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

Godstone and Tilburstow Hill

Distance: 7 km=4½ miles — easy walking with some inclines

Region: Surrey — Date written: 19-nov-2011

Author: Schwebefuss — Date revised: 25-feb-2019

Refreshments: Godstone — Last update: 11-nov-2026

Map: 146 (Dorking) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Village, water, woods, meadows, bluebells in spring

In Brief

This walk is full of delightful surprises and a few ghostly secrets from history along the way. Because of the good tracks and the sandy paths, it is a good walk at any time of the year, although the tracks in the woodland are drier in summer. In late spring, the forest floors are decked with bluebells. In autumn there is a huge harvest of ripe chestnuts in the woods.

There are no nettles, so shorts and any sensible clothing and footwear are fine, but in winter and early spring, boots are recommended. Your dog is welcome too.

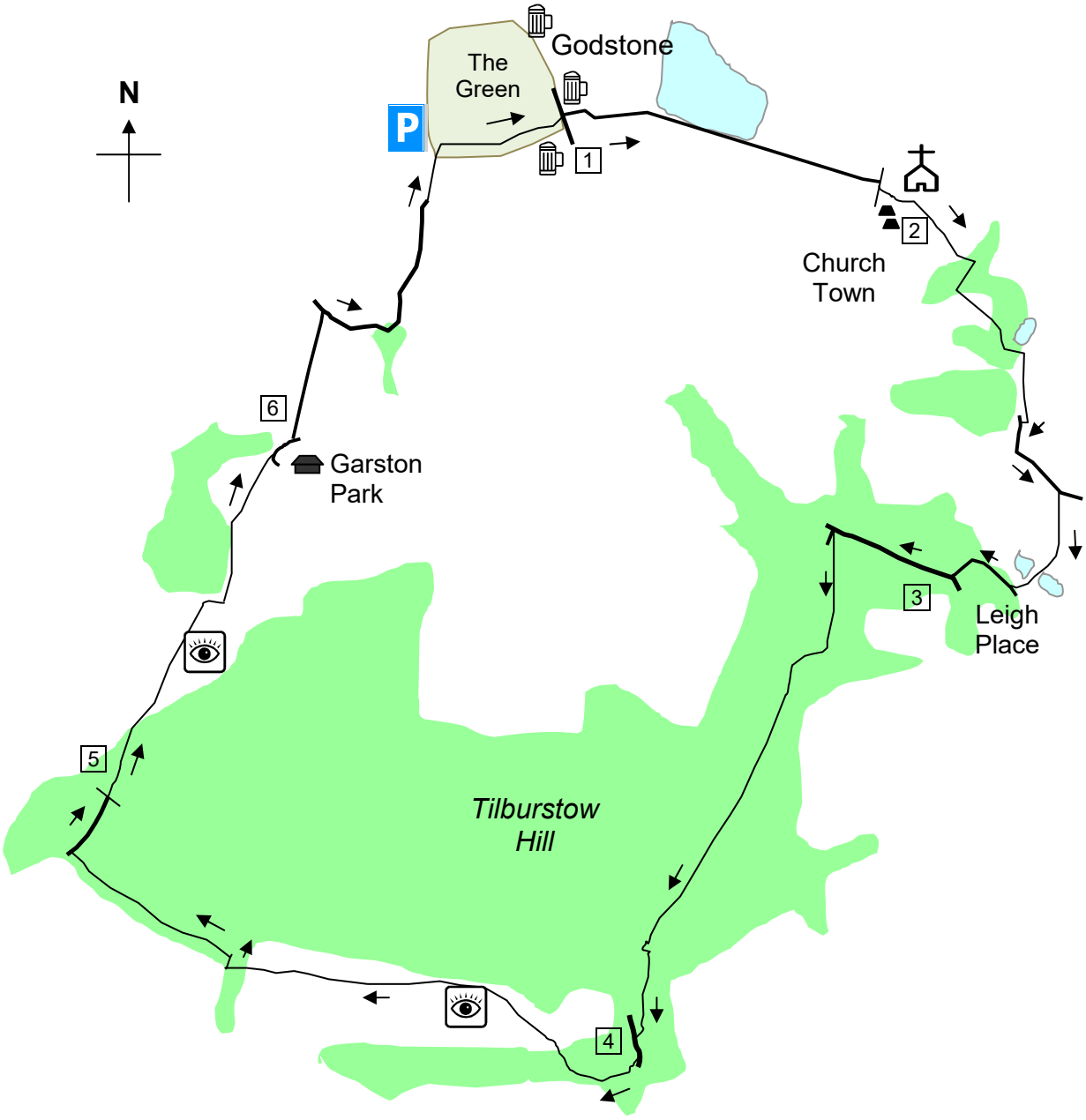
The walk begins at the Green in Godstone, Surrey, just off the M25, postcode **RH9 8DU**. If coming by car, park carefully anywhere round the Green. Note that the free Council car parks only allow three hours' parking. If every space is full, park on the west side of the Green (Bletchingley Road, then left on Ivy Mill Lane, w3w:danger.wasp.leave). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Godstone has four (three?) pubs: the *White Hart* is Marstons and another, the *Bell*, is an upmarket bar-restaurant (albeit with an attractive garden and patio). The *Hare and Hounds*, at one corner of the Green, is a traditional pub, open all day every day, with one or two brews, including Adnams, and some food, with a nice seating area where you can watch life go by. The *Godstone Inn* which once did an "excellent lunch" is closed and up for sale.

