

Benenden Amenity and Countryside Society

Historic landscape trails in Benenden

Trail 1: Goddards Green and Church Wood



by

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The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

These walks explore part of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – a nationally valued landscape protected for its unique character of rolling hills with small irregular fields, many woods, shaws and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes. To find out more visit www.highweald.org.

Practical matters

There are pubs in Benenden - The Bull and The King William in the village centre and The Woodcock in Iden Green - shops and a toilet in the village centre. If you park in a pub car park while on a walk, ask permission. There is a picnic site in Hemsted Forest.

Public Transport

Train: stations at Staplehurst (7.5 miles from Benenden), Headcorn (9.5 miles) on the London to Ashford International Line; two trains per hour Monday to Saturday, hourly on Sundays.

Bus: Transweald services 295 and 297 - Tunbridge Wells to Tennerden/Ashford via Benenden; Monday to Friday 9 buses per day, Saturday 8 buses, Sunday 3 buses – tel. 0870 608 2 608.

B&B - contact Cranbrook Tourist Information 01580 712538

Maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer maps 125, 136, 137 cover the area, as does the KCC footpaths map for Benenden. Maps are recommended to add interest and to help you to follow the routes.

This route has been developed without local authority involvement and there is no guarantee of standard rights of way furniture (gates, stiles etc), maintenance or waymarking. They should however meet the basic standards for rights of way. If you experience problems with any of the routes, contact the West Kent Area Public Rights of Way Team on 01732 872829.

Introduction to the walks

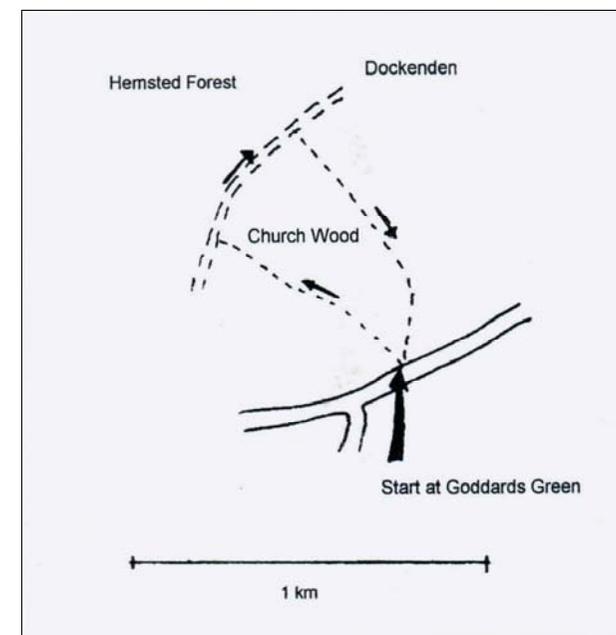
In these walks, we look at the landscape of Benenden in the light of its history. To do this we describe a series of historic trails along the roads and footpaths of the parish.

One early feature of the history of the Weald dominates today's landscape. In early Saxon times, from around 500 A.D. and perhaps even earlier, the Weald was used for the seasonal pasturage of pigs, known as pannage. Each autumn, pigs and no doubt other livestock, were brought into the Weald, which was divided into dens, or woodland pastures, belonging to settlements in the north and east of Kent. There were some thirty to forty dens in the area that later became Benenden parish, and approaching a thousand dens in the whole Weald although not all date from the earliest period. Each settlement, many later to become manors, owned dens scattered along their drove road into the Weald. At some stage, it is not known precisely when, the dens became settled and farmed, although still attached to the manors outside the Weald. This early history of the Weald determines the today's pattern of settlement, with isolated farmsteads and small hamlets reflecting the distribution of dens and often retaining their names.

The walks draw attention to just a few features of the landscape; much remains to be discovered and understood. The notes are as accurate as possible, but there will undoubtedly be errors and the author would be grateful for comments or criticisms.

I would like to thank Neil Aldridge of Headcorn, who has generously allowed the use of unpublished information on the Roman roads of the parish.

Trail 1: Goddards Green and Church Wood



This is a short walk, starting from Goddards Green (Grid Reference 817346), around Church Wood, taking about 45 minutes.

The origin of Goddards Green is not known, but it was probably used for common grazing by the surrounding farms from an early period. It lies on one of the two main drove roads in the parish, this the more northerly one from the manors around Ashford. Goddards Green has become shaded by trees in recent years and they are not really appropriate here on an “open” green. However, there are some fine individual specimens, including a monkey puzzle, said to have been planted by Lord Cranbrook of Hemsted House in the 19thC, beech and yew.

