

## WILMINGTON'S HERITAGE TRAIL



***The WALK starts at the ORANGE TREE Public House continues up OAKFIELD LANE turning into COMMON LANE via PARSONS LANE then down the HIGH ROAD passing St MICHAEL'S CHURCH before returning to the ORANGE TREE Public House.***

Starting at The Orange Tree Public House, known to exist in 1841 as part of the Orange Tree Farm, continue up Oakfield Lane, passing Oakfield Community Primary School on the left, to the top of the hill.

Oakfield Park (home of the Parish Council) is to the left via Oakfield Park Road. It was here in 1886 that Lord Randolph Churchill made his famous Dartford speech to an audience of 20000 people. This important speech should be seen as a part of the history of Wilmington A green plaque has been erected here to commemorate this important site.

Oakfield Park formed part of the Oakfield Lodge Estate until 1930 when Oakfield Primary School (now Oakfield Community Primary School) and the present housing estate was built. Over the brow of the hill is Clock House, originally the stables to Oakfield Lodge.

Continue along Oakfield Lane passing the Dartford Campus of the North West Kent College on your right. This site was formerly home to Madame Osterberg's Physical Training College founded in Hampstead in 1885 but which transferred to Dartford in 1895 until it closed as a specialist College in 1986.

Cross over the A2 bridge and Hulsewood Close is reached. This was originally part of the ground of Hulsewood, a large mansion taking its name from Sir Edward Hulse, a royal physician who died in 1759. Hulsewood was demolished in 1962, but the modernised Coach House and Lodge still remain. At the Lodge turn left into Parsons Lane and continue between Wilmington Manor on the left and Wilmington Grange on the right - these now form part of the Grammar School for Girls Wilmington.

On exiting Parsons Lane a detour can be made to visit the Horse & Groom Public House by turning right into Common Lane and then left at Leyton Cross roundabout. The Horse & Groom is on the left opposite the Heath in Leyton Cross Road. This is an early 20th century building beside which was a 19th century house formerly a bakery (now unfortunately partly demolished).

Retrace your route to Parsons Lane and continue down Common Lane. On the right hand side you will see the grounds of Wilmington Hall, originally built in 1743 by Edward Bathurst and purchased late in the 19th century by Sir James Whitehead. To obtain access between the gardens of the Hall and the Manor a bridge was erected over Common Lane, at the foot of one of the supports, which can still be seen to this day, was an Ice House. A green

plaque has been erected here to mark this important site This part of Common Lane was formerly known as Sherwood Hill.

Wilmington Boys Grammar School and the Wilmington Enterprise College (formerly known as Wilmington Hall School), the oldest part dating back to 1949 are now on the Wilmington Hall site.

Opposite the Schools is Wilmington Common lined with magnificent Lime trees. The Common is connected to the Heath and Oakfield Lane via Peep Bo Alley.



Adjacent to the Common is Wilmington Primary School which relocated from the old National School building in the early 1970's. Opposite the Primary School is a drinking fountain erected in 1906 in memory of Emily Martha Lamb, a prominent resident of the village and Governess at Wilmington Hall.

Continue up the hill, turn left and to your right is the Foresters public house built in 1932. Adjacent to this was the original village pound (often used to impound stray donkeys from the Heath!), formerly enclosed by a wattle fence in Medieval times, but which now has a brick wall and a seat. A green plaque has been erected to mark this historical site

At the junction of the High Road and Barn End Lane is the old village shelter which is inscribed '***The horse is man's good friend, good men befriend horses***'. Beside the shelter is a horse trough presented to the village in 1911 by Sir James Whitehead in memory of Mercy, Lady Whitehead on the occasion of the coronation of King George V. It is fitting that even today local residents help maintain that Memorial in a style of which Sir James would have approved - a glorious display of flowers.



Behind the horse trough is the Memorial Hall, originally the site of the local fire station, the Hall now houses the Village Memorial to those killed in World War 2. To the left of the Hall was the Village Police House now the site of two new detached houses.

Walking a short distance up Barn End Lane on the left is Brewers Field, a new housing development. In 1874 the Wilmington Brewery was on this site, mainly due to the excellent well water that existed but in 1898 the premises were converted to a laundry by James Bentley.

Further along Barn End Lane on the right is Lower Barn End Farmhouse a timber framed building dating back to the 15th century.