The Walk

Welcome to Walchnestead! Well, that was the original name of this village. But maybe the Normans couldn't pronounce it when they put it in the Doomsday Book. The village was in the realm of King Ethelred the Unred, who married a daughter of the Duke of Normandy (no, not that one) and was father to King Edward the Confessor. Ethelred gave Walchnestead to his daughter Goda as a marriage portion. So the village was renamed as "Goda's place".

Godstone was nearly wiped off the map in 1349 by the Black Death: stroll over to Bullbeggars Lane and you will find "mensfield" and "womensfield" side-by-side where the dead were buried thousands upon thousands. Godstone was always an important coach stop; the "Bell Inn" dates from 1393 and the defunct "Rose and Crown", the "White Hart" and the "Hare and Hounds" from the 1500s. Also in the 1500s, Godstone played its part in arms manufacture: George Evelyn, grandfather of John Evelyn the diarist, obtained a formula for a saltpetre substitute from a refugee German captain for £300. Many notable figures came from Godstone; in 1554, during the reign of catholic counter-reformer Bloody Mary, two men, John Lauder and Thomas Iveson wished to stay loyal to the English Prayer Book and travelled to Brighton to attend a service using the illicit book but were betrayed and arrested in Godstone, brought to London for trial, sentenced by Bishop Bonner to death by burning and dubbed the "Godstone Martyrs" (see the walk "A Ring with a View: Chanctonbury & Steyning" in this series). Another personage was Polly Paine (or Pain), considered to be a witch who could turn herself into a cat or hare; according to legend, some hounds chased a hare to Polly Pain's Cottage; it was savaged on the hind leg and disappeared; next day, Polly was seen in the village limping badly.



2026: The Godstone "sinkhole" has now been dealt with and the road has a nice new surface.

1 Locate the *White Hart* on the east side of the Green and go down a lane between the inn and the old butchers, previously *Coughlans Artisan Bakers*. Go past the village hall and through a metal barrier onto a tarmac path going past the Bay Pond on your left. *The Bay Pond was built (yes!) in 1588 to power a gunpowder mill. It was dredged and restored by the Surrey Wildlife Trust and is now the territory of carp, terrapins and moorhens.* Soon you reach a lane opposite the church with the St Mary's buildings on the right, this place being known as Church Town. The chapel is up the steps of the almshouses and **left** through the door ahead.