Take footpath **WC340** north-west between the apple orchard and Church Wood. In the late 1700s, the orchard land was part of Home Farm, belonging to William Ward, steward of Hemsted (now Benenden School) and also of Hole Park in Rolvenden. There were eight small fields here, including some that have since been taken into Hemsted Forest.

Church Wood, also known as Knowles Wood, like several woods in the parish, belonged to the Dean & Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral (hence “Church”) for many centuries. It was leased to the owners of Hemsted. In 1332 there was a dispute between the prior of Christ Church (Canterbury) and his tenant at Hemsted, James de Etchingam, over rights to the timber at Knolle (“Knowles”). The wood was sold to Lord Cranbrook in the 19thC and is now part of the large area of Hemsted Forest, owned by the state (us) and managed by the Forestry Commission. Near the start of the walk, the wood has abundant self-sown birch, with invasive Rhododendron.

Some way along, the path enters Church Wood and continues just within the woodland. Here is abundant heather and some broom, flourishing on the acid soils at the edge of the conifer plantation. Shortly, on the left, is a conspicuous woodland bank, the boundary between Church Wood and the old farmland. On the bank is an irregular line of five yews (one small and in poor condition). Similar ancient boundary banks can be found around many old woods in Benenden. Continue along the footpath, eventually meeting one of the main tracks through Hemsted Forest where you turn right (Footpath **WC339** north-east).

Hemsted Forest is popular for walking, riding, cycling, bird watching and general enjoyment of the countryside, and is a great asset to the village. It was not always the continuous block of woodland that it is today, but was farmland, much like the rest of the parish, but with many small woods. First the Hemsted Estate

and then the Forestry Commission consolidated the woods into a single large area. The bluebells, primroses, and other spring flowers, which are common in spring, are characteristic of land that has been wooded for a long period.

Pass a broad track leading south from our route; beyond this track the woods to the south of the route occupy what was formerly a large (c10 acre) field, known in the 18thC as Upton Field. In summer, abundant spotted orchids can be seen along the way here.

Before the 20thC, the local woods were highly valued for timber from the oaks and for coppice products such as fencing and firewood from hazel, hornbeam and other species. Some of Church Wood was planted with sweet chestnut, probably after Lord Cranbrook bought it from the Dean and Chapter, and some can still be seen. A major use of chestnut was for hop poles, at a time when almost every farm in the parish grew hops.

This is the area of Dockenden, one of the dens of Benenden parish. Dockenden is now mainly woodland, but in the late 18th C the vicar of Benenden, Joseph Dunn, owned a 50acre farm here. The farmstead of Dockenden has survived and is about 300 yards straight ahead from the next junction (with the bridleway), but our walk does not take us so far.

The bridleway **WC359**, which crosses our forest track here follows an old road, known as Dockenden Lane and formerly as Farningham Lane, linking Goddards Green with Farningham (The Golf Club). Before the parishes were formed, Kent was divided into lathes and hundreds and this road was the boundary between Cranbrook and Barclay hundreds in the lathe of Wye, suggesting a date for Dockenden Lane of the 900s A.D. or earlier. Looking to the north of the junction, we see large double banks either side of the road, an ancient feature of unknown purpose.

Turn right (south) at the junction, along Dockenden Lane, which is a bridleway, **WC359**. A map of 1719 shows Pickhorne House, on the left (east) of this lane, although the exact location is not known. After crossing staggered “cross-roads” (left then right), continue south along the bridleway with orchards on the east (left) side. Guelder rose grows here and is also scattered through Hemsted Forest. The orchard land, like that at the start of the walk, belonged to Home Farm now known as Old Eaton House. It had yet another name, Little Goddards, in the 19th C.

Turn left at the main road just for a moment; a few yards along the verge is a stone of unknown age, marking the point at which three hundreds meet - on the sheltered sides can still be read the names of Barclay (spelled in a variety of ways at different times) and Cranbrook hundreds, whose boundary we have followed, but on the south side the name of Rolvenden hundred has long since weathered away.

Goddards Green Road here is part of the Roman Road from Hemsted through St Michaels Tenterden and on to Ashford and Canterbury. In addition to our road, Dockenden Lane, and Goddards Green Road, two further roads Walkhurst Road and one long disused, running south past Goddards Green Farm, all converge here. Goddards Green was clearly a place of importance in times past.

Benenden Amenity and Countryside Society

The main aim of writing these guided walks has been to encourage interest and enjoyment of the local landscape, whether the walks are made on the ground or in the mind. This accords with the principal objectives of the society, which are:

- 1. To encourage amenity and countryside activities in order to promote a fuller understanding of the geography, history, natural history and environment of the Parish and the Weald of Kent.*
- 2. To resist any proposals which would adversely affect the environment and amenities of the Parish*

