

# Rudgwick Walks 7

## “Fair Havens” on the Billingshurst Border

### The Blue Ship to Okehurst, Bignor, Hope, Gibbons, and Garlands

Access    *Parking in the lay-by beyond the junction near the pub.  
Alternatively, park on the verge of Okehurst Road (3), near Okehurst, when dry,  
and start the walk from there. Pub info @ 01303 822709.*

Length and suitability    *4¼ miles (7km), 2 hours 15 mins.  
No major roads to cross. On quiet roads in several parts, and on footpaths  
through woods and fields. Except near the Arun, a fairly level walk.*



1. From the **Blue Ship** (pictured left), take **Okehurst Road** (signposted ‘Okehurst 2’), the middle of the three roads that meet at the pub. On passing the entrance to Ranvers House and entering woodland, fork left onto **Marles Lane** (no through road sign). Go ahead on the tarmac road, which soon becomes a gravel track/bridleway, and then two concrete strips, through **Lannards Copse**.

In **Lannards Copse** (an ancient name referred to as Lanars in 1543), **Casita** (or Half Penny Cottage) is in a modern vernacular style that is currently popular in Sussex. Tilhill, a large UK forestry company has recently harvested timber here. Opposite (on your left) there used to be Marshall’s brick kiln and yard, active in the late C19<sup>th</sup>. The woods have many shallow pits. The public road ends here. A little further on your right there was until c1900 a cottage originally **Marles Farm**, which gave its name to the lane, and in its turn was probably named from the digging of marl locally – hence the brick kiln. Look for the entrance in the road bank.

Across the fields behind **Muttons Pond** your map marks **Muttons Farm** but there is no building there now. As in other remote parts of Rudgwick old cottages and industry shown on C19<sup>th</sup> maps have disappeared, leaving subtle traces to search for on the ground. Spoil from the lake was made into a causeway and diverted the lane away from Muttons. Hugh Locke-King who lost his fortune building Brooklands motor racing circuit owned these farms on the border with Billingshurst.

After a right hand bend the lane slopes down to **Muttons Pond** on your left, then slightly uphill to **Keepers Cottage**, originally Leverance Farmhouse. Here you leave the lane walking to the right of Keepers Cottage, first on the gravel drive to a stile, then straight on along the side of a field.

Notice the use of sandstone, unusual in Rudgwick, in **Keepers Cottage** at **Leverance Farm**.

**Great Wood** is indeed a large wood! Today it is very mixed with a great variety of trees, some of which is plantation Scots Pine. You will notice many fallen trees in one portion, which is no doubt a legacy of the great storm of October 1987. The southern portion is **Spar Wood** and may have been historically part of the holding of **Spurland** (see below). Another portion called **Pond Wood** may be connected with Pound Farm, now just a cottage opposite Spurland.

2. Follow the hedge until it opens out to reveal other fields to the left. Go ahead, to the left of the large oak tree, through rough vegetation towards **Great Wood** on a well-defined and fairly straight path, until an unexpected scramble across a steep little gill with a footbridge over the small stream. Continue on a neglected woodland track to a stile with a broken fence. Keep straight on, cross a forestry track, taking the track ahead of you. This soon takes a turn to the left, but press on ahead on a footpath into woodland. Find an overgrown footpath sign on your left as you leave the track. After about 15 m the path veers left into a conifer plantation.

