



East Hoathly and Laughton

Distance: 13 km=8 miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

Date written: 18-jul-2018

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Last update: 17-may-2026

Refreshments: Laughton, East Hoathly

Map: Explorer 123 (Eastbourne) *but the maps in this guide should suffice*

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Villages, green meadows, long woodland trail, country freeway

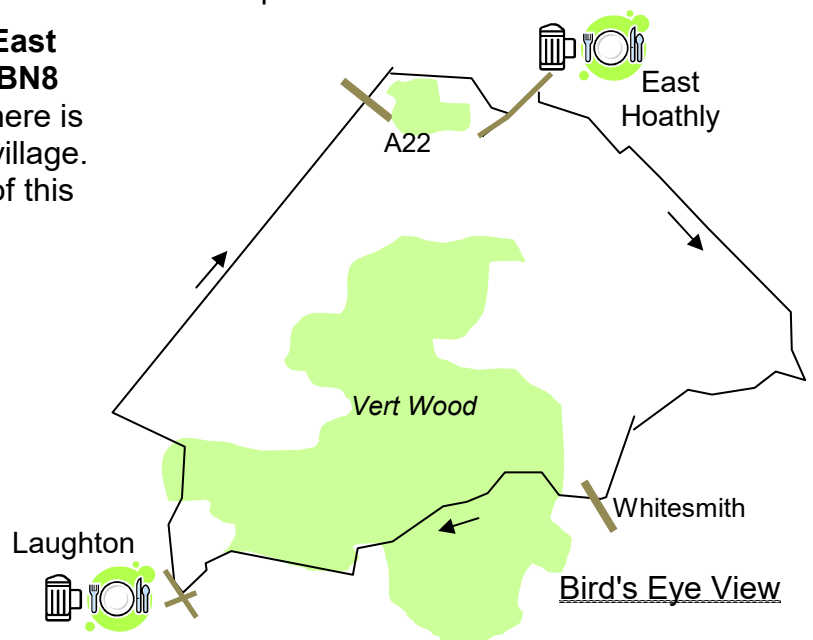
In Brief

This is a walk through history, starting in a famous Sussex village which was brought to life by a remarkable diary. There are no large ploughed fields, just green pastures, leading to a long woodland trek and another historic village. The last phase of the walk is made a sheer breeze thanks to a 2km-long straight country highway consisting of a long farm drive and a lovely wide greenway.



There are just a few patches of nettles or briars, so shorts are not advisable. Although this walk was done in the dry summer of 2018, there were signs of mud in the woods, with ample room to step around; so boots are recommended. This walk would be fine for your dog too, with a short lead to cross the main road twice and to cross an equestrian centre .

The walk begins in the village of **East Hoathly**, East Sussex, postcode **BN8 6DR**, w3w:wealth.pace.found. There is plenty of roadside parking in the village. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Leg 1: East Hoathly to Whitesmith 4¼ km=2½ miles

East Hoathly isn't east of anywhere (certainly not of West Hoathly which has no connection whatsoever). Its Anglosaxon name was "Aist Hoadlye" and in the Domesday Book it's "Estothingham". It used to lie on the A22 Eastbourne Road till the bypass was built, giving the village its serene idyllic feel. East Hoathly is known for some larger-than-life personages who lived in the village: the Pelhams, the Sussex Cannibal (a royalist assassin) and the most famous diarist whom you might not have heard of.

The Pelham family dominated the triangle of Halland (living at Halland Place), East Hoathly and Laughton (see later). When one of the Pelhams' old servants fell into poverty, the parishes of East Hoathly and Laughton went to law to decide which would have to pay for his relief. The poor man had spent most of his life at Halland Place but a survey showed that his bed stood over the parish boundary. The judge therefore decided that East Hoathly should pay because his head had lain in East Hoathly when he was asleep.

Poor relief even extended to the clergy. A certain village parson was a renowned scruff: his shirt was always hanging out and his breeches were in tatters. A bountiful lady of the village was so offended by his sartorial style that she bequeathed him one pair of breeches a year. She also presented the church with an area of glebe (a "church furlong") and woodland. The income from the woodland was to be used to buy a new pair of breeches for the parish parson. The site is still known as Breeches Wood.

