

A guided tour through Hadlow and the surrounding countryside using predominantly rural footpaths

The Hadlow Hike

1st Edition July 2018



Duration: Half day+ Distance: About 9 miles / 14 km
Full tour unsuitable for those with mobility difficulties
Suitable hiking clothing recommended



www.hadlowpc-kent.org.uk

Introduction

This leaflet guides you on a hike from the village along the valley of the River Bourne before ascending to Old Soar Manor, making a brief incursion into Mereworth Woods, descending past Rat's Castle and returning to the village via Oxenhoath Manor (note: the Old Soar Manor is closed on Fridays). Most of the hike is on unmetalled footpaths and tracks and involves the use of stiles and kissing gates. It is therefore not suitable for those with mobility difficulties or without suitable walking shoes and clothing.

The tour is illustrated in map form on the reverse of the leaflet, with landmarks highlighted, correlating to the written navigational directions and narrative. The start and finish is at Hadlow College entrance, but it is a circular route enabling you to join and leave at any point. The principal places for refreshment en route are Broadview Tearooms (at the start or finish point), The Kentish Rifleman PH (about a third of the way round) or, if you have a packed lunch with you, Old Soar (about half way round).

Thus, if starting at about 10.15am, you should be at The Kentish Rifleman by about midday, Old Soar by lunchtime (1.00pm) and back in the village by about 4.00pm.



Explore Hadlow with the help of these leaflets



Welcome to Hadlow

An illustrated guide to local attractions, businesses and services in and around Hadlow.



The Hadlow Village Amble

A leisurely circular tour through the village of Hadlow and around the immediate environs.

Distance: 1 - 2 miles



The Hadlow Parish Ramble

A minimum half day tour around Hadlow and the surrounding countryside, using predominantly rural footpaths.

Distance: about 8 miles



The Hadlow Hop Tour

A guided walk through the hop farming and brewing industry in and around Hadlow, past and present.

Distance: about 9 miles



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More information about the history of our village is contained in the other walking leaflets in this series, as well as from the village library.

THE TOUR

Section A-B: Hadlow College to High House Lane

From the main entrance to Hadlow College off the A26 Tonbridge/Maidstone Road, walk along the college entrance drive, passing Broadview Tearooms and Gardens on your left, continuing past the college buildings and sports pitches until you reach the equestrian centre. There is a pedestrian gate alongside the vehicle entrance gate here. Pass through and carry straight on between stables to your left and the indoor schooling arena to your right. At the second gate cross the stile and immediately turn sharp right to follow a well-trodden path, keeping the riding school buildings to your right and pastures to your left.

The path soon curves to the left and then, a little further on, divides. To view Bourne Mill you should take the fork to the right across a footbridge over the River Bourne, but to continue the main walk (or resume it having seen the mill) it will be necessary to simply carry on straight ahead at the fork.

Bourne Mill is one of 11 former mills along the River Bourne. It is almost certainly one of the mills mentioned in the Domesday Book in Hadlow. There is also mention of a corn mill and malt mill in the Manorial Survey of Hadlow 1460-1600. Documents in Tonbridge Library refer to there being three mills under one roof, before rebuilding in the 19th century. Thomas Lambert was the miller in 1899 and John Thirsk, his successor, advertised in the church magazine as a miller and poultry food specialist. Formerly known variously as Hope Mill (when part of nearby Hope Farm) or Hadlow Mill, the mill was driven by a breast-shot iron wheel 17 feet in diameter (shown in photos by Freda Barton C1905 and 1930), and was in operation as a mill until the 1930s. It is now occupied by a mail-order clothing company who moved here after being bombed out of London in the 1940s. The mill wheel has been removed, although the mill race remains. The old cottage to the left of the mill was probably the former miller's house and a storage building to the right of the mill has now also been converted into a house. The lane that approaches the mill from Carpenters Lane across the car park is narrow with high sides, indicating that it is an old cart track.

Take (or return to) the path from Hadlow College and continue along it, keeping the overgrowth lining the left bank of the river to your right. The path then dips and turns left across a stile into a field. Cross the stile and follow the path along the right hand side of the field to a green gate.

