

Rudgwick Walks 5

Walking the Ridgeway

The King's Head to Bury St Austen's and Hermongers.

Access Park at The King's Head, at the top end of Church St, Rudgwick (on B2128, half mile from A281). Pub info @ 01403 822200.

Length and suitability 4½ miles (7½ km), about 2 hours 15 mins.

Very few stiles and they are suitable for dogs. At first, on pavement in Church Street, it also takes in the Sussex Border Path from which can be seen Leith Hill and the Surrey Hills. The ridge-top also provides views of the South Downs and Chanctonbury Ring. The route passes through broad leaf woodland with bluebells, primroses, and wood anemones in flower in Springtime, followed later by orchids and other rare flora, and assorted fungi in Autumn,. It crosses open fields where many butterflies, insects and birds including skylarks and barn owls can be seen. There are many pheasants and rabbits. Much of the walk is along well-surfaced roads and tracks but footpaths and bridleways may be muddy in places.

1. The walk starts from the car park of the **Kings Head** pub, Church Street. Begin the walk by turning right out of the car park, walking down **Church Hill**.

First, take in the historic ridge-top scene, which is 85m (280 ft) above sea level. This area is a designated **Conservation Area**.

The King's Head is an C18th building (1733), becoming an inn by the time the Prince Regent is believed to have stayed here on his frequent visits to Brighton. Its cellar was used to store the "standings, boards and fair stuff" for the village fair held at the feast of the Holy Trinity (Sunday after Whitsun). Behind the pub is the lovely Norman **Holy Trinity Church**. See page 40 for more detail.

For information on the houses north of the pub, see Walk 6, page 42. Church Hill is the aptly named slope of the ridge. Rudgwick is 'the dairy farm on the ridge'. Saxon farmers must have penetrated the Wealden forest from the River Arun.

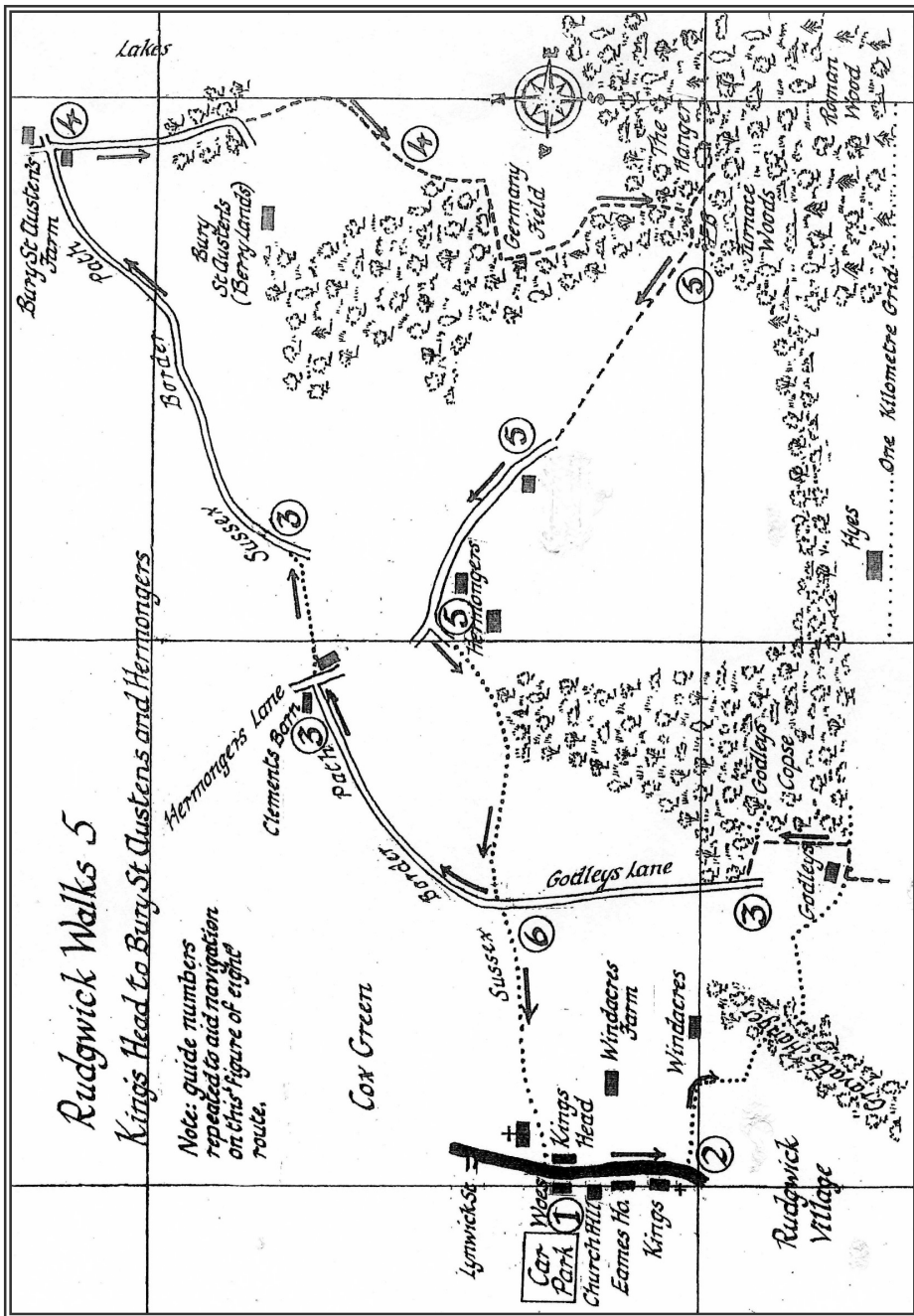
Downhill from the C17th **Old Parsonage** (Parsonage Farm), next to the church, was the glebe land providing the rector with an income up to the 1840s, and not built on until the mid C20th. Old photos show a stone path in the grass on the left of the road; a number of stones remain in the grass (see back cover).