Colonel Sir Thomas Lunsford (≈1611-1656) was rumoured to dine on children and carry their limbs in his pocket for snacks. This was probably designed to scare children away from revealing the location of smuggler's caches. But he did have a reputation in battle. He was a Royalist colonel and Cavalier in the Civil War. In 1632 he was charged with poaching deer in the estate of Sir Thomas Pelham. He tried to kill Sir Thomas at the church. (The trail of the bullet can still be seen on the stonework near the west door.) He was sent to Newgate prison, escaped, fled to the continent and joined the French army, was pardoned by Charles I, became Lord Lieutenant of the Tower of London, and eventually emigrated to Virginia.

The diarist Thomas Turner (1729-1789) lived in a house in East Hoathly and the lady organist still lives in it. His diary, written from 1754 to 1765, is extremely intimate and reveals much about village life in the 1700s. He had problems with the bottle, often ate too much and reveals a lot, not always blissful, of his married life with Peggy Slater. He says little about his second marriage, to Molly Hicks, apart from revealing that she was rather dull! He was a shopkeeper (mercier, grocer, draper, haberdasher, hatter, clothier, druggist, ironmonger, stationer, glover), undertaker, churchwarden, Overseer of the Poor, schoolmaster, cricketer, surveyor, scholar, tax advisor and legal advisor. Snippets from his diary are at the end of this guide.

- 1** **See the mini-map overleaf.** East Hoathly has a pub dating from 1648 (and a micro brewery also called "1648"), Muffins Coffee Shop (which does lunches and doubles as a boutique) and a Village Store (closed Sat pm and Sun). Clara's Bookshop, when open, has a wealth of info about the village. **Start:** Along from the King's Head, next to the Village Hair Shop, walk down the narrow passage Cider House Walk, passing several cottages. At the end, turn **left** on a gravel drive which soon changes to tarmac and passes more houses, becoming a wide dirt path. You are on part of the Wealdway (WW), a long-distance national trail running from Gravesend on the Thames Estuary to the coast near Eastbourne. You pass through two wooden barriers either side of a

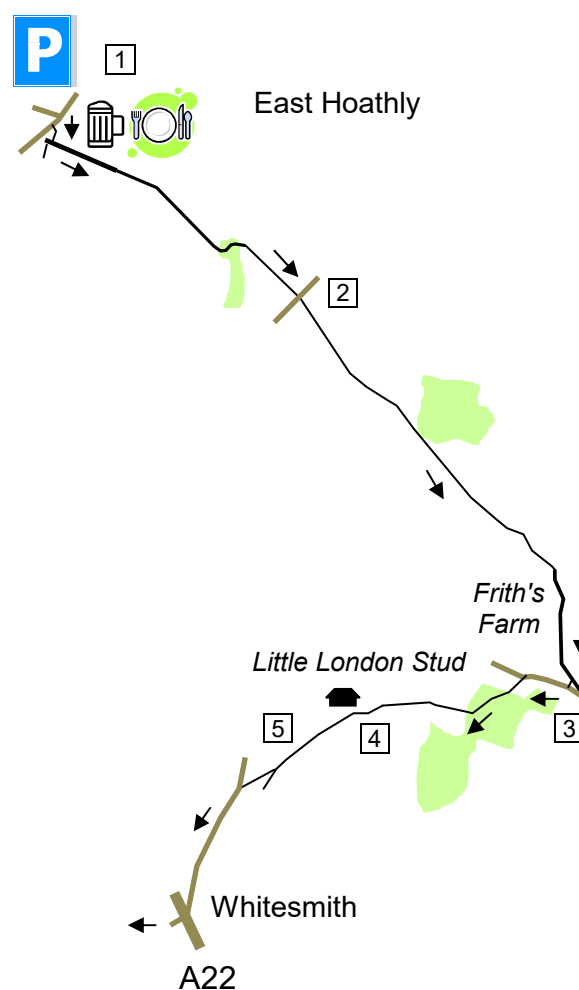
driveway and through an opening beside a metal gate. Your path runs beside a large meadow, now serving as a horse exercise track. At the end, a wooden swing-gate takes you **left** into woodland. The path soon veers right through a small wooden gate into a pasture. Keep ahead along the left-hand side of one meadow, then another. Finally, you come through a small wooden gate to a lane.

