

## Wadhurst History

Wadhurst is a historic market town, granted a royal charter in 1253 and within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The landscape retains its mediæval character of small irregular-shaped fields and scattered farmsteads, often grazed by sheep. Oak and sweet chestnut dominate the wooded rolling hills and streams run red in places from iron ore in the local rock. Close by, Bewl Water, the largest body of fresh water in the south-east, is an active water sports centre. Wadhurst was also the location of the Last Great Prize Fight on 10th December 1863, when Englishman, Tom King, beat the American, John Heenan.

Walk along the High Street and you follow the line of an ancient trackway connecting prehistoric and Roman ironworking sites and communities. This became the old drovers' road and, in 1767, the turnpike around which the village grew. Wadhurst centre still has over 25 buildings dating from between 1500 and 1800, and 40 traditional shops that attract people from outside the village. Untouched by the advent of steam in 1851 (the station is a mile away), major changes followed an RAF aeroplane crash in 1956.

Oak and iron formed the character of Wadhurst. It still has a working blacksmith and old converted forges, grand ironmasters' homes and the Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul where can be seen the finest collection of iron memorial slabs in England, dating from 1617 to 1799. The Church also commemorates the fallen of the two World Wars.

Local oak was used to build great wooden warships at Chatham Dockyard. It is said that oak from the Whiligh estate in Wadhurst forms the hammer-beam roof of Westminster Hall, commissioned in 1393 by King Richard II; it was certainly used to rebuild it after its bombing in the 2nd World War.

*Produced by Wadhurst Parish Council*  
[www.wadhurst-pc.gov.uk](http://www.wadhurst-pc.gov.uk)

## Further Information

**WADHURST HISTORY SOCIETY:** If you have enjoyed the glimpses of Wadhurst's rich history during this short walk and now want to find out more, the Wadhurst History Society has a wealth of information for you on [www.wadhursthistsociety.org](http://www.wadhursthistsociety.org) or in the History Centre which contains a considerable archive. The Centre is behind the red door, down to the left of the Commemoration Hall and is open on Tuesdays, 10am to 12.30pm and sometimes on Thursdays; or contact **01892 783212** or **783455**.

**WADHURST FOOTPATHS SOCIETY:** There are 72 miles of open and waymarked footpaths in the parish for those who wish to enjoy our countryside. Maps are available from Barnett's bookshop or the Post Office.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Wadhurst is one of the best places in the UK to observe the night sky because there is very little light pollution. Why not return and enjoy a clear night of spectacular viewing? For further information, contact: [www.wadhurstastro.co.uk](http://www.wadhurstastro.co.uk)

## Getting to Wadhurst

**BY TRAIN:** From Charing Cross or Waterloo in central London, it takes just over one hour. The centre of Wadhurst is 1 mile from the station.

**BY ROAD:** Turning off at Lamberhurst, it is a short distance from the A21 that runs south towards Hastings from Junction 5 of the M25.



*Wadhurst High Street c. 1910*

## Wadhurst History Walk

A SELF-GUIDED TOUR

*a step-by-step guide through  
1000 years of local history*

# Wadhurst History Walk

## 1 HOPE COTTAGE & CASTLE CORNER

The white house on the junction, Hope Cottage, was once a small primary school before becoming an Estate Agents. It sits up the hill from the old tollgate. The 19th Century Wadhurst Castle opposite is privately owned.

## 2 THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Originally built before the 2nd World War as a secondary school, it became a primary school in 1963. The old milestone beside the hedge shows it is XLV (45) miles from London.

## 3 THE WAR MEMORIAL

The original memorial cross lists names in the order that the men died. Lt Edward Boyd, whose mother and sister lived at Hill House, was the first man of Wadhurst to be killed in September 1914. Some names were omitted from this memorial and so, in 2014, the centenary of the 1st World War, a new memorial stone was erected to honour all those who gave their lives.

## 4 JARDIN D'AUBERS

The Wadhurst Twinning Association was created because of the historic link between Wadhurst and Aubers in northern France. Twenty-five men from Wadhurst died as a result of the Battle of Aubers Ridge on 9th May 1915. The green bench was originally the bench at Wadhurst Station.

