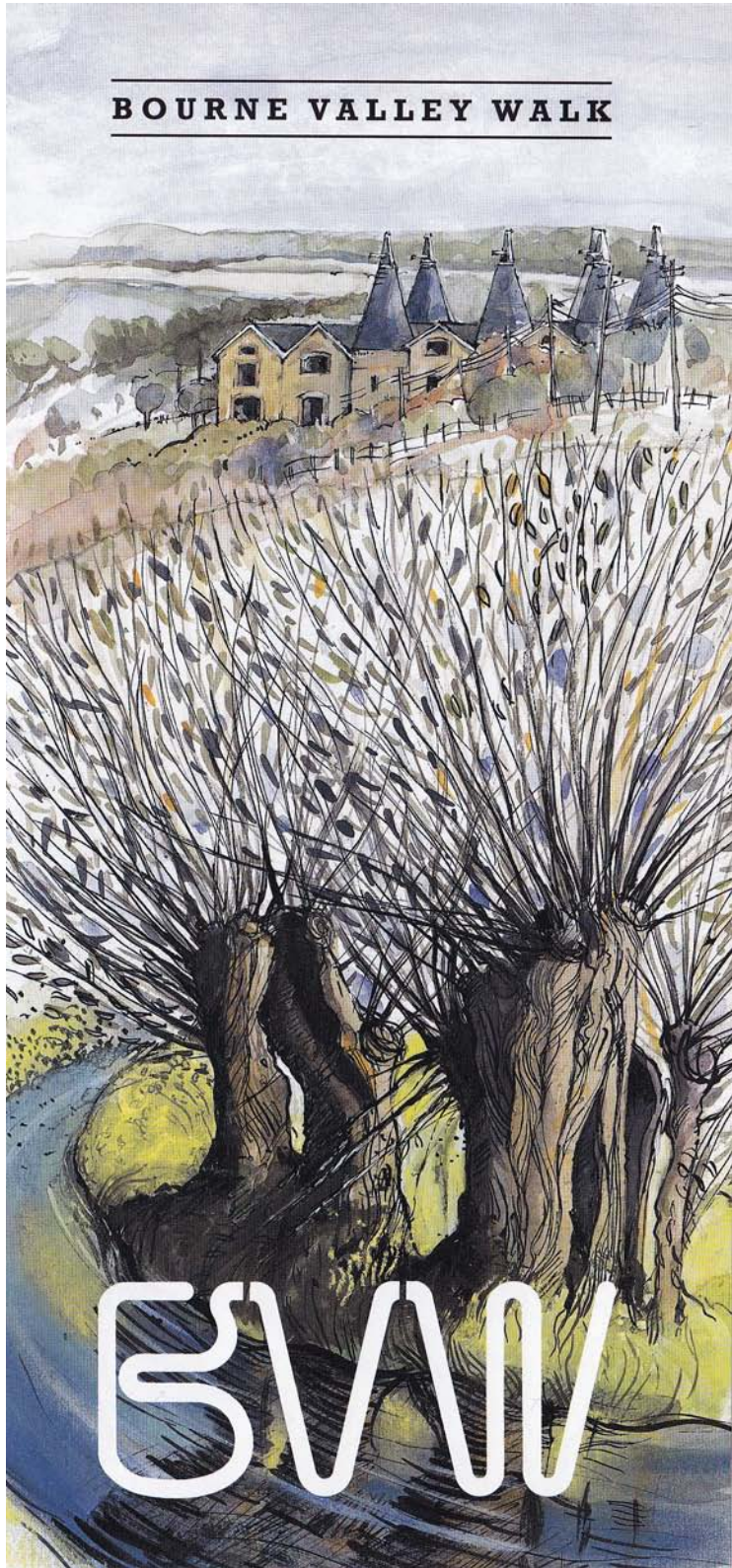


BOURNE VALLEY WALK



BOURNE VALLEY WALK

The river Bourne runs roughly north/south from the Greensand Ridge to the river Medway. Several springs feed into the headwaters of the Bourne but, depending upon the informant, the main source is either a spring on the North Downs at New House Farm, Yaldham or a spring to the west of Oldbury Hill, which is claimed by the Environment Agency. However, the most romantic spring rises on Oldbury Hill itself which feeds into a magical tree-ringed pond called the Waterflash by an ancient trackway and thence down the north side of the Iron Age hillfort.

