

The circular Trail starts in the village centre and is approximately 1½ miles long (2.5km).

The aim is to make the local countryside more accessible to young and old alike.

Although this is a rural route the path's surface is relatively flat and even and there are four kissing gates to allow easy access for people with pushchairs and also wheelchair and mobility scooter users (with a RADAR key) but exclude adult bikes, trail bikes and horses

The trail was established by the **Medway Valley Countryside Partnership** in collaboration with **Hadlow Parish Council**, **Hadlow College** and **The Hadlow Society** and funded by grants from **the KCC Community Paths Project** and **Living Spaces** as well as local organisations

The **HADLOW ACCESS TRAIL** starts by the gate to the churchyard at the top of **Church Street**. The view up this short street is much the same as it was 300 years ago. Number 1 has a



The scene in Church Street has hardly changed in 300 years

16th or 17th century framed structure although the exterior is late 18th century. **Cobblestones**, with its bow fronted window, was built about 1800 and was originally part of the coach house and stables to the adjacent former Kings Head Inn. The Inn, now called **Church Place**, was a popular centre for bare-knuckle fighting and during the hop harvest hopeful contestants would walk for miles to fight in the yard behind the pub. The pavement is made from stable yard bricks, cross-hatched to stop horses slipping, they now aid church-goers in icy conditions! Although **St.Mary's** was founded in the 10th century most

of the church pays homage to 19th century rebuilding. Inside two crosses carved on the Saxon archway are said to date from the time of the Crusades.

In the south-east corner of the graveyard is a pyramid-shaped memorial to 30 hop-pickers who tragically drowned in 1853 when their horse-drawn waggon, plunged into the swollen waters of the Medway from the old wooden Hartlake Bridge. Apart from the family graves the churchyard contains several large **yew** trees, beloved of mediaeval longbow makers. The common, or English, yew is less shapely than its more upright cultivated cousin 'Fastigiata', or Churchyard Yew. Birds do eat the red berries but 'discard' the central poisonous nut-like seed. It is the longest lived of all British native trees.