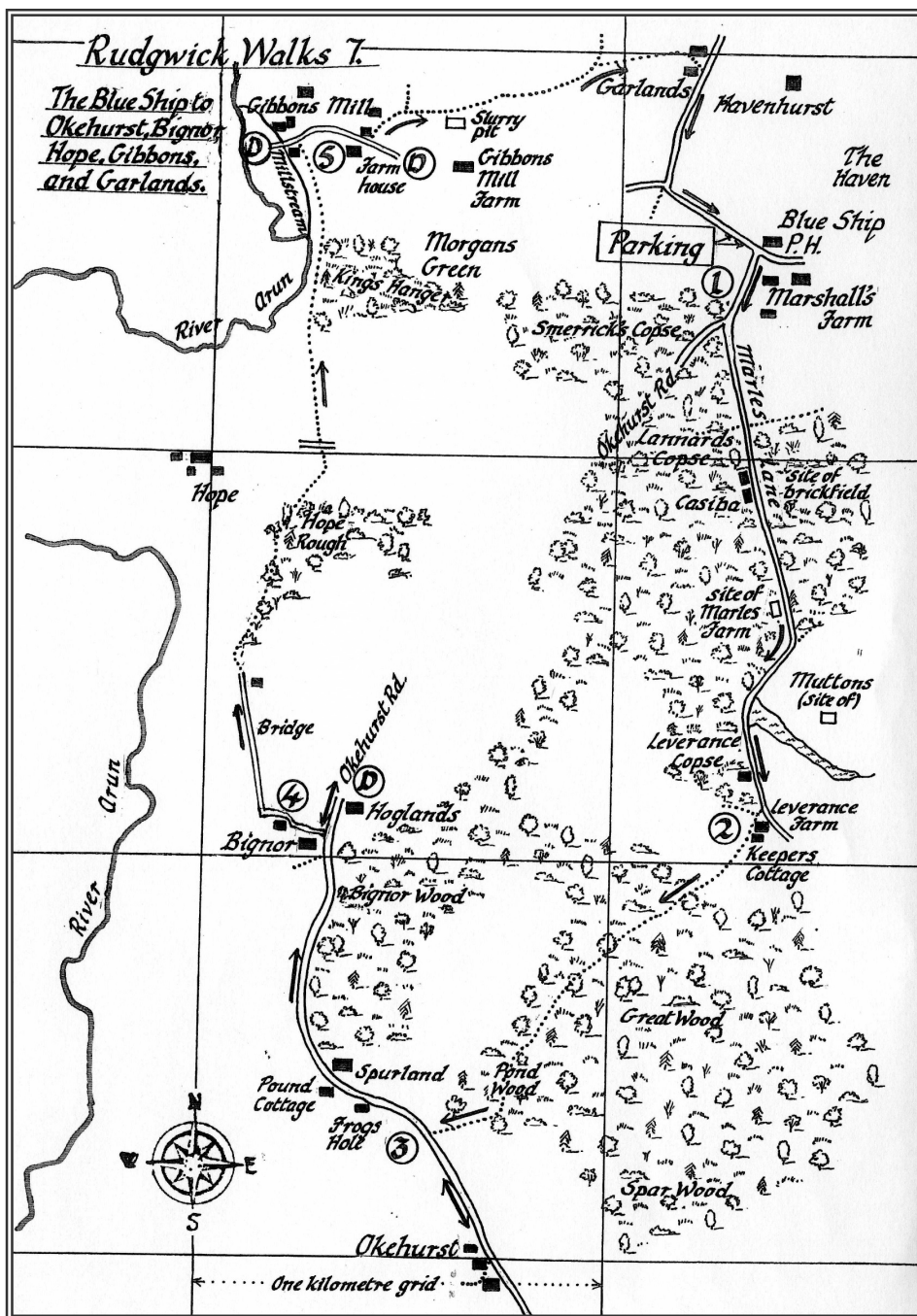
The path meanders through the plantation, and you cross two footbridges (sign at second). Now you come to a clearing where pheasants have been reared. Note a field visible to the right as the path continues across and ahead through more woods to a second clearing, and finally more woodland, after which you emerge on a proper track, with a view across a field to **Okehurst**.

Turn right on the track to stay in the wood and shortly before emerging onto **Okehurst Road** again you must veer left to a stile onto the road.

**Okehurst** in Billingshurst is an ancient property named after John and William Okehurst named in a document of 1417, and is a delightful assemblage of buildings (beyond the less interesting recent conversions). The property was an important holding of Bassetts Fee, a principal Billingshurst manor, which also held land in Rudgwick. At the front door there are carved initials EG and HG and the date 1606, a time when the manor was held by the Goring family, still a major landowner in the south of Sussex today.

# Rudgwick Walks 7.

The Blue Ship to  
Okehurst, Bignor,  
Hope, Gibbons,  
and Garlands.



**Diversion:** (strongly recommended) turn left on the lane for  $\frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$  mile to **Okehurst**, but then return the way you came (see boxes above and below for information).

**Okehurst** has a surviving example of a detached outhouse (the Clock Granary facing you from the road) from around 1530. Medieval arrangements often included a separate kitchen. It was originally two rooms on each floor, downstairs maybe for a dairy and/or cheesemaking; upstairs reached by external steps maybe for storage, and sleeping for labourers. That it survived is probably because it was turned into a cartshed and granary with lodgings, this time on the ground floor. Being a substantial building it was still of use and it is still separate from the house.

There is a Rudgwick connection with **Okehurst**. Members of the Botting family had been granted the role of javelin men to the Sheriff of Sussex at Horsham assizes, and in 1827 twelve Rudgwick Botting brothers escorted the Prince Regent to Brighton. They stopped at Okehurst on the way, an event later recorded by fixing their 12 javelins to the ceiling of the great hall of Okehurst, where they still lie today. The Bottings farmed Okehurst at the time as well as several other farms and were millers at Wanford, Brewhurst and Gibbons Mills.

3. Follow **Okehurst Road**, having turned right out of the woods (or returned from Okehurst deviation), go round a bend passing **Frogs Hole Cottage** (left) and then **Spurland** (right) and **Pound Cottage** (left).

