



# Otford to Eynsford walk

2 climbs, the River Darent, two castles, and a Roman villa

## River Darent, two castles and a Roman villa

**Length** 14.1km (8.8 miles), 4 hours. For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow 8 hours 45 minutes.

**Toughness** 5 out of 10.

**OS Maps** Explorers 147 & 162 or Landrangers 188 & 177. Otford, map reference TQ 532 593, is in **Kent**, 4km north of Sevenoaks.

**Features** The suggested route takes in three villages steeped in history, a ruined palace, two castles and a Roman villa. At times the route runs alongside the River Darent, at other times through fields and woods.

At the start of the walk there is the Otford Solar System, which claims to be the only scale model of its kind in the world; it shows the relative position of the sun and planets at the start of the new millennium.

Lunch is in Shoreham, which has 4 historic pubs to choose from plus a tea room.

In the afternoon, you come to Lullingstone Park with its (early summer) orchids; its Visitor Centre offers exhibitions and information about the park (and has a café).

Towards the end of the walk you pass Lullingstone Castle with its new visitor attraction, the World Garden, and Lullingstone Roman Villa (English Heritage). The main walk then continues to Eynsford passing under the impressive Eynsford Viaduct, but if you wish - and just before the Roman Villa - you can detour uphill to the Eagle Heights Wildlife Foundation - Birds of Prey Centre - before continuing on the Darent Valley Path downhill to Eynsford.

The walk has two steep uphill sections and the first half can be very muddy.

**Walk Options** In winter and after periods of heavy and continuous rain the opening fields in the walk on your way to Sepham and Filston Farms can be very muddy. The mud can be avoided by taking an alternative route - the reverse of the closing leg of SWC Walk 43 - Otford Circular Walk. Alternatively, you could avoid the mud by starting the walk from the suggested lunchtime stop by travelling directly to Shoreham Station (or you could end the walk in Shoreham). You can cut 1.2km off the end of the walk by following the short cut at [\*] in the Walk Directions.

The walk can be extended by adding a section of SWC Walk 291 - Farningham Road to Eynsford, along the Darent Valley Way, to end your walk at Farningham Road railway station. This adds 5.5 km (3.4 miles) to the standard walk.

**History** **Otford** goes back to the sixth century when the Anglo-Saxons called their settlement Ottonford ('Otta's ford'). The Archbishop's Palace in Otford, the remaining fragments of which are on open view, once rivalled Hampton Court for splendour, until Henry VIII forced Archbishop Cranmer to surrender it in 1537.

Construction of **St Bartholomew's Church**, Otford, began in 1060, with the tower being added in 1175. The church contains large marble memorials to Charles and David Polhill, great-grandsons of Oliver Cromwell.

The artist **Samuel Palmer** lived and worked in Shoreham from 1826 to 1834. He was the leader of a group who followed William Blake and called themselves **The Ancients**. Palmer's father, also called Samuel, rented the **Water House** by the river.

The **Church of St Peter and St Paul** in Shoreham has many interesting features, including an outstanding wooden rood screen spanning the width of the building and a stained glass window by the **Pre-Raphaelite** artist **Burne-Jones**.

**Lullingstone Park** was a deer park from the Middle Ages until World War II, when the park was used as a decoy airfield – the heavy bombing so terrified the deer that they escaped. Species of tree that deer would not eat have been planted through the centuries, thus ancient hornbeam pollards remain.

**Lullingstone Castle** (tel 01322 862 114) is the residence of the Hart Dyke family, having remained in the Dyke family for centuries, with the original house built during the reign of Henry VII. Its gatehouse is one of the earliest all-brick buildings in Britain. In the grounds is the **World Garden**, containing plants from around the globe, which is open to visitors on Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons between April and September (and Bank Holiday Mondays). The House is only open on Bank Holiday weekends (Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday). Admission (2018) is £9.

**Lullingstone Roman Villa** (tel 01322 863 467) was first occupied in 80AD by a rich Roman who practised pagan worship of the local water sprite in a room here, which later became a Christian temple. The ruins include two mosaic floors. It is normally open daily (not Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day) from 10am to 6pm in summer, 4pm in winter (October to the end of March) and all school half term weeks. Admission (2018) is £7.60.