To the many springs may be added the many names for the river – the Shode, the Sheet, the Busty and, most commonly, the Bourne.

It's a secretive river, its waters only occasionally glimpsed, especially in summer when the banks are shaded by nettles and tall grasses but it's also been a productive river, its waters used to drive numerous mills. Although the sites of some are only identifiable by a few remaining stones, others have been converted to new uses. Sadly in all cases the wheels are now missing.

OLDBURY HILL is 189m high (620ft) and part of the Greensand Ridge. Its Iron Age camp with 4kms (2.5mils) of ramparts, erected about 100 BC, failed to repel the Romans. On the north-east side are Old Stone Age rock shelters, occupied about 35,000 BC but sadly damaged by 19th century quarrying, which were excavated by Benjamin Harrison, a grocer and amateur archaeologist of Ightham, who found flint implements. On the north-west side of the hill, near the E.A. source of the Bourne, he also found flint flakes, pot boilers and cores connected to a pre-Roman settlement and later Roman ware.

IGHTHAM is a delightful village on the old Roman military way from Maidstone to London. The Bourne runs below the 12-15th century church of St Peter (memorial tablet to Benjamin Harrison), under the main road and down Busty Lane. It has many Tudor houses including Ightham Court (north of the village). Its many famous and influential inhabitants include members of the Sedley family, one of whom – Sir Charles Sedley (dramatist and wit) – was described by Pepys as "the lewdest fellow of his age" probably due to his habit of running drunk and naked down Fleet Street! Two miles from the village lies Ightham Mote (a moated house on an ancient moot site) which is now National Trust and beautifully restored to its former glory and can be viewed from an adjacent footpath.

As the headwaters enter the true valley of the Bourne a remarkable feature occurs – a 36m deep (120ft) gorge has been formed in the Greensand Ridge, probably as a result of a

fault in the limestone which allowed underground springs to join with the overground stream to cut away the rock. The sides of the gorge are densely wooded. In 1891 Ice Age fossils of musk ox, reindeer, woolly rhino, giant hare, cave hyaena and eagles were found by Benjamin Harrison in a quarry fissure to the east of the gorge.

Below the quarry the stream mysteriously appears by a house on Thong Lane and passes close to Basted House, where stood the first mill of the Bourne on its way to the Medway. The river then enters a large mill pond at the hamlet of BASTED where, by 1716, stood paper mills historically making paper for writing, drawing and postage stamps. The premises were taken over by Butterworths, the publishers, but in 1997 the site was developed for housing and the hamlet has now expanded and a tradition of water-driven industry has disappeared.

The river flows south past the sites of two more mills – Basted Lower Mill (possibly known as "Johns" – 1825 map) and Winfield Mill on Winfield Lane. A datestone of 1836 showed that a mill was erected by Eliza Carter. Just south of the lane a stream from the Golding Hop PH joins the main river. This isolated but popular freehouse (named after a local hop variety) hides in a small steeply sided valley at the bottom of Sheet Hill.

Wrought iron was made at PLAXTOL SPOUT for 500 years but times change and nowadays the old Hyders works is a housing estate which serves as a backdrop to the surviving late 14th century house.

PLAXTOL high street rises to the west; its amenities sadly diminished, the village now only boasts one pub (the aptly named Papermaker's Arms) and a shop cum post office. The church was built during the commonwealth period but badly 'restored' like many other churches during the Victorian age. Above the village lies Fairlawne, once associated with Sir Henry Vane, one-time governor of Massachusetts and treasurer to the Navy who was executed in 1662 for treason (buried at nearby Shipbourne) and, in more recent times, Peter Cazalet, the royal racehorse trainer.

To the east of Plaxtol Spout the lane leads to Old Soar Manor (NT) – a mediaeval house built in 1290 and owned by the ubiquitous Culpepper family. The main part of the house was demolished and replaced with an 18th century farmhouse but a solar over a vaulted storeroom and chapel still remain. Entry is free and there is an interesting display of local history. Well worth a detour.

