Fancy Free Walks

point your feet on a new path

Egerton

Distance: 6½ km=4¼ miles — easy walking

Region: Kent — Date written: 6-aug-2019

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Refreshments: Egerton

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

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

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Apples, woodland, streams, surprises, views, easy field paths, pub

In Brief

If Kent is the Garden of England, then this is certainly the Orchard of England as you will instantly see. But first you need to pronounce the village's name so you don't receive any wry smiles from the very welcoming inhabitants of this delightful village. The first syllable sounds as "Edge". This walk takes you through apple orchards and woodland (with bluebells in late spring) to meet the Stour Valley Walk (which follows Kent's second river) before looping back across fields where the paths are always nice and wide and clear. There are no steep sections, but this pioneering walk has some other navigational challenges. There are many surprises along the way which are best left to those places in this text where you meet them quite unexpectedly.

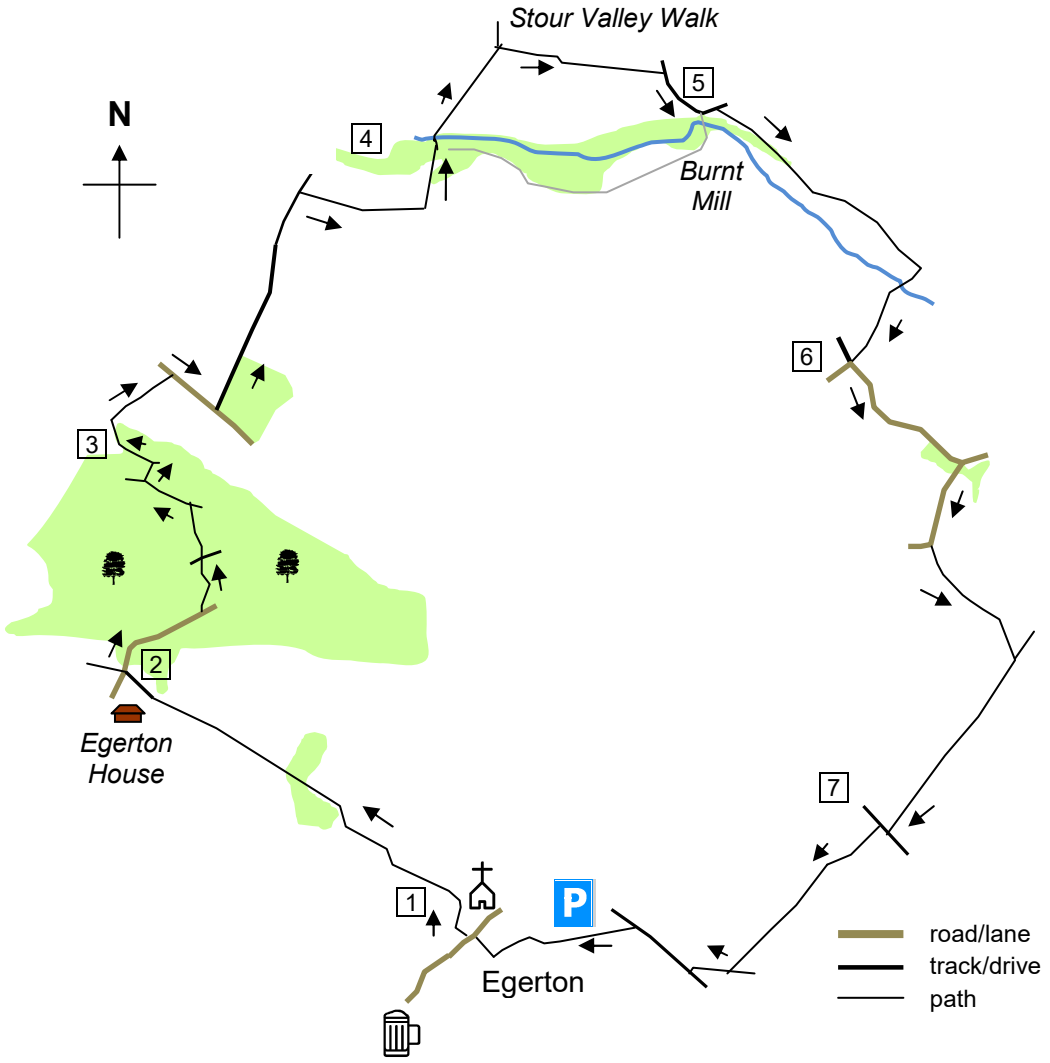
The *Barrow House* pub re-opened in 2021. For booking or enquiries, ring 01233-756599.

