

Staplehurst to Frittenden last checked	Frittenden to Headcorn last checked	Frittenden to Sissinghurst Castle last checked	Sissinghurst Castle to Cranbrook checked
12 April 2024	25 September 2023	12 April 2024	12 April 2024
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Staplehurst to Headcorn or Cranbrook

Length:	Staplehurst to Headcorn	13.1km (8.1 miles)
	Staplehurst to Sissinghurst	12.6km (7.8 miles)
	Staplehurst to Cranbrook	15.2km (9.4 miles)
	Cranbrook to Goudhurst (<i>map/GPX only</i>)	<i>adds 6.8km (4.2 miles)</i>

Toughness: 2 out of 10: 3 out of 10 to Cranbrook

Maps: OS Explorer 136 & 137; OS Landranger 188

Features

Once you get a new housing estate on the outskirts of Staplehurst, the morning of this walk is an easy stroll through fields and woods in the Low Weald of Kent, with a very fine bluebell wood en route from mid April to early May, and good displays of wood anemones from mid March to mid April. The whole route is wonderful for wild flowers in late April and early May.

After lunch at **Frittenden** you then have the choice of carrying on over low-lying fields to the pretty Kent village of **Headcorn**, which has a railway station (*in which case you only need pages 1-6 of this document*), or (*Mondays to Saturdays only: see **Transport** overleaf*) diverting south to the National Trust-owned **Sissinghurst Castle**, the former home of the diplomat Harold Nicholson and Vita Sackville-West, the writer now more famous as the lover of Virginia Woolf.

Sissinghurst was originally a moated Tudor mansion, which fell into disrepair until only a few buildings – including the gatetower and the stable buildings were left. Nicholson and Sackville-West bought the property in 1930 and created the famous gardens that are now maintained by the National Trust. Notoriously, each lived in their own separate building – Sackville-West in the tower, Nicholson in the nearby house, only coming together in the communal living room in the stable block. A member of the family still lives on the property, though it has been owned by the National Trust since 1962. The gardens are open daily from mid March to December, but the permissive paths across the estate used by this walk are open year round.

Beyond Sissinghurst the walk takes you to Sissinghurst village, passing through a wood with wood anemones in and bluebells in early spring. From the village there are buses back to Staplehurst station or you can continue for 2.6km (1.6 miles) to the pretty town of **Cranbrook**, which is served by the same buses as Sissinghurst and which has a working windmill that still grinds corn.

Other walk options

From Cranbrook it is possible to extend this walk by **6.8km (4.2 miles)** along the High Weald Landscape Trail to the very pretty hilltop village of **Goudhurst**. No written directions are provided for this, but there is a GPX file and a map of the route on the Saturday Walkers Club website, and the trail is fairly well waymarked. Given the last bus times from Goudhurst (see **Transport** below) you will probably want to be leaving Cranbrook by 3.30pm to 4pm to make this option viable, however. *There are no buses from Goudhurst on Sundays or bank holidays.*

Transport

Staplehurst is on the line between Tonbridge and Ashford, and is served by twice hourly Charing Cross and London Bridge. Journey time is about 1 hour. Catch the train nearest to **9.30am** from **Charing Cross** to **Staplehurst** to get to the lunch pub in time.

If ending at Headcorn, this is the station beyond Staplehurst, served by the same trains, so buy a **day return to Headcorn**.

If planning to finish in **Sissinghurst** or **Cranbrook**, a **day return to Staplehurst** is sufficient. Once you get to Sissinghurst village of Cranbrook, you will need to use **Arriva bus number 5** to get you back to Staplehurst station. At time of writing the buses go from Cranbrook go roughly hourly until around 7pm Monday to Friday, and 6.15pm on Saturdays, serving Sissinghurst village 7 minutes later. *There are no buses from Cranbrook or Sissinghurst village on Sundays.*

If finishing in **Goudhurst**, the number 27 bus to **Marden** (the station before Staplehurst and so covered by a Staplehurst day return) departs at 17.30 every day except Sunday. The 297 bus provides a later connection to **Tunbridge Wells** station, departing 18.21 Monday to Friday and 18.11 on Saturday, but you will then need to buy a rail ticket from Tunbridge Wells to Tonbridge to return to London. *There are no buses from Goudhurst on Sundays.*

Lunch & tea places

The Bell & Jorrocks, Frittenden (01580 852415). Located 7.1km (4.4 miles) from the start of the walk, this is the only lunch option if ending in Headcorn. Groups should definitely book, as this is a small family-run pub. Closed at lunchtimes on Monday and Tuesday (though open for drinks from 3pm), it serves food from 12pm-2.30pm and 6.30pm-8.45pm Wednesday to Saturday and 12-3.30pm Sunday, being open all afternoon for drinks on all these days.

