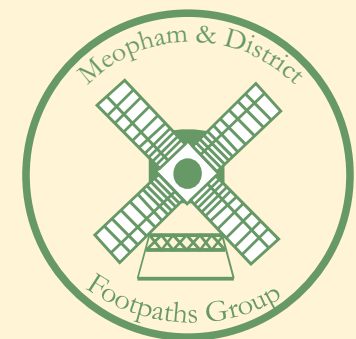




Meopham & District Footpaths Group  
50 Golden Years  
1962 to 2012



On line Version Part 1  
Articles

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**P & DJ Goacher**

Congratulate the Meopham & District Footpaths Group on their 50th year.

Cheers!

The Brewers of Goacher's fine Maidstone Ales have generously sponsored the publication of this booklet.

# Our Beginnings

An Introduction by our President & Founder

Pat Wilson

Speaking at our AGM in 2012 gave me the opportunity to recall the drama of our 'Coming into Being' in 1962 and the debt we owe our earliest members. When we moved from Central America to Priestwood, Harvel, Meopham our one car disappeared during the day and we depended on walking, cycling and infrequent buses. Imagine, no emails, only snail-mail and few photocopies. Our local footpath number 38 (later renumbered to NS 232, which many of you will know well) north to Luddesdown from Scratch Arse Corner on Chandler's Hill had an absentee landlord who said that I and the children could use the footpath but NOT the public. My fury resulted in an unbelievable barricade – corrugated iron, chain-link fencing, barbed wire and more.

My husband, a Kent County Council officer said "don't grumble at me, go and look at the new 1952 Draft Definitive Map". I did, and there was our footpath. However, KCC still demanded evidence of 20 years use. Novice that I was, I did not realise that their duty was to clear the obstruction without evidence from me. So I misguidedly started to prepare for a Public Inquiry in Harvel Village Hall, chaired by the Chairman of KCC Highways Committee.

For over a year I collected written statements of use from all and sundry – Gravesend Scouts, Meopham Guides, past Parish Councillors, past residents now in Council Houses and Alms-houses and workers formerly on the Waterlow Estate including our path, who had a duty to instruct rabbit shooters to 'Halt and Beware Footpath'. This was excellent evidence.

I asked advice from Arthur Skeffington Barrister and Member of Parliament, living in Meopham and expert on rights of way. He wouldn't be bothered to look at the obstruction and told me I didn't have to produce any evidence! This was the collapse of me, but I said that I was going to offer witnesses anyhow, as we'd got it all prepared like a military operation and transport arranged in all directions.

Harvel Hall was packed. Only one neighbouring farmer supported the obstruction. Arthur smote the trestle table to maximum effect and told the legal representatives of the Obstructor, who turned out to represent an Oxford University College to 'GO AND READ HIS LAW'. He then told the KCC Chairman that he was asking for evidence unlawfully! Arthur was flanked by resplendent House of Lords documents in red and gold. KCC said they didn't need to hear my witnesses but I insisted that they listened to a dozen or more anyhow, they were brilliant.

There was jubilation! We handed round tea and biscuits and many witnesses greeted each other as long-lost friends. Arthur had to beat a hasty retreat to the House of Lords.

It took over a year to get the barricade dismantled. Of circa 80 paths on Meopham's

Definitive Map, over 40 were impassable. It was essential to get the public walking, so in 1962 I formed three walking groups, first Culverstone, then Harvel and lastly North Meopham from the Old Vicarage, Arthur Skeffington's house. We all had the same subscription and some joint committee meetings and in 1962 we held our first joint AGM in Meopham's small hall.

Our priority now was to get our own 2.5 inch O.S. Map (TQ 66) marked up with path numbers so that we could all 'sing from the same sheet'.

My son copied endless sheets at 1s.6p. in 'old money' about 7.5 pence now. Imagine copying 80 footpath numbers per map copy. We kept spare copies on loan/deposit.

WE WERE OFF!

(In 1964 Jim Carley had moved to Meopham Hook Green. He proposed complete amalgamation of the Groups and soon embarked on leading Group walks and publishing walks leaflets.)

Little did we know of the challenges and rewarding times that lay ahead. Every year since then has provided good reason for us to remain vigilant and positive in the promotion and protection of our public rights of way in Meopham and District. We should never again have to face a situation where half the paths recorded on the Definitive Map are impassable.

Mike Groom's brilliant 'roll-out' of our history is an excellent portrayal of our Group's 50 Golden Years. It is delightful that this booklet establishes a memorable record so that we and those who follow us can reflect on the Group's history.

Pat Wilson



President's Tea Party 2012

The President's Badge of Office.

Presented to Pat Wilson on her appointment as President in 1994. It is a unique piece of Marquetry made by Peter White a local craftsman.



# Meopham & District Footpaths Group

An asset to the Parish

By Doug Powell  
Chairman of Meopham Parish Council

One of the main attractions of Meopham Parish is the vast number of public footpaths that are available to visitors and residents, allowing them to explore the magnificent countryside surrounding our rural villages. Walking in the country side is a pastime that is enjoyed by all ages and Meopham Parish Council very much appreciate the support of the Meopham & District Footpaths Group who volunteer to monitor, provide advice and update the Council on rights of way issues.

The Council is grateful for the commitment, work and effort that the Group contribute to keeping these footpaths open for all to use, particularly now with the significant cuts in funding from Councils. It is astounding that they managed to keep clear some 40 miles of footpath during last year and the Council acknowledge that without this work many of the footpaths would now have been impassable.

We are thankful to their many volunteers that have contributed over the past 50 years in making Meopham Parish an attractive place to live and visit by their efforts in organising walks, ensuring the local definitive map of public rights of way is kept up to date, and tackling the high maintenance work of clearing encroachment and undergrowth to keep the footpaths open.

Doug Powell



Pictures from Group's History tour of the Parish.  
The Group's contribution to the Meopham Diamond Jubilee Celebrations.