However, the right hand side is the attractive row of ancient houses and cottages, mostly C16th, that form the core of a **Conservation Area** with about 20 historic buildings.

Rudgwick Walks 5

Kings Head to Bury St Austens and Hemmings

Note: guide numbers repeated to aid navigation on this figure of eight route.



The first on the right is **Church Hill**, a large Victorian house. Built for Dr Boxall in the 1890s, it continued to be a surgery and home for Dr Kelsey until the 1950s. Next, at the bottom of the hill is the small **Jubilee Hall**, at 69m above sea level, it is 16m lower than the church. Mr Braby of Maybanks (Cox Green) donated the hall to the village – see the discreet plaque dated 1868 hidden on the right hand wall. For a time it was a classroom for the village school, until one was built at Bucks Green in 1880.

Eames House, originally built in 1520 as an open-hall house, and the only Horsham stone roofed house in Church Street, is attached to its neighbour, a butcher's shop until about 1980 (owned at one time by the eponymous Mr Billy Butcher!).

A little further on is the Georgian frontage of **Kings**, possibly hiding an older house. Kings was also of medical note, because a large building, out of sight behind it, was a tuberculosis sanatorium, taking patients from all over the country, and in the charge of Dr Annie McCall, born in Manchester 1859. One of the first 50 female doctors, she lived at Kings where she died in 1949. Better known in London as a pioneering midwifery specialist she founded women's hospitals in Clapham and Battersea.

Several properties such as Kings and Eames on this side of the road had long plots down to the woodland. Most had wells close to or even inside the houses.

The little **chapel** was originally a Congregational Chapel, erected in the C19th, and still very much part of Rudgwick's religious life today. It was built on land from the garden of **The Cottage** (C17th) next door. Further down the street, the Conservation Area continues, including more of this row of historic houses, as far as The Plough. For further reference, see Diana Chatwin's book, listed on page 58.

1. At **Rudgwick Chapel**, cross the road. Take the footpath opposite along the right hand side of the drive to **Windacres**, keeping inside the fence.

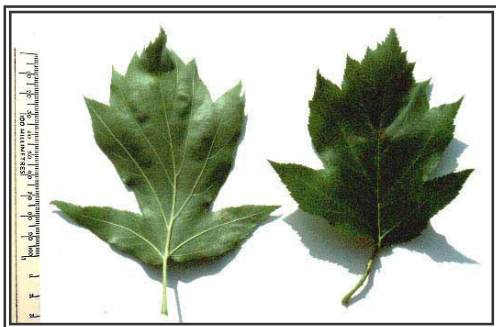
Windacres is the house on the left before reaching the hanger. Built in the early C20th as a gentleman's residence, it is close to the village yet very much in the countryside. However, an area to the north of this quiet location is proposed for housing and light industry in Horsham District Council's Local Development Framework.