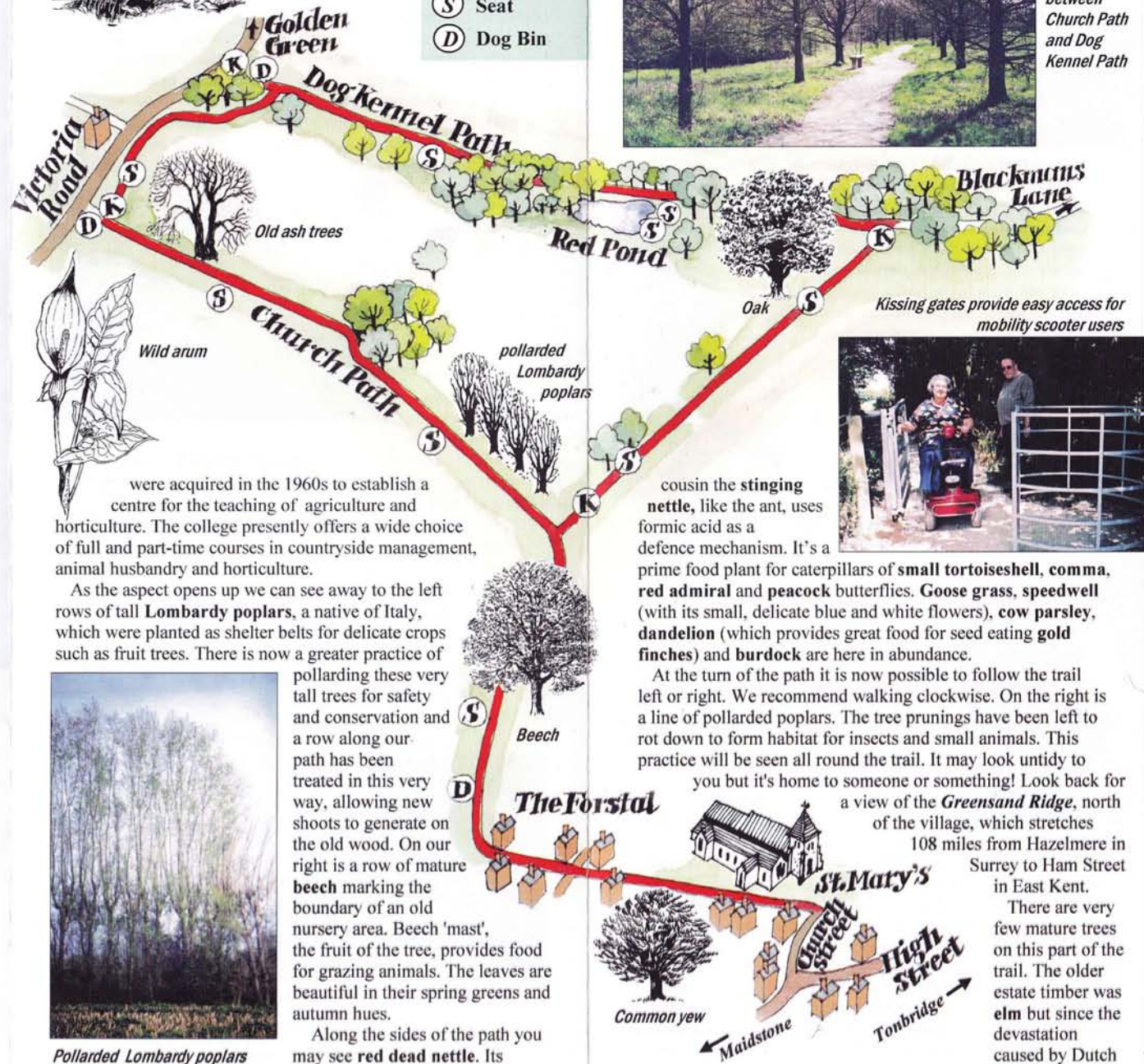
Ground ivy

Beyond the church can be seen the tall tower of **Hadlow 'Castle'**. Built in the late 18th early 19th century this pseudo-Gothic extravagance probably replaced an earlier Tudor mansion. It was largely pulled down in the early 1950s but local portrait painter Bernard Hailstone managed to save the tower and some of the servants' quarters. The Grade 1 Listed tower will hopefully be restored to its former 170ft Victorian glory in the not too distant future.

Taking the footpath to the side of the churchyard, with its fine wrought-iron railings, and passing through **The Forstal**, once part of Castle Farm, we now begin to leave the village behind. To our left is the Court Lane horticultural training area for **Hadlow College**. 600 acres of land (part of which once 'belonged' to Hadlow Castle)



Stoat



- KEY**
- (K) Kissing gate
 - (S) Seat
 - (D) Dog Bin



The trail running between Church Path and Dog Kennel Path

were acquired in the 1960s to establish a centre for the teaching of agriculture and horticulture. The college presently offers a wide choice of full and part-time courses in countryside management, animal husbandry and horticulture.

As the aspect opens up we can see away to the left rows of tall **Lombardy poplars**, a native of Italy, which were planted as shelter belts for delicate crops such as fruit trees. There is now a greater practice of pollarding these very tall trees for safety and conservation and a row along our path has been treated in this very way, allowing new shoots to generate on the old wood. On our right is a row of mature **beech** marking the boundary of an old nursery area. Beech 'mast', the fruit of the tree, provides food for grazing animals. The leaves are beautiful in their spring greens and autumn hues.

Pollarded Lombardy poplars

cousin the **stinging nettle**, like the ant, uses formic acid as a defence mechanism. It's a prime food plant for caterpillars of **small tortoiseshell**, **comma**, **red admiral** and **peacock** butterflies. **Goose grass**, **speedwell** (with its small, delicate blue and white flowers), **cow parsley**, **dandelion** (which provides great food for seed eating **gold finches**) and **burdock** are here in abundance.

At the turn of the path it is now possible to follow the trail left or right. We recommend walking clockwise. On the right is a line of pollarded poplars. The tree prunings have been left to rot down to form habitat for insects and small animals. This practice will be seen all round the trail. It may look untidy to you but it's home to someone or something! Look back for



Kissing gates provide easy access for mobility scooter users

a view of the **Greensand Ridge**, north of the village, which stretches 108 miles from **Hazelmeres** in Surrey to **Ham Street** in East Kent.