**St Martin's Church** in Eynsford is unusual in having retained the Norman ground plan with apsidal chancel. In about 1163, Thomas à Becket excommunicated Sir William de Eynsford III, the Lord of the Manor who controlled the patronage for this church. The excommunication was cancelled by Henry II and the issue became part of the quarrel which led to Becket's murder.

**Eynsford Castle** (free entry) was built in the eleventh century and vandalised in 1312. John de Eynsford, who lived there, is said to have assisted in Becket's murder.

**Eagle Heights Wildlife Foundation - Birds of Prey Centre** (tel 01322 866 577) open from 10.30am to 5pm (last entry 3.30pm) from 25 March to 31 October, admission (2018) £9.95- can be visited via an uphill detour from the main route, which links up to the walk extension to Farningham Road. There are fine views of the Darent Valley from the public footpath beside the Centre (without having to pay the entrance fee). The Centre houses over 100 species of birds of prey, including eagles, falcons, owls and an Andean Condor. There are handling displays every day.

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#### Travel

Take the train nearest to **10.45am** from **Victoria** Station to **Otford**. Journey time 35 minutes. Trains back from Eynsford are half-hourly and go to Blackfriars and Kentish Town during the week, Victoria at weekends; these are slower, but you can change at Bromley South for a fast train to Victoria. Buy a day return to Otford.

If driving, Otford Station car park costs £3.50 (cheaper at weekends). Alternatively, there is a free public car park in the village, opposite the Bull pub. Eynsford Station has a small free car park. There are trains every 30 minutes from Eynsford to Otford.

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#### Lunch

The suggested lunchtime stop is the **King's Arms** pub (tel 01959 523 100) in Shoreham, which serves food to 2.30pm; it has in its front wall the country's last remaining ostler box (like an enclosed little sentry box, where the ostler used to wait to attend to customers' horses).

Alternatives pubs are **Ye Olde George Inne** (tel 01959 522 017) in Church Street, which serves food midday to 3pm Tuesday-Thursday, all day Friday & Saturday, and 6pm Sunday; the **Two Brewers** pub (tel 01959 522 800) at 30 High Street, which serves food midday to 2pm (Sunday to 2.45pm); and the **Crown** pub (tel 01959 522 903) at 84 High Street, which serves food midday to 2.15pm (Sunday to 3pm).

For cafe food and lighter fare in Shoreham Village you have two choices, but only at weekends. The first is **The Shoreham Aircraft Museum Tea Room - Battle of Britain Museum** (tel 01959 524 416), open Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, from 10am to 5pm. The Museum has a lovely tea garden which is a popular stop for SWC walkers not in need of a pub lunch. The second is the **Honey Pot** (tel 07546 696 623), open Friday, Saturday and Sunday, from 10am to 4pm.

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#### Tea

Mid afternoon, the café at the **Lullingstone Park Visitor Centre** (tel 01322 865 995) is open daily to 5pm in summer, 4pm in winter.

The suggested tea place in Eynsford is the **Riverside Tea Room** (tel 01322 861 551) open until 5pm weekdays and until 4pm at weekends. For a pub-tea you have a good choice. The **Plough** (tel 01322 862 281) has an attractive riverside location and serves tea and coffee as well as normal pub fare.

Other pubs in Eynsford are the **Malt Shovel Inn** (tel 01322 862 164), the **Five Bells** (tel 01322 863 135) and the **Castle Hotel** (tel 01322 863 162).

**Updates** No major changes. [Pre 2011 Editions] Many small updates - this edition June 2018. Use the online version

**Help Us!** After the walk, we would love to get your [feedback](#)

**Photos** Upload your photos to the [SWC Group on Flickr](#), and [videos to Youtube](#). This walk's tags are:



**By Car** **Start** TN14 5QY **Finish** DA4 0HP

**Help** National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Travelline SE (bus times): 0871 200 2233 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

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## Walk Directions

The [numbers] and sketch map they refer to, is only in the book.

