Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Charing and Stalisfield

Distance: 10½ km=6½ miles — easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Kent — Date written: 18-sep-2014

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Refreshments: Stalisfield Green, Charing

Map: Explorer 137 (Ashford) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Country town, windmill, woodland, pub, views

In Brief

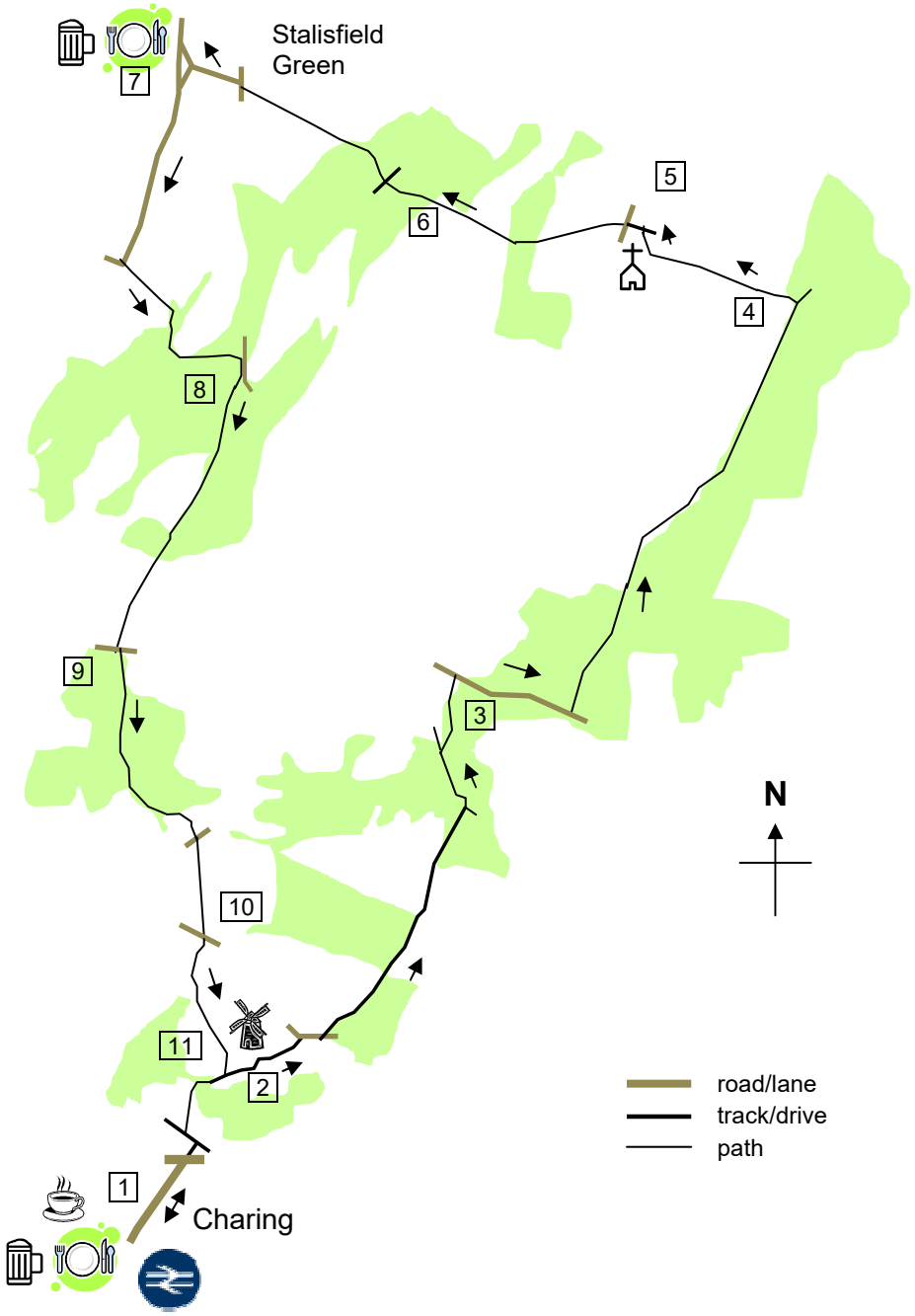
The historic and picturesque large village of Charing in East Kent sits at the foot of the Downs and this walk takes you up into the woods and meadows that overlook the village. You visit on the way an isolated church and a good pub (to enquire at the *Plough* in Stalisfield, ring 01795-890256; note that they only take cash for payments under £10). The *Plough* is **closed** on Mondays.

There are some nettles and brambles on this walk, especially in the height of summer, and just a few brambles that may scratch. Boots are recommended as always, but good walking shoes or trainers are quite adequate for this walk. This walk would be fine for your dog provided that he is not too large: although there are not many stiles, one or two would be a problem for a large dog without a ready "hand-up".