**Okehurst Road**, that you follow, is a north-south route of great antiquity, an alternative to Haven Road, linking Rudgwick's river valley farms to the southern villages from which Rudgwick settlers came (see Bignor below), and the ancient bridge over the Arun at Newbridge.

The location of **Frogs Hole** suggests it was built on roadside waste, as were a number of other cottages in The Haven. **Spurland** is referred to in a medieval Latin charter from Gilbert *de baseuile* to John, son of Walter *de la punde* of Loxwood. The latter is given rights, with various payments, to three acres of "my free land in the parish of Billingshurst, of my wood of *la sparre* west of the 'king's highway' (i.e. Okehurst Road) for his service and his fealty". This must be the land around **Pound Cottage** (formerly **Pounds Farm**) on the left of the road opposite Spurland, but may also be in the name of **Pond Wood**. 'Pounds' was a small manor with land in Billingshurst and Rudgwick. 'Spar' was a woodland enclosure.

Continue ahead passing Bignor Wood on your right. After you cross a small stream you will see **Bignor Farm** on the left. Do not take the first footpath left. At the second drive entrance turn left on the gravelled drive, which is also a footpath.

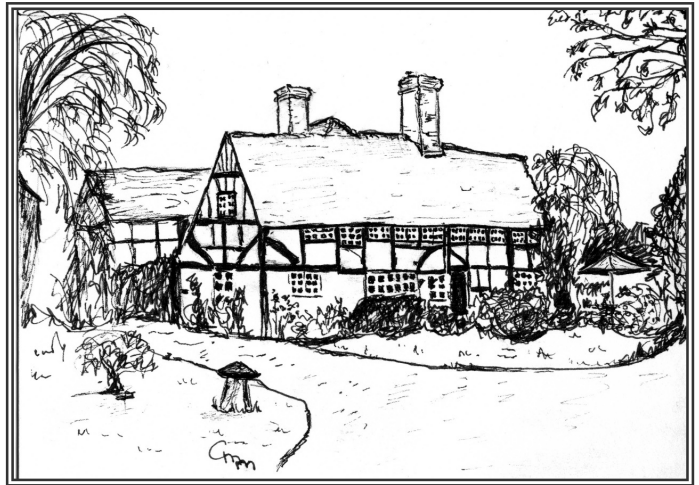
***Diversion:*** divert to see C14<sup>th</sup> Hoglands visible just ahead of you, then return.

By continuing up the lane a few yards past **Bignor** you may see the very old **Hoglands Cottage**, once a farm, by its name a reminder of the pasturing of pigs in the forest in Saxon times, and by its profile a typical hall house, of timber dated 1370.

At **Bignor** there is a connection with the Downland village of Bignor (near to which the Roman villa was found). Place name evidence in Sussex shows the penetration of the Weald by coastal and downland settlers to ‘outliers’ in the Wealden forest, some, as here from Bignor village, using the Arun valley as a routeway, initially probably for summer pasture (hence the “fair havens” pun in the walk’s title). The connection persisted as Bignor in Rudgwick came to be owned by the Priory of Hardham, which owned much land further south, until the Reformation.

The large and well cared for house is an open hall from c1500, and possibly used for weaving as there is a tell-tale range of windows under the eaves which would give good light for indoor workers, as you can see on the picture below.

4. On entering the gravel drive to Bignor Farm, pass to the right of the house and buildings. If the field gate is closed, use a narrow stile almost set into the hedge alongside. At the back of the farm, the track turns sharp right on a track between fields.



Pass over a dam between two ponds set in trees. At cattle barns, keep to the left of the low greensand barn, continuing ahead over a stile into a field with trees on the slope. The path slopes down diagonally to the foot of the slope where you enter a wooded hanger, called Hope Rough, by a stile. Watch out for rabbit holes in the path! After crossing a footbridge, you go up a slope into a field, which you cross, straight ahead towards the large trees, intercepting the private road to **Hope Farm** (which you will have seen away to the left) over a stile with a footbridge located a few yards to the left of the gate. Cross

the road and continue ahead through the green metal field gate, along the right hand edge of a large field.

The first view of **Hope** is across the Arun floodplain meadows before entering Hope Rough. The river and canal here are out of sight across the field, but it is an attractive view, exemplifying the similarity of the sites of Spurlands, Bignor and Hope on the flood-free valley bluffs where lighter river gravels may have encouraged crop farming. Observation on this walk suggests that even today there is more arable land in the south of the parish than in the north. **Hope's** name (unchanged in spelling from 1352) may refer to its sense of isolation, rather than its position on a spur of high land, both senses of the word being derived from the Old English 'hop'.