In Headcorn **Bill's Village Tea Rooms** close rather early at 4 pm daily. A **Costa Coffee** nearby is open until 6pm Monday to Saturday and 5pm Sundays. A better choice, however, is **George and Dragon** (01622 890239), a very friendly and cosy pub which offers both cream teas and excellent food well into the evening.

On the Sissinghurst or Cranbrook ending of the walk **Sissinghurst Castle Gardens**, 3.2km (2 miles) beyond Frittenden - or 2.3k (1.4 miles) from the start of option c) - have a National Trust self-service restaurant and tea room which can be accessed without paying an entrance fee to the site. It does hot meals from midday to 3pm, and serves tea until 5.30pm daily from mid March to the end of December. There is also a separate small cafe, near the entrance to the car park.

The **Milk House** pub, (01580 720200), a gastro pub in Sissinghurst village, is a possible tea stop (or very late lunch stop!), 12.6km (7.8 miles) into the Sissinghurst or Cranbrook walk.

In **Cranbrook** the most obvious tea place as you arrive in the village is the **George Hotel**, a pleasant enough old coaching inn with comfortable seating. Otherwise, the various cafes nearby close frustratingly early, especially at weekends. **Arthur's**, directly opposite the George, is only open until 4pm Monday to Saturday and 3pm on Sunday, for example. **Kypseli**, a Greek taverna next door, advertises itself as serving coffee and cake (as well as some lovely gooey puddings) and is open until 10pm, but in practice after about 5pm it is preparing for its evening meal service. The nearby **Wendy House** cafe is open till 5pm Monday to Friday but only 4pm on Saturday (closed Sundays).

If you get to **Goudhurst**, the **Star & Eagle Hotel** is one refreshment option, while the **Vine Inn** has the advantage of overlooking the bus stop and has outside tables.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Staplehurst station to church **(2.7km/1.7 mi)**

1. Cross the footbridge at Staplehurst station and go up the station approach which curves left to reach the main road. Turn right on this.
2. In 80 metres turn left into Fishers Road.
3. In 200 metres the road passes a three metre high hedge to your right. In another 50 metres, just past a house converted from an oast house to your right, fork left up a residential cul-du-sac (44-55 Fishers Road).
4. In 20 metres, where the road turns from tarmac to paved, turn right at a three-armed footpath sign up a path between fences.
5. In 50 metres you emerge from the fences to find a small wild area ahead. You can skirt round to the left of this on a tarmac path (*which is the one you otherwise rejoin in paragraph 7 below*), but it is more pretty to take the informal (*and much older*) path straight ahead into the wild area, keeping to the right of a pond (*not initially visible in summer due to young willows*).
6. In 40 metres there is a pond/boggy area to your right also. In 40 metres more you pass through a kissing gate.
7. 5 metres beyond the kissing gate turn left in front of a wooden garden fence, and then right again in 5 metres to follow a tarmac path between houses.
8. In 50 metres cross a road and keep straight on along a tarmac path. In 50 metres the path emerges alongside more housing, with a pond to the left.
9. In another 120 metres pass through a kissing gate into a field. Head across this for another 120 metres to pass through a kissing gate to the left of a metal fieldgate.
10. Turn right beyond at a three-way road junction, passing a large Staplehurst sign, and Home Farm on your left.
11. In 300 metres, where the lane veers right to the entrance to the housing estate, pass through a metal barrier and continue on a tarmac path to come in 40 metres to a T-junction with a busy road. Turn left on this.

12. In 180 metres, just past the entrance to a sports field on the left, turn right at a footpath sign on to an enclosed path between fields.
13. In 500 metres, at the top of the field, veer right at a path T-junction and continue onwards on a path between hedges which in 40 metres has a field to its left, though it is only occasionally visible for the next 80 metres.
14. In 350 metres, at the top of the field, pass through a metal gate and turn right through a wooden barrier out to a tarmac lane (Chapel Lane).
15. Follow the lane for 100 metres and then turn left at a footpath sign along an enclosed path that leads into the churchyard of All Saints, Staplehurst.

