

West Malling Town History Walking Tour



The Malling Society

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Blue Plaque narratives can now be found here

<https://www.themallingsociety.org.uk/west-malling-blue-plaques/>



West Malling Town History

Walking Tour

Distance approx. 3 km circular 1.5 - 2-hour gentle walk.

Established shortly after the year 1100, today's town centre of West Malling retains the medieval plan and many fine ancient historic buildings hidden behind 17th and 18th century facades. In 1800 there were 19 alehouses, 2 slaughterhouses, a magistrate's court and fashionable assembly rooms. Two centuries later; the town remains popular for its good selection of pubs, restaurants, specialist shops, regular farmers' markets and 'village community' atmosphere.

Along the way you will see many **Blue Plaques** containing information around the famous and not so famous people that have been associated with West Malling over the years. Each of the Plaques has a QR barcode which will tell you more about that person. However, I have included some basic information on the following pages.

The walk can start anywhere in town and choose where you go using the map or start at the Manor Park carpark just off St Leonard's Street where this guide begins. Parking charges do apply.

The Café in Manor Park closes at 4p.m. There are other stop off refreshment points along the way within the town.

So let's get started...

Walk down the driveway and turn left onto the short footpath which will lead to the main road, directly in front you will see the first of the many stops on our journey.

1. St. Leonard's Tower



St. Leonard's Tower

Between 1080 and 1090, Bishop Gundulf of Rochester chose this important location (overlooking the 'Ewell Spring' and a Roman burial site) to establish the church of St. Leonard (demolished) and to erect the massive tower now known as St. Leonard's Tower. But this was no church tower, rather a bold affirmation of the new Norman regime and a secure 'administrative centre' from which to conduct the secular and religious business of the Parish. In about 1090 Gundulf founded a nunnery at West Malling (below) and established a 'new town' with regular markets providing revenues for the nuns.

In front of the tower can be seen the remains of;

2. St Leonard's Dipping Well and Ewell Spring



Originally a dipping well (probably for the cottages which were pulled down in the 60's (where 112 is now) also for Park Cottages). The well was installed in the mid-19th century when the Tower wall by the road was entirely rebuilt. The water supply for these wells was usually from a nearby spring in this case probably the one by Malling Place. You can see a standpipe and a tap in the 'close-up' photo which was installed when mains water supply was laid on. (The well was filled in). The brick roof over the well

survived into the late 1980's/90's when a car crashed into it - the rubble is still there! It appears that no one will take responsibility for it!! The local community feel that the well should be rebuilt, as it is part of St. Leonard's Street Hamlet heritage, the estimated cost £8000 (2021)

There are no written records of the spring predating the late 19th century, and no known photographic records predating WW2. However, the spring is shown on a map of 1704, and feeds the lake in Manor Park. Clearance of the spring and partial excavation was carried out in August 1998 under supervision of archaeologist Kevin Booth of English Heritage (Dover Castle).

3. Malling Place

As we walk towards the town the next place of interest is a Blue Plaque on the entrance gate post of **Malling Place**. Dating from 1560, Malling Place was owned by three main characters; Admiral **Charles Stewart** bought Malling Place in 1718 and installed in it a captured Spanish ship's mast and leather covered doors.



The son of a Viscount, he saw service in the Nine Years War, wars of the Spanish Succession, Quadruple Alliance, Austrian Succession and other campaigns. Early in his career he lost a hand. In 1720 he commanded a squadron against the Sale Rovers and Mediterranean Pirates. He negotiated a treaty with Morocco and obtained the release of 296 British prisoners. He served as Commander in Chief in the West Indies becoming a Member of Parliament for Malmesbury 1723-1727 and Portsmouth 1737 until his death. A mahogany Spanish ship's mast in the staircase and leather covered doors in Malling Place come from his active service.