- [1]** Coming off the London train, cross the footbridge over the railway line and exit the **Otford Station** building. Turn left under a barrier into the station car park and in 40 metres, on the right-hand side, *go through the gap in the railings* and take the tarmac path heading west away from the station, gently downhill, soon with an open field on your left-hand side. Keep to this path through a bend to the right. A wooden swing gate takes you through to the churchyard of **St Bartholomew's Church**, which is worth a look inside (the old south door is no longer used and the new entrance is a set of modern doors on the north side).
- From the church, head north-west towards the main road, passing the war memorial on your right-hand side.
- A detour to the left here would take you in less than 100 metres to the gatehouse and north-west tower, virtually all that remains of **Otford Palace**.
- To continue the walk, go over to the far side of the village pond, in the centre of a roundabout; the duckhouse here is Britain's smallest listed building. Take the road on the left, westwards, by the Crown Inn (closed - 2018), soon passing the Hospices of Hope tea shop on the left and the seventeenth-century Forge House (now a restaurant) on the right.
- Keep on this road. In 120 metres (from the roundabout), by the Bull pub (part of which dates back to 1500), a short diversion to the back of the public car park on the opposite side of the road will take you to a map showing the planetary locations of the Otford Solar System. In 200 metres you pass on the left Pickmoss, a medieval open-hall house, and in a further 50 metres, on your right, the Darent Valley Path. The alternative route - reversing Book 1 - Walk 43 Otford Circular - starts here.
- The alternative route: take the surfaced drive, with the river on your left, and in 75 metres, at the end of the drive, keep ahead on a footpath, soon with allotment gardens on your right and a woodland strip to your left, with the river down below you. Go through a wooden kissing gate and keep ahead, now along the left-hand edge of a large open field. In 270 metres the path swings to the right and you go through a metal kissing gate. Keep ahead, gently uphill, on a path between fields, with a mesh fence on your left. In 230 metres go through a metal kissing gate, cross a drive and go through another metal kissing gate, to keep ahead on a broad grassy way. In 350 metres go through another metal kissing gate and head through a woodland strip, soon with golf links on your left. In 100 metres cross a golf access path and keep ahead through the woodland. In 450 metres the path comes out onto a surfaced lane, where you turn left, downhill, following signs for Home Farm and the Old Mill. In 200 metres at the bottom of the slope, with Old Mill House on your left, cross the River Darent and keep ahead between properties. Where the road ends and becomes an earth track, with water directly ahead, cross a narrow footbridge and at the path junction, take the left-hand path, with the river on your left and woodland on your right. In 210 metres you come out by Kennel

Cottage on your right. Head up the access road (Water Lane) and in 200 metres you come to Filston Road. Cross over and continue with the main route up the trackway.