## 5 HILL HOUSE

On the left is Hill House, built in 1740 by the ironmaster, John Legas, and is one of several ironmasters' houses within the Parish. During the 1st World War, the house became a hospital, run by Mrs and Miss Boyd.

## 6 THE OLD VICARAGE

Down 'The Walk', the fine Georgian 18th Century house on the left was once the home of another ironmaster, Richard Tapsett. The current vicarage is set back from the road behind this building. On the other side of the road you can see a house called 'Novam', named by a retired commuter who needed to catch 'No 5am any more'.

## 7 CLOCK HOUSE & GORDON HOUSE

Clockmaker Horace Newington and his Family lived here during the 19th - 20th Centuries. He and later his son used to look after the Church clock and also travelled round the district every week by bicycle, maintaining and winding clocks in the larger houses of Wadhurst, even as far as Lower Cousley Wood where Fred Wilkin had 50 clocks.

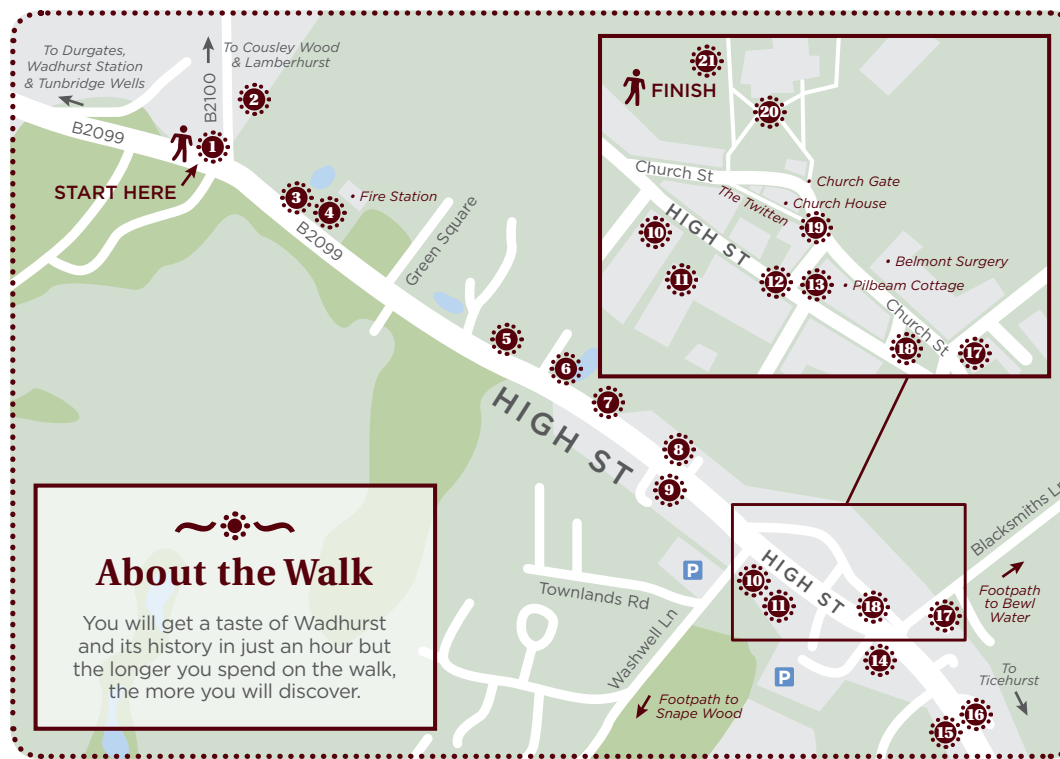
Gordon House, now Barnett's bookshop, one of the last independent bookshops in Sussex, dates from the early 19th Century. It is a fine example of decorative tile-hanging typical of the area.

## 8 FOUR OLD BUILDINGS

Four adjacent buildings evoke old Wadhurst: Wealden Wholefoods, Wing Gallery, Carillon Cottage and the Post Office. Previously these were all shops and are the oldest in the High Street. Carillon Cottage is now an information centre and is thought to be the oldest secular building in the village, dating from the 14th Century.

## 9 THE PARADE

On the other side of the High Street, this row of modern shops replaced the very old shops and the mediæval Queen's Head Hotel, destroyed when an RAF Meteor jet crashed into them in January 1956. Parts of the aeroplane's engine ended up in the window of the shop opposite (now a charity shop) and in the West porch of the Church. Unfortunately, four people were killed.