South of Plaxtol Spout the river runs below Allen's Farm where, in 1857 when plough was converted to hops, Roman remains were unearthed. Finds included a small bronze statuette of Minerva (now in Maidstone Museum) and many fragments of inscribed box tiles. Near to the Bourne part of an 18m (60ft) long building – possibly a bath-house – was discovered.

The tall tower of Roughway Paper Mill (c.1807), which was taken down after a fire in 1997, presented a distinct landmark in the area. Further downstream Hamptons (formerly Puttenden) Mill also manufactured paper during its working history.

Oxenhoath Mill can be traced back to 1259. Originally a fulling mill and part of the Oxenhoath Estate (Culpepper again!) it later ground corn. The grand house, which overlooks the village of Hadlow and the Medway valley, was started in the 14th century and is now a substantial, mainly Georgian, house set in ornamental gardens. A fine avenue of cedars was decimated in the great storm of 1987 and a lovely avenue of tall field limes above the house, much enjoyed by walkers, was so badly damaged that all the trees had to be felled.

On the northern outskirts of Hadlow village Bourne Mill (also known as Hope or Hadlow Mill, which once milled flour), now houses (AD2000) a small clothing factory.

As you enter HADLOW through the College grounds, note the ancient stepping stone set in the bridge parapet. It is a large mixed village on the A26. It still boasts a variety of shops although these have been much reduced in recent years. There are still several pubs and a restaurant. There is no mistaking Hadlow Folly, an erstwhile 52m (170ft) tower erected in the 1830s, which once formed part of a gothic mansion built between 1780 and 1803. William Cobbett (of 'Rural Rides' fame) described Hadlow Castle as "...a house stuck all over with a parcel of chimneys and columns looking like carnation sticks with caps at the top to catch earwigs".

The top part of the tower was removed during 1995 by the local Borough Council for safety reasons and awaits refurbishment with a grant from the Lottery Heritage Fund.

The fine maltings buildings were saved from demolition and converted to residential use in the 1980s.

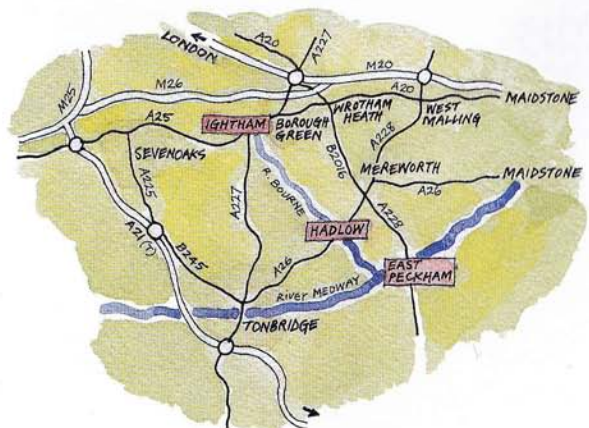
In St Mary's church (established in 975) is a carved chair reputed to have belonged to Miles Coverdale when he was Bishop of Exeter; in the churchyard is a pyramidal memorial to 30 hop-pickers who drowned in 1853 when their horse-drawn wagon toppled into the Medway whilst crossing Hartlake Bridge.

At GOLDEN GREEN the path follows the smaller stream with the mill channel, dug in Saxon times, passing through Goldhill Mill. The modern fishponds to the south of the path were used to raise American crayfish, a voracious cousin of our native species, although more graceful carp now fill most of the ponds.

At BARNES STREET is the 14th century Barnes Place, once a merchant house now a farmhouse, and nearby a housing estate has taken the place of a factory that first made jam, then gramophone records and billiard balls, the latter being road-tested by the factory manager's famous nephews Joe and Fred Davis.

There is no sign of a sluice at Pierce Mill but at LITTLE MILL (a hamlet of East Peckham) the mill house is still there, as is the tumbling bay which can be seen behind the Man of Kent PH (mind your head!) where the clear stream and a hump-backed bridge can be enjoyed from the beer garden. Adjacent is Muraspec's vinyl wallcovering factory where the waters of the Bourne are still taken up for cooling the processing equipment.