Still behind a fence, turn right alongside a paddock and follow the well-used path left and downhill and over a small bridge in **Gravatt's Hanger**, then ahead and upslope though trees fenced off from a field. Bear right approaching the garden and left after crossing a stile into a field keeping alongside the garden hedge of **Godley's**. Continue to a gap in the hedge by an oak tree to the ancient green lane, now bridleway, known as **Bowcroft Lane**. Turn left into Bowcroft Lane. Continue ahead, skirting Godley's, still to your left, and **Godley's Copse** to your right. When you meet a woodland path crossing your route, turn left. In a few paces join the surfaced lane from the house.

Gravatt's Hanger is woodland on the slopes of one of two steep sided valleys (locally called gills) that confine Rudgwick village to its linear shape (the other is Greathouse Hanger). In Gravatt's Hanger there may have been a stone slab bridge, part of an old trackway (i.e. the path you are following) from Rudgwick to Rowhook and Horsham, joining **Bowcroft Lane**. This route became redundant when the new turnpike road (now A281) was built after the Guildford-Horsham Turnpike Act 1809.

Back in the early 1920s, stone slabs, such as might have made a bridge, were unearthed nearby. Made into long and heavy stone seats these were erected and given to the village by the late Mr Secretan of Swains. One of these seats, placed next to this path by the hedge at Godley's, has unfortunately, recently been moved to the far end of the field near **Gravatt's Barn**, the group of buildings to your right. In its proper place it was good to sit enjoying the clear view of Chanctonbury Ring to the south, and was used by many a passer by. A second is by another nearby footpath.

Diversion: At the woodland path, north of Godley's, before turning left, go a few yards to the right. Find a 150 year old Wild Service tree. Located a short way along the path on the left before the stile is a mature tree with strongly marked bark, maple-like leaves and brown Autumn berries. Return to the road.



Rare **Wild Service** trees (*sorbus terminalis*) only grow in ancient woodland on heavy soils and are long lived, reproducing from suckers that may have a lineage of 1000 years. They have sweet brown berries in September which were taken medicinally for upset stomach, and also to flavour a beer, called 'chequers', and an alternative name for the tree, possibly from the pattern made when the grey-brown flaky bark is stripped (and the name of the pub in Rowhook). They have rich autumn colours in large leaves that resemble field maple (see left), and yellow wood prized in turning and cabinetwork.

This specimen is on the edge of **Godley's Copse**, one of a number of recognised ancient woodland Sites of Nature Conservation Importance in Rudgwick. Behind the tree can be seen a stand of sweet chestnuts, which has been planted at a more recent date.

2. Turn right onto the hedged **Godley's Lane**, following it for over half a mile (1 km). The lane gradually bends to the right. Half way along, the **Sussex Border Path** joins from the left. At the road junction by a barn, cross **Hermongers Lane**, into a shrubbery to the left of a white house, **The Lodge**. Continue to follow the Sussex Border

Path. Cross a stile, rest a while by sitting on the bench, and continue ahead, at first along the edge of a field. Then go through a gap onto a concrete farm road, where you keep left, but still continue ahead on the Border Path to **Bury St Austen's Farm**, half a mile from Hermongers Lane.

Your route on **Godley's Lane** (laid 1874 by the Crichton's of Hermongers) follows the existing hedgerow – note the mature oaks. After the sweet chestnuts you pass a hornbeam copse. The road mostly crosses fields with views to Highcroft and Cox Green. Where a path crosses the lane, you join the Sussex Border Path (SBP). In 1989, with the increasing popularity of long-distance paths, the five adjacent county councils created the beautiful and varied SBP from Emsworth to Rye, including Rudgwick's five mile county boundary (using signs with the 'Sussex martlet' bird).

At **Hermongers Lane** there is a new, but traditionally constructed, barn on the left (Surrey side), with an attractive duck pond, on the site of an older building, known as **Clement's Barn**. The ridge you are now on stretches all the way from Loxwood and Alfold via Rudgwick, Okewood Hill, and Rusper, to Ifield and Charlwood. Resistant strata in the Weald Clay influenced its elevation; it lies at about 80-90 m above sea level. Across the Rudgwick section, it forms the watershed between the Thames Basin (the Wey) and the English Channel (the Arun). It has been the county boundary from Saxon times, and for over 1000 years been a relatively dry east-west trackway as well.

The views from near **The Lodge** (built for the Hermongers estate), at 83 m asl, are over breathtaking Surrey countryside taking in Ellens Green and the distant Surrey Hills: from the left, Pitch Hill, 257 m stands above Ewhurst, then Holmbury Hill, 261 m, and on the right Leith Hill, the highest hill in the South East at 294 m. The smoking chimney is Smokejack Brickworks near Wallis Wood. As you cross the field there are also views, right, to the South Downs.

