

THE PILGRIMS' WAY
TO CANTERBURY FROM WINCHESTER
AND LONDON
by Leigh Hatts

CICERONE

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Front cover: Geoffrey Chaucer window by CE Kempe in Southwark Cathedral

STAGE 9

Otford to Wrotham

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Start | Otford |
| Finish | Wrotham recycling centre |
| Distance | 5¾ miles (9.2km) |
| Time | 2½hrs |
| Maps | OS Explorer 147; Landranger 188 |
| Refreshments | Tea shops at Otford; pubs at Otford and Kemsing |
| Public transport | Railway stations at Otford and Wrotham (Borough Green & Wrotham station); bus to railway station at Wrotham |
| Accommodation | Wrotham |

Otford is where the London route joins the path from Winchester, and where in 1851 one antiquary claimed that this was the true start of the pilgrim road. As the converged ways continue east there is a turning down to the hidden village of Kemsing which has its own saint, Edith. Wrotham has an unusually large church. Be aware that although Wrotham has a railway station it is downhill away from the village and best reached by bus.

From Otford station

Either from the main station house or the London 'down' platform walk to Station Road. Turn left for the village centre (¼ mile/0.4km) at the pond roundabout.

The route from London joins the High Street opposite Otford Tearooms.

Go down the the right, or south, side of the church and follow the path ahead below a long brick wall (left) to leave the churchyard at a gate. After a double bend there is a view (right) across Church Field where St Thomas Becket's well is located on the far side.

Go ahead only for Otford Station. The route continues sharp right on a still enclosed path. At the next junction go left over stiles at the railway line. (Before crossing

OTFORD

Otford is famous for its unique duck pond roundabout complete with a duck house. Becket was associated with the village while still chancellor, for as a deacon he had been nominally assigned the church benefice. The manor belonged to the archbishop and when Becket attained that office he stayed here during his first year, 1162. He is said to have struck the ground with his crosier to obtain water. There is a Becket's Well in a garden and spring water runs in front of Otford Palace. The ruined palace seen now is half the north front of a rebuild for Archbishop William Warham who crowned Henry VIII and Katharine of Aragon. The king made the new palace his first overnight stop from Greenwich on his way to the Field of the Cloth of Gold summit in France in May 1520. The Bull inn has a fireplace, paneling and a settle which may have come from the palace. Opposite is the church hall built in 1909 to a design by Edwin Lutyens when his brother William was vicar.



Otford pond and church



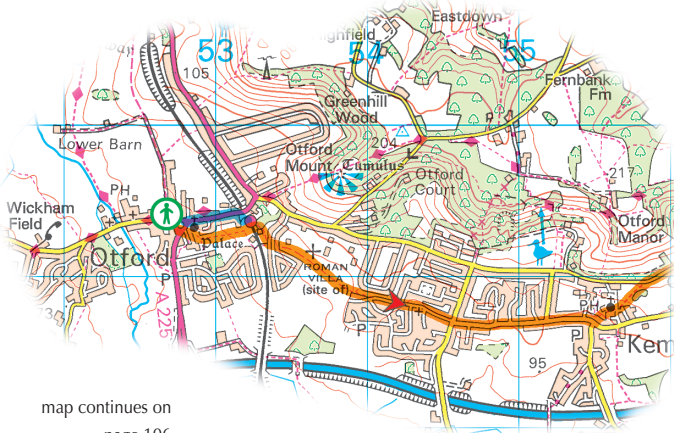
A surviving fragment of Otford Palace

look and listen.) On the far side a passage leads to a road. Cross over to find the way continuing.

The metalled way is enclosed before running along the edge of Oxenhill Woods (right). Ignore all turnings and stay on the path which joins Dynes Road. Still keep forward to reach, after almost a mile (1.49km), St Edith's Well at the junction of the High Street and St Edith's Road (right) by The Bell.