St Nicholas' church dates from the 1200s and 1300s with a south aisle added during a heavy restoration of the church 1872-3 by Sir George Gilbert Scott who also designed the St Mary's chapel and homes. The church is usually locked, so we won't dwell on the stained glass, ribbed and painted vaulted ceiling and the carvings. The wonderful late Victorian gothic St Mary's chapel alongside it is usually open and is a must-see. It was founded by Augusta Nona in memory of her only child Mabel Fanny. The other buildings are alms-houses, surrounding the pretty central well.

In the churchyard, not far from the south (nearest) door, you may notice that one or two of the gravestones have a skull and crossbones carved in them (now probably taken by souvenir hunters?). These were pirates and smugglers ambushed by customs officers in 1687, the most notorious of which was John Edward Trenchman. Running away to sea aged 12 and later brutally pillaging the Spanish colonies, Trenchman eventually returned home and switched to smuggling along the south-east coast. Within a year he was regularly bringing teams of horses laden with contraband to Croydon. One of his gang later turned King's evidence to save his neck and betrayed the rest of the gang. An ambush was laid, as you will discover during the walk, leading to Trenchman's death.

2 Continue through the churchyard, keeping to the **right** of the church, going past the entrance porch. Keep slightly **right** through the cemetery (to avoid a path close to the fence) on a tarmac footpath downhill. Go through a fence on a woodland path and over a dainty bridge with white criss-cross railings. The next bridge is similar but with a hump. On your left is Glebe Water, sometimes reduced to a reedy marsh. The path turns right by a fence. Avoid a wooden gate ahead and turn **left** uphill. Your path goes over a small meadow and reaches a large field. Turn **right** along the edge of the field. In 130m, the path bends right to meet a driveway. Turn **left** on the driveway which bends left round a wall of *Leigh Place*. *This great estate is dominated by two large ponds, partly fed by the springs found in this area.* Go beside an automatic gate to reach a 3-way fingerpost [Sep 2026: one finger missing]. Go **right** here on a footpath, soon passing on your left one of the ponds of *Leigh Place*. Immediately after the pond, ignore a footpath on the left and continue following the path between fences. At the end, keep **right** on a tarmac drive, soon arriving at a road. Turn **right** on the road using the footway.

3 You pass on your left the black timbered *Hythe Cottage* with its long red-brick façade, tile hung on its right. After 250m, turn **left** on a lane, The Enterdent, and immediately, at a signpost, **leave** the lane by keeping **left** uphill going past *White Cottage* on your right. *This cottage and its neighbour were once a tea room and hotel. The Enterdent is an old settlement along a road, previously known as Polly Pains Bottom after the witch mentioned above.* Go

through a wooden barrier uphill into woodland which reveals a spectacular display of bluebells in late spring. As the path veers right, ignore a signed footpath on the left and continue uphill. Keep to this ascending path through Tillburstowhill Common. As the gradient eases, your path crosses a bridleway. You finally arrive at the top of the hill by fallen trees at the edge of the sandstone ridge with views (summer foliage permitting) down the steep drop below. *Thousands of ripe sweet chestnuts can be picked up in these woods in autumn.*

> *It was in a clearing on this hill where Trenchman rode with his gang. The troops acting for the Customs Men, hidden in the trees, immediately opened fire. Trenchman was the only survivor and made a desperate bid to escape. Looking down at his blood-drenched clothing, he realised that he had stopped a bullet. He staggered into a nearby inn but died from loss of blood some hours later. For some reason, the villagers took pity on him and buried him in an unmarked grave near Godstone church. Then strange things began to happen …*

Continue straight ahead ignoring the footpath to your left. Shortly there is a wire fence on your left, with a tennis court behind and the road visible down on the right. When you reach the road, turn **left**.

