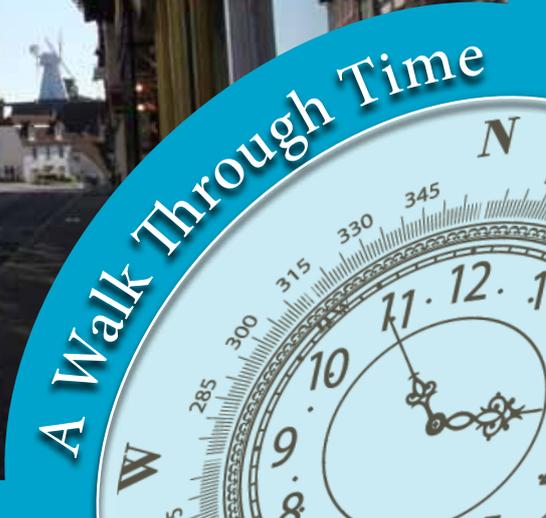


Cranbrook Walks

North 2.6 miles (4.2kms) allow 1.5hrs
South 3.8 miles (6.1kms) allow 2hrs





A History of Cranbrook

These two short walks explore the countryside to the north and south of the historic town of Cranbrook, taking in some of the landmark buildings in the High Street and Stone Street. Both walks cover less than 4 miles over easy terrain, and give a taste of the rolling High Weald landscape where the routes lead through fields and woods.

The area around Cranbrook was originally heavily forested. It was part of the Anglo-Saxon Great Wood of Andredsweald. In those days, herds of domesticated pigs were driven every autumn from the north and south downs into woodland clearings or dens - open areas where grazing or pannage rites were granted by local leaders. Many of the existing roads and woodland tracks we use today are ancient drovers' roads, characterised by their steep sides created by generations of wear from feet and trotters. The pigs were fattened on fallen acorns and beech nuts, and over time the clearings grew large enough to become established human settlements. This explains the many examples of place names in the area ending in den, such as Benenden, Biddenden and Frittenden. Cranbrook's name post dates these other towns. Its name means the brook of the crane, with the town growing up around the church in the 11th century.





The Cramp Institute



St Dunstan's Church

This is also an area associated with industry, from iron working - dating back to pre-Roman times and continuing until the 19th century - to the cloth-making and woollen industries that made Cranbrook prosperous in the 15th and 16th centuries. The town's wealth produced the many surviving examples of fine timbered houses, as well as St. Dunstan's Church, so large it became known as the Cathedral of the Weald.

The people of Kent were always independent-minded, and from the 14th century onwards this attitude gave rise to religious dissent – as first Protestant, then Puritan factions came up against the established Church. Reminders of this dissent can be found in the Biblical place names and chapels in the area.





Walking Notes

*Cranbrook Museum left
and George Hotel above*

The Old School

Both the Cranbrook walks start from the Weald Information Centre. The north walks leads up the High Street and through Angley Woods, then around several fields, before returning via St Dunstan's churchyard. The south walk heads down Stone Street and out into the countryside, past orchards and over fields. The return route passes through young woodland, where it may be damp and muddy in the winter months, otherwise you'll find that conditions underfoot are generally good.

Both the walks pass many of the important buildings that have contributed to Cranbrook's history, as identified by the heritage plaques attached to their walls – there are 18 in total!



Cranbrook walk North

2.6 miles (4.2kms) 1.5hrs

† From the Weald Information Centre walk up the High Street towards Hartley. The Vestry Hall was built in 1859, with a courthouse above and an old fire station below.

† Go past the White Horse (Victorian pub), and on your right is a typical narrow passage leading to the Horse Pond. Opposite is the site of the Post Office, once the White Lion Inn. Look for the plaque commemorating the founding of the Observer Corps.

Next to this is the Congregational Church, built in 1836, though the congregation began worshipping at the Presbyterian meeting house on The Hill.

Further up the street, on the right-hand side is the Cramp Institute Club, which was built by Clement Cramp, in 1807, as the Baptist Chapel.

Opposite is the Old Studio and Broadcloth Cottage, both former clothiers' houses. Thomas Dence, benefactor of Dence's School, lived here. The school was built within the churchyard, and was the first charity school, dating back to the 15th century. Notice the difference in timbering – more for the master and less for the journeyman?