3. With the farm in front of you, turn right, passing the farmhouse, on a tarmac drive to Bury St Austen's house. Continue ahead on the drive passing pretty lakes in trees to the left. At the top of a small rise leave the drive by a street light and old water trough. Go ahead through a gate, around the edge of the field with mature oaks dotted about (former woodland) – with views of **Bury St Austen's** to the right. Enter woodland, known as **Germany Field**. Follow the twists of the path (it can be muddy). After ¼ mile veer right when you are close to the woodland edge. On descending into a hanger turn left to walk parallel to the stream below. When the path goes steeply down a sunken section, you come to the lowest point, at the junction of two streams. Turn right to cross the stream.

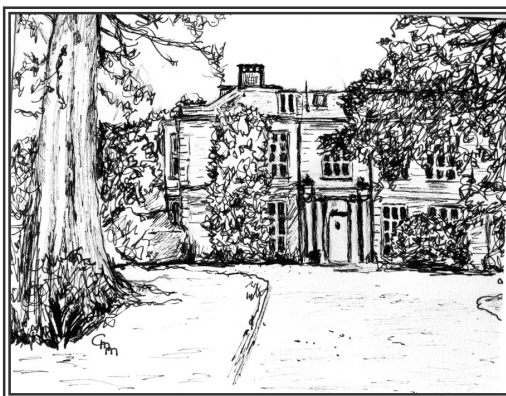
Bury St Austen's was once Berry Lands, or sometimes Berry House, or Bury Farm, and was historically part of the manor of Dedisham. The farm you pass is recent, the location originally being at the large house. The business had been enlarged to include neighbouring Ridge Farm as Bury St Austen's Farms Ltd, though the large dairy herd has recently been sold. Other changes are under way, with the main house sold separately.

The woodland at **Germany Fields** is part of extensive woodland, even larger on late C19th maps, which adjoins Furnace Woods and Roman Woods, where the timber and lakes were resources for the iron industry at Furnace House. The works used to control the flow into the pond downstream which provided the power for the bellows for the furnace began at the path where it crosses the stream, as is seen by the remains of brickwork here. The iron industry was at its peak in the C16th, but totally dependent on rainfall storage.

At the lowest point in the walk there was an important meeting of roads. East over the hill to Rowhook, north the way you have just come, west your route to Hermongers Lane, south to long gone Pondtail Cottage, where the controller of the water flow may have lived, then west to Hyes and Rudgwick. Thus travellers on the old pre-turnpike road from Bowcroft Lane to Rowhook and Horsham referred to above came this way skirting around the top of the furnace ponds. It is difficult to imagine this place as a busy hive of industry, or how the horses ever got up the hill to Rowhook!

Crossing a large field to Hermongers, imagine it divided in two, woodland on your right. West of **Hermongers Barn** and **Little Coopers**, on the slope below Hermongers House, there was formerly a small farm called **Oldlands**. Demolished in the C19th, barns on the site of these two houses were then renamed Oldlands.

4. Leave the wood and cross a large field, uphill, to join **Hermongers Lane** at **Hermongers Barn**. You pass the deer fencing you saw earlier on the right, then **The Old Farm Farmhouse**. Continue ahead on the road through the farmyard, but soon turn left where the roads fork (but not into the drive to **Hermongers House**, pictured right). The sign by the footpath saying 'no bridleway' means 'no horse riders'!



Go ahead, passing the walled garden, the cold frames and potting shed, and the stables, to join an embanked track into Street Copse

(the top end of Hermongers Hanger where there is a pond). Go over the stream, the path leading straight ahead across a large field back to a stile into Godley's Lane.

Hermongers itself has an interesting name, for which I do not have an explanation.

The Hermongers estate had been built up by the Michell family (related to the Michells of Warnham and Horsham) after Edward, previously tenant, purchased it in 1669, adding Oldlands, Godley's, and Lemons in Ewhurst to his holdings. The Michells sold Hermongers in 1811. **The Old Farmhouse** had been built about 1550, and was an open hall ('undershot', which means that it had a floor over part of it) until the Michells installed a brick stack (seen at the back) and a new chamber in 1694 ('IM', standing for 'John Michell' is engraved in three places). His fascinating inventory at probate is in Chatwin, pp130-2 (see page 58 below).

