



Greywell

Distance: 7 km=4½ miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire

Date written: 10-apr-2022

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Last update: 31-jan-2024

Refreshments: North Warnborough, Greywell

Map: Explorer 144 (Basingstoke) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Long woodland trails, canal walk, picturesque villages, pubs

In Brief

This is a walk of great contrasts, featuring a historic village, long paths through the woods, a medieval castle and a walk along the Basingstoke Canal.



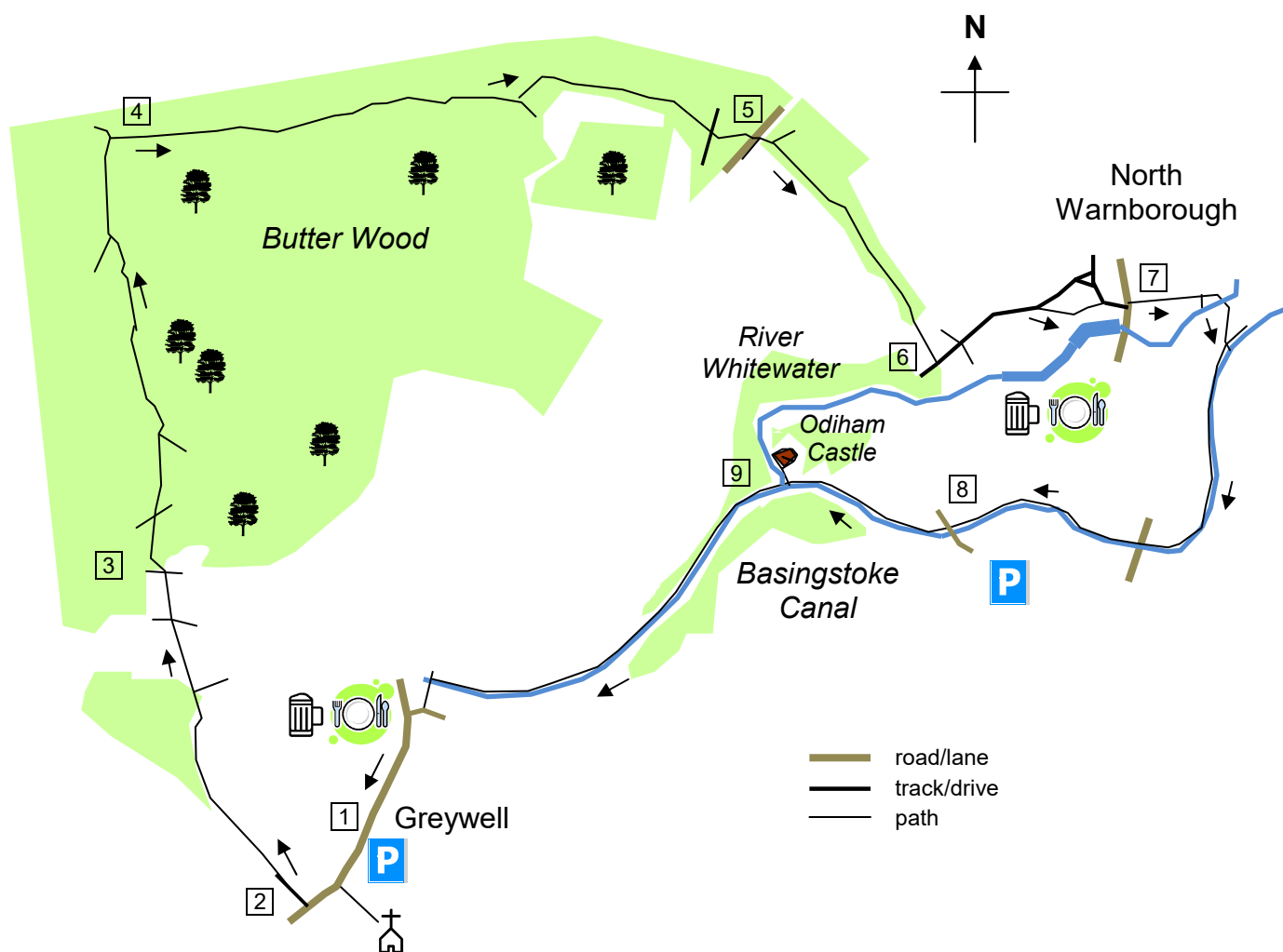
One of the most satisfying features for many walkers will be the two first-class country pubs. The *Mill House* is at the half-way point (for enquiries, ring 01256-702953). The *Fox and Goose* is at the end of the walk (ring 01256-702062).



The terrain covered by this walk is a mixture of good woodland paths, and an excellent canal towpath. No nettles were encountered when the walk was planned, but they may spring up in high summer. In early April the walk was mostly completely dry, with only one or two brief muddy patches making the author glad to be wearing boots. As the seasons progress, it should be fine to wear sensible walking shoes or trainers. This walk should be fine for your dog, with a lead of course, because of one main road crossing.