The walk begins in the village of **Charing, Kent**, by car or from **Charing Station**. It starts and ends with a short pleasant walk from and back to the centre of the village but, to save ½ km or so each way you could of course park somewhere else along the route. You could also park near the pub in Stalisfield Green making a pleasant and interesting mid-walk break in Charing village. If you park in Charing, there is plenty of room on or off School Road, postcode **TN27 0JQ**, or in the free car park on that road behind Brenchley House, w3w:dustbin.owned.grain. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Charing (pronounced 'Charring' not 'Chairing') is situated on a bend in the old Pilgrim's road and this may explain its name: in 799 it was written as 'Ciorrincg' probably from the Anglo Saxon 'cerring' meaning 'a bend' (c.f. old High German 'keran'). Or it may simply be another familial name. The village was granted to the Church of Canterbury in 765-80 by Kentish King Egbert II. Charing was important from medieval times as a stopover on the Pilgrim's Way to the shrine of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. Amongst the wealth of historic buildings is the Bishop's Palace which became the temporary residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury when in transit. The parish church of St Peter and St Paul dates from the 1200s.



Leg 1: Outward 6 km=3¾ miles

1 Walk up the historic High Street, with the church on your right. You pass several smart houses and, in about 500m, reach the Bypass (the A252 road). Cross this road carefully directly over to a wide track opposite to reach a T-junction in 50m. Turn **left** on a tarmac drive, part of the historic Pilgrims Way. In 40m, turn **right** on a narrow path quite steeply uphill. In 150m, at the top, your path goes up steps and veers right. You come out onto a hillside that reveals your first surprise: Charing Windmill !

Charing Windmill is a smock mill, that is, having a one-storey base, a platform, a hexagonal tower and a revolving top (in so-called "Kentish style": boat shaped). It was built just before 1821 when the first record appears and milled grain until the end of the 1800s. It has been a private residence since the 1930s and none of the internal machinery remains, although the outside has been completely restored, except for the sails.

2 Head straight for the windmill and go through a wooden swing-gate through rickety fence panels. (Yes! This is correct – the way through is definitely a public footpath.) You pass the mill on your left, going very close to it, out onto a driveway. Follow this tarmac drive to a road junction. Turn **right** on the curving Bowl Road and, in 20m, fork **left** on a dusty track. The surface improves to rough tarmac as you pass woodland first on your right, then Down Wood on your left. You pass scattered superior properties. After nearly 1 km on this track, just before an entrance to an architect-designed house, you come to a crossing path. Turn **left** here between metal barriers on a footpath, following the black-on-yellow arrows. You pass through woodland between wire fences. In 150m, at a marker post, avoid a path forking left into a field, staying in the wood. In another 200m you reach a tarmac lane, Stalisfield Road. Turn **right** on the lane.

3 Follow this very quiet lane through woodland for over 300m. As the lane comes out of the trees, look for a wide track and a (probably open) metal barrier. Turn **left** through it into Vine Wood. After nearly 400m on this wide forestry track, you come out into an open area. Keep straight ahead along the right-hand side of the open space, close to the trees of Hurst Wood on your right. After 350m, you approach a crop field. Here, your path divides into two, separated by a hedgerow: take either path as they re-join after about 300m. At this junction turn **left** uphill towards farm buildings on the brow.

4 The route is directly up the field, on a fairly clear path, following a line of oaks on your right. At the top, veer slightly **right**, through the silos of Court Lodge Farm, across the farmyard, straight ahead down the farm track. (Note: there will be some very noisy dogs, but safely contained and out of sight behind a high fence.) You'll reach the churchyard of the little church of St Mary Stalisfield. *This flint-and-sandstone 13th-century church stands isolated from the main village. The unusual tower is on the north side. If the church is locked, you should be able to visit by ringing 01233-712270 / 713212 / 714904.*

5 Go out through the lichgate and turn **left** to reach a tarmac lane, Church Road. Cross straight over the lane onto a wide grassy path. When, in 100m, you reach a field, go straight across on a faint path (or between crops, depending on the season). At the other side, go through a narrow gap into woodland. Follow the path through the wood and, in 50m, out into a field on the other side. Go straight across, a fraction right, heading for the corner of some woodland and thence through a small metal gate. On occasions you may see cattle in this field or the next; if they worry you, you make a detour or divert north to Hillside Road near Woodsell Farm. Go up the right-hand side of a sheep pasture, veering slightly left to go through a small metal gate into the beautiful woodland of Spuckles Wood.

6 The woodland has bluebells in season and the path takes you gradually down to meet a crossing path, actually a bridleway, in the valley bottom. Cross straight over it going steeply up again on a flinty path. After a longish ascent, finally you come out through a modern kissing-gate into a field. Follow a line of electricity poles straight ahead and, at the other side, go through a small metal gate to a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane, Thorneycroft Road. and immediately turn **left** on another lane. At a 3-way junction, fork **right** to reach the little green and the *Plough Inn*, Stalisfield.

The Plough Inn is a magnet for local Kentish ales with rarities like Musket of Linton and Goody Ales of Herne but most people (maybe even walkers following this guide) come for the food. Set at a fixed price for three inventive dishes, this place is really good value. For fine weather there is a pleasant garden on one side (or a roaring log fire for less clement circumstances). The Plough is open all day weekends (closing 6pm Sunday). You need cash for payments under £10.