Broadcloth Cottage

Go over the road again and you'll find Shepherds, hidden behind a yew hedge. This is the residence of another important clothier, Thomas Sheafe and his descendants, and it was also once a school.

A little further up and on the right-hand side is Myrtles, with a row of cottages to the east of it. From the rear, it can be

seen that this was all part of a medieval hall house. Myrtles itself was the first Quaker Meeting House in Cranbrook. Over the road is Beemans. This beautiful Georgian house was the home of Isaac Beeman, one of the builders and the first pastor of Providence Chapel, situated off Stone Street.

† Continue up the High Street and turn right into New Road, and walk on until you reach the main road (A229). Cross with care and go round the barrier into Angley Woods.

† Follow the footpath, bearing right at the fork, and continue through the ancient mixed woodland, with chestnut coppice and conifer plantation.

† Take the path through the woods, turn left and go over a footbridge, before bearing right round the paddocks.

On the left by the bridge is Spratsbourne Farm. In the mid 17th century the stream was dammed to create Tucker's Pond, which fed the water-powered corn mill at the farm.

† Carry straight on, and leave the wood with the paddocks on your right, and a fence on your left. Walk along a footpath that has an uneven surface, then along a driveway up to the road (A229). Cross the road to the footpath opposite, go through a gate and up through a field onto a path that runs between playing fields on the left and Cranbrook Primary school on the right. At the end of the path, bear left through a gate and continue towards the churchyard, passing the old Victorian primary school (now a surgery), on your right. Go through the churchyard and you will find yourself back to the start of the walk - the Weald Information Centre.



Vestry Hall

Cranbrook walk South

3.8 miles (6.1kms) 2hrs

† From the Weald Information Centre, head down Stone Street towards Golford.

Notice the George Inn on the right. This is one of the oldest buildings in the town, dating back to 1464, and also Cranbrook's oldest surviving hostelry. Queen Elizabeth I was received at the inn in 1573, at the height of Cranbrook's wealth based on the cloth industry. In the 18th century, the building was the base for Revenue men pursuing smugglers, and was also used as a Court House for many years before the Vestry Hall was built.

On the other side of the road all properties were originally owned by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury, and represent a rich mix of styles from medieval to Victorian.

Back on the right-hand side of the road several narrow passages lead off Stone Street.

Stone Street Alleyways



(a) The alleyway leading to the non-conformist Providence Chapel, built in the early 1800s, an early example of a pre-fabricated building, and part of Cranbrook's strong dissenting tradition.

(b) Chittenden's Passage that passes Hatter's Cottage, which was William Tooth's water-powered hat factory.

(c) Mr. Wimble's Passage, wide enough to take a horse and cart, and leading to Speedwell Field (now the Tanyard car park), with its two wells - the Speedwell and the King's head (site marked) - the town's main water supply until 1898.



† Carry on and bear right down *The Hill*.

In the dip you'll see the Arts and Crafts building (now a restaurant and wine bar), that was donated to the town by Clement Cramp, a prominent Baptist, as a working men's club with temperance coffee and a reading room. Beyond it is a row of old cottages.

Over the road on the right hand side, next to the Old Bakery, is the tiny chapel of the Strict and Particular Baptists, built in 1785 - the oldest existing place of worship for Dissenters in the parish.

A little way up the hill on the same side is Hill House, dating from the late middle ages, when the town was the centre of a thriving woollen industry. Notice its lovely door.

If you have the time, visit the windmill opposite. Built in 1814, and dominating the town, Cranbrook's windmill is the tallest surviving smock mill in the British Isles. It is still in working order, grinding wheat regularly to produce wholemeal flour which can be purchased from the mill shop. The Windmill is usually open Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday afternoons in the summer. Entry free - Donations welcome.

Enjoy the view of the row of cottages beyond, and look for Crest Cottage, the original Dissenters' Chapel (rather than Dissenter's Cottage further along!).



Cottages on The Hill

† Turn right into Frythe Way, and follow the road until you reach Brickenden Road, where you cross over to take the sunken footpath running between houses.

As you come out onto the driveway, ahead you'll find the late medieval Pest House, a place where the sick would have been kept in isolation during times of epidemic. Note its chimney.