Take the footpath north of the well to climb up to the church. Turn left out of the church lychgate and through

STAGE 9 – OTFORD TO WROTHAM



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KEMSING

A legend claims that the knights who murdered Becket rode through here on their way to Canterbury and today the church is said to be haunted by a knight who appears on 29 December. The knights are unlikely to have come this way but the village was visited by passing pilgrims whose staves may have made the many indentations in the 13th-century church door. The holy well outside the deli-café recalls St Edith of Wilton who was born here in 961. The site was a convent founded simultaneously with one in Winchester by King Edgar as a penance for abducting Edith's mother Wulfrith from Wilton. Edith, whose statue can be seen outside the magnificent 1911 St Edith's Hall, was the sister of Ethelred the Unready. Kemsing had an arm bone relic of Edith to show pilgrims. On St Edith's Day, 16 September, there is well dressing and a procession.



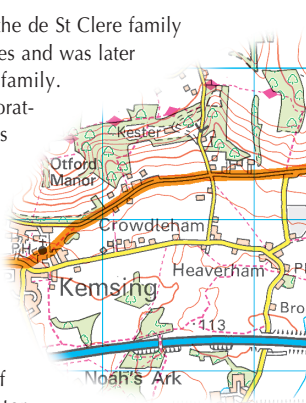
Kemsing church porch door

a gateway. Pass a playground (left) and walk ahead over the grass with trees on both sides. Later pass tennis courts (right) and in the far corner of the grassland there is a short woodland path leading to steps. Go left to the road and turn right.

The PW continues ahead past the Kemsing path. After a crossroads and a junction there is a view of **St Clare** house and its grounds.

St Clare was the home of the de St Clare family before the Wars of the Roses and was later owned by Anne Boleyn's family.

The present house, incorporating some Tudor work, was built around 1630. Jane Austen knew William Evelyn, a relative of diarist John who lived here, although it is not known if she visited him. In 1878 it was purchased by Sir Mark Collet who became Governor of the Bank of England. Later his relative Montagu Norman lived here when also Governor. Ownership has descended within the family with the garden occasionally open to the public.



The path is mainly in a long tunnel of trees with an occasional view over countryside to the south.

When the tarmac road turns sharp right, keep ahead up the rising hedged way. Soon the track runs past White Hill wood (left) before crossing (at a slight angle) a road. ◀

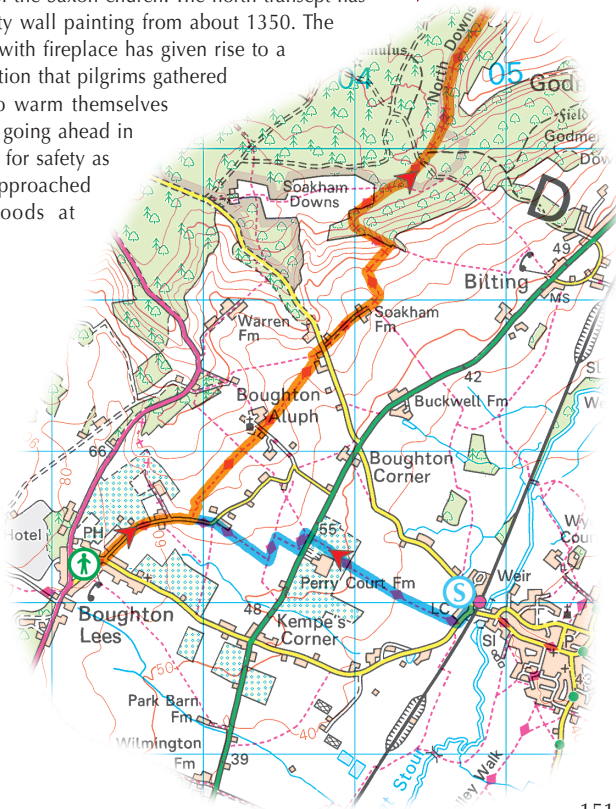
On reaching Wrotham keep ahead. At a junction with Old London Road keep forward between Butts Hill Cottage (left) and Pilgrims Cottage (right). Soon the recreation ground appears (right). As the road bends right the church tower is seen ahead. The PW continues by the recycling point (left).