7. **The Main route** After passing Pickmoss, cross over the River Darent, to then pass the iron gates of eighteenth-century Broughton Manor on your left. In 100 metres the road goes over a stream and in a further 100 metres, just beyond a wooden bus shelter on the north side of the road, you come to a concrete pillar representing the planet Uranus.
8. **[2]** Immediately after this pillar, *turn right* through a kissing gate on to a signposted and well-used public footpath, across an open field, your direction 330°. In 230 metres, having kept to this main path, go through a wooden kissing gate (a potentially very muddy area) to carry straight on between a hedge and a wire fence.
9. In 400 metres the path goes through a hedge and across a ditch, then through a metal squeeze stile. In a further 120 metres cross a stream on a slab of concrete (a small hump bridge) and 10 metres keep ahead (slightly right), to pass through a wooden barrier with a yellow footpath disc on it, along a path, your direction west, with a wire fence on your right. In 100 metres, at a path junction, take the right-hand fork and in 130 metres the path merges with a farm track from the right, with a metal field gate over to your right. 10 metres ahead, you have a choice of routes, both about the same distance.
10. To go past the concrete pillar representing the planet Pluto, *turn right* along a path, which can be overgrown in summer. In 240 metres you pass this pillar and continue along the field edge. In 180 metres keep ahead on a potentially muddy car-wide track between hedges. In 500 metres you pass an open barn on your left, with **Filston Oast** house ahead. Follow the farm track round to the left, heading for a prominent hopper attached to a large industrial shed. *Turn right* there to reach the farm access road, then turn left to reach Filston Lane in 140 metres. Pick up the main directions at **[4]** below.
11. To follow the original route, however, keep on this grassy farm track, which in 250 metres comes to the corner of a former orchard **[3]**. Instead of veering left and right with the main path towards **Sepham Farm** and its oasthouses, *turn right* through a metal fieldgate, with a yellow footpath disc on it (or pass to the left of it) to go along the edge of the former orchard, your direction 40°, soon passing under mini-pylons.
12. In 100 metres, ignore a left turn through the former orchard towards the farm, to continue ahead over several large fields towards **Filston Farm** in the distance. In 500 metres go through a field boundary and keep ahead. In a further 200 metres on entering the farm, go past an industrial shed with feed hopper on your left and go through the concreted farmyard. In 25 metres *turn left* onto the farm's access road and follow this surfaced road steadily uphill between hedges to reach Filston Lane in 140 metres.
13. **[4]** Turn right on this car road. In 250 metres, opposite Water Lane on the right, *turn left* up a trackway between hedges. **The alternative (reverse of Otford Circular) route joins here** . Climb steadily up this track and continue through a metal swing gate to climb more steeply up the right-hand side of a field, on a grassy way, with **Meenfield Wood** on your right. In 150 metres at a cross paths and just before a convenient seat, *turn right* and go through a metal kissing gate on to a wide path through the wood, gently downhill.
14. In 600 metres you come to a crossing, with a sign for Meenfield Wood on your left and an information board with map on your right, with steps up and down, and you *turn right downhill* towards Shoreham on a potentially slippery path, your direction 120°.
15. In 60 metres go through a wooden kissing gate and continue down the left-hand edge of a field. On your left behind you is a chalk cross commemorating those who died in WW1. In a further 100 metres, go through another wooden kissing gate and down through hedges. In a further 120 metres, go through a metal kissing gate and keep on the main path down past playing fields on your left-hand side.
16. You come out on to **Shoreham's High Street** (*turn left* here if you wish to go to the **Two Brewers** pub, 100 metres away on the other side of the road, or the **Village Stores**, a further 50 metres up the road). But for the main route, *turn right* on the High Street. Immediately on your right you have the **Shoreham Aircraft Museum Tea Room - Battle of Britain Museum** , a light lunch option at weekends. Continuing along the High Street you next come to the **Honey Pot** tearoom on your left. Just past this, *turn left* into Church Street. In 180 metres you come to the **King's Arms** pub on your right-hand side, the suggested lunchtime stop for the walk.
17. Alternatively, continue along the road, cross the river and follow Church Street up to the right; **Ye Olde George Inne** is on the right 150 metres away, opposite the entrance to the **Church of St Peter and St Paul**.
18. On coming out of the King's Arms, turn right and go along the road, cross the river and *turn left* into Darenth Way (or, from Ye Olde George Inne, return to this point). Pass to the left of **Water House** and keep to the riverside path, with the River Darent on your left-hand side.
19. In 500 metres you cross the river by a footbridge with metal railings. 50 metres further on, you leave the Darent Valley Path to *turn left uphill* on a car lane, westwards. At the top of Mill Lane you come to a T-junction with the main road (the **Crown** pub is 80 metres away on your left here).