† Keep on the driveway as it bears left in front of woodland, and follow it down as it becomes a wide track between orchards and walk towards *The Freight*.

This privately-owned house dates from the 15th century. Its name comes originally from the Anglo-Saxon word 'fridd', meaning heathland on the edge of the wood. A hall house in origin, *The Freight* was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in the 17th century, when it was pivoted on its axis to face north rather than its original position. In 1675, the owner was fined £20 for allowing a Presbyterian meeting to be held in his house. The building was divided to create two cottages in the 19th century, but restored as a single house again in the 1930s.



The Freight

† Go straight on, past *The Freight*, and across the field, following the path through a gap in the hedge. Keep to the left hedge line and go straight across the field to the edge of a copse. Follow this line down to a strip of woodland before reaching the road. Cross the road with care, and go round the edge of the field, passing through a gap in the hedge on the left, and into a small orchard. Walk round the bottom edge of the orchard until you see a gap in the hedge and a bridge over a ditch.



Field beyond the Freight

† Cross into the field beyond, and follow the path with the hedge on your left until you reach a large oak tree. Here the footpath is marked at right angles, directing right, across the field to the edge of a wood. Follow the path at the bottom of the wood and walk beside a hedge, coming out onto a track leading to the Swattenden Centre. Turn right, and keep the yard and buildings on your left

as you walk towards the road. When you reach Swattenden Lane, turn left and follow the path inside the hedge at the top of the playing fields, and go up to the entrance to the Centre. Cross the road with care, and carry on into *Comfort's Wood*.

† Follow the permissive route waymarker through *Comfort's Wood*, bearing right as you go and you will come to a stream, before following the path up to a gate that leads to the main footpath you walked down earlier.



Comfort's Wood

Comfort's Wood was gifted to the Woodland Trust in 1990, when it was a commercial orchard and arable land. The wood has been planted since with native broadleaved species. This woodland, with its grassy glades and rides, creates good habitat for birds and invertebrates.

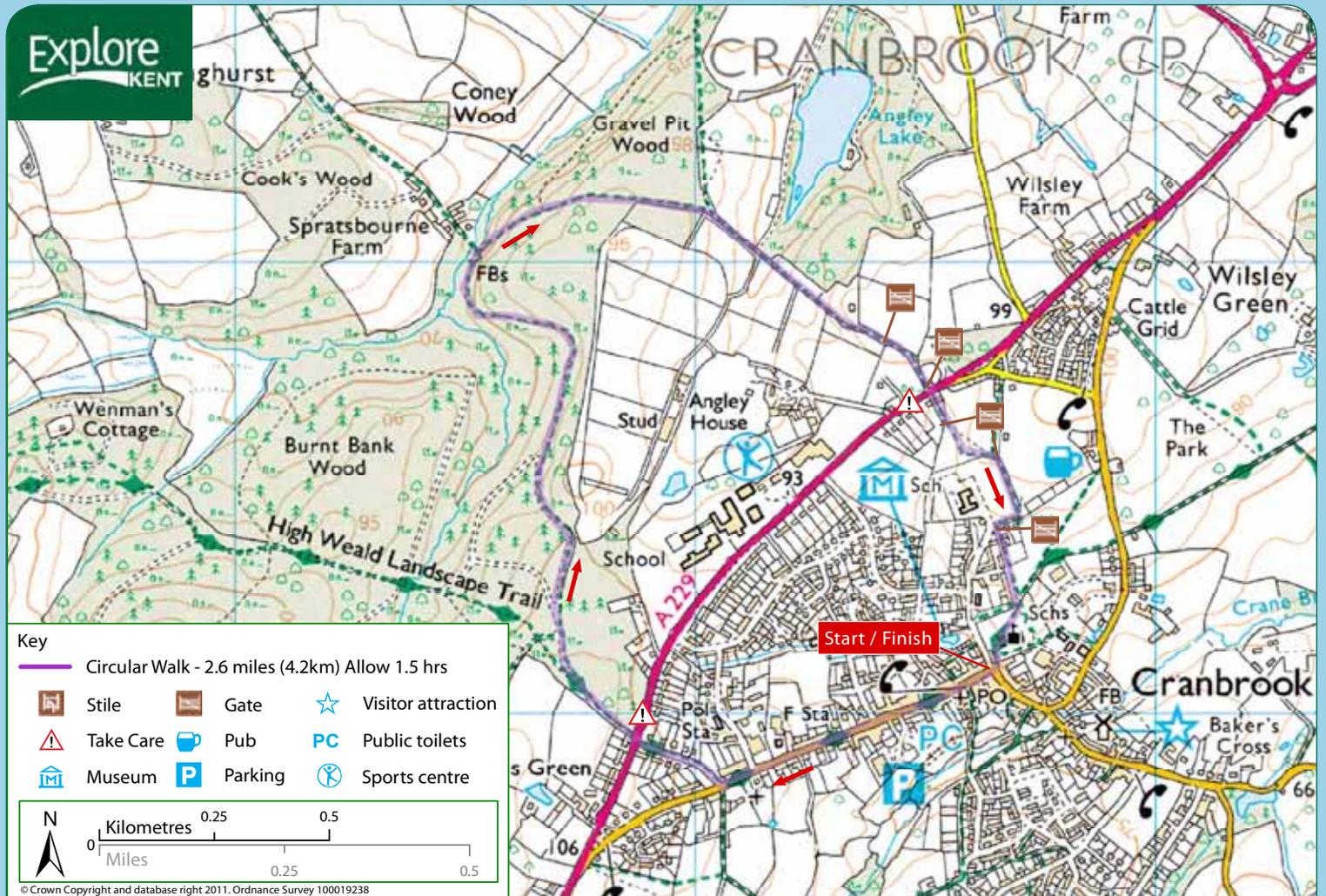
A memorial in the wood marks the resting place of Dr Alex Comfort, the celebrated author of *The Joy of Sex*, and Mrs Comfort who died since gifting the site.