Admiral John Forbes (1714 – 1796) Forbes passed his vast knowledge of naval matters to his friend and colleague William Locker, Horatio Nelson's acknowledged mentor and so called "Sea Daddy".

He refused to sign the Death Warrant of Vice-Admiral Byng.

Byng's execution.

'On 14 March 1757, despite appeals (2 vice-admirals refused to sign the sentence), Byng was led on to the quarterdeck of his flagship, the Monarch, which was anchored off Spithead, amid mobs chanting "Swing, swing Admiral Byng". A coffin had already been brought on board inscribed with his date of death. Byng prepared himself for death with bravery, resignation and remarkable composure. 6 marines fired and Byng fell to his side.

Why so harsh?

The British government may have sought a scapegoat in the admiralty, having badly underestimated the threat by the French and denied Byng the reinforcements he had requested. It was supposed to send a message to future naval officers that a refusal to fight faced severe consequences.

As the philosopher Voltaire, witness at the execution, aptly put it in his (then scandalous) novella Candide, 'In this country, it is good to kill an admiral from time to time, in order to encourage the others.'

Born in Minorca, Forbes was the son of the third Earl of Granard. He served on the *Burford* under his uncle Hon. Charles Stewart.

In 1729 Stewart promoted Forbes to Lieutenant. He was Captain of the *Poole*, later commanding the *Port Mahon*, the *Severn*, the *Tiger* and the *Guernsey*. Commanding the *Norfolk* in 1742 he took part in the battle off Toulon in 1744, and gave evidence in the Parliamentary enquiry. As Rear Admiral of the Blue in 1747 he was second in command to John Byng. In 1748 he rose to Rear Admiral of the White. He became Vice-Admiral of the Blue 1755 and was elected to the Irish Parliament. Under William Pitt he became a member of the Admiralty Board.

In 1758 he married Lady Mary Capel and became Admiral of the Blue, Admiral of the White 1770, and Admiral of the Fleet 1781. He bought Malling Place in 1779, where he lived until his death in 1796. He was highly respected.



Sir Thomas Twisden presided at the trials of the executioners of Charles I in 1660.

Born 1602 at Roydon, East Peckham he attended Emmanuel College Cambridge in 1614. He was admitted to the Inner Temple 1617, called to the Bar in 1626 and married Jane Thomlinson in 1639. Jane Thomlinson was the sister of the man who escorted Charles I to his execution. Twisden bought Malling Place in 1642. He became a Bencher in 1646 and changed the spelling of his name from Twysden to Twisden. At this time, he became Member of Parliament for Maidstone but was excluded in 1648. He became Sergeant at Law in 1654 and bought The Manor of Bradbourne House, East Malling, Kent in 1656. After the Coronation of Charles II, he became MP for Maidstone again in 1660 and was knighted. After the trials of the Regicides (the signatories to Charles I death warrant) he was made a baronet in 1666. He died in 1683.

In 1796 it was bought by Thomas Augustus Douce who also owned the adjoining property, Douces Manor. In the mid-1800s Malling Place became the West Malling Lunatic Asylum when the original moved down from the High Street.

4. Douce's Manor



Thomas Augustus Douce occupied this imposing 18th-century mansion, created by Benjamin Hubble from a Tudor farmhouse. Douce landscaped 'Manor Park' (opposite) and purchased the Manor of West Malling. A mixed history of ownership and use includes WW II fighter pilots, who signed the ceiling of the cellar with candle smoke. The house is now made up into luxury apartments, and the cellar has been preserved for use as a Museum and Heritage Centre by the Malling Society - **The Twitch Inn**

