

WALK CARD 8 WEST WICKHAM TOWN TRAIL



CIRCUIT

In the text, SL refers to a statutorily listed building of architectural or historical significance; LL refers to a locally listed building

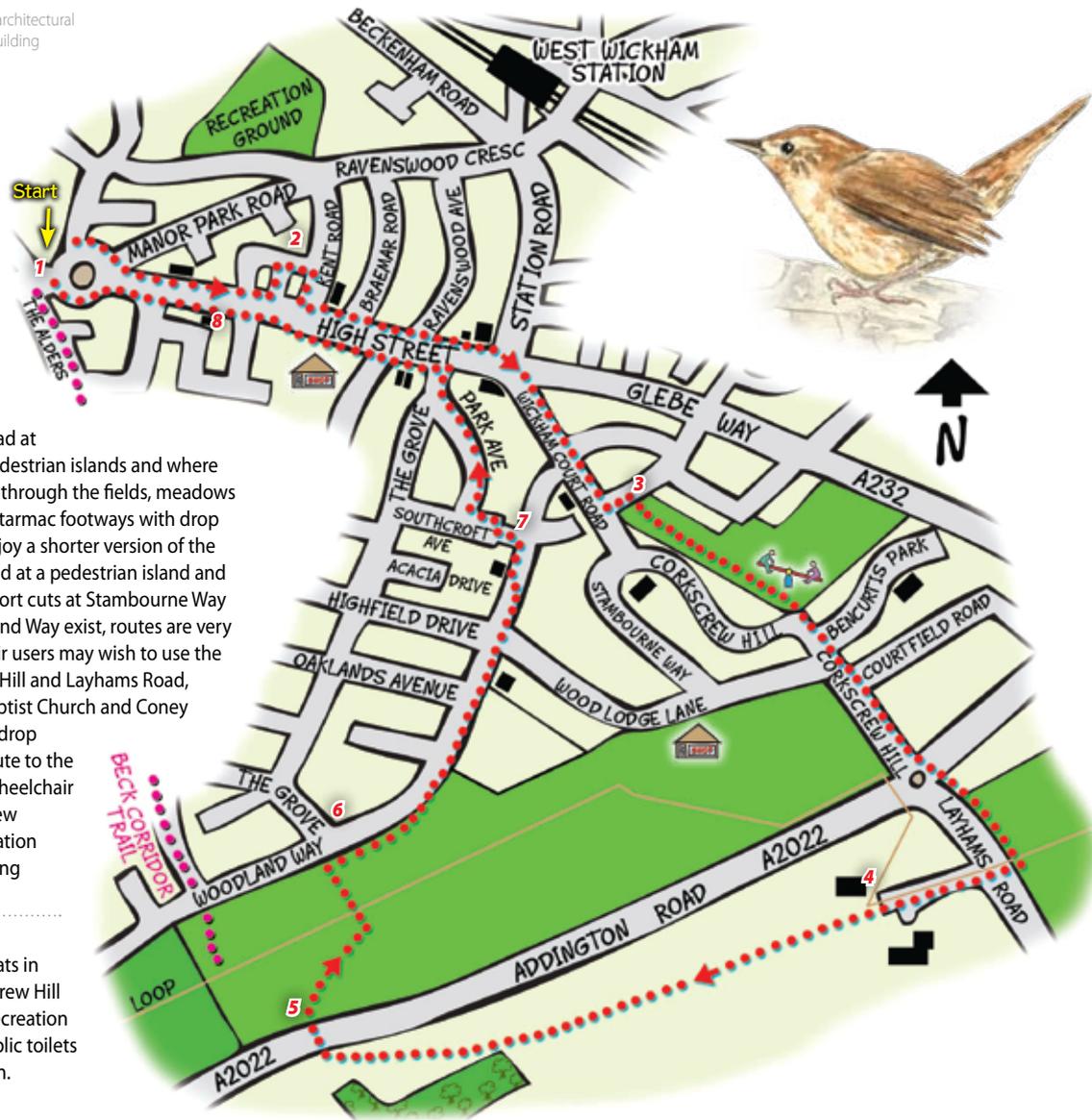
Distance

Walk 8 starts outside La Rioja Tapas Bar (once the White Hart Public House) by Cavendish Crescent (close to the junction with 'The Alders'). This walk is approximately 5.8km long.