## 50 Year Celebration

Our 50th anniversary cannot pass without mention  
It's an important time in our year  
Perhaps no-one has walked during all of that time  
But no doubt some have come very near

At the beginning the walks were more local  
In places well-travelled and known  
But soon they developed and widened  
Into the vast unknown

The very first walk seemed a nightmare  
A footpath was blocked half-way through  
This certainly wasn't intended  
But we did what we had to do!

The blockage at Scratch Arse Corner  
A cause for public concern  
So folk got together and went hell for leather  
Hurrah! The Group was born

Some flexed their muscles and others just groaned  
As all tried their best to look tough  
But with the best intentions in the world  
This just wasn't enough

So now all walks are monitored and nothing left to chance  
And even the holidays are arranged now and then  
To the Isle of Wight, Italy and France!

From the few who joined first to the membership now  
Is quite an achievement, no less  
But as people grow older, and young ones get bolder  
The Group will one day confess

If it hadn't been for our forebears, who put in such effort and time  
That view from the hill, which to climb is to kill  
Would never have been yours and mine!

Joan Shillabeer

# More than a Group of Walkers

An introduction by the Chairman Ken Dare

**H**ow fortunate we are to be centred in the Parish of Meopham, a part of Kent with its distinctive landscape and scenery and its valued woodland. The farmland is actively managed and consequently provides seasonal crop scenery and the added attraction of livestock. The extensive public rights of way network is a 'jewel in the crown' of the Parish. It provides us with some forty miles of paths. As our title, Meopham & District Footpaths Group illustrates, our interests extend into the District and this has no boundaries.

To provide a regular programme of led walks and published walks leaflets is within the key objectives of our Group but represent only one of our published Objects. Members sign up to these Objects and they are freely displayed on our web site for all to see.

The dynamic nature of the countryside results frequently in the necessity to clear vegetation and other obstructions from the paths. Whilst such clearance is the legal responsibility of the County Council in practice it, increasingly, does not have the financial resources to be sufficiently effective.

Over the past decade or so our Group has developed a team of volunteers who each year inspects and report upon every path in the Parish. Clearance problems are taken care of by a small party of our members who go into action armed with an impressive armoury of strimmers, saws and secateurs and the like – a formidable bunch of volunteers! Understandably, this exertion calls for a visit to a local hostelry after each session. Further volunteers are always welcome! We are aware of the need to respect health and safety as we go about this work and, for example, those using the strimmers have all been on a training course. Our practical involvement includes reasonable signage of the paths and removal of obstructions. We also occasionally repair stiles and we have erected a number of kissing gates in the Parish.

The pioneer work by our Group in the establishment of the Definitive Map is well recorded in our 30 years celebratory publication. The original Map was a major step forward as it constituted legal representation of the respective public right of way. It has stood the test of time but inevitably it required substantial updating and a new edition was finalised on 12.12.2012. Any changes to the Definitive Map require a legal order and our Group plays an active part in the consideration of any changes relating to our area. References to many of such cases in which we have been involved are included in the updated rolling history of our Group presented in an excellent way by Mike Groom.

Reviewing applications for changes in the network, for example diversion of a footpath, is often complex and demanding – but can be highly rewarding. The latter comment was the case regarding both Ifield Road and Steele's Lane in Meopham

Parish in respect of which we were instrumental in establishing recorded legal public rights of way on the Definitive Map. In achieving the positive result relating to Steele's Lane we were actively involved in a Public Inquiry.

We work to protect and promote the enjoyment of the public rights of way beyond the confines of the Parish. A recent example of this was evidence we presented at a Public Inquiry at Shipbourne where a landowner proposed (unsuccessfully) to divert a footpath.

The protection of the environment is high on our agenda and even leads us into formally commenting upon local government strategic plans. We, together with others expressed, in writing, our objections to the initial Gravesham Strategic Plan in 2011. The Plan was consequently fundamentally rewritten. Recently we responded to the GBC's invitation to comment on the revised Plan.

We value our relationship with the Parish Council. Unfortunately a change in legislation has resulted in our representatives no longer being co-opted onto the Environment & Amenities Committee; however, we do still have an input and are kept informed on matters relating to public rights of way. The grant received from the Parish Council in response to our path clearing is appreciated.

Our participation in the Gravesham Rights of Way Committee (GROWC) facilitates a broad basis of communications with others, including Councillors, who have an interest in public rights of way. Other walking groups, equestrians, cyclists, four wheeled drivers and a wide variety of others participate in GROWC.

There is a first class relationship with local Rambler's groups and many of our members also belong to the Ramblers. Our affiliation to the Ramblers centrally and the 'Open Spaces' helps us to keep in touch with rights of way issues on a general and national basis and we, in turn, support those organisations. Partly as a result of our affiliation we have been able to offer our comments on such major issues as the CROW Act (Countryside and Rights of Way) in 2000.

There is a social side to our activities which require no further explanation in this article but it serves to illustrate the camaraderie which stems from walking together. Furthermore, friendships develop and support for one another occurs in a variety of different ways.

**In essence, yes, 'more than a group of walkers'; it is rather a way of life.  
Long may it continue as we now head towards M&DFG's Centenary.**

Ken Dare

## Chairmans' Jottings

Recollections  
from past Chairmen of the  
Group

I sat in the chair for five out of seven years between 2000 and 2007. One notable event was the disastrous outbreak of Foot and Mouth early in 2001, that curtailed our walking programme as the countryside was out of bounds. A spell of tarmac walking just wasn't the same! Fortunately the ban was lifted in July 2001 – we don't want a repeat of that!!

In January 2002 the Group celebrated its fortieth anniversary, and also installed the "Pat Wilson Millenium Seat" on Priestwood Green.

2003 saw the refurbishment of the windmill at Meopham Green, mainly from a Heritage Lottery grant. Jeskyn's Farm came into being in 2006, which gave a substantial extra area for walkers. Although now accepted there was some controversy at the start!

My tenure concluded with a celebration of our President Pat Wilson's 90th Birthday at Priestwood Green – long may she reign!!