There are some nettles on this walk, also undergrowth, some at shoulder height, so shorts and short sleeves are not advisable. Boots are not necessary but, if the weather has been damp, they are preferred because the ground may be a little spongy in the meadows which form part of the river plain of the Stour. Your dog should be happy on this walk, with a lead of course.

The walk begins in the village of **Egerton**, near Ashford, Kent, postcode **TN27 9DJ**, w3w:creatures.using.meatball. There is (discreet) roadside parking. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

The name "Egerton" means "the farmstead of Eegheard", the original Saxon owner. The parish has around 80 listed buildings. The oldest houses in the village go back to the 1400s. Because this is farming country, many of them are spread out along the Greensand ridge. Apart from the church (see below), the most important building is the "Barrow House" inn, previously known as "The George". This inn now has a clean pine interior, offering good food and at least three ales, typically Whitstable, Cellar Head and the inn's own Barrow House Brew. A bright prospect for the end of the walk. On most weekdays, the inn operates a pizza oven with a choice of toppings.



1 Starting in the village of Egerton, go through the large metal gate into the churchyard. *The ragstone Church of St James dates from the 1400s. The tower, which you can see from miles around, houses six bells, which you may also hear during the walk.* Go **left** round the side, then straight down through the cemetery and **left** through a small wooden gate at the bottom into an apple orchard. *Mid Kent Growers is a collective with vast tracts of apple orchards which dominate this part of the Garden of England.* Take a path which runs through the orchard on the left side, so that you have one bank of fruit trees on your left at first, the remainder on your right. The path is partly surfaced with stone slabs and is therefore unmistakable. *Note that you are walking on part of the Greensand Way, a long distance path from Haslemere, Surrey to Hamstreet in East Kent.* The zigzagging path goes round the corner of some woodland keeping the same general

direction. As you come through a band of trees, keep straight on, between the two hedges. You come past a large metal gate, under ash and willow, past a cottage, then two more, to continue on a tarmac drive, leading out to a lane, with the large white *Egerton House* on your left.

Egerton House, with its grand music room, has long been a weekend home for musicians. It is owned by violinist and conductor Bryan Gripps. The fine white façade was added by owner Sir Horace Mann who hosted the Mozart family's trip to England in 1765.

2 Turn **right** on the lane, thus leaving the Greensand Way. The lane runs down through woodland, passing the small wooden gate of *Keepers Cottage* on your left. Shortly after this, as the fence on your left ends, go **left** at a signpost on a footpath into Foxden Wood, a home to broods of pheasants as you may see. Be sure to follow the signs on the trees to stay on the right track. Your path enters an open area, veering **right** to meet a marker post where a wide forestry track crosses. Fork immediately **right** on a rising path, as indicated by the arrow. This path comes up to a T-junction. Turn **left** as indicated by the yellow arrow. You reach a junction of four paths. Veer **right** here uphill, as indicated by the yellow arrow. Where the track suddenly bends away right, **leave** it by turning **left** on a narrow path into a small garden. (Yes, this is correct!) Pass to the left of a decrepit old caravan and shortly turn **right**, passing to the left of an isolated, spooky, wooden house. Turn **left** after the house. Welcome to Burscombe Farm!

Take away the tractor and this farm would be unchanged from a century ago. As a (Greensand) "ridge farm" it commands terrific views north to the Downs. Also, in consequence, the farm would have needed twice the usual number of horses to heave the produce down the hill and back. The farm is even more organic than organic, since it uses no artificial aids (although they do not formally register it). The pig pens house a small herd of saddlebacks. The prize residents are a wonderful breeding pair of Blonde d'Aquitaines (beef cattle), brought over from France. If you come at a pause in the heavy workload, you may even be lucky enough to have the livestock breeds explained to you by the lady owner.

3 Continue up the concrete track, out to a tarmac lane. Ignore a signposted footpath opposite and turn **right** on the lane. Immediately after a bungalow, turn **left** on a track signed as a footpath. You go between fields with great view of the Downs. Ignore a metal kissing-gate on your right as you go. Continue straight through the farm, passing its large barns, and straight down a rough track, as directed by a yellow arrow. Only 100m from the farm, at the corner of a hedgerow, turn **right** through a large metal gate into a long narrow wild meadow.