Links with Walk 3 of the Beck Corridor Trail

Accessibility

Other than along the southern section of the route, where the walk passes through farmed land and Spring Park (and there is need to cross Addington Road at a point where there are no drop kerbs/pedestrian islands and where there are obstructions/no surfaced paths through the fields, meadows and woodland), this trail lies on paved or tarmac footways with drop kerbs. Wheelchair users are advised to enjoy a shorter version of the trail, by crossing over Wickham Court Road at a pedestrian island and continuing up Woodland Way. Though short cuts at Stambourne Way and Wood Lodge Lane leading to Woodland Way exist, routes are very steep. Possibly with assistance, wheelchair users may wish to use the steep roadside sections along Corkscrew Hill and Layhams Road, so as to enjoy views up to St. John the Baptist Church and Coney Hall Recreation Ground. (Bollards, lack of drop kerbs and uneven roadway makes the route to the church from Layhams Road difficult for wheelchair users). Separate visits directly to McAndrew Recreation Ground and Coney Hall Recreation Ground are suggested; Sparrow Den/Spring



Park during dry conditions only. Some seats in McAndrew Recreation Ground, on Corkscrew Hill and in Spring Park; some in Coney Hall Recreation Ground but not along the route itself. Public toilets (including disabled) close by the Swan Inn.

Walk 8

West Wickham is very old, though much of the development you will see on this walk is comparatively recent. Archaeological evidence suggests that there was human settlement in the area as early as the Stone Age (Palaeolithic period). The area is referred to in a Saxon charter in 862AD. The name West Wickham is thought to have Roman origins, being an Anglo-Saxon interpretation of the Roman word 'Vicus', meaning a small village. Until recently the name was thought to be of entirely of Anglo-Saxon origin, being a combination of the words 'Wick' meaning dairy and 'Ham' meaning Village.

1 Start your walk by the River Beck, beside La Rioja, which lies at the western end of the High Street, close to the old Kent-Surrey boundary. The current building dates from 1908 (LL); the original weather-boarded building dated from about 1820 and was associated with a pond filled by the adjacent waterway. Spot the willows growing at the edge of the car park and the dovecot at the top of the building. Follow the footway towards the roundabout, first crossing the pedestrian island on Cavendish Way and then the one on Manor Park Road, named after Manor House, which stood here until 1928. Take the footway to the right of St. Mark's Catholic Church, which was built in 1962.

You are now walking along the High Street, one of West Wickham's oldest roads. In the past it was known as Wickham Street and in the 15th Century, 'The Commonway to Croydon'. En route, note a number

of the late 19th Century houses which have been converted into shops. On your left, look out for The New Church Centre, opened in 1861 and deconsecrated in 1933. This was once the village infant school and you can still see some of the original railings.

1898 maps show a pond at the corner of Surrey Road and the High Street. An estate of small cottages was built in the area of Sussex, Surrey, Kent and North Roads in the 1880's on a site originally called Pigs Park (sometimes known as Pix) because it had been used to graze pigs. Continue a little further along the High Street and turn left down Sussex Road. You pass an Age Concern Centre to your right, a corrugated iron building dating to 1901 and replacing the former 1878 Lecture Hall, and then the Wickham Halls facility, originally built in 1934. Look out for the cottages bearing dates of their completion. **2** At the end of the road turn right in to North Road and right again into Kent Road. Once known as Ridle Lane, it was diverted in the early 19th Century and the land used to construct the Old Wickham Hall's stable block on the left of Kent Road. Before being restored and extended by Marks & Spencer, it was occupied by Unigate Dairies. Note the pigeon loft, hay loft openings and Pegasus weather vane. Turn left on reaching the High Street. Look out for the bollards shaped like milk bottles as you pass the entrance of the store's car park. The building is all that remains of Wickham Hall, a late 19th century house which was much extended and improved by

Gustav Mellin, a wealthy baby food manufacturer who entertained Bismarck there. Continue up the High Street, and after crossing Braemar Gardens and Ravenswood Avenue, look out for Vine Cottage (SL), presently a barber shop. This dates from the 17th century and was constructed as two back to back cottages – the front now clad in brick, the rear with wooden weatherboarding. According to the 1881 census, the front cottage was occupied by a porter, Mr. J. Thompson and his family and the rear by Thomas Berridge, his wife and three children.