(See website for opening days.)
www.themallingsociety.org.uk

5. John 'Cat's Eyes' Cunningham and Peter Woolridge Townsend



On the main gate entrance to Douces Manor can be seen a Blue Plaque detailing two pilots of World War II. **John 'Cat's Eyes' Cunningham** born in the middle of World War I and joined the Royal Air Force in 1935. He flew many types of aircraft and became known as a test pilot. In 1940 when he was flying Bristol Blenheims, his squadron took up night flying activities, and developed the use of the new airborne radar. In September of that year, he



became a Squadron Leader, and two years later a Wing Commander. Whilst flying night fighters, his squadron shot down twice the number of enemy aircraft as any other. In order to keep the advent of radar secret, the story was told that this was due to a diet of carrots to improve his night vision. This led to him becoming known as "Cats Eyes" – and it also helped to promote the value of vegetables in the diet of a population of a country at war. In 1943 he continued night flying in command of 85 Squadron based at West Malling.

Douce's Manor was used as accommodation, and also served as the headquarters for RAF West Malling and the officers' mess. After the war Cunningham continued flying as a test pilot and flew the world's first jet airliner, the Comet. He never married and retired in 1980.

Also stationed at RAF West Malling between April and December 1941 was Guy Gibson, then acting Squadron Leader of 29 squadron of Bristol Beaufighters. Later Wing Commander Gibson went on to lead the famous Dam Busters raid in 1943 for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest military award for bravery.



Peter Woolridge Townsend joined the Royal Air Force in 1933. He was one of three pilots that shot down the first enemy aircraft over England at the start of World War 2, which led to him being awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). In 1940 he was a notable pilot in the Battle of Britain, acting throughout the action as squadron Leader of 85 Squadron in Hurricanes. In August 1940 he was shot down and wounded over Tonbridge. He was awarded a Distinguished Service Order (DSO) in 1941. He went on to fly Spitfires and led a night flying squadron. In 1943 he became commanding officer of RAF West Malling, and was promoted to Group Captain in 1948. Townsend was credited with a total of eleven kills.

He is also known for his romance with Princess Margaret, whom he met when, after the war, he became equerry to King George VI. Unfortunately, Townsend was divorced, and in the social environment at the time a marriage would have been met with severe disapproval, so the Princess broke up the relationship. He spent most of his later life as a writer.

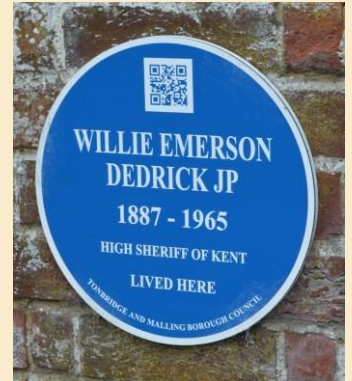
Walking up the hill to our next port of call **Brome House**

6. Brome House



Willie Dedrick lived here and was born in Snodland and died 18th March 1963 aged 77 years. His wife Doris Harriet died 2nd December 1981 aged 90 years. He was a scholar at Marlborough College and Managing Director of Snodland Paper Mill from 1919 to 1963. His father William was Managing Director before him and rebuilt the business following the disastrous fire of 1906 thus saving the livelihoods of many workers. Willie enabled the continued success of the business by links with The Times etc. A keen collector of art and antiques, he paid for the construction of windows in All Saints Snodland

from medieval fragments left after a bomb blast. A beautiful window commemorating him by Moira Forsyth was installed in the ancient All Saints Church, Snodland in 1963, and a garden was built near the High Street. More information on the window can be found in Snodland Museum.

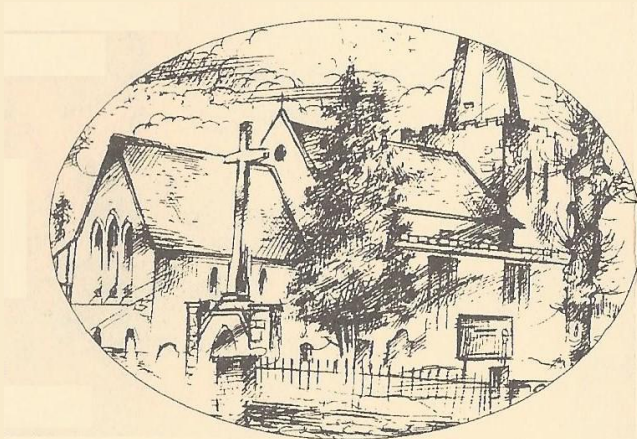


Willie Emerson Dedrick sat on the Bench at West Malling and was High Sheriff of Kent in 1952. The Office of High Sheriff is the oldest secular crown office. Originally the principal law officer, the role of Sheriff is now largely ceremonial.