On the left at the corner of Shirehall stands the Mount built in the 18th Century and originally called Mount Pleasant. Also on the site was Stanley Morgan House which was named after a Kent County Councillor who died in 1951. Stanley Morgan House was recently demolished to provide new sheltered accommodation.

Returning to the High Road and to the right is the old National School, built in 1850 to replace a village school held in Coombe Cottage. In front of this building stands the War Memorial dedicated to the Men from the Village who lost their lives in World War 1



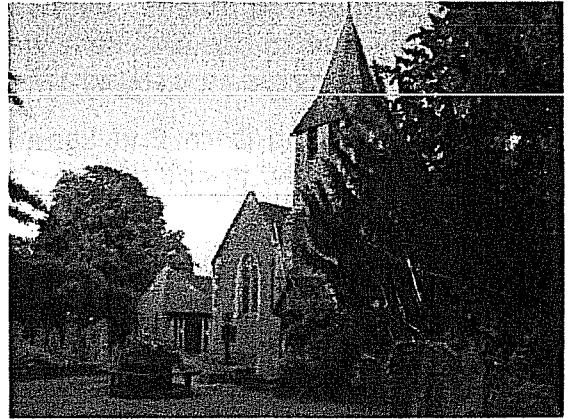
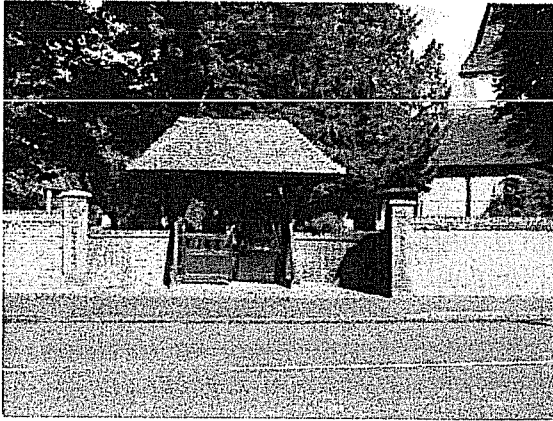
Next you come to The Retreat which was built in 1851-1872 for 'distressed stock market gentlemen' but the residences were never used for this purpose. Instead they were used for 'distressed governesses' and in 1921 for farm workers.

Opposite the Retreat you will see Post War Council Housing. This site, before it was built on, served firstly as an Italian POW camp then later to house German POW!

Continuing along the High Road up the hill (formerly known as Cock Hill ) pass Stock Lane and the old village shop and butchers, now converted into flats, to the Green Barn, behind which was the McGowan Brothers Garage. It was they who donated the large meadow (next to the cricket field in Oakfield Park) to the Parish which forms part of Oakfield Park known and is known locally as McGowans Meadow.

Continuing further along High Road you reach The Plough Public House, possibly the oldest Public House in the Village and which appears in the 1851 directory.

Continue on, passing The Close, where Mick Jagger, one of Wilmington's most famous residents lived as a child and cross the A2 bridge to where the Parish Church of St Michaels and All Angels is on the Left.



A Church has stood on this site since Saxon times. The only remaining portion of the original Church is the base of the tower with its two Saxon windows. In the old churchyard can be found a memorial to Sir Edward Hulse (1682-1759) and the family grave of Sir James and Lady Whitehead which together with the Church's lych gate commemorates the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. Also in the churchyard lies the body of Robert Pocock, the first printer in Gravesend and the compiler of the first history of Dartford's neighbouring Town and associated villages. The lych gate has the quotation '**Death is the gate to life**'. The Yew tree in the churchyard was brought as a sapling from Horton Kirby and planted in 1731.