Ahead of you is the Swan Inn (SL). The current building dates from about 1840 but there is known to have been a pub on the site since 1745 and a survey of 1484 shows a tenement known as 'Smethes'. Before the arrival of the railway, The Swan was a thriving





coaching inn, with the land now used as a car park having been occupied by stables. Cross over the High Street at the pelican crossing. The corner building you meet is Wickham House. A house has stood on this site since the 18th century, but the present building owes much to its re-design to William Teulon (1856) and to Norman Shaw (1870 re-modelling in the Queen Anne style). Converted into shops in 1928, you can still see the hipped roofs, corniced eaves and sash windows. Cross over Wickham Court Road at the pedestrian crossing and turn right to proceed along this road. You can still see some of the pine and cedar trees which once graced the 90 acres of parkland associated with the house. Enjoy the front gardens on your way and any birds and insects that might be visiting them.

Cross over Wickham Crescent. To your right, on the corner of Woodland Way, lies Wood Lodge Cottage. This was once the entrance lodge to a mansion, finished in 1891 by J & R Killick Ltd Builders. The cottage at that time was occupied by the butler and his family. The mansion, after a period as an orphanage, was pulled down for redevelopment in 1961.

3 After crossing Rose Walk, go through the park entrance and follow the public footpath lined with beech hedging. This path emerges onto a path which also acts as a drive for vehicular traffic to West Wickham Football Club. Continue straight ahead. A small obelisk to your left commemorates the purchase of the playing fields as a memorial to Reverend Bertie Roberts, who once occupied Glebe House when it was still the Rectory (until 1925). Elm hedgerows and old oak trees divide the fields to your left and there are views beyond. Listen out for birds in the woodland to your right and look out for ash, elm, oak, hawthorn and elder trees growing there. As the drive bears left, continue on

the path straight ahead through the trees. Soon you see spectacular views of the countryside which can also be enjoyed from the benches by the War Memorial. This monument was moved from the High Street to its present position in 1939 but commemorates the people of West Wickham who lost their lives in both World Wars.

(To remain on a slightly less steep route, from **3** simply walk alongside the winding 'Corkscrew Hill' until Bencurtis Park. Greenhayes Cottage beside Stambourne Way reflects the name of the former Greenhayes School, built in 1818 as the village National School. Note the mistletoe growing in the trees nearby).

The steep path by the War Memorial joins Corkscrew Hill.

On the left is Bencurtis Park, a retirement complex opened by the Duchess of Kent in 1976. In its centre is the 18th century Glebe House (SL). During the Second World War, a 14-bed American Hospital was set up in the house for emergency use. It was called 'American' because all the equipment was supplied by the American Red Cross. ▶



▶ Continue downhill. On the opposite side of the road look out for No. 25 Corkscrew Hill, Sparrows Den Cottage (SL), a 19th century building. Originally two cottages, it was recorded in 1881 as housing 9 people. It is weatherboarded with Gothic leaded windows. At the bottom of the hill near the roundabout, follow the footway round to the left and cross Addington Road at the pedestrian island (or at the pelican crossing further along). Follow the footway ahead up Layhams Road. Shortly to the left is Coney Hall Recreation Ground, named after a farm of that name. Records indicate that 'coney's' or rabbits were caught in the area. In the distance you can see the woodland of Wickham Common on a ridge of high ground. Close by the zebra crossing, just ahead of you, is Wickham Court Lodge (SL). This Victorian brick built lodge reflects the fashion during the late 19th century for Gothic Revival.



Cross Layhams Road at the zebra crossing and bear left and immediately right to join the highway signposted 'Byway to Parish Church'. Note that vehicles use this route too. Through the trees to your left, catch glimpses of Wickham Court (SL). This was built in 1469 for Henry Heydon whose great niece, Anne Boleyn, is believed to have been courted by Henry VIII whilst staying there. Their signets are in the windows in the keep. It was occupied by the Lords of the Manor until 1931. It subsequently became a hotel, was used by the army during the Second World War, became a teacher training college, the Schiller International University and a school.

4 Early 20th Century photos show that a pond used to exist close by the lychgate to the church. Enter the churchyard and continue ahead, past the yew trees and porch of St. John the Baptist Church (SL). There was a church here in 1086 but nothing of it remains. Parts of the present flint building date back to the 13th century, but it was largely rebuilt in the late 15th century when Wickham Court was being built. Some of the medieval glass survives only because the Rector temporarily buried it in the churchyard during the Second World War.