Cross the stile to the right hand side of this gate to a bend in the river and immediately turn sharp left to cross another stile on the left side of a second green gate into an open field.

From here, walk straight on along the left side of the field, which is bordered by a drainage ditch lined with young trees. About half way along the field edge the path divides at a footpath sign. Take the fork sharp right through the centre of the field towards a red brick bungalow in the near distance. Descend to cross a second ditch and keep straight on towards the bungalow. At the end of the field, cross the stile into High House Lane.

Section B-C: High House Lane to The Kentish Rifleman

Turn right along the lane, passing the bungalow to your left. Follow the road around a series of bends passing the entrance to Mount Pleasant on your left and Oak Cottages to your right.

Just beyond these properties, where the road curves away to a nearby bridge over the river, take the signposted footpath (track) sharp left alongside the garden to Mount Pleasant (this is the point at which the millstream mentioned in the text box below rejoined the River Bourne) After about 40 yards (35m), and *before* the metal gate, cross the stile alongside a wooden gate on the right and follow the trodden path as it winds round to the right (not straight on towards woodland) and join the left hand side of the River Bourne. The small isolated group of buildings to your right, on the far side of the river, represents the site of Oxenhoath Mill (it was from this section of the river that the millstream left the main watercourse).

Oxenhoath Mill: Now isolated from the River Bourne, the site of the mill was formerly served by a millstream, which left the River Bourne at a point roughly in line with the end-most building of the remaining Oxenhoath group. The area between the river and those buildings was once occupied by an extensive millpond. All that now remains of the original mill building itself is part of a lower wall. A mill had stood here from about 1259. It was originally a fulling mill and part of the Culpepper family's Oxenhoath Estate, which subsequently passed to the Geary family. More recently it was used for grinding corn and was still standing in 1930, albeit with the machinery removed. Interestingly, "fulling" is the name given to the process of cleaning oils, dirt and other impurities from cloth. The material was suspended on hooks on a "tenter frame" – hence the saying "on tenterhooks" meaning held in suspense – and pummelled by hammers driven by the mill.

Keep on alongside the river. Pass the first bridge over the river to your right (towards a pair of red brick cottages) and continue along the right hand side of the field to a second bridge just beyond some outbuildings. Cross the river here and aim for the pylon in front of you and then to the gate beyond, exiting onto Hamptons Road opposite the site of Hamptons Mill. Turn left to follow the track around the inside of the ditch that separates the cricket pitch from surrounding farmland and woods.

Hamptons Mill: This mill was formerly known as Puttenden Mill and was built in 1740, originally for the manufacture of paper. It probably had an overshot wheel and remained active until about 1880 but was demolished in 1890. Now only traces of the foundations remain. More recently, the millponds here have been used as a fishery. The original mill cottages remain a short distance along Hamptons Road to the right.

Turn left along Hamptons Road (the opposite direction to the mill cottages) for about 300 yards (280m) to a signed footpath to the right hand side of Popes Villa Farm. There is an elevated backward panorama of the site of Hamptons Mill and its setting in the river valley across a gate just as you turn off the road.

The footpath is to be found *between* the second wooden gate leading into the Fairlawn Estate and a modern blockwork barn – aim for the right of the barn and the path immediately becomes obvious behind the barn (*not* the private track through the Fairlawne Estate). Proceed along the path, ignoring the kissing gate to the left and emerging a bit further on onto a road with The Kentish Rifleman PH immediately to your left (you might wish to stop for lunch here). The walk, however, continues to the right, along the road, signposted towards Roughway.



Section C-D: Kentish Rifleman to Old Soar

Follow this road past a cluster of houses on your right (which include Woodbine Cottage) and continue for about another 130 yards (120m) to a signposted footpath (MR335) on the left in a gap in the hedge *before* a ragstone cottage, pillarbox, the mill entrance and the bridge over the River Bourne. Enter the footpath, which passes between chestnut pale fencing and behind Roughway Mill.