20. Cross over the road and take a permissive path, the Millennium Footpath, which runs parallel to the road on your right-hand side, steadily uphill. In 100 metres go through a metal kissing gate and follow a grassy path up the right-hand field edge, which soon swings to the left, to reach the top corner of the field.
21. Exit the field through a metal kissing gate to the right of a metal fieldgate. Continue uphill for 25 metres and pass by a vehicle barrier to come out onto a road and *turn right downhill*. In 100 metres continue ahead at a road junction, but in a further 100 metres, *turn left* at another junction into Cockerhurst Road (Just before this junction there is an interesting little memorial stone up on the bank; the biblical quotation is from Hosea 2:14.)
22. After 350 metres of walking uphill between tall beech trees, and opposite a large bungalow (Combe Vale) [5],[!] *take the footpath on the right*, your direction 15°, to follow a clear path steeply uphill, soon with a large field behind a fence on your left-hand side.
23. 300 metres from the road, cross a stile and follow the left-hand field edge northwards, towards **Homewood Farm**. Keep on this path, with trees and then hedges on your left-hand side.
24. In 400 metres you come to the field end, with a small house on the right-hand side. Keep ahead, slightly left, and head down a narrow path with a high wooden fence on your right and a hedge to your left. In 100 metres, you join a concrete car road and continue on, your direction 350°.
25. 200 metres later, at the T-junction with a car road, *turn right down the road*. In 85 metres, at a bend in the road, ignore the access road to your left, but 10 metres later *cross a stile on the left* into **Home Wood [6]**.
26. These woods, and the golf course up ahead, are part of Lullingstone Park. When this walk was devised the directions through this Country Park followed the route of a published trail, but the numbered posts which marked out this route are no longer present. Not all of the paths used are shown on the OS map.
27. 5 metres inside the wood, *turn right* on to a wide path, downhill, your direction 100°. In 40 metres follow it round to the left, your direction now 40°.
28. In 150 metres pass to the side of a metal fieldgate and keep ahead. In a further 150 metres, having ignored paths off to both sides, you come to a T-junction. *Turn right and then in 20 metres turn left* into a very wide grassy avenue going gently downhill between **Upper** and **Lower Beechen Wood**, still heading north-east.
29. In 400 metres you come to a permissive bridleway [7], with a wooden gate up ahead leading on to a golf course.
30. The suggested route is to go through this gate on to the golf course, soon bearing left across grass before reaching a gravel track in 75 metres, but as you come out into the open *beware of golfers playing across your route from a raised golf tee on your left*. (You can avoid this hazard by turning left on to the bridleway just before entering the golf course, then following it through the trees and up a short rise, round to the right behind the golf tee and down through the trees to reach the same gravel track a little further along.)
31. Either way, *turn right* on to this gravel track, heading east.
32. If you wish, you could now simply follow this gravel track all the way through the golf course. In 1.25km you would come out on to the Darent Valley Path in front of Lullingstone Castle, resuming the directions at point [8] below. However, this would miss out a nice stretch of the walk and you would bypass the Lullingstone Park Visitor Centre.
33. For the recommended route, follow the gravel track for about 135 metres and then, just before a tree stump on your left,[!] *turn half-left* onto a wide grassy path going up a slope, your direction 80°. The path swings to the right and after levelling out, the path goes past the 13th tee and a green, then descends for 250 metres to go back across the gravel track, which has curved round to the left in the valley. Head on a grassy way up a slope, go through a gap between some trees and bushes and aim for the left hand corner of a green, to the right of golf Tee Hole 8. On reaching the back of the green, with woodland beyond, you come to two bench seats. Here *turn right* and follow white posts on your left, around the back of the green. Just before the sixth white post, follow the direction of the blue arrow *to the left* through a gap in the woodland strip, and in 20 metres you come out into the open, where you bear right for an further 20 metres to join a broad grassy permissive bridleway.
34. You now have fine views across the Darent Valley below, with the brick gatehouse of Lullingstone Castle on your left and Lullingstone Park Visitor Centre down on your right.
35. *Turn right* and go along the ridge on the broad grassy permissive bridleway, soon taking the *left fork* at a Y-junction, your direction 210°. In 200 metres, with a bench seat on your right, the path goes between hedges. In another 100 metres, as the path swings left, *turn left* downhill on a car-wide track, between hedges and trees, in 200 metres reaching **Lullingstone Park Visitor Centre** (which has a café).
36. Coming out of the Visitor Centre, turn right through the car parking area, go past the Acorn Adventure Play area and *turn right* onto a gravel path which swings down to the right to a bridge. Just before the bridge (which you do NOT cross), *turn left* onto an

attractive riverside path, along the river bank with the water on your right-hand side. In 600 metres, by a weir in the river to your right, go through a wooden kissing gate [8] and continue straight on towards the gatehouse of **Lullingstone Castle**.