At the downhill fork in the path, walk carefully down the steep steps to the left and through the kissing gate. Follow the public footpath across the fields forming part of Wickham Court Farm, keeping the fence line and, after climbing the stile, the poplar trees to your left. The landholding was purchased by Kent County Council in the 1930s to restrict the outward expansion of the suburbs and is now part of the Metropolitan Green Belt. Archaeological evidence suggests that the area has been



inhabited by numerous peoples through the ages. The earliest evidence is an axe from the Palaeolithic period or Stone Age and others from the end of the last Ice Age and New Stone Age, around 4000 BC. These fields were once wooded; a series of maps, the earliest dating from the 1600s, show the size of the woods progressively decreasing over the centuries. All that now remains is Foxhill Shaw in the distance ahead (no public access). Evidence of a Roman settlement has been found around this section of Addington Road. The course of the Roman road from London to Lewes crosses the footpath 200 metres along from the churchyard boundary. Although there is little evidence of its presence, its route across Sparrows Den is visible from the air in dry summers. The Roman settlement here would have provided rest and replenishment for travellers. It would have been established here because soils are easy to farm and the springs and streams in what is now Spring Park would have provided fresh water. The pumping station on Addington Road (the

original built in the late 1800s, its replacement built in the 1970s) now keeps the valley dry.

Follow the footpath straight ahead through the gap in the hedgerow. After passing through the gap in the second hedgerow, follow the path diagonally right across the field, heading towards a white cottage off Addington Road. 5 Cross carefully over the busy road. Walk through the gap in the post and rail fencing of the car park opposite. Use one of the gates beyond to enter Spring Park. The woodland here was part of the Estate of West Wickham until 1924 when the owner, Henry Lennard of Wickham Court, donated it to the public with its maintenance vested in the City of London. The meadowland was later purchased from him in 1927. Follow the path diagonally right

across the field, heading towards the noticeboard and bench. The hay meadow has a range of wildflowers; you may be lucky enough to see a kestrel inspecting the area for small mammals. It is edged on its eastern side by a hedge which has been traditionally managed by hedgelaying. The meadow also incorporates a pond, fed by the park's springs. Climb straight up through the woods using the path to the left of the noticeboard. The woodland here is rich in species of trees, birds and flowers. Ignore all paths to the left and right and emerge from the woodland at the junction of

Woodland Way and The Grove. Turn right to walk along the edge of common (alternatively cross the road to walk on a paved footway).



6 Here you will see a disused water fountain, which bears the inscription 'In memory of Margaret Anderson McAndrew, who lived at Wickham House from 1881 to 1935'. Woodland Way was once an old trackway known as Drive Lane. During the 1930's West Wickham changed dramatically from a well wooded village with a number of large mansions to a suburb of London. Predominant amongst the builders was George Spencer Senior who lived in West Wickham. On the left hand side of the road is No. 112, Tudor House. He built this for his son Charles, who married Eveline (Bessie) Killick. It remains a fine example of reproduction Tudor architecture.



Soon the grass of the common gives way to a paved footway. Look out for a pair of Victorian cottages to your right called Rose Cottages (LL). Note the unusual arrangement of bricks known as 'Rat trap bond', so called because the hollow created by laying alternate bricks end on resembled a rat trap. Cross over Wood Lodge Lane. Further down Woodland Way on the left is Kathleen Moore Court. Originally the house was called Old Field and was built in the 1920s for the McAndrews, who were finding Wickham House in the High Street too noisy. It has a fine south front. It served as a maternity home for a brief time before becoming the headquarters of the Home Guard during the Second World War.

Just beyond lies a short path beside a huge oak tree which is thought to be about 800 years old. Cross Woodland Way and follow this path to Southcroft Avenue.



7 The oak tree stands at the rear of No. 2, a house originally called 'Pantiles'. It was built by George Spencer Senior for his son George, using the pantiles from the outbuildings of Wickham House. Note the wooden beams and weatherboarding. It's garage was built using the stable doors.

Follow the right hand footway along Southcroft Avenue. Turn right into Park Avenue, where there are more Spencer houses. After passing Emmanuel Church (look out for the mistletoe growing in the trees), fork right at The Grove. On meeting the High Street, turn left, crossing over The Grove. On the left is Barclays bank, which was originally built in 1865 as a private house called Runswick House. It then became a butchers shop with a slaughter house at the rear, later a bakers shop, then a hotel annexe with a café before becoming a bank in 1928. Next door is Lloyds bank, which was also originally a private house built about 1800. Continue down the High Street, crossing Sherwood Way. On the corner of Sherwood Way you will notice that the corner shops are set back; this was the original location of the War Memorial. Just after Grosvenor Road on the left of the High Street is 'The Wheatsheaf' (LL). **8** This public house dates back to 1825. However, records of a pub at this site go back to 1750. An 1898 map of the area shows that much of the land in the vicinity was covered in orchards. Continue down the High Street to complete the circuit by 'The Alders' roadway.

This marks the end of Walk 8. □