2 Cross the lane, a fraction right onto a footpath through a small metal gate. Proceed straight across the centre of a large sheep pasture on a well-defined path. At the other side, go through a metal gate and a straight ahead along the right-hand side of the next pasture. **The author passed some quiet beef cattle along the way.** Continue through a large (open) gate into the next pasture and continue along the right-hand side. At the far end, go through a large metal gate and along a narrow strip of grass. Continue on a concrete track, passing stables and the house of Frith's Farm. At a fingerpost, ignore a junction on the left and stay on the WW as it curves right between duckponds. Continue until you meet a tarmac lane.

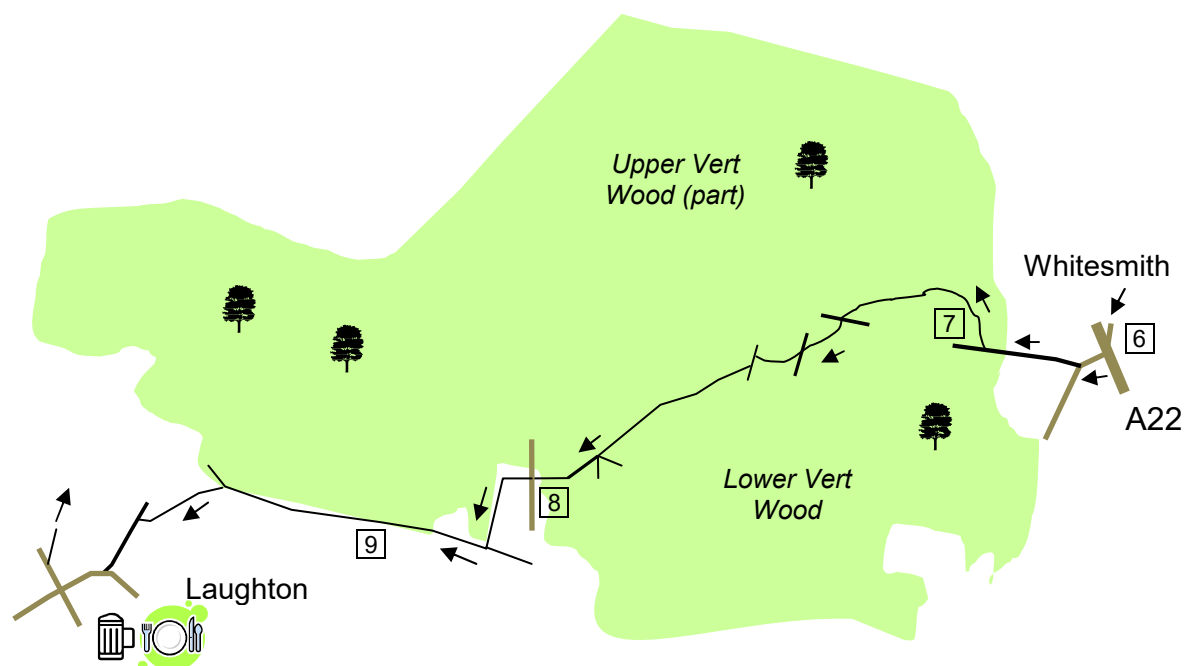
3 Turn sharp **right** on the lane, using a short cut across the grass, thus leaving the WW. Just after a cottage (Coopers?) with a manicured hedge, go **left** through a large wooden gate on a footpath. Keep left in this small meadow, exiting through a large metal gate. You are on a wide path through a sombre plantation of young oaks. The path leads you between wooden fences through a donkey paddock. Go over a stile, along the right-hand edge, exiting over another stile into a large sheep pasture. Your route is diagonally **left**, cutting the left-hand corner of the pasture, to a stile almost half-way along the long side.

4 You are now in the grounds of the Little London Stud, a relatively recent establishment. The spanking new stables house is over to your right. The grounds have recently been subdivided and the footpath legally diverted. The path is marked by yellow paint on fence posts. The gap between the posts is narrow and the fences have electric wiring but it is not operational. At the far side you meet a brook. Turn **right**. You reach a fingerpost which points you **left**.

5 Go through a wooden crush followed by a metal gate (the heavy rusty chains can both be opened and re-closed – this gate is obviously very little used). Another large metal gate leads you along a wide grass strip between fences. Shortly, at the start of the next field, go **right** over a stile, diagonally across a small pasture and over a stile (**careful! wobbly**) to a tarmac lane, Whitesmith Lane. Turn **left** along the lane. You pass several houses. *A field over to your left became famous when the owner planted a maze of willow trees which spell out a Christian message, visible on Google Earth.* Ignore two footpaths on your right, all the way to the main A22 road in the hamlet of Whitesmith.