John Macknish.

My couple of years as Chairman of Meopham and District Footpaths Group were enjoyable and I hope I was able to contribute positively to the Group during that time – my main recollections were having to, at times, bring my diplomacy skills into play and trying to move us forward – we managed to move to emails and the electronic copy of the Newsletter.

Paula Robinson

I was Chairman for two years in the early 80s. Although the records show that the Group was dealing with a fair number of footpath problems, none were particularly outstanding.

There were two memorable events. The first was a visit by a group from Gravesend's Twin Town of Neumünster. They stayed for a week and finding suitable entertainment was challenging. Also I was led to believe that they were a walking group, so we organised a programme of walks. Certainly some of them were walkers; however for a significant number their main activity was centred around coffee & cake.

One sad event was the death of Charles Kentish an early member of the committee and lifelong champion for rights of way. I presided over the planting of a memorial Chestnut Tree on Meopham Green. The tree flourishes to this day in his memory.

Mike Groom

Paula should also be credited with the Group's introduction to the World Wide Web.

Ed.

## Chairmans' Jottings Continued

Reminiscences from the from the distant past

The thing I remember most about my term as Chairman was my shock and amazement at being elected to that eminent position mainly, as I said at the last AGM, because all the other members of the Committee had thought up reasons for not taking the job.

To show how long ago it was one of the subjects to be discussed at some length during my term was the adverse effect the building of the M20 might have on the local environment and particularly the footpaths south of the village!

One event, which time has not erased from my memory, was "volunteering" to lead a Sunday morning walk from Hope Hill where the Scouts were holding a family weekend. On reporting in I was told that those people wishing to take part would be gathering at the flagpole where, to my astonishment, I was met by what looked like a football crowd. It turned out that I had "volunteered" to lead 127 people 4 dogs and 3 pushchairs! Fortunately I had persuaded my son to come with me and, thanks to his efficiency as a back marker, we completed the walk without losing anyone.

David Arnold

The Group has had many Chairmen over the years the recollections of some of the more recent are presented here. The thoughts of our current Chairman Ken Dare are presented in other articles in this publication.

By the time I became Chairman, after about 20 years as Secretary, the Committee were not meeting at members' houses but met at the Committee Rooms in the Village Hall. We all sat round a large table and the meetings were opened and closed with the use of a gavel which had been presented to us by our President. All very professional. Our meetings were always well attended with much discussion taking place concerning footpath problems, walks schedules and our social events.

Gillian Willsher

My recollections of my time as Chairman of our Footpath Group are somewhat dulled with the passage of time. However, I do remember being asked to consider the post whilst at a meeting at Anne Waugh's house (when Anne and Geoff lived in New Barn). I was rather taken aback as I had only been on the Committee for a year.

Some things I remember well, one joining the Mayor and his party to Beat the Bounds and, when one of our founder members Jim Carley decided to leave the Committee on what he considered to be a matter of principle which being in the distant past I will not dwell on. There are good things, I recall well when Ken Dare first joined our Committee (readers, you may well have heard of him!!!!)

Peter Marsh

# The Castles Walk 2009 and 2010

By Nigel Ward

Prior to 2009 the group had tried to offer a long-distance walk during the summer months. Such walks were usually promoted paths such as the Greensand Way or The High Weald Landscape Trail, and they were broken up into roughly 9 or 10 mile sections. One section per month would usually be undertaken between May and October, and transportation would be by the “double car” system.

In late 2008 / early 2009 informal discussions led us to the conclusion that we had run out of such promoted paths in our immediate area. If we were to continue to offer such long-distance walks, we had best devise some of our own. Hence, The Castles Walk came into being.

The Weald Way had proved popular, running as it did from Gravesend to Beachy Head, through stunning landscapes including the North Downs, Greensand Ridge, Low and High Wealds and the South Downs. I felt that if we could come up with a walk through similar country, but further to the east, this might meet our needs for our first devised walk.

As a theme for the walk, I decided to pass as many of our fine castles as possible. This would be of interest to our members, but would also give some purpose to the walk should we decide at some stage to put it into the public domain.

The first part of the task was a desk exercise using Ordnance Survey 1/25,000 Explorer Maps. The walk was to be on Public Rights of Way (PROW) or lanes, and the only exception to this was through some Ministry of Defence land near Chattenden on the first section of the walk.

The next task was that of field verification, which involved walking the whole 100 mile route to confirm that what appeared on the map was in fact there and available to use. During this process I also located suitable start and finishing points where cars could be safely parked, and located at the required 9 or 10 mile intervals.

Once these sectors had been established, details were given to our Walks Secretary John Tyler, who then sought walk leaders for each sector. This met with an excellent response, and I sent John detailed walk maps at a scale of 1/25,000 for each sector. We also suggested that each walk leader undertake a reconnaissance walk of his or her chosen sector, which I offered to accompany if required. This led to some useful modifications of the route in places, and guaranteed that there would be no “where are we now” moments on the walk itself.

It was not our intention to actually visit all of the castles during the walk itself, that would have been impossible in the time available. It does however leave a legacy for those who would wish to make such a dedicated walk, not only to the castles but to other historical sites on the walk. We also sought to make members aware of the wonderful PROW network available to us in Kent and Sussex, and the number of promoted paths that we have. During the course of the walk we incorporated parts of The Saxon Shore Way, The Medway Valley Walk, The North Downs Way (national trail), The Len Valley Path, The Greensand Way, The High Weald Landscape Trail, The Sussex Border Path and the 1066 Country Walk.

The fact that the walk was completed successfully should serve to show members that such long-distance walks can be devised between any chosen points. A certain amount of planning is obviously required, but we should never be short of a good summer trail.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all those who helped to make this walk a success, including the committee, our Walks Secretary John Tyler, the various walk leaders, and to our enthusiastic members whose cheerfulness and good humour make our walks such a pleasure.