Staplehurst church to **Frittenden (4.4km/2.7 miles)**

16. Go straight on through the churchyard, with the church on your right. (*Worth a visit for its leaning pillars. There are also some rather slight remains of an anchorite cell.*) In 60 metres bear slightly left to pass to the left of a low stone wall.
17. In 80 metres go through a gap in a hedge into a new section of the graveyard and keep on in the same direction, diagonally across it.
18. In 40 metres more go through a wooden gate, then in 7 metres turn left through another gate and go half right diagonally across a field.
19. In 100 metres pass through a gap to follow a path with a fence on the right that comes out onto a road in 150 metres.
20. Cross the road and turn left for 25 metres, then turn right through a gate up a path into a wood.
21. In 200 metres, 30 metres after crossing a stream, ignore a path to the left and instead veer right on a path that in another 25 metres or so goes alongside a ditch and metal fence.
22. In 70 metres more go through a metal kissing gate and follow the path to the left along a wooden fence.
23. In 70 metres the path emerges into a grassy area: go straight ahead across this, merging with a wooden fence to the left.

24. In 70 metres more you enter a wood. In another 50 metres you come to a path junction in front of a hedge. Turn left here and cross a stile into a huge field, ignoring a path forking to the left just before the stile.
 25. Cross the field diagonally, heading just to the right of a large oak tree in 130 metres (direction 130 degrees).
 26. Continue in the same direction for another 120 metres to the far side of the field. Here cross a stile to the left of a double metal fieldgate. Continue diagonally, ie in the same direction, across the next field, approaching the wood to the left in 300 metres.
 27. 30 metres beyond the corner of the wood, there is a fieldgate ahead with a track to its right. Ignore these and instead turn right across a stile to the left of another fieldgate into another field. Turn two thirds left across this (your direction 150 degrees) to a concealed gate halfway along its upper edge.
 28. In 200 metres cross a stile to the right of this fieldgate. In 30 metres emerge into a field and turn left along its top edge beside the wood. The woodland here has **wood anemones** in late March and early April, and then a magnificent display of **bluebells** from mid April to early May.
 29. Follow the edge of the field along the wood edge for 1km, with a kink uphill to the left halfway, until it eventually leads through a kissing gate to a lane.
 30. Turn right on the lane. (*In late March and early April if you **turn left** on the lane you come in 300 metres or so to a magnificent wood anemone wood, just as the lane turns right: retrace your steps after seeing this*).
 31. Stay on this lane as it bends left, right and then left, and then finally a big long curve to the right.
 32. In 500 metres, at the far end of this big long curve, ignore a signposted footpath to the right across a field.
 33. In another 50 metres, as the road bends left, ignore a signposted path to the right up a track. But in another 40 metres take a signposted path to the right across a stile to the right of a fieldgate.
 34. Go up the right-hand edge of a field, passing through fence posts (gate missing) in 40 metres.
 35. In another 70 metres, at the end of this field pass through a metal gate. Continue onwards up a path between trees.
 36. In 130 metres pass through another metal gate and turn right for 10 metres and then left through a rusty kissing gate.
 37. Carry on uphill, passing to the right of a large horse chestnut tree in 30 metres, another in 40 metres more and a third 40 metres further on.
 38. In 100 metres more, at the top of the field, pass through a kissing gate and turn left along the edge of a large field.
 39. In 130 metres pass through a metal kissing gate and keep alongside the field edge as the church steeple comes into sight (*in winter at least...*).
 40. In 300 metres go through a kissing gate into the churchyard of St Mary's, **Frittenden**.
 - At this point, if you do not **do not** want to have **lunch at the Bell & Jorrocks pub**, and you are walking to **Sissinghurst** or **Cranbrook**, keep to the right-hand edge of the churchyard to exit via the main gate and turn right on the road. Now follow the directions in paragraph 86 on page 6.
 41. Otherwise, **for lunch at the Bell and Jorrocks** or the **Headcorn** ending, go straight on past the church entrance and carry on in the same direction to exit the churchyard in another 70 metres
 42. Carry on down an enclosed path with a building to your right. In 70 metres more keep down the left-hand edge of a green space.
 43. In 100 metres pass through a metal gate and carry on downhill on a road. In 150 metres you come to the **Bell and Jorrocks**.
*After lunch, for **Sissinghurst** or **Cranbrook** - follow the directions in paragraph 83 on page 6. For the **Headcorn** ending, continue with the directions below.*
- Frittenden to Headcorn**
(6km/3.7 miles)
44. After lunch, come out of the pub and turn left up Biddenden Road (or turn right in front of the pub if not stopping).