Leg 2: Whitesmith to Laughton 3¼ km=2 miles



- 6 Cross the A22 road carefully and take Broomham Lane on the other side. In 50m, fork **right** on a narrow and very quiet lane. After a wide bungalow, the lane becomes gravel. 50m later, a very straight byway leads ahead across the forest. Do *not* take this byway but instead turn **right** beside a shed. (The Council sign shows the byway closed, to keep out motorbikes, but the path used in this guide is infinitely more attractive anyway.)
- 7 Keep to the right next to a fence across an untidy area, ignoring side paths, passing an upright post, through a pinewood. This clear woodland path curves left and, in about 150m, goes between vertical posts into mixed woodland. Continue on the woodland path for about 250m where the path curves left to meet a 4-way fingerpost on the wide straight byway you saw earlier. Go straight over on the narrower winding woodland path of Lower Vert Wood. In 130m your path crosses over another wide woodland track. In 150m you reach a T-junction by a marker post: turn **left** as indicated. In 25m, at a fork, take the signed **right** fork (*don't miss this turn!*). After nearly ½ km through the woods, you finally emerge between grounded tree trunks to a junction of paths. Turn **right** on a wide track heading for a large iron gate (an entrance to the sawmill). Keep right at the side of the gate on a narrow woodland path that runs just outside the perimeter fence of the timberyard, leading out to a tarmac lane.
- 8 Cross the lane to go over a stile on a path between a hedge and a fence, with open pastures on your left. In 80m, your path turns **left** through a small wooden gate and runs along the far side of the pasture. It crosses a drive via two more small wooden gates. In another 70m you come through another small wooden gate at a junction of paths. Ignore the path on your left and instead go up a bank ahead and turn **right** on a path between a fence and a hedge with a large house and garden on your right. A small wooden gate leads over a bridge with a pond on your left in an especially captivating spot.

- 9 You pass more properties and a barn on your left, after which a small wooden gate marks the start of a narrow grassy strip, passing a bench seat. Continue for 400m near the edge of woodland past two meadows on your left. As your path enters trees you meet a small 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left** here over a stile into a grassy meadow. Walk the length of the meadow to the far right-hand corner. Go **right** over a stile here, or through a large metal gate, and turn **left** on a gravel track, graduating to tarmac and coming out to a road in the village of Laughton. *The PO / village store at the corner is closed on Sat pm and Sun.* On your right is the *Roebuck Inn*, a local curiosity and an ideal lunchtime stop, drawing custom from all around.



The name "Laughton", pronounced "Lawton", seems to come from the leeks that were grown here. There is much more to Laughton than you see on this walk. The church is half a mile down the lane, and this often indicates that the village centre shifted as a result of the Black Death in the 1300s. But the village goes back to centuries before the Normans. The doughty and rebellious Earl Godwin was lord of the village and his refusal to recognise William of Normandy's claim to the throne, in favour of his own son Harold, was portentous, as we know. Later owners were the Aquila family who founded Michelham Priory (see the "Arlington" walk in this series) and the Pelhams who dominated this area for centuries and are buried in the church. Sir John captured the King of France (Jean II) at the Battle of Poitiers (1356) and as a result was granted Jean's belt buckle as a badge of honour, a symbol which appears in the heraldry in several churches in the area. Laughton Place, a remarkable moated tower-house a mile and a half away, was built by the Pelhams using the local bricks which were the village's source of income. You can stay there for a peaceful (and rather lonely) vacation.