Roughway Mill: This was built in about 1807 as a paper mill. Between 1862 and 1882 the paper was used mainly for the printing of colonial postage stamps. Unusually, the mill was powered both by water and steam, the 9 feet diameter breast-shot wheel being used to power bellows for a steam engine. The latter required a tall chimney which was a local landmark, but had to be demolished following a fire in 1997. The mill is no longer operating and very little of it now remains standing. The site is now occupied mainly by a manufacturer of specialised packaging materials. Continuing along the footpath, the wooded area to the right beyond the main house was the site of the extensive mill pond. For more information and photographs, see <http://www.courier.co.uk/Harsh-conditions-Plaxtol-s-paper-mills/story-16183974-detail/story.html>

Keep straight on through a chain gate and then a wooden gate into a field, where the path follows a hedgerow on its right hand side. A little further on, go through another chain gate into the next field, where the path carries straight on from the end of the planks across a sometimes boggy pasture. Aim towards the green painted railings of a bridge over the river. Go through the small gate alongside the railings onto Allens Lane. Cross straight over the Lane and over the stile directly opposite, to join the footpath that continues diagonally to the left across another field. On reaching the hedgerow on the far side of this field turn right towards a clearly visible wooden field gate and stile. Cross the stile into the lane and turn right towards a 30mph sign, which marks the edge of Plaxtol village.

Do not take the footpath off the left side of this road but instead continue ahead past the recreation ground and Hyders Forge (housing) into The Street.

From here, turn right in the direction signposted for Crouch and Borough Green (*not* Plaxtol and Ightham) and then right again into Brook Lane (signposted for Old Soar Manor). Just after the 30mph sign, cross the bridge over the River Bourne turn left off the road, cross the stile and join the footpath that follows the right hand side of the river. At the next field boundary, cross the stile into the next field and immediately turn sharp right to follow the fence and scrubby hedge on the right hand side of the field.

After some distance, the path continues briefly through scrubland before becoming well defined. At the entrance to the next field the path divides. Take the left fork (uphill) towards a large red brick house on the hilltop. At the top of the field, cross the stile into a tennis court area of the house's garden and continue straight on up past a black boarded building and a converted stables to a gate onto a road. Turn left along the road and the entrance to Old Soar is on the left (entry is free and there is usually a small display inside – there is a bench outside, which is a good place to enjoy a picnic lunch).

Old Soar Manor was built in 1290 as a Medieval Knight's house. It originally took the form of a hall house, the hall being used for meetings and business, as well as being the main area for living, eating and sleeping. At night, the trestle tables would be taken down and rough straw mattresses set out. Only the most important people had a room of their own, typically in two storey wings at each end of the main hall. At Old Soar, there is a private bed-sitting room for the lord and lady (the great chamber or solar as it was called) built at first floor level with a garderobe and a small private chapel (also used as an office) leading off it. Beneath this (and now serving as the public entrance to the remains) is cellarage originally used to protect the lord's valuables, clothing, materials and luxuries bought in the annual fairs, together with the equally valuable proceeds of the harvest and salted meat stored for the winter. The main hall of the house along with a second bedroom and a further garderobe at the far end were, however, demolished and replaced with a farmhouse in the 18th Century. The Manor House was once owned by the Culpepper family (during the Middle Ages), who became the largest land owning family in Kent and Sussex through their method of kidnapping heiresses whom they forcibly married. Old Soar later became part of the estate of the Geary family at Oxenhoath and upon the death of Sir William Geary in 1947 it passed to Mrs S L Cannon who gifted it (but not the adjoining farmhouse) to the National Trust. There are local and historical displays inside (no entry charge).

Section D-E: Old Soar to Oxenhoath House

To continue the walk, leave Old Soar and turn left along the road (uphill) for about ¼ mile (400m). At the T-junction with The Hurst, turn right (signposted for West Peckham). After about 220 yards, there is a signed footpath into Mereworth Woods on the left. Enter the woods on this path.

Mereworth Woods are a large area of woodland and scrub between Maidstone and West Malling. During the Second World War the area was one of many in the South East taken over by the British Army for training purposes, and as you walk around the woods you can sometimes see tank traps and other concrete structures. Today Mereworth Woods are a wildlife haven as well as being a wonderful place for a gentle ramble (if you have a map and a compass, or keep to the following route!).