45. In 250 metres, just after the road starts to descend, turn left at a footpath sign. In 35 metres go through a kissing gate into a field and keep to its right-hand edge
46. In 150 metres pass through another kissing gate and then in 40 metres another.
47. In 50 metres more, with a pond on the right, pass through a kissing gate to enter a small wood.
48. In 70 metres cross a stile into a large field.
49. Keep straight on, slanting gently downhill across the slope, passing a pond to the right in 60 metres.
50. In 200 metres cross a stile to the left of a clump of trees (which hides another pond) and keep on in the same direction across the next field, heading for its bottom right-hand corner.
51. In 230 metres cross a stile in the field corner and go diagonally across the next field, aiming for a point roughly midway along its far edge.
52. In 150 metres cross a stile which is hidden by the hedge until you are almost upon it. Beyond, keep straight on along the right-hand edge of a field.
53. In 100 metres pass through a metal gate and turn right.
54. In 50 metres to go over a plank bridge and through a metal gate. Veer half left across the next field.
55. In 200 metres pass through a fieldgate and keep on down the right-hand edge of a field.
56. In 80 metres pass through a fieldgate onto a gravel drive, with a house to your right. In 70 metres pass through another fieldgate and turn left on a road.
57. In 40 metres, where the road turns right, keep straight on through a kissing gate signposted as a footpath.
58. Keep to the left-hand edge of the field for 30 metres and then turn left through a fieldgate. Keep to the left-hand edge of the next field.
59. In 120 metres turn right up the far edge of the field.
60. In 60 metres, halfway up the field edge, turn left through a metal gate under a large oak tree and across a footbridge. **Immediately turn right** through another metal gate.
61. Go diagonally across the field beyond, heading towards a large oak in its far corner.
62. In 150 metres, when you get to the oak, turn right along the field edge and keep on up the left-hand edge of the next field.
63. In 150 metres turn left up a grassy track, with a hedgerow right and a wood and wire field fence to your left.
64. In 400 metres, as you approach farm buildings, veer to the **right** of a pond (concealed by willows in summer) to then resume your former direction and go past barns and stables (vehicles and other farmyard clutter may conceal the way here).
65. Beyond the stables keep straight on along a track along a field edge.
66. 150 metres after the stables, and before some houses ahead, the track turns left. After this left turn **ignore a track to right** which leads to a house, and instead go straight ahead for ten metres and then **turn right, just before a fieldgate, through another fieldgate into a field**, following a yellow arrow on a post.
67. Walk down the length of the field, with a house and converted barns to your right.
68. In 180 metres, about midway along the far end of the field, there is a black metal gate in the hedgerow, not visible until you get close to it: go through this and turn right on the road.
69. In 40 metres turn right up a track to Little Brookwood Cottages. In 25 metres turn left up a signposted path into a field.
- In September 2023 there was a confusing sign on this stile which made it sound as if the field path is not a right of way. But it is. The sign refers to the rest of the track you have just left, which is definitely NOT a right of way. But if you have followed the directions above carefully, that does not affect this walk route.*
70. Go straight out across the field on a path heading for a point roughly halfway along its far edge (as seen from this point), your direction 45 degrees.