There are very few mature trees on this part of the trail. The older estate timber was **elm** but since the devastation caused by Dutch



View from the trail towards Golden Green

Elm disease replacement species have not been planted. There are some **ash** and **sycamore** and a **horse chestnut** but the young elms which have regenerated from suckers will generally not live beyond 12 years before succumbing to the disease. Elm leaves can be identified from all other leaves by their double-toothed leaf edge and asymmetrical leaf base. The **ivy** clad remains of the **hawthorn** hedgerow is good for overwintering insects and the old iron park railings are still in evidence. Further on, four large **ash** trees in the hedge struggle to produce any leaves but may be host to a colony of **honey bees** seen in the vicinity while a **tree creeper** has been spotted looking for insects on their rotting trunks.

Along the path can be seen **ground ivy**, with its vibrant blue flowers, **dogs mercury**, **jack by the hedge**, **wild arum** (also known as **Lords and Ladies** or **cuckoo pint**), **blue bells**, **celandine** and **white dead nettle**. The path continues out onto **Victoria Road** but just before, turn to the right through the first of the kissing gates. The trail now



A young long-tailed tit waits to be ringed



Blackthorn blossom

follows a 'permissive' route by courtesy of the College. Notice the carpet of **ground ivy**, **stitchwort** and **pea vetch**.

Instead of walking along the road it's now possible to enjoy a stroll through young **English oaks** with a backdrop of **hawthorn** and **blackthorn (sloe)** and there are **hazel** and **oak** in the hedge. Mature oaks can support up to 284 different kinds of insects which attract a variety of birds. Emerging from the small copse we can look out to the left across the road to wide cultivated fields where you might just spot **golden plover** or **lapwing**.

At the corner of the field is another more densely planted copse where families of **stoat** have been seen over successive years. The tumbling **brambles** are a good source of food for bees and butterflies and provide excellent cover for nesting birds.

We now join an ancient trackway known to exist for over 500 years, known locally as **Dog Kennel Path**, which, in the past, has also been called Park or Pipers Lane. There are extensive views over to the hamlet of **Golden Green** and **Castle Hill**, Tonbridge beyond. This track also accesses Victoria Road by another kissing gate through a small copse of blackthorn (best seen in early Spring).

To our right is a mixed belt of trees and shrubs, including **cherry**, **plum**, **dog rose**, **currant**, **hawthorn**, **ash**, **field maple**, **hazel** and **aspen**, planted as part of the College's environmental improvement policy. The mixed habitat throughout the trail attracts a wide variety of birds and The British Trust for Ornithology has ringed over 30 species along part of the trail including whitethroats, blackcaps and a nightingale. Listen for the hammering of **woodpeckers** in the woods and the song of the **lark** ascending over the adjacent fields.

The path curves on pleasantly and enters a narrow wood with larger **oaks**, mature **beech** and **ash**, **hornbeam**, **field maple**, young **elms** and plenty of decaying wood (look out for fungi in the Autumn). There are **bluebells** and **celandine** in the Spring and it's also possible to see bats at dusk. The ancient track is more noticeable here with drainage ditches evident on either side.

On our right **Red Pond** is fenced because the centre is around 15 feet deep. There are **willows**, **lady's smock** and **red champions** on the bank,



Red Pond in Spring

yellow flags and **reed mace** on the margins and **carp** in the water. Look out for **dragonflies**, **damsel flies**, **moorhens**, **water vole** and **kingfishers**. There is an access ramp across the ditch to a seating area. Nearby are several **alders**, the only native deciduous tree that bears cones.

At the point where the access trail turns right up a shallow slope to another kissing gate the path continues to the river **Bourne** and **Blackman's Lane**. On the left the ground slopes steeply away where rag stone or clay has been extracted. Passing through the gate there is a good seat under a spreading **oak** from which to enjoy the view. Along the boundary fence are **greengage**, **plum** and **damson** fruit trees as well as **yew**, **dog rose** and **hawthorn**. Follow the hedgerow back to the last kissing gate and return to the village.

Bluebells and celandines by the Trail



For information about the route or radar keys contact the Parish Office at the Old School (phone 01732 851878)

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