Nigel Ward





# THE CASTLES WALK

Gravesend, Kent, to  
Pevensey Bay, East Sussex  
97 1/2 miles 156 km

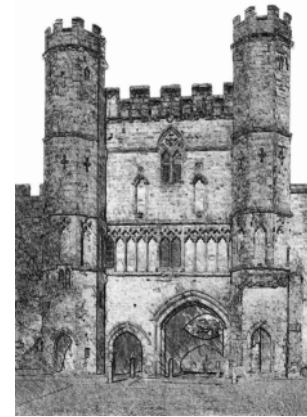


Kits Coty

Scotney Castle



Sissinghurst  
Tower



Battle Abbey



- |                                                                                |                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 New Tavern Fort                                                              | 10 Thurnham Castle (remains)                                             |
| 2 Milton Blockhouse                                                            | 11 Leeds Castle                                                          |
| 3 Shornmead Fort<br>(view to Coalhouse Fort)                                   | 12 Sutton Valence Castle (remains)                                       |
| 4 Upnor Castle                                                                 | 13 Sissinghurst Castle                                                   |
| 5 Rochester Castle                                                             | 14 Scotney Castle                                                        |
| 6 Rochester Cathedral                                                          | 15 Bodiam Castle                                                         |
| 7 Kits Coty House (on route)<br><i>Neolithic long barrow</i>                   | 16 Battle Abbey                                                          |
| 8 Aylesford Village (3 miles South)<br><i>One of England's oldest villages</i> | 17 Herstmonceux Castle                                                   |
| 9 Aylesford Friars (3 miles South)<br><i>13th century Carmelite priory</i>     | 18 Pevensey Castle (remains)                                             |
|                                                                                | 19 Pevensey Bay<br><i>Reputed landing place of William the Conqueror</i> |



Journey's end Pevensey March 2010  
Nigel Ward is 4<sup>th</sup> from left.  
John Tyler is 5<sup>th</sup> from right.

NIGEL WARD 2013

## Our Walks Programme

by Ken Dare

From those early days of the Group when there was a walk on a Sunday morning or afternoon only, we have now progressed to a comprehensive schedule of walks in Meopham and District. The programme is published each quarter in the Newsletter. In addition to the walks on a Sunday we have a mid-week one plus an additional one in the evening through spring to autumn. We are fortunate to have a team of some 27 walks leaders.

Approximately twenty five per cent of our walks start from Meopham Green. Lengths vary from about 3.5 miles to anything up to 15 miles – with an average of some 5.5 miles. All the walks are led and a back-marker ensures the well-being of the participants and makes sure no one is left behind!



For those who are interested we publish five sets of local walks, with five walks in each set, which are available to our Group members and the public. Each set is from a different start-point.

The Group walks are very well supported and for those who enjoy statistics the following may be of interest: -

During 2012 we put on a total of 137 walks, 106 Normal Daytime walks, 18 Evening walks and 13 Short walks. We had 2,296 walkers take part in the walks throughout the year. The walk attracting the most walkers, 64 in total was the historical walk to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee on 5th June. Within these numbers were the 50/50 walks during which we had 225 walkers taking part with an average of 25 per walk.

This impressive programme is due to our keen team of walks leaders and again our thanks go out to them all and their willing and much appreciated back-markers. In addition, our thanks go to our Walks Secretary, John Tyler, who arranged the quarterly walks schedule and was also the instigator and architect of the 50/50 walks.

Ken Dare

The 50/50 celebration walks are now available to download from the Group's web site at: [www.meopham-walkers.co.uk/](http://www.meopham-walkers.co.uk/) where you will find not only the text of the nine walks, but loads of information about the group.

## Keeping us Afloat

by Bill Reed, Treasurer

I am now in my ninth year as Treasurer of the Group having “inherited” the job from Sue Bates who had taken over from John Creed some three years before that. Significant changes have taken place over the past nine years. A computer is now an essential tool and all transactions are listed on an Excel spreadsheet. As a result of this, Committee members now receive a monthly summary of our transactions by email before each committee meeting. By utilising the “Data Sort” facility, income and expenditure for each category can be itemised. This makes the compilation of the Balance Sheet and Income/Expenditure Summaries for presentation at the AGM much easier.

In 2011, Gravesham Borough Council, who sell our Walks Leaflets in the Towncentric tourist office, required us to alter our banking facilities to allow them to pay us by BACS (Bankers Automated Clearing Services) as they were no longer prepared to pay by cheque. This has subsequently led us to putting the current account “on-line” so that transactions can be rapidly processed without the time consuming need to use cheques and paying-in slips.

In order to keep us afloat and absorb the increases in affiliation fees, insurance, printing, stationery and postage costs the membership subscription has risen from £3 per family in 2004 to £5 per member in 2012.

Bill Reed



# Meopham Parish – Rights of Way

## Monitoring

By Ken Dare

Our monitoring programme was a natural development following the Group's comprehensive survey of all ROW in Meopham Parish to coincide with our 30th Anniversary in 1992.

Data and method used in the survey (thanks to Dave Burch) provided excellent bases for the monitoring programme which followed just a few years later.

A team of 12 monitors, to whom we owe a vote of thanks, sets out after May to inspect their allocated paths and complete written reports, by 1st September at the latest. They work to guidance notes and give definitive map references, plus photographs at times, identifying where problems or particular observations arise. Major problems are reported back immediately. Each team member covers some five miles of paths.

Vegetation clearance is frequently required and the necessary information is passed for action to our well tooled up and efficient path clearing team. However, there is a wide variety of problems which arise and sometimes liaison with the KCC rights of way is required. Unfortunately the increased budget restraints are having an adverse impact on the service they are able to provide.

A summary report is produced which is displayed at our AGM. A copy is passed to the Parish Council, which always takes a keen interest and to the KCC for information.

We regard the programme as an essential audit of all the rights of way in the Parish and we are pleased to have achieved some fifteen continuous years of annual monitoring which is to the benefit of path users from near and far.

Ken Dare

The Parish of Meopham has retained a magnificent Rights of Way network as illustrated by the adjacent map.