The last length of the river is across meadows to the Medway. In summer wild flowers and open skies are in stark contrast to the deeply shaded upper stretches. To the north is the straggly village of EAST PECKHAM (PH and shops) and its other hamlets of Snoll Hatch, Addlestead and Bullen. The original village was further to the north above Roydon Hall once owned by Sir Roger Twysden (cousin of Henry Vane, Fairlawne), who was imprisoned during the Civil War, and now a centre for transcendental meditation. The ancient church of St Michael (not shown on this map) is now redundant but it still has its contemporary church stable although the building is constantly being vandalised and how presents a sorry sight. Turn your back and enjoy the view of the lower valley of the Bourne from this wonderfully elevated position.



BOURNE VALLEY WALK

The dedication of this walk was undertaken as part of Hadlow's Millennium celebrations.

The 10 mile (16km) route runs from Ightham in the north to the river Medway in the south passing through 8 parishes along the way.

All the paths shown are definitive rights of way except for the stretch between Pierce Mill Lane and Little Mill which is permissive and at the discretion of the landowner. Some road walking is involved. For the most part this is along reasonably quiet country lanes, although care must still be taken. At Ightham (A227), Hadlow High Street (A26) and Little Mill road walking is on pavements.

This leaflet should be used in conjunction with OS Explorer maps (1:25,000 scale)

147 Sevenoaks & Tonbridge	(upper reaches and source)
148 Maidstone	(middle reaches)
136 The Weald	(lower reaches)

For those who are interested in the history of Oldbury Hill there are information boards at access points to the fort. There is a waymarked route around the encampment with route cards available from KCC Planning Department.

The Greensand Way – 108 miles (172km) long-distance path between Haslemere, Surrey and Hamstreet, Kent – crosses our path at Dunks Green.

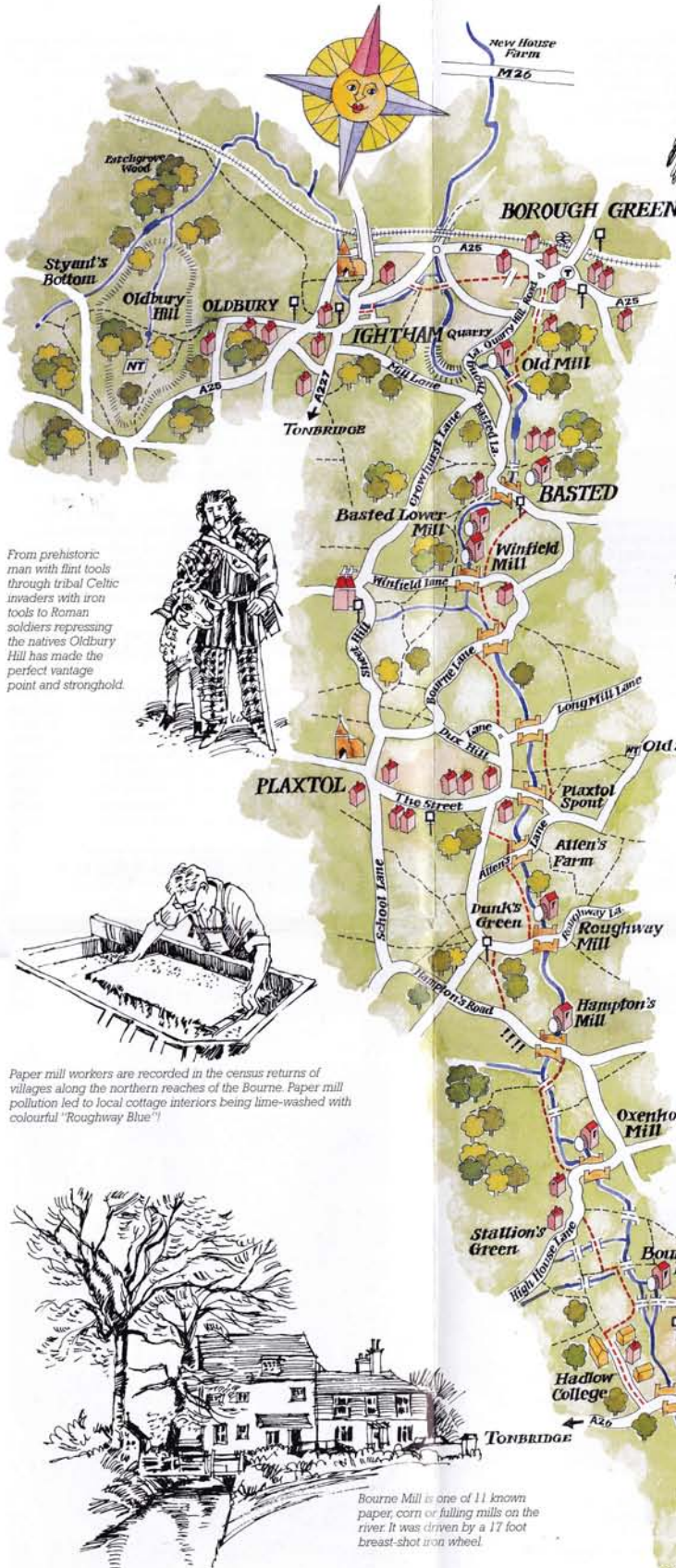
The Weald Way – 82 miles (131km) long-distance path between Gravesend on the river Thames and Eastbourne on the English Channel – crosses our path at Barnes Street.