71. In 500 metres cross a stream and go along the left-hand edge of the next field, following it round alongside a wood (which has a fine display of **bluebells** in late April and early May).
72. In 500 metres, just past the end of the wood, cross a stile on the left. Pass Brookwood Farm House to the right and cross a driveway. Then go over a stile and follow the right-hand edge of a field, alongside a wood.
73. At the end of the field in 300 metres turn left and then right to cross a concrete bridge over a large stream, then turn left and right to go along the left-hand edge of a field, with a line of trees to your left.
74. In 300 metres cross a stile and then a lane and pass through a kissing gate to continue on a fenced path on the right-hand edge of a field.
75. In 200 metres, at the end of the field, turn half right with the fenced path across the corner of another field.
76. In 50 metres veer left onto an enclosed path inside the field boundary
77. In 150 metres cross the River Beult on a concrete bridge.
78. In another 130 metres go up steps to cross the railway line with care and continue ahead.
79. In 100 metres keep straight on along the edge of a grassy space to enter the churchyard in another 100 metres. Turn right on a path down the edge of the churchyard.
80. In 200 metres keep on down the main road through the village.
81. In 150 metres you come to the **George and Dragon** on the left, with a **Costa Coffee** just before it and **Bill's Village Tea Rooms** just beyond.
82. Keep on down the road for 350 metres to come to the approach road Headcorn station on the right.
- Frittenden to Sissinghurst Castle (3.2km/2 miles)**
83. Coming out of the Bell and Jorrocks pub, retrace your steps by going straight ahead up the road, signposted to Sissinghurst and Cranbrook.
84. In 150 metres you pass a grassy area behind a hedge on your right, and 100 metres beyond that the primary school.
85. 150 metres beyond the primary school you are level with the main arched gate into the churchyard on your right.
86. In another 70 metres, just past the white wood-sided village hall on your left, turn left up a signposted footpath.
87. In 60 metres cross the remains of a stile to the left of a fieldgate and keep straight on down across the field ahead
88. In 100 metres go through a decaying wooden kissing gate and head out half right across a big open field towards a hard-to-see gap in the hedge on its far side.
89. In 300 metres pass through this gap and keep more or less straight on across the next field, aiming for a mini-pylon pole 120 metres away.
90. At the pole, **fork right**, heading for another mini-pylon pole 100 metres away on the corner of the field boundary (**not the pole 120 metres straight ahead**).
91. At this second mini-pylon pole veer a third left away from the line of pylons across the field ahead aiming for a point under some tall trees roughly halfway along its far edge.
- If crops block your way at any point, your goal is a lane to the left. Get there by any means you can and turn right on it. Continue with the directions in paragraph 94 below.***
92. In 300 metres, at the far end of this field, cross a stile and veer slightly left to another stile visible 200 metres ahead in a gap between bushes (which surround a small bog, which you have to pass to the left of).
93. In 170 metres cross this stile and veer slightly left, passing to the left of a lone tree in the field in 100 metres. Carry on past this almost to the corner of the field. Here cross a stile to the right of a fieldgate (*on the left-hand edge of the field: NOT the more visible metal gate in the hedge ahead*) and turn right on a road.
94. In 250 metres at a road T-junction, keep straight on up a driveway, signposted Castlefield, Old Brickyard Cottage, ignoring the entrance to a warehouse and timber yard to the right of it.

95. In 120 metres pass a half-timbered house on your left and keep on up an earth and grass track.
96. In 70 metres there is a fenced field to your left. In another 70 metres carry on down a path between hedges.
97. In 800 metres you come to a three way track junction.
- **To bypass Sissinghurst Castle** and its tea rooms and carry straight on to Sissinghurst village or Cranbrook, take the right fork (more or less straight on) at this junction, going gently uphill. In 300 metres, by a red tile-sided house, veer left to cross two forking gravel tracks, and then veer slightly right across an orchard on a path that slants across the rows of fruit trees. Continue with the directions in paragraph 103 below.
98. Otherwise, turn left at the junction towards the buildings of **Sissinghurst Castle**. In 250 metres go through the arch to find the tea room, the **Granary Restaurant**, to your right beyond it, and the entrance to the gardens on your left.

Sissinghurst Castle to Sissinghurst village (2.3km/1.4 miles)

99. From the archway or the **Granary Restaurant** entrance walk straight ahead up the hill towards the house entrance.
100. In 70 metres, when level with the start of the house, turn right up a tarmac path, passing an oast house-topped barn and toilets to your right.
101. In 120 metres more you pass the **Old Dairy** cafe and plant shop on your right: ignore two tracks to the left leading to the car park here and instead keep ahead up a track. Soon there is a fenced-off field to your right.
102. In 250 metres, where the field to the right ends, and when nearly level with a red-tiled house to the right, fork left up a track and then immediately veer left into an orchard. Cross this diagonally on a path that slants across the rows of fruit trees.
103. In 180 metres, about 30 metres before the end of the orchard, veer right on a broad grassy strip, parallel to the orchard edge.