The Statistics are:-

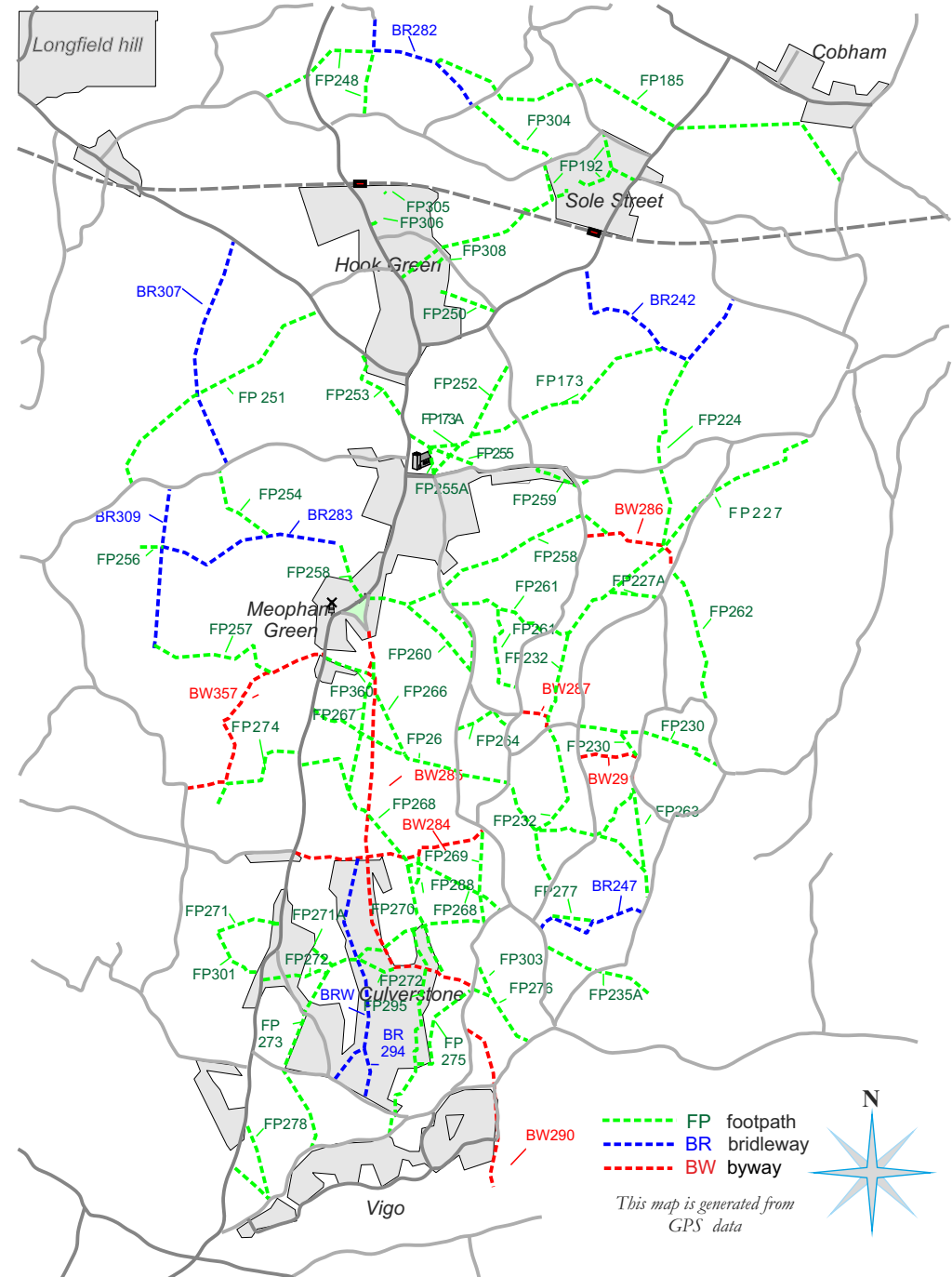
8 Bridleways with a total distance of 5.6 miles.

7 Byways with a total distance of 5 miles.

52 Footpaths with a total distance of 28 miles .

Amounting to a total length 38.6 miles.

## Rights of Way in the Parish of Meopham



# Holidays Abroad

by Roy Freeman

Our first holiday abroad was part of the Group's celebrations for the millennium in 2000 and took some 35 odd members and friends to Westerdorf in the Austrian Tyrol by coach for 10 days. An excellent walking and exploring holiday was had by all but we were all grateful that the various chair/gondola lifts were operating and that most if not all the walks involved a halfway stop at one of the excellent mountain inns. The weather was kind to us and allowed us to enjoy swimming and marvelling at the mountains around us from the open air communal swimming pool complex on returning from our exertions.

Members decided that they had enjoyed Austria so much that they would like to go on another holiday in June, 2002. Again some 30 or so members and others travelled by coach to Molveno in the Italian Dolomites for a 10 day stay. Again the weather gods smiled upon us and we had a very hot and dry week in the mountains and lakes with some excellent walking. Standing out among the memories of this holiday is, on a hot walk around the lake, some of the ladies following one or two of the men's lead in soaking their hats in the lake and putting it on immediately! They had forgotten the effect water has on hair dos and T-shirts! Another memory is of a walk which took a small party up a hillside on some 650 steps - not to be recommended! A final memory is on the last day of members in teams making and sailing (!) model boats over a set course on the lake. Much fun was had by those taking part and even more by the locals who went away convinced that we were as mad as they thought! Regrettably, our coach ailed whilst we were there and we were unable to do one or two excursions that had been planned. However, the overall assessment was that the holiday was a great success.

In the spring of 2004 eight member of the Group experienced a highlight of their walks abroad. It was a holiday in Madeira arranged and led by Geoff Viner. It was a huge success and certainly unforgettable. The photos still stand out in our albums.

