathway alongside the A30; after crossing the railway go down steps to Platform 2.
- The nearest refreshment places (some fast food shops and a couple of nondescript pubs) are in the parade of shops beyond the railway bridge. There is also an M&S Café in the Meadows Shopping Centre on the other side of the A321, but this is more awkward to reach.

Walk Notes

1. **Shepherd Meadows Nature Reserve** consists of wildflower meadows and woodland alongside the River Blackwater. It is named after the wildlife artist David Shepherd.
2. The **Blackwater Valley Path** runs for 37 km, from the river's source near Aldershot in Surrey to Swallowfield in Hampshire, just beyond where the river merges with the Whitewater to become the Broadwater.
3. The **Three Castles Path** runs for 98 km between Winchester Great Hall (the only surviving part of the town's castle) and Windsor Castle; the third castle is Odiham, whose ruins are passed on Walk #84. The route is based on the 13thC journeys made by King John at the time of Magna Carta.
4. The giant redwood trees along **Wellingtonia Avenue** were planted in the 1860s as a tribute to the Duke of Wellington, who had died in 1852 shortly before *Sequoiadendron giganteum* was discovered in the Sierra Nevada.
5. The **Devil's Highway** was the name given by Britons to the Roman Road between London and Silchester (Calleva). There are many dead-straight roads and tracks in the area, but surprisingly few are actually shown on the map as Roman Roads.
6. The **Queen's Oak** claims to be the only pub in the country with this name. An ivied plaque on the green commemorates the planting of an oak tree in 1887, the 50th year of Queen Victoria's reign. Another oak tree was planted in 2002 for Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee.
7. **St James, Finchampstead** dates from the 12thC and retains many of its Norman features, including a semi-circular apse. The brick tower was added in 1720.
8. **Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve** supports a wide range of wildlife. The viewing hides are only open to members but there are several places where you can get good views from the perimeter path. The reserve is due to be extended to include the flooded gravel pits to the west.
9. **Horseshoe Lake** is used for sailing and similar activities. Its name comes from the shape of its small island.
10. **Ambarrow Court Local Nature Reserve** consists of two merged areas: Ambarrow Court (the site of the old manor house) and Ambarrow Hill (NT). Bracknell District Council acquired the former site in 1985 and the LNR was opened in 2002.
11. **Ambarrow Court** was a country residence built in 1885. It was bought by the MoD in 1940 and used as a radio research centre, but fell into disuse after WW II and was demolished in the 1970s.
12. **Ambarrow Hill** is thought to be man-made but archaeologists have been unable to establish its purpose.
13. **Wellington College** grounds are open to the "Friends of Wellington College" but not to the general public. The college itself is 750m away and not visible from the public footpath.
14. **Ludgrove School** is an independent preparatory boarding school for boys aged 8-13. The royal princes (William and Harry) attended the school in the 1990s.
15. **Wokingham Town Hall** was built in 1860, in Gothic revival style. It originally combined the function of town hall and county police station, and included a courtroom and gaol. It is listed Grade II*.
16. **Rose Street** is an example of a medieval enclosed street, narrow at both ends (one has since been widened) to allow fairs, markets and other commercial activities to be contained within it. It has retained many timber-framed houses, some dating back to the 14thC.
17. **Tudor House** is the best surviving 16thC building in the town, although the striking timber-framed façade is not original: it was added in the 1920s. Several houses appear to have been joined together in phases to form the present structure.
18. The **railway footbridge** south of Wokingham station was constructed in 1886 after there had been several accidents to pedestrians on the level crossing. It was built by enterprising navvies out of old rails and sleepers, an innovative design which has been listed Grade II.

» *Last updated: February 23, 2024*

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