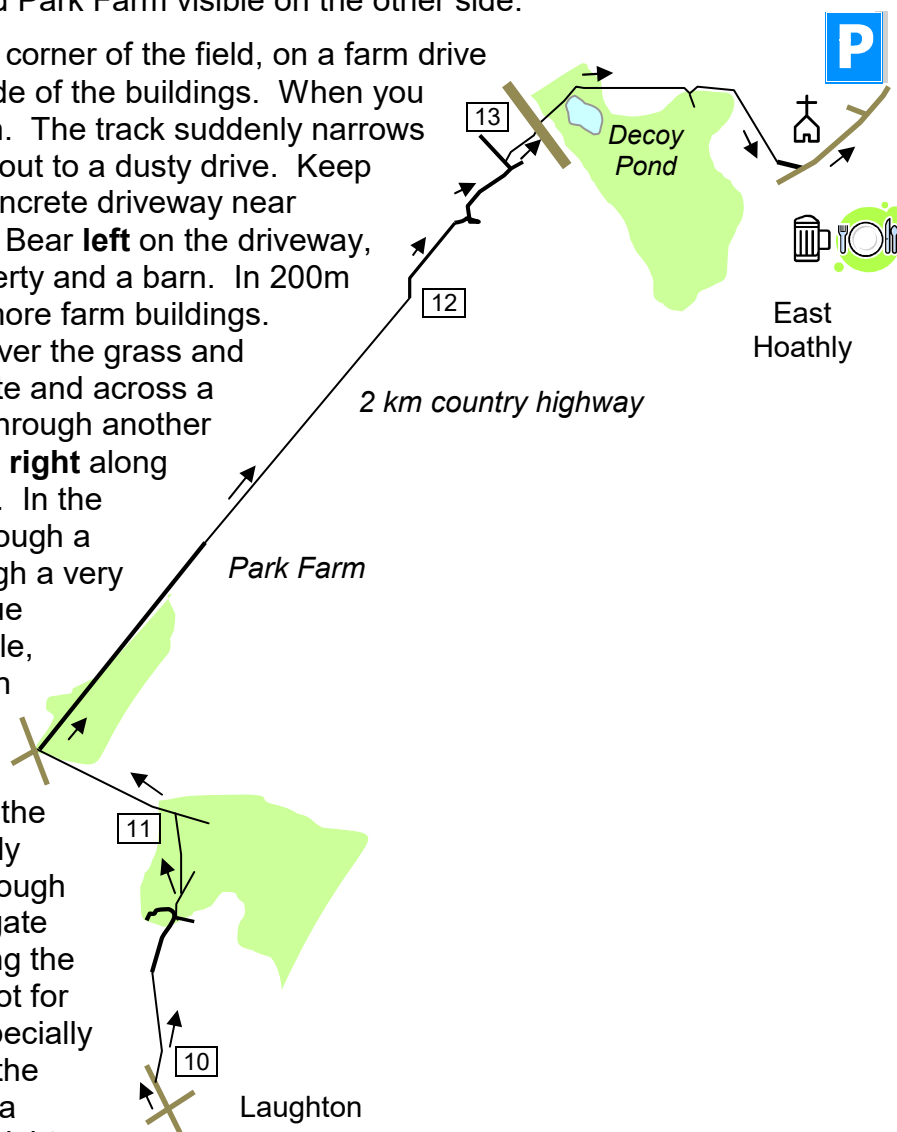
Leg 3: Laughton to East Hoathly 5½ km=3½ miles

- 10 After your break, continue a short distance past the pub and turn **right** on a side road in the direction *Shortgate, Halland*. In 50m, just before a 30 mph sign, fork **right** at a fingerpost on a bridleway into woodland. As your path runs past a house and garden, ignore a signed path on the left. The wide grassy path becomes gravel and passes on your left what seems like a car breakers yard. Ignore another footpath on your left as you pass a pond and continue to a junction of tracks where the tarmac curves left round the pond, by a bench seat. Leave the tarmac here by keeping straight on past a little triangular patch, full of daffodils in spring. Turn **right** on a wide dirt track but, **almost immediately**, go **left** at a 3-way fingerpost [Jul 2024: gone?] through a wooden fence onto a path through the wood. After 80m, your wide path reaches a deceptive fork with two narrower paths ahead. The right fork seems correct as it is fairly wide and straight. However, your path is the **left** fork, a narrower, winding path, indicated by a low wooden fingerpost. In 250m the winding path arrives at a T-junction with a wide byway.
- 11 Turn **left** on the byway. (Alternatively, there is a footpath straight ahead which cuts across the next big field diagonally **left** and re-joins the route, avoiding some of the concrete.) Soon the byway runs along an avenue of trees between open fields and, after nearly ½ km in total, you reach a junction with a tarmac lane. Do not join the lane but immediately turn sharp **right** on a long straight concrete track signed *PARK FARM*. This remarkably straight highway will provide an easy trail almost all the way to East Hoathly, a memorable contrast to the meanderings of the earlier part of the walk. Soon you pass farm buildings on your left and, after 600m, a track on your

right. In another 200m, you enter an avenue of birches and you pass tennis courts and, via a weeping willow avenue, Park Farm House. Soon the driveway changes to grass, following a line of electricity wires. After nearly 2 km in total on this rural highway you finally come out to a hayfield with the buildings of Halland Park Farm visible on the other side.