The walk begins in the village of **Greywell**, near Hook, Hampshire, postcode **RG29 1BY**, www.w3w.co/scarecrow.ditched.toenail. Park on the roadside, past (but not too near) the *Fox and Goose* pub. There are some roadside spaces in North Warnborough village and a parking strip in Tunnel Lane, just before the bascule bridge over the canal. You could also treat this walk as a pub walk and, on a quiet day, use one of the large pub car parks, provided that you will be using the restaurant and bar after the walk. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



The “well” in Greywell’s name is the Whitewater River which arises from deep springs. But the “Grey” of the name is an old word for “badger”, since those animals abounded here. In the 1600s Greywell Manor was owned by the Zouche family of Bramshill (see the Bramshill walk in this series). In 1786, it was sold to Sir Guy Carleton, 1st Lord Dorchester, and first Governor General of Canada. The house has stayed in that family ever since, located on Greywell Hill.

- 1** With houses on your right and meadows on your left, walk along the road, away from the pub, on the excellent footway. You will be going right, up into the woods, and there are several paths leading up – but it is pleasant to stroll and admire these historic houses, including the huge timbered *Malt-house* of herringbone bricks, supporting (or supported by) a huge creeper. You reach a large lichgate, just before *Church Cottage*, with a chance for a brief there-and-back visit the medieval church of St Mary on your left.

Greywell church dates from the 1100s and the central nave has hardly changed from the year 1200. If you look as you enter the Norman doorway, those little carvings of crosses are thought to represent the crusaders who accompanied Richard Coeur-de-Lion in the 1190s. Greywell church is unusual in having a rood loft – a gallery above the screen and a survivor from Catholic times. The church possesses some treasures such as a silver chalice from 1569 – but these are not kept in the church.

Continue along the road a short distance, passing *Dower House* on your right. In only about 50m, opposite a small wooden door, turn **right** on a tarmac drive and immediately slip **right** onto a signed bridleway, leading up to a small metal gate and into a field.

- 2 Take a path up the left-hand side of the field, parallel to the drive on your left. The path soon curves round to lead you through another small metal gate, into the next pasture. Keep straight ahead, in the direction on the fingerpost, up the centre of the grass. **Subsequent walkers occasionally had to skirt round some friendly beef cattle here.** *Greywell Hill House, the principal house of the Manor of Greywell, is visible on your left.* Head for a large oak, where you find another traditional Hampshire-style 4-way fingerpost. Keep straight on, reaching a very rudimentary bench seat. A wide path leads you into woods by another 4-way fingerpost. Your route is the footpath, straight ahead. A large kissing-gate beside a large metal gate sets you on a wide track through the depths of Butter Wood.

Butter Wood is a 133-ha (330-acre) Site of Special Scientific Interest. Much of it is ancient coppice and it was also used for grazing sheep and goats, from which it probably gets its name. In medieval times it was a haunt of wild boar and wolves. Butter Wood is part of Up Nately Local Nature Reserve and at least 25 species of butterfly have been found here.

- 3 Keep straight ahead at all times under tall beeches, avoiding side paths, as the frequent notices say, passing the occasional yellow arrow. You may encounter some horses which are allowed to roam free in these woods. Soon you will hear the sound of the M3 motorway. After about 850m total in these woods, look to your right to see an old woodsman's hut. At this point you can see your path curving left just as you come to a marker post. Turn **right** here on a footpath (*don't miss this turn!*), soon passing the hut on your left.
- 4 You are on a good wide path, mainly grassy wherever the woodsmen have not recently used it. The trees soon change to birch, then to oak. The path becomes twisty and there may be muddy patches which can be skipped around. After about 700m on this path you meet a junction on your right with a marker post. Ignore the side path here and stay on your original path as it bears a little to the left. Shortly after this, you pass another marker post and your path curves right, passing a small open meadow on your right. Your path takes you through a double metal gate. Continue ahead, passing a house on your right to meet a concrete drive. Cross straight over, as indicated by the fingerpost, on a narrow grassy path. It leads to a metal kissing-gate and a 2-plank bridge to the road. **(The author avoided a muddy patch and fallen branches here by steering wide round to the left. [In Jan 2024 a fallen tree needs to be climbed over.]**
- 5 Cross the road to a choice of a stile or a small wooden gate. Avoid a kissing-gate on the right and avoid a junction on the left, thus heading straight into the wood, with a crop field on your right. After 400m you see a brick wall and a redbrick cottage ahead. Keep straight ahead, aiming just to the left of the cottage, where there is a small wooden gate. Follow a path past several houses, going through another wooden gate to bypass an animal grid, to meet a tarmac drive. On your right (not on your route) is the remains of a ford on the River Whitewater.

- 6 Turn **left** on the tarmac drive, crossing driveways on your left and right, with meadows on your left and some marshy wetlands of the river on your right. You soon meet a warning sign for a cattle grid about 50m ahead. Fork **right** at this sign across the grass on a path beside the stream. It leads over a stile onto a drive beside a house, bearing right on Mill Lane, quickly reaching the main road in North Warnborough. Your route is straight over the road, but for mid-walk refreshments, the *Mill House* is immediately on your right. To reach it, you need to turn **right**, cross the road where you have a good view of the traffic and cross back again, preferably using the traffic island. Entry is round the back.