A further foray abroad took us to the Ardennes in the late summer of 2004 where some excellent walking was enjoyed by 32 members and others. Our accommodation in the Val d'Arumont was a little unusual in that we occupied, in groups of 4, separate excellently equipped and comfortable chalets although our meals were enjoyed together. Again we were lucky with the weather, despite some frost on the grass in the mornings, and enjoyed sunny days throughout. Our 2 coach drivers proved masters at organising excursions and arranged a visit to a medieval castle although it had officially closed at the end of the season some weeks before! A day trip to Luxembourg to visit Luxembourg City with a guide, Clervaux, Ettelbruck and Bastogne particularly sticks in the mind as a very enjoyable trip.

September 2007 found 28 members enjoying a holiday in an excellent hotel complex in the village of Combrit, close to the ancient city of Quimper in Brittany, France. Although showery at times, the weather stayed reasonably kind to us and the excellent walking of this area, particularly the coast, was enjoyed by all together with some coach excursions further afield. The similarity of the country, coast, language and history to Cornwall was quite remarkable and our walks took us to many places which demonstrated this association. Memories of this holiday include walking along golden beaches, enjoying the restaurants of nearby towns and villages in the evenings and playing various games in the courtyard of the hotel, particularly a table tennis competition in which everybody was involved.

Overall, these holidays not only allowed members to enjoy some walking in different places but a willingness to join in and enjoy the fun and companionship was paramount in all those who went on them. Such companionship continued of course with the later shorter walking breaks in this country.

Roy Freeman

*P.S. Our thanks to Roy who has been the instigator and organiser of the majority of our holidays abroad. K.J. D.*



Madeira  
2004





Madeira  
2004

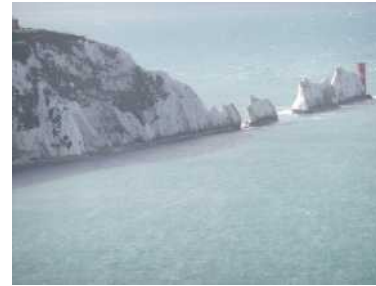


# Group Holidays at Home

Barbara Reed

After several excellent holidays abroad, in April 2007 Geoff Viner organised a long weekend of walks in the New Forest, including two much enjoyed skittle alley evenings.

After some years without a Group walking holiday, in 2010 it was decided to arrange a four day break in the Isle of Wight for October 2011. We could not have imagined that it would be so successful that we would be asked to repeat the experience the following year.



The weather was good for both holidays and gave over 40 of our Members the opportunity to explore the island, choosing to join long or short walks or alternatively visit places of interest using local buses. Whether the more challenging walks along the coastal paths or the more leisurely shorter walks were chosen, we were rewarded with spectacular coastal views.

The meals and services at the Riviera Hotel in Sandown also added to the overall enjoyment of the holiday. On the final evening Sue Bates and Barbara Matthews organised a games evening which was the “icing on the cake” and left us all laughing and looking forward to our next holiday.



Barbara Reed



Austria  
2008



Isle of Wight 2012

## Ruminations of a New Member

by Bryan Smith

**M**y wife Connie had read several items in the Parish Magazine about the local footpath group and had mentioned that they had a couple of walks a week and we should give it a try.

Finally, on retirement she decided to go to Camer Park where a Sunday walk was taking place. I was too busy watching paint dry and excused myself. She enjoyed it so much despite the snow falling on the return to Camer and decided to join. Happily there just happened to be a membership form available for her to take home and complete!

The following week I had run out of excuses and joined her on a walk to see what I was missing. I felt rather conspicuous as I didn't own a walking pole or knapsack so having signed in waited quietly for the off. The leader for the day gave a brief outline of the proposed walk, asked for a volunteer "back marker" and off we set. The back marker had to keep an eye on the walkers ahead, and if anyone had the misfortune to have an accident or need assistance had to shout or whistle for the leader to stop. Also he/she was to shout a warning should a car, bicycle or runner come up behind us.

I soon drifted towards the back of the group as those at the front set off at a brisk pace. We soon reached a stile and I was able to catch my breath while awaiting my turn to climb over. This concertina effect happened throughout the walk at gateways, stiles and roads as the leader took stock and allowed everyone to keep together. This also gave time for walkers to gossip and/or admire the view. As the walk progressed I learned to admire the panache of those with walking poles when they tackled a stile. Some threw their poles over and neatly followed, others stood the poles against the stile, climbed over and then retrieved them. Everyone seemed to have their own solution to the problem.

A coffee break halfway through the walk was taken, when it became evident why everyone had a knapsack. Coffee, tea, biscuits, fruit are all taken and enjoyed and it gave everyone a chance to have a chat.

Setting off again I realised I was either getting my second wind or that the group, feeling replete had slowed down. I soon realised it was the latter and I was able to join in the chit chat more, having made the acquaintance of several people on our journey.

Feeling more at ease I was able to look around and enjoy the views and note where we were. The car park soon came into view and after changing our boots for shoes the group dispersed, some returning home and others heading for the local hostelry for more refreshment. Having now been on many walks I have got to know many of the club members. I have also been introduced to many footpaths, byways and little hamlets in the surrounding area that I had never previously, in 30 years, come across, not to mention some glorious views.

MDFG has an active social calendar and in the recent past has walked on the Isle of Wight, plus I understand the Saxon Shore Way has been walked in stages over a period of time. If you like walking and would like to meet like minded people, I recommend you give the Group a try.

Bryan Smith

## On the social side

Gillian Willsher

**T**o-day the social activities of the Group are very well supported, and are a means of enjoyment amongst our members. For many years there were no such events taking place and it was eventually decided by the committee at the time that it might be an idea for the group to arrange such events. Probably Quiz Nights were the first adventure in the social field, with members of the Committee setting the questions. We got more daring and organised a BBQ at Hope Hill Campsite (Oh how it rained that day!). Undeterred by the weather at the BBQ it was decided to hold a Strawberry Fayre at Hope Hill, this time we organised the hire of a hut, the weather was beautiful. The Strawberry Fayre (with a short walk before and games afterwards) has now become a highlight of our summer.