The Old Farmhouse now plays second fiddle to **Hermongers House**, built above and behind it. In the mid C20th, then known as Rudgwick House, it was complete with a park stretching south towards Hyes.

The wealthy Crichton family, who lived here from the 1870s, erected the solid-looking light sandstone and slate-roofed mansion. Robert, James, and Anne were unmarried brothers and sister in their sixties, born in Perthshire Scotland. They moved on to Caterham in 1889.

The Teshmaker Busk's then acquired it, an unlucky family as father died in his 40s and two of their four children, Edward and Hans, were killed during the 1st World War. This family was of Scandinavian origin, coming to England in the C18th, and were lawyers from Middlesex. Edward was a celebrated aeronautical engineer who, after attaining First Class Honours in Mechanical Sciences at Cambridge, became an Assistant Engineer at the Royal Aircraft Factory, Farnborough. Here he devoted much of his time to the mathematics and dynamics of stable flight.

Tragically, he was killed on 5 November 1914 while flying his own stable aeroplane, which burst into a sheet of flames and came down at Laffans Plain near Aldershot, where he was buried in the Military Cemetery with full military honours. His genius, from which has resulted much of the stability of aeroplanes, together with his courage, was recognised by the posthumous award of the Gold Medal of the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain (the fifth ever awarded, two of the others being the Wright Brothers). Amongst the many letters of condolence received by his mother was one from King George V.

His younger brother Hans was killed bombing the Turks at Gallipoli in 1916 two years later.

Today, with the development of a number of properties along the lane, Hermongers is almost a hamlet in its own right, demonstrating the appeal of living in the heart of the countryside – providing you have a car! Curiously, this part of Rudgwick is only accessible from Surrey.

5. At Godley's Lane, cross over and go ahead over a stile to the ridge-top path

leading to **Highcroft Cottage**, on the village fringe. Pass close to the cottage and through the front drive, then almost immediately right through a kissing gate, across a small meadow into the **churchyard** via another kissing gate (one more muddy stretch here). The main path through the churchyard runs between the back of the **King's Head** public house and the former **Humphries Stores** (The Old Bakehou

The path from Godley's Lane to the church is part of the Sussex Border Path, and it is also the route from Hermongers to walk to church, so it was once paved with stone, some of which may be seen. You are now on the ridge again, with views to the South Downs, and nearby Cox Green. You are also crossing the showground for the Rudwick Steam Show, held here every August Bank Holiday.

Highcroft Lane (left after **Highcroft Cottage**) is a private road, not a right of way. The final small field, rather overgrown, has some superb ancient oaks part of a lost hedgerow on church land. They are however in danger of losing branches or even splitting as they age. The **churchyard** has some interesting trees too, especially a number of yews, traditionally associated with Christianity.

One grave seen immediately on entering the churchyard is that of the Busk family. This churchyard is Rudwick's history in stone, where generations of families lie at rest. Some of the old gravestones are laid into a path that crosses your line of walk and still carry their legend for all to read. Some upright stones are now beyond reading as weathering takes its toll. Most are of local Horsham stone, as is the roof of the church. Spare time to examine the walls of the tower to count and identify the many local stones (and Roman tiles too) used in its construction. You may wish to go inside, where there is a cool and peaceful atmosphere to think awhile, and to admire the carved Sussex marble font, which may be older than the church building itself. Buy the RPS publication '*The Geology of Rudwick Church*' here for £2.50.

The squat Norman pyramid tower of **The Holy Trinity Church** is early C13th, and is without doubt the most elevated, and probably the oldest structure in the Parish. It is believed that Alard *le Fleming*, lord of the manor of Pulborough, held Hope (by the Arun) to which the land for the church belonged, and was instrumental in its building. He was also granted the right to hold Rudwick Fair (page 33). An earlier nave and chancel were rebuilt in the C14th, with a series of interesting windows contemporary with rebuilding. The interior of the tower has been sympathetically modernised, and the bells ring out every week, whilst the exterior is illuminated at night. There are numerous places around the village where the tower peeps over the trees when you least expect it, The view south over the garden of **The Old Parsonage** is one that inspired the builders of this church 850 years ago. One cannot but wonder whether this had been a religious site even before that.

The King's Head lacks a rear garden because it was built on roadside waste backing onto the well-kept churchyard. Although not in the centre of the parish, this assemblage of buildings has long been the focal point of village life, though less so today without the shops, post office, and surgery (see page 41 for sketch).