The path ascends through the woodland quite steeply before levelling out. Do not take any of the tracks or paths to left or right on the uphill section (whether signposted or not). Instead, climb up to the level section which is reached after a small dip and turn right along the broad track here, which is clearly signposted as part of the Wealdway long distance footpath (the sign is a yellow flash with the lettering W/W>). This soon joins a wider surfaced track from the left (an access drive to visible forestry houses). Keep straight ahead, avoiding paths to left and right until you come to a single bar metal gate (normally open) across the track. Pass through or round the metal gate posts (which are only there to prevent unauthorized vehicular access) and then, after just a couple of additional paces, leave the Wealdway by turning sharp right onto an unsurfaced path/track which descends through the woodland back towards The Hurst. Cross this road and take the signposted byway directly opposite. This soon passes a wooden field gate to a Fairlawne Estate cobnut orchard (or "platt") on its left side. A little further on, the byway divides. Take the left (downhill) fork to emerge onto a road (Roughway) opposite a property called Rats Castle (where there is also a "platt").

Rats Castle is about 400 years old and Grade II listed house. It derives its name from the multitude of rats found to be in residence by tradesmen who lodged here while working on a nearby building project. The 1851 census records 16 people living in the house including a farm worker, his wife and 6 children, 3 lodgers and another farm worker with his wife and three children. It is now a single family dwelling (without rats!)

Turn left (up hill). There is a distant view of Hadlow Tower to the right along this stretch. After a short distance you will come to Roughway Cottage. Take the footpath over the stile on the right just past the cottage. This traverses an arable field diagonally. If the line of the path is difficult to see, stand with your back to the stile and cast your eye along at the boundary on the far side of the field from left to right. You will be able to discern what appears to be a wooden gate some way along it. This, in fact, is a set of horizontal wooden bars crossed by a stile and is the point you need to aim at. Having crossed the stile turn right along the road (Park Road). Pass the School House and then bear left at the Coffin House (named for its shape), which is the subject of a charming 1946 painting by Denton Welch, a local artist and writer, now deceased. Pass Pillar Box Lane on your right hand side. On reaching the gatehouse to the Oxenhoath Country Estate, turn into the access drive. There is another view of Hadlow Tower from here, off to your right.

Oxenhoath House: The Oxen Hoath estate was originally a Royal Park for oxen and deer, with a house having existed here, built by Sir John Culpepper, in about 1572. It eventually passed to the Geary family in 1757 with substantial phases of remodelling taking place between then and 1846 to create the now existing grand house of chateausque style. Sir William Neville Geary lived here from 1895 until his death in 1944. The house is noted for its ornamental gardens, including the only original parterre in England. Since 2010 it has been used as an open retreat centre.

Section E-F: Oxenhoath to Hadlow

At the end of the initial straight section of the drive, the drive turns left through a gate to Oxenhoath House itself. *Do not take this left turn or go through the gate* (unless you want to view the house from a closer range). Instead, leave the drive by turning to the right, away from the gate, and across the field. The best way to identify the starting point for this path and its general direction if it is difficult to see is to walk across the field as though you had come through the gate across the drive. Pass between the two pine trees and then between the two elderly oaks and aim for the wooden bench that soon comes into view as you pass a fishing lake away to the left. Just beyond the bench, you will see a gate to the left of two poplar trees, all pretty well pointing towards Hadlow Tower (visible in the distance). Pass through the kissing gate to the left of the field gate and carry straight on along the right hand side of the dividing fence between two fields, still aiming towards Hadlow Tower. Go through the kissing gate at the end of this field and continue across the next field skirting the left side of the house in front. Cross the stile into Common Road and take the road opposite (Carpenters Lane) to return to Hadlow village.





Mereworth Woods

The Hurst

Old Soar Manor

PLAXTOL

DUNK'S GREEN

Kentish Rifleman

Roughway Mill

Rats Castle

Hamptons Mill

Oxenhoath House

Oxenhoath Park

Oxenhoath Mill

HADLOW

Hadlow Village Centre

Hadlow College

Broadview Gardens Tearoom & Garden Centre

Hope Farm

Bourne Mill

0 miles
Half mile / 840 meters