† Continue up the path towards Cranbrook, this time passing *The Freight* on your right-hand-side, and continue until you arrive at the entrance drive of Mount Ephraim, a building possibly named after a Dissenter's home.

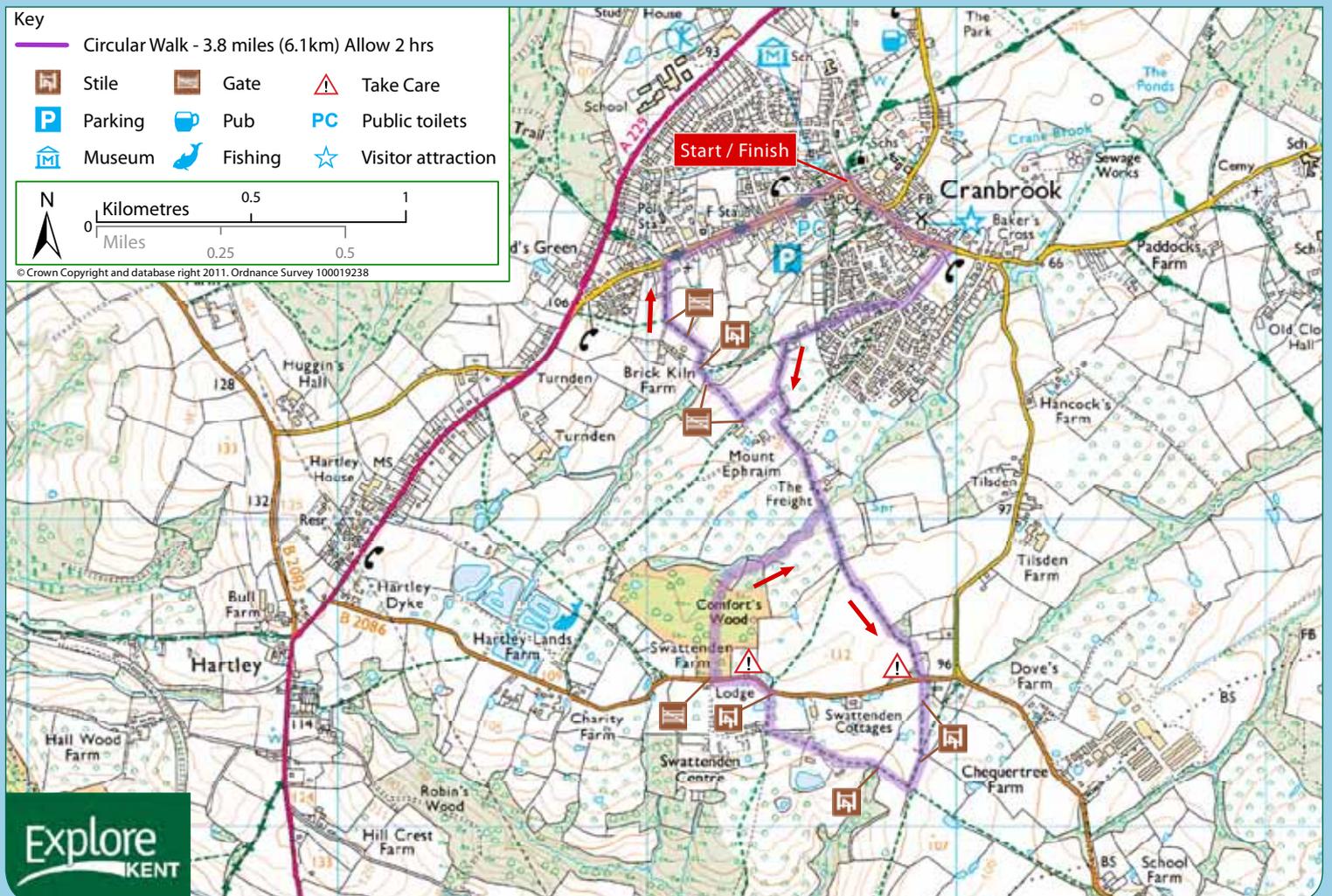
† Turn left here, and follow by the side of the drive until you see the footpath on the right, go through a gate and across the middle of a field. Follow the path down to woodland, bear left over the stream and walk up into another field. Continue over a stile and through a gate, eventually reaching the track leading to Brick Kiln Farm, named after the local brick-making industry, no doubt making good use of the Wealden clay.