The Mill House is on a widened section of the Whitewater. There were eight mills listed under "Odiham" in the Domesday book in Norman times, and this one has been preserved, even to include some of the old winching and grinding mechanism. The inn burnt down in 1345 and was rebuilt. It was owned by lords of the manor until as late as 1920 when it became a private dwelling, then a restaurant and now a full-fledged hotel/pub/restaurant. With gardens and tables on both sides of the river it is ideal for al fresco dining. Usefully, it also serves coffee etc. from 11am. Food, which is available all day from 12 noon, has several popular offerings, but with some imaginative twists that will please everyone. A cycle of beers may include White Horse Luna, Porter, Stonehenge Great Bustard and Windsor and Eton Knight of the Garter.

- 7 Having crossed straight over the main road, preferably using the traffic island on your left, go over a stile onto a footpath, straight ahead along the right-hand side of a large meadow. Avoid a rather tricky yellow-arrowed footbridge over a sluice on your right and continue 50m further to turn **right** over a flat bridge [Jan 2024: be **very careful** of wide square holes caused by missing boards]. After the bridge, fork **right** across the grass, heading for a small metal gate visible in the bank ahead. The gate leads up to the bank of the Basingstoke Canal. Turn **right** along the towpath. You will be following the Canal for just over 2 km: a much longer stretch is the subject of the nearby walk in this series "*Basingstoke Canal and Dogmersfield*" which starts in Odiham.

The Basingstoke Canal was planned in 1776 and finished in 1794 as a means of transporting goods (flour, timber, building materials, etc.) from central Hampshire into London, where it joins with the Wey Canal just before meeting the Thames. Maybe there were distant thoughts of extending it further to the west country, but it was ill-conceived and was never a success, even before the railway came along to deal a death blow. It wasn't until the 1960s that enthusiasts formed the new Canal Society to restore it for leisure purposes.

After a tranquil 400m, the canal bends right to pass under the main road in North Warnborough. Keep **left** on the towpath to walk under the arch.

- 8 After 400m, the canal crosses Tunnel Lane that runs over a white bascule bridge, which occasionally is lifted to allow a canal boat to pass. (Beside the lane on the left here is a parking strip.) Continue straight over. After another quiet 300m, suddenly on your right is the part-ruined *Odiham Castle*, not to be missed. You can walk around the walls and enter by a portal on the right-hand side into the central space.

Odiham Castle was built for King John at the start of the 1200s for use when travelling between Windsor and Winchester. In those days it was a much larger comfortable three-storey dwelling, with many outbuildings, gardens and a moat.

It was a main residence of Henry III from 1236, who gifted it to his sister Eleanor, soon to be married to that ambitious and extravagant warrior Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester. After the failure of de Montfort's rebellion, Eleanor's property was confiscated by the future Edward I and she was banished. The castle was used as a royal prison and hosted Parliament on a few occasions. By the 1600s, when castles were scant protection against cannon, it fell into ruin. Hants and English Heritage began restoration in 2007.

- 9 After your visit to the castle, continue on this excellent dry towpath. Within about 700m you see the first houses of Greywell, and your path rises giving you a view of the entrance to the disused Greywell Tunnel. Your canalside walk ends here.

The Greywell Tunnel was built to take the canal under Greywell Hill after a local landowner objected to a circuitous route. There was no towpath, so the bargees had to employ "leggers" who would lie on their backs and push against the walls. It could take six hours to travel the 1,230 yards. The tunnel is now much used – but only by bats! In fact it is a major wildlife site with several species of those delightful mammals.

At the top, turn **left** and walk between garden fences, coming out to a lane. Turn **right**, immediately reaching a T-junction with the main road. Turn **left** with the *Fox and Goose* pub directly opposite.

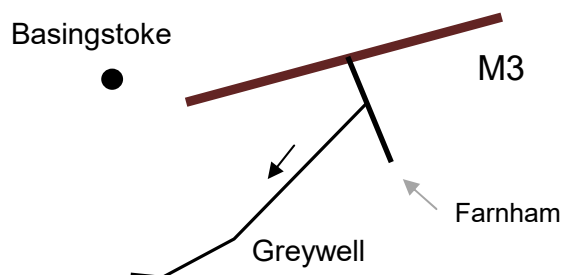


*The Fox and Goose dates from the 1500s. You can lunch or dine from the very-well-regarded menu and sup the two regular ales (plus two guests) in the large garden. The pub is open all day, daily **except Mondays**; and note: the chef has the evening off on Sunday or Monday.*

After final refreshments, continue **left** (that is, **right** if coming out of the pub) along the main road, quickly reaching the spot where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: the easiest route to Greywell is from the M3 motorway. If coming from the London / M25 direction, come off at exit 5 (Hook). Turn **left** as for *Farnham* and quickly filter and turn **right** as for *Greywell*. Park after passing the *Fox and Geese*, on the left-hand side of the road.



By train and bus: bus 13 from Basingstoke station to North Warnborough. Check the timetables.

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