**Hope** farmhouse is unusual in being tile hung to the ground giving it a severe aspect, but it is an ancient and important property which remained one of the largest holdings in Rudgwick, though the house is only from 1500, perhaps replacing an earlier one. Look at the **barn** to the left, as it is also from 1500, and unlike the house remains unaltered, an impressive 5-bay barn, rare in the Weald.

Alard *le Fleming* held **Hope** in the C13<sup>th</sup> as lord of the manor of Pulborough. On his death, 1263, Hope passed to his daughter Florence, but not before Rudgwick church tower was erected (the church was on Hope land, and Alard had the right to present a clergyman to the benefice), and he was granted a charter in 1260 to hold the annual Holy Trinity fair, which continued to profit the manor. By 1733 when the King's Head was built beside the church, Hope itself was referred to as a 'manor'.

Drop down to a wet area by a stream (wet even in drought). Ignore the signpost and footbridge ahead of you. They lead you into a boggy area, seasonally covered in nettles. Veer right over an old bridge into the wood. A painted arrow on a tree indicates the correct path through the wood. After passing very close to the bank of the **River Arun**, the path veers away to a stile into a field. Keep to the lower land (now near the millstream). Go ahead



across a field to a gap in the hedge, which takes you into another field. Keep to the right of **Brook Cottage**, and through an electric fenced area, to the small gate onto the lane/ bridleway to **Gibbons Mill**.

***Diversion:** turn left down the hill to see the **Miller's House** and the converted **Mill** (both pictured left) and the **millpond** (see page 5), and return.*

5. To continue, go uphill. Turn right (at the small gate) to follow the concrete (then gravel) lane, passing **Gibbons Mill Farmhouse** on the right.

**Gibbons Mill Farm** is still that rare breed, a dairy farm, which is why you may find yourself walking through lush pasture with electric fencing and a black and white Frisian/Holstein herd. Not so many years ago almost all the local farms had a small dairy herd. Today, only the more determined farmers survive with large efficiently managed herds.

***Diversion:** to take a short cut on hard surfaces back to The Blue Ship, omitting Garlands, continue up the lane to Morgan's Green. Here, turn left and then right.*

To continue to Garlands, turn left, straight after **Kiln House**, on a gravel drive to a new farm cottage, but instead of entering the property, cross the stile on the right into the field. Follow the field edge, curving left, until you come to another stile (which may if the electric fences have moved have no obvious function!). turn right into the field and head uphill, diagonally, left of the built up ground holding a large (securely fenced) slurry lagoon, to a signpost just visible in the far corner. You may have to cross electric fences with sections that may be unhooked. On reaching the far corner, keep right of the hedge, as signed, on a track along the edge of the next field (pausing to note the view). The track proceeds ahead past an active rabbit warren and a pond. In the field beyond, go ahead (not to the stile half left) towards the farm and stile in the left corner of the field leading into the farmyard at **Garlands**, followed by two gates. Once on the gravel, pass in front of the magnificent house and outbuildings to leave by a wide gate controlled by a blue electric button.

**Garlands** is a well-maintained grade II\* listed house, the only one in Rudgwick, with an assemblage of interesting buildings around it. Pause to look at the house, which remains in keeping with the original large C16<sup>th</sup> smoke bay house, and has a Horsham stone roof. All other smoke bay houses in Rudgwick are smaller and later. The left hand wing also dates from the C16<sup>th</sup>. Chimneystacks were only added from the C17<sup>th</sup>. The right hand crosswing is Georgian and, with a central porch, the house gained an imposing Georgian façade in the C18<sup>th</sup> and has been little altered since. To the left is a fine C18<sup>th</sup> cart shed with granary over (now living accommodation). Behind you is a range of farm buildings including a restored timber barn, also listed. Finally, note the C18<sup>th</sup> brick wall by the road.

Across a field opposite is **Havenhurst**, which used to be Locks or Maxfields.

Turn right on the lane (opposite the entrance signposted to **Havenhurst** and **Locks Barn**). At the next junction, turn left to return to **The Blue Ship**.

The **Blue Ship** first became an alehouse in the mid C19<sup>th</sup> – from 1830 all that was needed was a £2 annual license. It retains a certain period charm, untouched by modern makeover, and of course its quiet location. A wing was added to the right-hand side of the original c1600 building in Victorian times. Some timbers are older than 1600.

Many people ask what and where The Haven is. This name for the old green that was at the junction with the modern Haven Road is shown on maps only as far back as 1724, but it was also known as **Maxwells Green** as late as 1813. Here there developed a post office and shop as well as the pub, giving a focal point to a very scattered community of farms south of the river. The Haven is in the Parish of Rudgwick, which at its greatest extent reaches almost as far as Five Oaks.