STAGE 14 – BOUGHTON LEES TO CHILHAM

The PW continues up a slope (left) to follow a narrow path which soon runs through a tunnel of trees. After a double bend the way is on a wooded bank. On entering a field, the tower of **Boughton Aluph church** can be seen ahead. Shortly before the end of the field go through a kissing gate (right) into a long field with a tree in the middle. Halfway down, a gate (left) leads into the churchyard.

The name **Boughton Aluph** (pronounced Borton Aluff) comes from 13th-century lord of the manor Aluphus de Boctune who began the replacement of the Saxon church. The north transept has a Trinity wall painting from about 1350. The porch with fireplace has given rise to a suggestion that pilgrims gathered here to warm themselves before going ahead in groups for safety as they approached the woods at

map continues on
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Godmersham. The church is used for worship in the summer and is a venue for the Stour Music Festival. Boughton Court on the north side has a 14th-century undercroft and Dering windows.

*Seats in Boughton
Aluph churchyard*

On reaching the road at the kissing gate, or churchyard gateway, go over a stile to the left of the holly tree opposite. Soon there is a fence on the left. At a gate go left over a stile and then right to follow a path ahead downhill and then uphill. At a field corner go ahead just inside a hedge. The narrow path bends left to pass a stile (left) before turning right. At the lane go ahead on a track leading to **Soakham Farm**. ►

*There is a magnificent
view to the right over
the Stour Valley.*

The way runs downhill and through a farmyard. Where the concrete ends keep forward to a gate. A track double bends uphill before bearing left. The path bends to the right along the edge of King's Wood (right). Go through a high deer gate to reach a junction. Go right and at a divide, with Pilgrims' Way sign, bear left. Keep to the main track as it gently descends and left again at



another fork as the way curves steeply left and right to a high wooded bank.

After a junction (left) there is a NDW stone and soon a board indicating a view of Canterbury Cathedral. Almost 0.5 miles further on there is a low brick deer wall (right). Leave the NDW by going right through the tall narrow gate (right).

Cross the field to a stile. In the hilltop meadow follow the tall yellow posts downhill to a stile by a gate. A straight path ahead affords a view down to Godmersham House and ahead to a summerhouse said to have been used by Jane Austen. Pass a house to reach an estate track junction. (Only to visit the church go ahead to gates, bear right to the main gateway by a lodge and turn right on a road.) The PW is left onto a hedged way. This is the beginning of **Mountain Street**, and still the old Canterbury main road, leading to The Square in Chilham.

STAGE 14 – BOUGHTON LEES TO CHILHAM

Soon the way is in a field alongside a wood. In the corner keep forward to a high gate. An ancient wooded lane runs ahead, and only beyond another gate, at a junction, does it become metalled. After a hamlet there is the castle wall (left) which when built in 1728 caused the road to be slightly diverted. A gate and then brief railing gives a glimpse of the castle and lake. Keep forward at a junction past Elephant House (left) and up School Hill to the hilltop village. ► The PW runs across The Square and past the White Horse Inn into the churchyard.

Chilham Castle was built by Henry II in 1171, the year after Becket's death. The adjoining building which is the residence was completed in 1616. Here Jane Austen attended a ball and dinners hosted by James Wildman. For a time her niece Fanny Knight from Godmersham was about to marry him. Later he had to sell the castle after losing his income from a plantation, having backed the abolition of slavery promoted by his friend William Wilberforce. The family has a memorial by Francis Chantrey in the church which dates from the Norman period but stands on 7th-century foundations. The tower was added in 1534 just before Henry VIII stopped pilgrimage.

For Chilham station

From The Square walk down The Street to The Woolpack (right). Bear left to the main road. Turn right along the main road to find the turning to the station (right) opposite The Old Alma Inn (¾ mile/1.2km).

Opposite, at the Chilham Castle gate, is a modern sculpture of pilgrims.