4 Follow the path, keeping the large hedge on your right. After 280m you come to the end of the hedge. Turn **left** here, down to a ditch with a bridge across it, marked by yellow-topped stakes. (There is also a path straight ahead, staying in the meadow and, in 300m, cutting across a crop field, direct to the next landmark, Burnt Mill.) Once over the bridge, go straight ahead to a modern kissing-gate. The path takes you over a bridge across the Stour and up into a crop field. Turn **right** and almost immediately **left**, onto a narrow, practically invisible, path across the centre of the field. The path ends at a small metal gate, taking you into a grassy meadow and introducing you to the Stour Valley Walk. *This is a 54-mile=87 km walk from Lenham near here, where the river is young, ending at Pegwell Bay, near Ramsgate.* Turn **right** along the meadow edge, bordering the field you have

just crossed. In the corner, go through a kissing-gate and resume direction beside the crop field. As it passes a corner, your path goes straight across the centre of the field. After a kissing-gate, turn **right** on a gravel track which wheels left past sheds, soon giving you sight of the two mill ponds of the picturesque *Burnt Mill*, 18th-century Grade II listed. *The 3.15m waterwheel which drove a pit wheel stopped rolling in the mid-1950s*.

5 Keep to the **right** of a newish barn. Very shortly, at the end of a fence, go **right** through a metal gate, over a (tricky) 3-plank bridge into a meadow. Keep to the **right**-hand edge (soggy in winter). You cross a small (bypassable) bridge with a stream on your right and come through a kissing-gate (also bypassable). *You must by now be aware of the M20 motorway and its high-speed rail: don't disparage it as a rude intrusion – it's likely it brought you to this peaceful place!* Ignore a gated bridge on your right across the Stour and stay in the meadow. A redundant bridge leads into the next meadow. A vital turning now approaches: look for a long bridge on your right, opposite an electricity pole. Go **right** over the bridge (hopping over a bar at each end) and through an optional kissing-gate. Now keep the same direction, going diagonally across a large meadow, heading for an earth bank which bisects the meadow. After going up over the bank, you can see a signpost and small metal kissing-gate half-way along the far edge, under an electricity pole.

6 Go through the gate and turn **left** on a tarmac lane, still on the Stour Valley walk. This very quiet lane goes over a bridge and slightly uphill. At a T-junction, turn **right** on a wider lane. In 200m, as the lane bends right before a house, go **left** at a signpost on a footpath, through a kissing-gate into a sheep meadow. Keep to the left-hand side. As you approach a fenced enclosure which juts out, head for the right-hand corner. When you reach the corner, turn **right** on a path which cuts across the centre of the pasture. After a kissing-gate and a bridge continue straight ahead across the centre of a crop field. A wide concrete bridge leads you into the next field. Now head for the whiteboard house visible on the far side. At the end, your path goes through an overgrown gap in the hedge to meet a tarmac drive. Turn **right** on the drive and, in 20m, **left** on a track beside the whiteboard house. *The track is available to horse riders as part of the off-road network.*

7 The track narrows and becomes a path up the left-hand side of a crop field. *The tower of Egerton church is now clearly visible.* Just before the end of the field, opposite a gap* in the hedge, go diagonally **right** across the field. At the far side, by a marker-post, go through a gap in the hedge. (*2026 The gap is easy to miss now as it is has partially closed; if you miss it, just walk to the corner of the field and turn **right** where you find the end of the diagonal path and marker post.) Ignore a path straight ahead and instead turn **right** on a grassy path between tall hedges. As you pass a large metal gate on your right at a division between fields. go **left** at a marker post *(easily missed!)* through a gap in the hedge. Now go diagonally **right** through a metal gate, diagonally across a meadow and through another metal gate. Go over a track, up a couple of rough steps, and through a kissing-gate under tall trees. Cross this pleasant lawn, going through yet another kissing-gate into a tree garden, through a kissing-gate and **left** on a short footpath leading to a tall wooden gate. Yes, this is correct! You are in the premises of a very fine purveyor of plants and wooden garden fixtures. Turn **left** alongside the house, follow the path and turn **right** before a hedge at the top. A short dirt

drive takes you out to the road in Egerton close to the church where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Egerton is signposted off the A20 road, just over a mile east of Lenham and about 3 miles west of Charing. If coming from the London area, take the M20 motorway and come off at junction 8 (*Leeds Castle*). Follow the A20 for 5 miles through Lenham. Now look for a **right** filter and a sign for *Lenham Heath, Egerton*. Follow the signs to *Egerton*, watching out for twists and turns.

By bus/train: bus 123 from Ashford or Charing; not weekends. Check the timetables.

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