

A Village Walk

Wrotham Village, 30min

Wrotham (pronounced /'ru:təm/)

W R O T H A M

THE · BULL
H O T E L

The first record of the name of Wrotham is in a Charter by which King Offa of Mercia granted Addington, Trottscliffe and Stansted to Rochester in AD788. King Offa came to the throne after a period of civil war following on from the assassination of Aethelbald. King Offa took advantage of the instability within the Kingdom of Kent and established himself as lord. In the earliest days of Christianity, when the two great cathedral cities of Winchester and Canterbury were built, it was a custom of the monks to make pilgrimages from one cathedral to another and the Pilgrims Way came into being. Houses where the monks could stop were erected along the route, were always at the intersection of roads, near hamlets, so that the dangers of molestation and robbery were lessened. Even before pilgrims' days this route was used as a trade route, and would have led to the coastal beaches of Kent. The Bull Hotel became an inn in 1280 and is one of the oldest hostleries in the country. In recent years, and during WW2, pilots from Biggin Hill and West Malling made this one of their favourite watering holes, and at one time, the ceiling was decorated with the signatures of the famous Battle of Britain pilots.

When in the car park of The Bull, on the right hand side you will see the old ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE. Most of the OLD PALACE was pulled down in the mid 14th century by Archbishop Islip and taken to Maidstone, where the new place was built beside the river. Considerable rebuilding has taken place over the last few years, and it is now a splendid re-creation of its former glory.

Leave the car park turning right. Just passing The Bull, on a wall on the right hand side is a plaque which describes how, in 1759, COLONEL SHADWELL was shot to the heart by deserters. There is a memorial to the Colonel in Maidstone Church. The deserters were caught and hanged at Penenden Heath.

Opposite the wall, the other side of the road, you will see the glorious WROTHAM PLACE, which was once a royal lodge. It was here that Henry VIII awaited the news of Anne Boleyn's execution. Thomas Nysell, an early owner, is buried in the church alongside his wife Alice and ten children. The date of 1498 was found carved in the rafters of the stables. You may notice pigeon house in the grounds, these were permitted by charter to large landowners so that the pigeons could feed on their owner's corn and not on other people's.

Retrace your steps to the junction and look towards the church, you will see a selection of fine buildings either side of the road adding excitement and interest to the aspect. ST GEORGES HOUSE on the left was in the last century a Temperance Hotel, which is next to the THREE POST BOYS a former public house. BISHOPS LODGE has interesting features, once the home of the Spencer family who farmed and lived also at WROTHAM PARK outside the village, which was once the home of the Byng family.

The CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE which dates principally from the 13th and 15th century and was the site of the first church built here in the middle of the 10th century. The 15th century tower is remarkably fine in its proportions, and is all the more impressive because from its position close to the road it rises directly and seems to dominate the whole village. The clock was made early in the 17th century and is probably one of the oldest church clocks in the country. It is still in excellent mechanical order. A separate leaflet is available in the church giving full details of the contents and history. You can visit the grounds around the church as well as its gorgeous interior.

Proceed from the church, passing the OLD SCHOOL and the CHURCH HALL, on the left, and several interesting cottages on the right. Notice the LYCH GATE at the junction of the Old London Road, and on the left you will see COURT LODGE. This was once the Rectory and during the curacy of Reverend Moore (who we understand was more interested in entertaining than his church duties!) is said to have played host to Jane Austen whilst she was writing *Pride and Prejudice*. There is an artesian well in the garden. This was once used as the village pump.

Walk up the London Road, pass the recently refurbished recreation ground on the right and walk up and you will come to the PILGRIMS COTTAGE on the right. This was once a rest house for pilgrims and then became a turnpike house. In 1852 it became the Wrotham lock up, the bars and windows are still in place. In 1620 an encampment of huts was known to be on the Pilgrim's Way at this point and an old map drawn by hand shows it to be known as SLUTS ACRE. An archery existed at BUTTS HILL further up this road and a practice range was in the Chalk Hill nearby.

Turn right in the Pilgrims' Way and walk this pleasant little road around the village green, turn right and you will soon find on your left the lovely old cricket ground, (Wrotham is one of the earliest venues where the game was played).

When returning through the village you may like to wander down St Marys Road once called Donkey Lane (pass the church on your right, turn right at the junction, pass the ROSE AND CROWN pub on your left then turn left in St Mary's Road). Old cottages at the top are named after one of the old potters, Nicholas Hubble, then the Almshouses bequeathed by Miss Helen Betenson, there are houses here covering every century and at the very end CEDAR HOUSE built in 1490 still houses the old blacksmith forge.

17th century pottery made in Wrotham is known throughout the world. The kilns were situated a short half mile north of Wrotham station and made mostly slipware. The were called TYGS and the few ones that are left can be seen in Maidstone Museum.

As you approach the junction with Borough Green Road you turn right and walk towards the High Street passing WROTHAM HOUSE on the left and THE OLD VICARAGE on the right. This 17th century house, originally a Hall House with later additions, was once the home of Lord Hardinge of Lahore born in Wrotham in 30th March 1785 (after serving in the Waterloo Campaign he became Secretary at War in Wellington's ministry). during his father's curacy. On the bend in the High Street, just passing Kemsing Road, you notice WEST HOUSE, a beautiful Queen Ann house, which has a fire mark on the wall, this insured good attention by the fire brigade in the last century.

West of the village, from Kemsing Road, is the road called Battlefields which recalls the Battle Of Blacksole Field fought in 1554 between Thomas Wyatt's supporters and the troops of Queen Mary I on Blacksole Fields, during Wyatt's anti-papist rebellion.

At this point look up the High Street and notice the various buildings, the architectural quality of Wrotham is best appreciated here where two storey shops and dwellings appearing to be generally of 18th /19th century in origin are in many instances built much older structures dating back to the 14th century or earlier, walls as architectural features contribute much to the character of the village.