On another occasion Meopham Parish Council gave their permission for us to hold a "Picnic on the Green" quite a memorable day. Several dinners have been organised – Our President's Dinner, 30th and 40th Anniversary Dinners and this year our 50th Anniversary Supper all of which were well supported and thoroughly enjoyed. At some of these events we raised funds for our chosen charities.

A memorable event was to celebrate our President Mrs Pat Wilson's 90th Birthday with a gathering on Priestwood Green where a cake was cut and duly handed around to members who had walked to the Green.



Victoria Yallop entertaining members at the 50th Anniversary Supper

In the past we have held a Hot Pot Supper and a wine tasting evening with wine from various places including Meopham Vineyard being sampled. More recently we have held a games evening which was great fun and a very popular Jazz night with a ploughman's supper. This latter event was so popular the Committee are to organise another one later this year.

Gillian Willsher

Other pictures taken at the President's tea party

# The Newsletter

Keeping our Members Informed, by Eve Tyler

When the M&DFG started some 50 years ago it could not have been long before it was realised that a Newsletter was required to pass on information to our new membership. Our first Newsletter is lost somewhere in the dawn of that time but would have started with a single page. By the 1980s, membership was 200 or so; subscription £1 and 2 walks a month were on offer. Our present day quarterly Newsletter comprises 8 colourful pages for the email version, although a black and white printed version is still on offer for some members. Some copies are still posted but many are hand-delivered by some of our loyal members. The main focus of the Newsletter is to provide information to our membership, such as advance notice of the AGM, the agenda and précis of the previous AGM minutes, Group involvement in protecting footpaths, as well as advertising our holidays and social events.

Today's edition comprises the all-important Walks' schedule, with information about date, start time, length of walk, leader and contact details. Walks are now twice weekly in the winter months and three times a week in the summer; all led by an enthusiastic team of leaders. Interesting Farm Walks led by local farmers on land not generally open to the public, the Annual London Blind walking group walk and sponsored Charity walks in the local area having some link to the Group are all featured. There are descriptions of recent walks with photos of places visited and members taking part.

We have 6 local businesses giving their support by advertising in the Newsletter. We hope our members mention the Group when responding to an advert, as they make a valued contribution to the Newsletter paying its way. There are also monetary benefits advertised for our members in that a discount is available through the Group on purchases from walking equipment retailers. From time to time information appears as a reminder about our sets of walks leaflets, sweatshirts and polo shirts printed with our logo, which are for sale. The present membership and contact details of the Committee is listed along with articles concerning their work on behalf of members. Important news is relayed from our Chairman and our President, including any new legislation that could affect the local footpath network or open spaces. Information about ROWs, definitions of a footpath, bridleway, byway, etc. can all be found on a regular basis. Information on how to report problem paths or any dangerous animals encountered, where to obtain the form to use, phone numbers and the email address for KCC are necessary additions. There is also information about new publications, historical information about a walking area visited and new publications about the local area of interest to members.

The working side of the Group with its involvement in protecting paths by contact

with local authorities regarding planning applications, appearing at Public Inquiries into footpath diversions or closures that merit our involvement. The Newsletter explains how to get involved with this aspect of the Group and the work of the path-clearing teams in keeping the local paths open and walker-friendly.

Articles on the Countryside Code, how to read maps, lead walks, or be a back-marker can all be found periodically. Health issues are also highlighted, ranging from hazards to look out for to the health-giving benefits of walking, the social benefit of making new friends and of meeting old friends to exchange pleasantries.

And last but not least, there are articles describing our Group holidays and photos of our members enjoying our many and varied social events.