- 12** Go **left** and **right** round the corner of the field, on a farm drive heading for the left-hand side of the buildings. When you pass them, keep straight on. The track suddenly narrows through shrubs and comes out to a dusty drive. Keep straight ahead to meet a concrete driveway near Halland Park Farm House. Bear **left** on the driveway, passing another large property and a barn. In 200m you reach a junction near more farm buildings. Keep straight ahead here over the grass and through a small wooden gate and across a pleasant little garden. Go through another little wooden gate and keep **right** along the edge of the grassy field. In the corner, keep straight on through a thicket of thistles and through a very wide wooden gate. Continue through trees and over a stile, then down steps to the main A22 road.

- 13** Cross the main road, patiently waiting for a lull in the traffic, to a fingerpost directly opposite. Follow a path through woods, through a wooden gate with an unusual bolt, passing the Decoy Pond, a favourite spot for anglers with a number of specially constructed "swims" round the banks. Go over a stile into a sloping meadow. Keep straight ahead up the slope, soon aiming for a stile you can see in the fence ahead. After the stile, your path passes between allotments. Go ahead into trees by a fingerpost, re-joining the Wealdway as the sign indicates. Keep left out into a field and follow a path along the right-hand side. At the other side, keep ahead into a holly wood and follow the woodland path, finally leading out into East Hoathly churchyard. Pass the church on your left, exiting through the lichgate and keeping left on the main road, quickly arriving back in the centre of the village where the walk began.



For final refreshments, the Kings Head has a garden, a good collection of ales and food of the comfort type.

Getting there

By car: East Hoathly is signposted from the A22, 15 miles from Eastbourne. After passing Uckfield, you come through Halland and a small roundabout. At the next larger roundabout, keep **left** for East Hoathly.

By bus/train: bus 54 from Uckfield station, not Sunday. Check the timetables.

Snippets from Thomas Turner's diary (modern spelling):

17 July 1756. "In the morn after breakfast went down to Mr. French's to get him to bring me from Lewes half oz. cauliflower seed, and when I came there, I found Mr. French, his servants, and Tho. Fuller a-catching of rats; so I stayed and assisted them about 3 hours, and we caught near 20."

23 July 1756. "In the morn Mr. French and the keeper drew the pond before our door and made us a present of a brace of carp. Afterwards we went down to the church to take Peter Adams's bond out of the chest in the church to ask Mr. Poole's advice on it. We went into Jones's and spent 5d. apiece. Dined on a piece of pork and peas with a baked beggar's pudding."

25 July 1756. "This day I had a sailor at the door who asked charity (and whom I relieved), who could speak 7 tongues."

7th Aug 1756. "This being a public day at Halland, I spent about two or three hours there in the afternoon, in company ... of people of all denominations, from a duke to a beggar. ... What a small pleasure it is to be in such a concourse of people! - one hour spent in solitude being, in my opinion, worth more than a whole day in such a tumult ... Oh! how silly is mankind, to delight so much in vanity and transitory joys!"

12th Sep 1756. "... After breakfast Mr. Burges and I went down again to talk with Osborne's servant about her being big with child, but she would give us no satisfactory answer."

26th Jan 1757. "... came home between twelve and one o'clock ... the worst for drinking, having, I believe, contracted a slight impediment in my speech, occasioned by the fumes of the liquor operating too furiously on my brain."

22nd Feb 1757. "After ten we went to supper, on four boiled chicken, four boiled ducks, minced veal, sausages, cold roast goose, chicken pasty, and ham. ... After supper our behaviour was far from that of serious, harmless mirth; it was downright obstreperous, mixed with a great deal of folly and stupidity. Our diversion was dancing or jumping about, without a violin or any music, singing of foolish healths, and drinking all the time as fast as it could be well poured down."

17th Jan 1761. "Oh, my poor wife is most prodigious bad! No, not one gleam of hope have I of her recovery. Oh, how does the thought distract my tumultuous soul! What shall I do? - what will become of me!" [She died on 23rd June.]

1st Jun 1764. "In the even, Mr. Banister and myself smoked a pipe or two with Tho. Durrant, purely to keep Mr. Banister from quarrelling; his wife, big with child, lame of one hand, and very much in liquor, being out in the middle of the street, amongst a parcel of girls, boys, & etc. Oh, an odious sight, and that more so to an husband!"

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