4 In 50m, just after a driveway on your left, go **right** through a metal barrier uphill on a track marked as a bridleway, part of the Greensand Way (GW). *This long-distance footpath follows the sandy ridge that you have been walking along all the way from Haslemere to near the Kent coast.* This wide path soon cuts through the sandy ridge. Avoid a wooden gate to your left by forking **right** on a narrower path, going past some leylandii and along the edge of a long grassy meadow, often grazed by horses unaware of their beautiful surroundings with great views across the Weald to the South Downs. Tilburstow Hill still looms up on your right. (If this stretch is very muddy, you can take a narrow parallel path in the woods on your right which rejoins the main route shortly before the carved tree trunk mentioned below.) Ignore a marker post with blue and yellow arrows and continue ahead along the path. As you go, look to your right for the bottom of a tree trunk which has been carved into a seat with a letter “K” on it. Shortly after, you reach a junction where a footpath (yellow arrow) continues ahead through a broken gate out into a crop field. Instead, turn **right** here, staying on the bridleway (blue arrow), and immediately go **left** on a wide level path that continues through fine beechwoods. There is a hollow on your right amidst the tall beeches. Soon on your left you have a sight of a lone black-and-white timbered house. A footpath joins you from the left at a fingerpost. When you reach a lane, turn **right** uphill, thus leaving the GW.

5 You arrive at a T-junction by Snatts Hill and Raby’s Heath. Cross straight over to a footpath opposite. Go over a stile into a glistening meadow (which may be slippery after rain) with a fence and wooded ravine on your right and an avenue of oaks up on your left. The North Downs make a fine sight ahead. Keep on to a stile, which turns out to be redundant, and continue ahead down the left-hand side of the meadow. The little green-topped spire of the old stable block of Garston Park, your next destination, comes into view. At the bottom, bear a fraction right and go over a stile onto a path between fences. You have a horse pasture on your right and a large wooded space on your left. In 2025: The area seems to be earmarked for equestrian use; three stiles have appeared recently, the first two avoidable. Soon you meet a tarmac drive that services Garston Park. Keep straight ahead on the drive downhill.

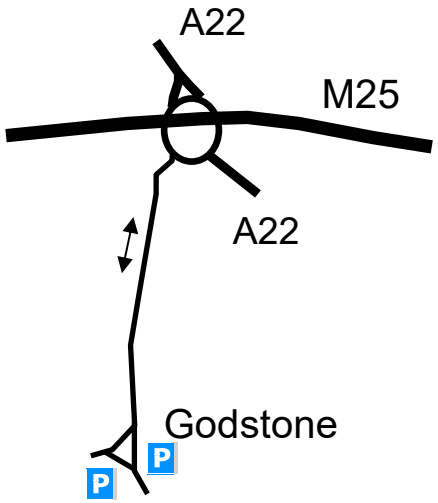
6 After passing the buildings, where the tarmac drive forks in front of a rough grassy area, take the more divergent **left** fork. At the end of the driveway, go through a wooden kissing-gate beside a larger gate and turn **right** on Mill Lane. As the lane bends left, there is a footpath on the left running above the lane. It rejoins the lane just as you re-enter Godstone. Keep ahead past houses. Soon there is a footway on the right as you pass the village school and arrive at the Green. Cross diagonally to reach the main buildings and the *Hare and Hounds* or turn right along the edge of the Green to return to the *While Hart* where the walk began.

We left Trenchman dead and buried and that should be the end of the story. But, on the night of his burial, two grave diggers were surprised by a figure in seaman's clothing who suddenly sprang up from behind a headstone and pursued them through the churchyard. Soon after this, the marker stone that had been placed over Trenchman's grave was found smashed to smithereens. This happened again and again and the figure re-appeared. Fresh blood was found by the altar. Finally the pirate's body was reburied in a Christian service in the place you saw him, but with the skull and crossbones carved on the headstone. He has been at peace ever since.

Getting there

By car: Godstone has its own entry/exit road off the roundabout on the A22 at Junction 6 of the M25. Follow the sign for Godstone and take the road, Godstone Hill and later the High Street, into the village. For parking, see theW head of this document.

You can also arrive from the south, from the A22 or from Tilburstowhill Road.



By bus/train: bus 410 or 774* from Redhill Station (* not Sunday). Check the timetables. South Godstone station is nearly 2 km from the walk.

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