Eve Tyler



# 50 miles of walks to celebrate our 50 years.

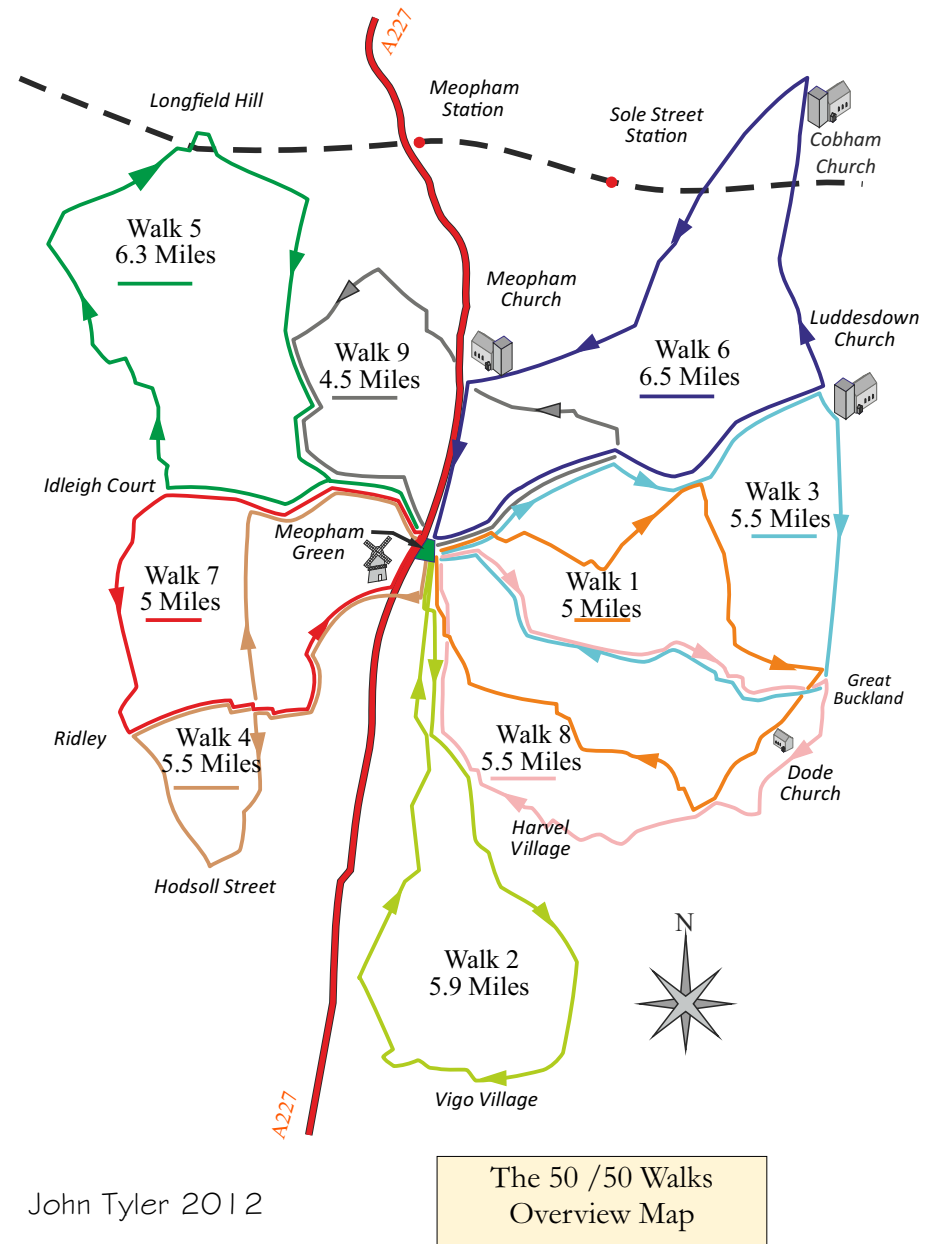
by John Tyler

**D**uring 2012 we celebrated our 50 years of walking and caring for the footpaths in and around Meopham. We looked at how we could commemorate this achievement in a way that would show the Meopham footpaths not only for the members of the group, but to all who wished to walk the paths we know and enjoy. We first looked at the possibility of doing a 50-mile circuit around Meopham but discounted this for number of reasons. The walking of a circular path requires places to start and finish the sections with adequate parking for the group. There would also be sections that would take us through large parts of Gravesend Town which would not show the footpaths that we wanted to celebrate.

The answer was to do a series of walks starting at Meopham Green. The series consisted of nine individual walks ranging in length from 4.5 miles to 6.5 miles. When planning the walks we wanted to try to cover the area as much as possible taking the walks north, south, east and west and then filling between with additional walks. It soon became apparent that the mapped routes were starting to resemble a flower so that is why we adopted the flower emblem for drawing attention to the walks in the newsletter. The walks all took place during the months of May to August 2012 and all were well supported.



The walkers that completed the series within the time scale were awarded a commemorative Certificate at the AGM signed by our President, Pat Wilson and our Chairman, Ken Dare. It was with the help of all the walks leaders that led the walks and the feedback that they gave that made the series of walks possible. The Group would also like to thank Anne Waugh for her help in the checking of the walks by walking them through and for all her helpful comments. The walks are now available on our web site. They are free to download, so please go and explore your local paths that so many people have fought to keep.



John Tyler 2012

The 50 /50 Walks Overview Map





# Looking ahead

by Ken Dare

How far shall we 'look ahead', five years, a decade or perhaps another half-century? We shall do so with no certainty, even for events of tomorrow. Did our Group forebears, so elegantly mentioned by Joan in her poem, attempt to look to the distant horizon that exists today? So many radical changes and developments have occurred, we could all write a list. With that caveat let us gather our courage and look forward with optimism, tempered with reality and ignore any outrageous scenario.

Our Group will continue to flourish, with an increased membership flowing from a recognised need of healthy exercise. More focus will be placed on that latter aspect in an endeavour to achieve improved standards of health.

An ageing population keen to maximise extra years of activity and companionship will look for more frequent short walks at a sympathetic pace. Conversely, there will be younger and / or fitter walkers who will look for a more demanding programme - probably more so than we have at present.

This suggested projection has to embrace a positive response by potential walks leaders. Their commitment and enthusiasm is key to the future of the Group.

Our task to promote and maintain the ROW network will be ever-present. It is indeed probable that demands in that respect will increase as building development in Meopham and District takes place. If the current 25 year Core Strategic Plan of GBC does not meet its aspirations our green land will be under serious threat. (Our Group has firmly expressed its views in accepting the invitation to comment on the Plan).

We all take our countryside and environment very much for granted. Looking forward perhaps we should be less complacent. A walk in our precious countryside is likely to show some increasingly unwelcome trends. The fall in bird population is truly dramatic and continues on an alarming downward path. Our trees are being badly affected; chestnut, elms, oaks and now ash are particular victims. We are all aware of the decline in hedgehogs but the major reductions in insects is, perhaps, less apparent. Bees and wasps are among those suffering a serious reduction with obvious consequences. The E.U. budget problems are heavily impacting adversely on both agriculture and forestry and there is very little likelihood of an improvement in the foreseeable future.

We can do little to reverse these trends but that does not mean we should be unaware or unprepared. For example, keeping our paths clear and taking appropriate action when problems arise may well be heightened as the KCC continues to entrench due to budget restraints.

Alas, I am certainly not a prophet of doom and gloom! Our paths will continue to offer us a fantastic heritage of opportunity to explore and enjoy our countryside, with all the benefits emanating from walking, whether alone or with others. There is more scope

for introducing experts on our walks at times to enhance our knowledge of the countryside and architecture, for example. We are likely, may I suggest, to arrange more holiday breaks and small group trips outside our immediate area. There are, for example, many long distance paths readily within our reach. John's 50/50 walks and Nigel's Castle walks offer us renewed opportunities.

There is a paramount ingredient to our success and continuity - willing and able leadership AND support. If that fails the Group's very existence will be threatened. We must not underestimate that factor. Membership numbers are no safeguard. 'Hiding lights under bushels' is not an option. As an example, for our next walk and in the future, let the leaders see a good number of hands raised when he or she asks for a back-marker. With such spirit prevailing we can 'Look Ahead' with pleasure and enthusiasm to the next 50 years.

Ken Dare





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