Leg 2: Return 4½ km=2¾ miles

7 After possible refreshment, on coming out of the pub, turn **right** on the road (that is **left** if you didn't visit the pub). You pass *Queens Cottages* and irrelevant footpaths left and right. After 600m, the lane bends off to the right. **Ignore** the stile leading into a meadow straight ahead here and instead turn **left** on a path into woods. This path takes you over a stile into a sheep pasture (the stile is well insulated and looks very safe despite the electric fence, which might not even be "live" – but keep your dog tightly leashed, as one group almost had a lightly-grilled beagle!) [Jan 2020: care! some walkers had a problem here; please report any changes]. Keep to the left-hand side but, as you near the corner, go **right** for 40m to find a wooden swing-gate. Go **left** through this gate and follow the brambly path down through Arkett's Wood. The path veers left by a large metal gate and comes down to a narrow tarmac lane.

8 Do *not* join the lane but turn **right** immediately before the lane on a wide path into woods. This path soon runs close to a sheep pasture on your right with Kennelling Wood on your left, passing a private wooden gate on your left. The path widens as it joins a path coming through a metal gate on your right. In a short distance through Bowl Wood, it takes you through another metal gate and out into a meadow. Keep straight ahead between sloping sides. At the other side, go through a metal gate and up the left-hand side of a field to a tarmac lane, Stalisfield Road again.

9 Turn **left** on the lane for 10m. (But, less than 500m on your **right**, is the *Bowl Inn*, a 16th-century inn and freehouse with locally-sourced food and several real ales.) Just before the gates of *Tangle Wood*, turn **right** on a path into a bluebell wood, Stakesdane Wood. The path runs beside a fence on your left and leads you through a modern kissing gate in the grounds of the house. It takes you **right** between fences beneath overhanging trees. It wheels right past a small private parking lot and goes out to a tarmac lane, Church Road again. Directly over the lane is a very small hidden gap in the hedge, easily missed. Go through the gap and take a marked path straight across the crop field to reach a road on the other side, Bowl Road again.

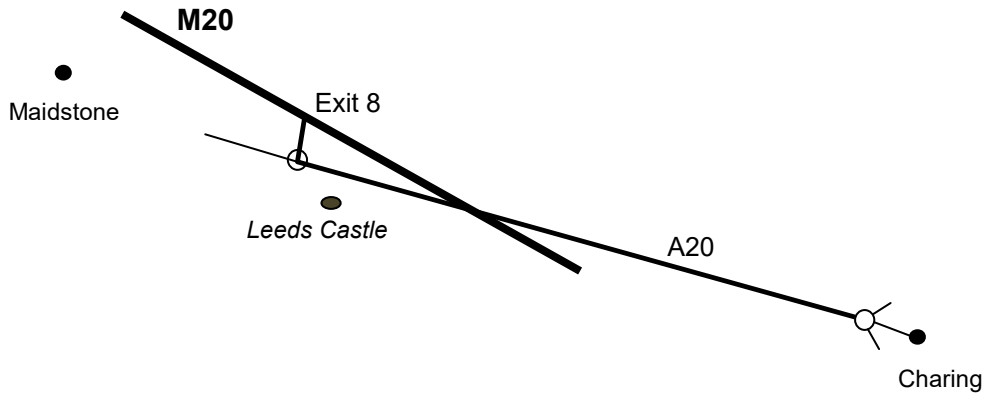
10 Cross straight over the road and take a path through a small wooden gate into an orchard. The path takes you **right**, staying close to the hedge on your right, to the right of some sheds. (In 2020, the footpath was completely re-routed. Look for signs on the gate as you enter from the road). Follow the line of the fence, keeping it on your **left**, with wonderful views across the Weald of Kent. There are new posts with yellow arrows to make the route clear. The new path takes you around the lawn and brings you to a stile in the far corner. Now follow the path through a sheep pasture with the windmill on view again.

11 Turn diagonally sharp **left**, heading to the right of the windmill. In the corner, go over a stile and veer **right** on a path across the grass. Your return journey is now similar to your outward journey (if you began in the village). Keep right and take a path through bracken, down steps and steeply down a grassy path with the village visible ahead. At the bottom, turn **left** on a drive and, in 40m, **turn** right on a track down to the main road. Cross the road very carefully to a road opposite (The Hill) and continue down into the old village where the walk began.

For final refreshments, try the Bookmaker's Arms, a micropub, near the bottom of the High Street on the left.

Getting there

By car: if you arrive by car from the west, e.g. London, the best way is via the M20. Come off at Exit 8 *(Lenham, Leeds Castle)*. Go **right** at the roundabout, as for *Lenham*. Keep **left** at the next roundabout and stay on the A20 past Harrietsham and Lenham, and onwards to Charing. At the big roundabout just before the village, take the road marked Village Centre Only and park somewhere on or off that road, School Lane, or in the free car park (as 2014) on the left just after the last square office building.



By bus/train: regular trains between Maidstone and Ashford International to **Charing Station**.

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