† Turn right when you reach the track that brings you out onto the High Street. Turn right again and head back down to the start of the walk, the Weald Information Centre, noting the places of interest described on the Cranbrook north walk.

Cranbrook walk north



Cranbrook walk south





Woodlands

The High Weald landscape is dominated by its patchwork of irregularly shaped fields and ancient woodland, which has been managed for centuries. Wood has long been a valuable resource in this part of Kent. It supplied timber for houses and ships, and fuel for domestic use, as well as for the huge Wealden iron industry, dating back to Roman times. Coppicing in cycles of between five and 35 years produced a sustainable supply of wood used for charcoal, fencing, hop poles and many other useful products. Today, woodsmen still continue this ancient management activity, albeit on a much smaller scale. Coppicing also benefits wildlife. Butterfly, moth and plant species have adapted to this environment over the centuries, as well as mammals, such as dormice.

Sweet chestnut is still the most-frequently coppiced wood, and is used for fencing, construction and furniture. In the recent past, a lot of chestnut was harvested to supply the hop industry with long straight poles for the hop plants to climb, but hop growing in Kent has declined drastically over the past century, with the importation of cheaper foreign hops used by today's brewers. The region's woodlands are well worth visiting in early May, to take in the stunning colour and scent of carpets of bluebells.

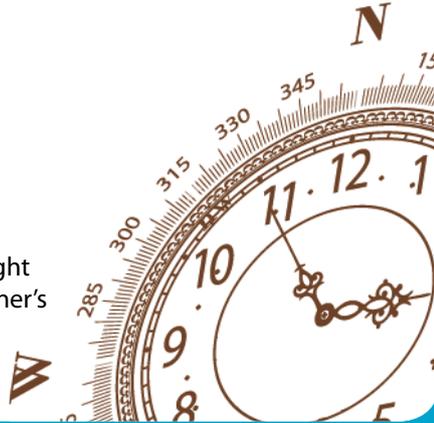


The 'Walk Through Time' walking guides have been produced by Cranbrook In Bloom in partnership with the Kent High Weald Partnership. For more information visit www.walkthroughtime.co.uk.

Walks available in this series:

- Bedgebury
- Benenden
- Cranbrook
- Goudhurst
- Sissinghurst

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Please respect the beautiful countryside you are walking through by following the Countryside Code:

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people



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