104. In 70 metres, near the end of the orchard, veer left to a double metal fieldgate: pass through a gate to the right of this and follow a fenced path along the left-hand edge of the field beyond.
105. In 60 metres turn left through a gate to the right of a double fieldgate and keep on down the left-hand edge of a field.
106. In 200 metres, at the bottom of the field, pass through a gate and across a footbridge to carry on down a path into the woods.
107. In 50 metres ignore a path to the right into the woods. But in 10 metres more, at a junction with a track, turn right, ignoring faint paths ahead and half right.

This track can be very muddy in winter, though the path that shadows it about 10 metres to the right avoids the worst of the mud. Another alternative is to turn left at the track junction mentioned in the paragraph above, and then right on the approach road to Sissinghurst: you can follow this to the main road and then turn right to reach Sissinghurst village.

108. Otherwise, follow the track through the woods (**wood anemones** and **bluebells** here in early spring).
109. In 700 metres, at the end of the wood, pass through a wooden kissing gate and turn left across a footbridge.
110. Keep up the left-hand edge of an commercial orchard. In 100 metres veer left through a gap onto a tarmac drive coming from a "Wastewater Treatment Works" and carry on up the drive.
111. In 300 metres turn right onto a main road. In 200 metres you pass a church and in another 100 metres the **Milk House** pub to the right.

To catch the bus from here to Staplehurst carry on along the road past the Milk House to find the bus stop on the right-hand side of the road in another 300 metres, just beyond a turning right to Frittenden.

Sissinghurst village to Cranbrook (2.6km/1.6 miles)

112. When level with the Milk House pub, turn left down Chapel Lane.

113. In 30 metres, just before a white-sided house, turn right up a signposted footpath, a gravel track
114. In 60 metres, where the track ends at the gate to Playstole, keep to the right of the hedge up a narrow path between garden fences/hedges.
115. In 120 metres ignore a path to your left and an earth track to your right, to keep straight on up an enclosed path.
116. In 150 metres there a gap into an arable field to the left. A locals' path veers left into this and along its edge, but the right of way sticks to the fence and is soon enclosed by hedges. However in 200 metres this enclosed path merges with the field edge path anyway, so it does not matter which you use.
117. 70 metres after the two paths merge, at the far end of the field, the path is enclosed once more.
118. In another 150 metres descend steps to cross a sunken road and climb up the other side. Pass through a kissing gate into a field.
119. Carry straight on downhill, passing a mini-pylon pole in 25 metres. In another 120 metres, at the bottom of the hill, pass through a metal kissing gate and on uphill through the wood on a broad path.
120. In 250 metres you come to the top of the hill. In another 100 metres pass through a wooden kissing gate and cross a concrete track and a 10 metre-wide grass triangle to keep straight on down another concrete track, with a hedge to the right and a gentle view to the left
121. You now follow this path all the way into Cranbrook. In 500 metres it becomes an earth path. In another 400 metres you pass through the remains of a kissing gate and carry on down a fenced path.
122. In 60 metres more cross a road and carry on up steps beyond. Keep on down the left-hand edge of playing fields.
123. In 200 metres keep to the left of a playground. In another 100 metres carry straight on down through a churchyard.
124. Pass to the right of the church in another 100 metres and in 80 metres you come to the main street of

Cranbrook. Ahead of you is the **George Hotel**.

- **Turning left** on the main road in 40 metres you come to **Arthur's** coffee shop on the left, and just beyond it the **Kypseli** taverna. 80 metres beyond that is **The Wendy House**. Just a little way further down this road you get a fine view of Cranbrook's **windmill** over the rooftops. It can be visited (keep ahead at the three-way junction) from 2.30 to 5pm on Saturdays and bank holiday Mondays from April to September.
- For the **Arriva bus no 5 to Staplehurst** (ultimate destination Maidstone) return to the point where the path through the churchyard joined the road and carry on around the corner up the main street of the town (**or turn right on the main road if coming down from the churchyard**). The stop is in 150 metres on the **right-hand side** of the road. *Don't go to the earlier bus stop on the left-hand side, as this is the service to Hawkhurst.*