37. Walk past the front of the gatehouse and haed along the drive, with car parking spaces on your right. Now continue ahead, northwards, on a tarmac lane. In 600 metres or so, you come to a khaki coloured large, steel clad shed on your left-hand side which houses **Lullingstone Roman Villa**.
38. [\*] You can shorten the walk by 1.2km at this point by turning right to cross the river on a bridge to the left of the car park. In 600 metres this private road – which is also a public footpath – comes to a T-junction with the A225, where you *turn left*. In 300 metres you go under the railway bridge and turn sharp right to reach the station.
39. For the detour to **Eagle Heights Wildlife Foundation** and viewing point, some 20 metres before you come to the Roman Villa, *take the signposted footpath on your left*, initially up earthen steps, through a woodland strip. The path meanders uphill through woodland and comes out into a field, where you continue uphill along its left-hand edge. Some 500 metres from the road, near the top of the slope, as you approach a field boundary, *turn right* just before it and walk beside a hedge on your left, a level way, with fine views to your right. In some 330 metres the hedge ends and you keep ahead through a field. In a further 270 metres you come out onto an access road. Here, for **The Eagle Heights Centre**, *turn left*, soon passing Hulberry Farm on your left. Beyond it, turn left for the entrance to Eagle Heights. After visiting the Centre, return to the point where the path came out to the access road. Here *turn left* to continue on the Darent Valley Path, now slanting downhill, to your right. In 90 metres pass through a gap in the hedge field boundary ahead of you, and continue downhill, now half left. In 350 metres the path comes down to the railway which you cross via stiles on either side. On the far side continue ahead for a further 260 metres to pass pipe barriers as the path comes down to the road, to rejoin the main route, some 70 metres before the junction with Sparepenny Lane.
40. To continue on the main walk without taking the detour to Eagle Heights, keep ahead - on the car road. In 600 metres you go under Eynsford Rail Viaduct (built in the nineteenth century with bricks made in Brick Field, just above the east bank of the river) and go straight on, with the river still on your right-hand side.
41. After the road curves to the right, keep straight on, signposted Eynsford, at the junction with Sparepenny Lane. In a further 200 metres you come to the **Plough** pub on your left-hand side (the suggested pub stop for tea). Continuing along the road, go over the bridge by the ford, where you have the **Riverside Tea Room** on your left (the suggested tea room stop for tea)- and head up to the main road (Note: for walkers wearing leather boots, the ford to the right of the bridge makes for an excellent boot wash).
42. To visit the ruins of **Eynsford Castle**, which is about 400 metres away, turn left on the main road and carry on through the village, passing the **Five Bells** pub on your right-hand side. Opposite the **Castle Hotel**, turn left on a tarmac lane signposted Village Hall and follow it round to the right to find the Castle car park and ruins.
43. For **Eynsford Station**, *turn right* on to the main A225 road, with **St Martin's Church** opposite. You soon pass the **Malt Shovel Inn** on your left-hand side and go uphill for 800 metres, turning left into the station approach road just over the brow of the hill. Trains back to London are on the far platform, over the footbridge.
44. **Alternative route to the station avoiding the main A225 road**. At the junction with the A225, cross over with care (there is a pedestrian crossing to your left) and go through a gate into the churchyard of St Martin of Tours. Follow the path uphill and round to the left and exit the churchyard by a black metal gate in the top left-hand corner. Go straight ahead over a drive, pass by a cycle barrier and enter a surfaced alleyway between fences, to go gently uphill. In 90 metres exit the alleyway passing another barrier onto a residential road - Pollyhaugh. *Turn right* along this residential road with detached houses on either side. After 700 metres, with Pollyhaugh ending and the road continuing as St Martins Drive, you come to a T-junction. *Turn right* down Eynsford Rise. At the bottom of this road you have **Eynsford railway station** directly ahead of you.

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