## About the Walk

You will get a taste of Wadhurst and its history in just an hour but the longer you spend on the walk, the more you will discover.

## 10 THE WHITE HART

This was built in 1910 on the site of the previous inn, 'The Spotted Cow'.

## 11 THE COMMEMORATION HALL & INSTITUTE

Controversial at the time because some felt the money could be better spent on a hospital, the Hall of Commemoration was built in 1923 in memory of the men who had died in the 1st World War. Ever since, it has been a venue central to the life of Wadhurst and is the location of the Library and History Centre. The Institute next door, formerly a farmhouse, was at one time a social centre.

## 12 CRITTLES & JACKIE MARTEL'S

The greengrocer's was a Baptist Church in the early 20th Century. Opposite, Jackie Martel's is a very old building which was, at one point, the village post office.

## 13 LLOYD'S BANK

Around 1905, Stanley Rowe had his grocer's shop here and that was taken over by Ashby's (also a grocer) from 1912 to 1927 when it was radically altered to become Lloyd's Bank. Behind Lloyd's bank was the site of the old Market Hall.

## 14 THE GREYHOUND

This 16th Century inn, called 'The Grazehound' in 1578, was once the haunt of smugglers thought to be associated with the fearsome Hawkhurst Gang.

## 15 3 BALLIOL COTTAGES & UPLANDS COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Hawkins family lived at No.3. Two brothers were killed at the Battle of Aubers Ridge and their older sister was engaged to one of the Pilbeam brothers who was also lost on the same day. Across the road, the Community Centre used to be the Wadhurst School. About 200 yards further down the Lower High Street was the tollgate for this turnpike road.

## 16 KINGSLEY COURT

Crossing the road and going back towards the village, Kingsley Court on your right, is on the site of the former Drill Hall built in 1913. Volunteers for the Territorial Army were rigorously trained here by CSM Albert Freeland.

## 17 FORGE COTTAGE

The Pilbeam family lived and worked as blacksmiths and farriers at Forge Cottage. Beside the cottage you can see the lay-out of the original smithy, attached now to the Methodist Church. Two of the Pilbeam sons were killed at the Battle of Aubers Ridge.

## 18 ST JAMES'S SQUARE & CHURCH STREET

In the 19th Century, many of Wadhurst's grocery shops were in this area. At the back of the bank in Church Street is Pilbeam Cottage, named after the family at Forge Cottage. It used to be the lock-up, where miscreants were housed overnight. Belmont

Surgery opposite is on the site of the old poorhouse which, in 1834, moved to Ticehurst.

## 19 THE TWITTEN

The narrow path in front of you is now called the Twitten but is still known by many locals as Amen Alley. Vine Cottage on the left was once The Vine Inn.

## 20 THE CHURCH OF ST PETER & ST PAUL

This mostly 13th/14th Century Parish Church is notable for having more iron memorial slabs than any other Church in England. Many of them are fascinating to read. To the left of the porch door as you enter is the list of past incumbents including the deeply unpopular vicar who was "intruded" (imposed on Wadhurst) during the period of the Commonwealth in order to preach in a Puritan style. To the right of the base of the tower, find the defaced coat of arms which may have been removed by unhappy residents who found out that the gentleman in question (Legas) had supplied cannon to the enemy, the French.

The 11th Century tower is the oldest part of the Church; the metal screen with its symbolic emblems of Sussex was installed in 1957. Note the Victorian stained-glass window above the altar dedicated to John Foley, the vicar for 40 years, then look at the other windows around you in the chancel and see his family's tragic history. Find also the Church's connection with the actor, Benedict Cumberbatch.

## 21 THE GRAVEYARD

Behind the Church is the graveyard with its beautiful views towards Bewl Water. Several Commonwealth graves commemorate those who died in both World Wars: these include, by the hedge, the grave of Fanny Kennaird, Wadhurst's only female casualty of the 1st World War. Up the central path is the grave of CSM Albert Freeland who had trained so many volunteers at the Drill Hall and was killed at the Battle of Aubers Ridge. Beside him lies the youngest soldier to die, Albert Kemp.