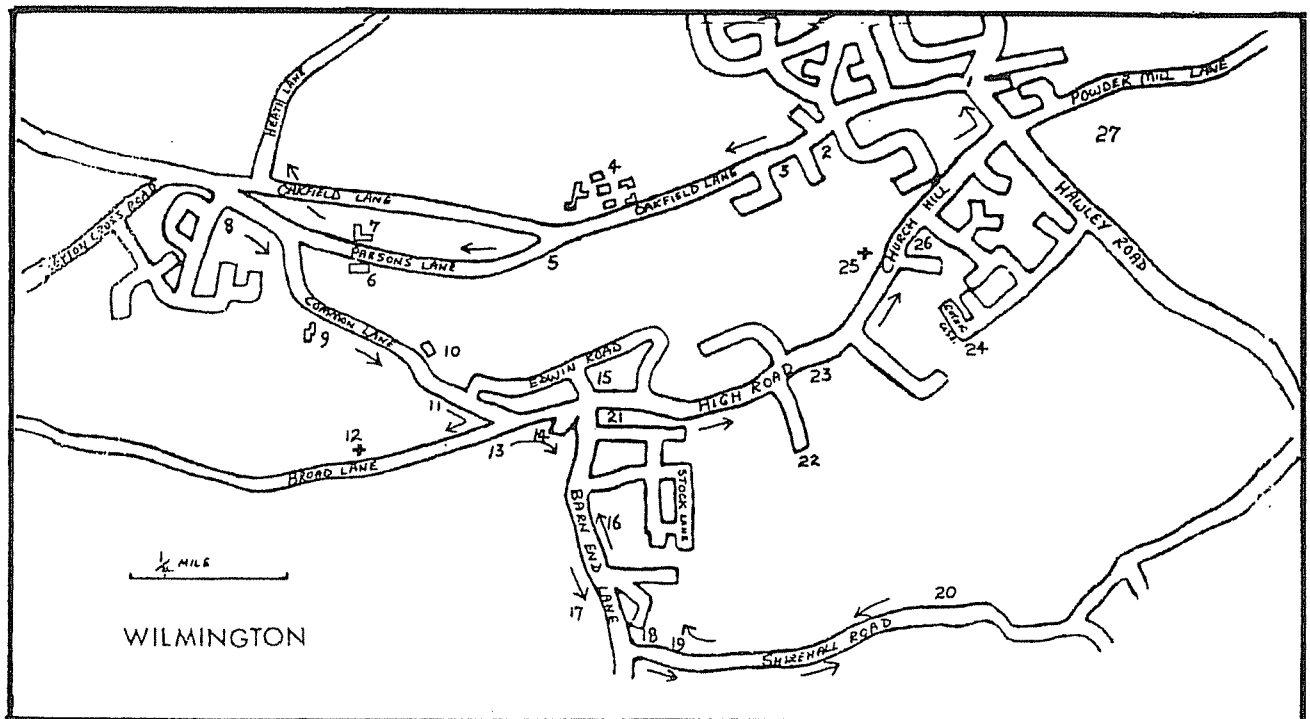
Opposite the church is Wilmington House. Originally the site was owned by the Nuns of Dartford Priory who rented the Priory land to local Farmers.

Continue down Church Hill to the junction with Hawley Road and cross over to Powdermill Lane with the site of the Thames Water Authority on the right. A well was originally sunk in 1885 by the Kent Water Works Company and a pumping station has been operating on the site ever since.

Further down the Lane, past the Trade Park, on the banks of the river Darent can be found the original Gun Powder Mills, recently restored and open to visitors.

Returning to the main road via Powdermill Lane, passing Brookland Fishing Lakes on your right, your walk takes you back to The Orange Tree Public House.

***Taken and updated from a publication of the Parish Council titled  
"Walks in Wilmington"***



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|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. The Orange Tree    | 8. Leyton House             | 15. Horse trough          | 22. Rowhill School         |
| 2. Clock House        | 9. Wilmington Hall          | 16. Site of laundry       | 23. The Plough             |
| 3. Oakfield Lodge     | 10. Primary School          | 17. Lower Barn End Fmhse. | 24. Gothic Close           |
| 4. Thames Polytechnic | 11. Lumb Fountain           | 18. The Mount             | 25. Parish Church          |
| 5. Hulewood Close     | 12. Evangelical Free Church | 19. Stanley Morgan House  | 26. Wilmington House       |
| 6. Wilmington Manor   | 13. Forresters Public House | 20. Shirehall             | 27. Thames Water Authority |
| 7. Wilmington Grange  | 14. Village pound           | 21. Reading Centre        |                            |

*For more details of this walk and the history of Wilmington from Pre-Roman times, please refer to 'Dartford Local History leaflet no 10' compiled by W.J Lowles FLA from the Kent County Library.*

To find out more about the rich, famous and powerful people that lived in Wilmington, reference to a recently published book by local historian Jean Radford titled *'Wilmington - a Village in North Kent'* will prove a most interesting read.

The book can be purchased by contacting Jean on 01322 221056 or email [jeanradford@hotmail.com](mailto:jeanradford@hotmail.com)