The Medway Valley Walk – 28 miles (44km) between Tonbridge and Rochester – terminates our route.

Booklets for these walks can be obtained from Kent County Council.

Old Soar is open between April and end September.
10am - 6pm
Closed Fridays.

This leaflet is published by Hadlow Parish Council, Kent and was designed by Caroline Wetton©



From prehistoric man with flint tools through tribal Celtic invaders with iron tools to Roman soldiers repressing the natives Oldbury Hill has made the perfect vantage point and stronghold.



Paper mill workers are recorded in the census returns of villages along the northern reaches of the Bourne. Paper mill pollution led to local cottage interiors being lime-washed with colourful "Roughway Blue".



Bourne Mill is one of 11 known paper, corn or fulling mills on the river. It was driven by a 17 foot breast-shot iron wheel.



The Waterflash floods the ancient trackway which crosses east-west over Oldbury Hill. A prehistoric track from Pevensey to the North Downs once passed nearby.

Running dry in the summer the infant Bourne still bursts its banks in Busy Lane, Ightham in severe Autumn rains.



The fossilised remains of woolly rhino were found by Benjamin Harrison at a quarry near Ightham.



At Old Soar Manor (National Trust) the mediaeval knight's house is open to the public. Its elevated position beneath Mereworth Woods commands the river valley.



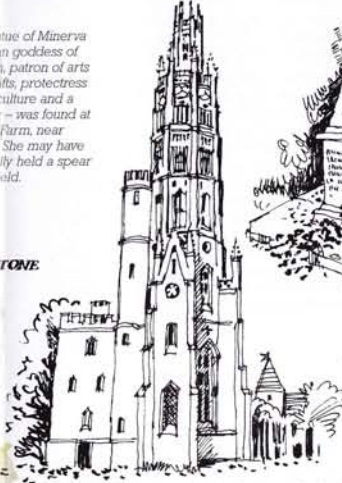
A 13th century knight, from a contemporary painting.



This statue of Minerva - Roman goddess of wisdom, patron of arts and crafts, protectress of agriculture and a warrior - was found at Allen's Farm, near Plaxtol. She may have originally held a spear and shield.



30 drowned hop-pickers are commemorated on this monument in St. Mary's churchyard, Hadlow. (See annotation in the church porch).



Hadlow Tower was used as a look-out post during the 2nd WW and saved for posterity by the artist Bernard Hailstone. Enthusiasts hope it will be restored to its former glory.

KEY

- River BOURNE
- BOURNE VALLEY WALK
- Other Public Rights of Way
- Beware of fast traffic
- Sites of old mills
- Public Houses
- Public Toilets
- Railway station
- National Trust



Barnes Place, listed Grade 1, is the oldest surviving house in Hadlow parish.