At the end of WW2 Mr Dedrick ceremonially planted a flowering crab apple tree at the North end of the small green on which stands the Town Sign and the Statue "Hope". It is possible that the tree also commemorates his nephew Richard William Pearson killed in HMS Hasty off Malta June 1942 aged 22 years. The tree is still living at the date of writing.

Lord Abergavenny succeeded Willie as Chairman of Snodland Paper Mill 1963 and KJ Funnel, author of the book Snodland Paper Mill, became Managing Director.

7. St. Mary The Virgin Church



oak flooring, pews and other fittings when it was auctioned in 1903 for the princely sum of 1450 guineas.

This Norman church is built on the highest part of the surrounding land. The nave was twice rebuilt whilst much of the Chancel are original. The needle spire was rebuilt in 1838. The golden ball of which contains a poem that was found in the spire was replaced. Inside, look for the Royal Coat of Arms (c. 1685) and a fine brass to Elizabeth Pierpoynt (1548), whose descendants emigrated to America.

A very rare Elizabethan stone-ware jug with silver-gilt mounts, discovered in the vicarage, provided funds for a new porch,



8. Church House

A grand and elegant Georgian house, in common with many other properties in the Town retains its fine original railings. Home to Captain Charles John Moore Mansfield RN, 1760 – 1813 Captain of HMS Minotaur at the Battle of Trafalgar

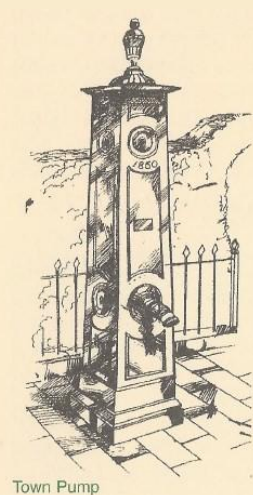


9. Tudor House



A boldly detailed late 17th century front with wing (now known as Tudor Cottage) to the right. Here the original mullioned casement windows of the upper storey have survived the usual replacement by sashes during the 18th or 19th century. Tudor House, like so many other houses, hides a secret hence its name, for inside one finds the remains of a medieval house.

10. The Old Vicarage



By the Town Pump, which was moved from its original position in the middle of the road when a vehicle crashed into it during a blackout in the war, stands The Old Vicarage.



It is a fine example of mid-18th century 'Gothic', with ornate geometric tracery windows and delicate internal joinery to match.

11. Forsters and Wisteria House

Here, two good Georgian town houses preserve their original external shutters, hinged at Forsters and the rare sliding type at Wisteria House, home to Dr. John Vincent Bates MD., MC.



On the opposite side of the High Street can be seen -

12. The Farmhouse

Until recently known as 'The Bear', this ancient coaching inn was well placed for trading at the upper end of the High Street. Visitors in c.1700 are reputed to have witnessed a duel here between Nephew Twisden and his disapproving lawyer Uncle. For more details you will need to consult the County Archives.



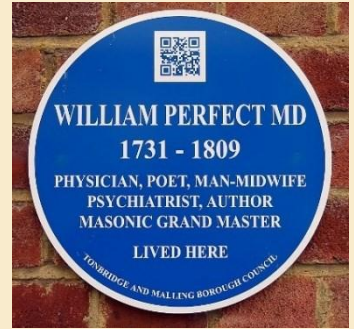
13. William Perfect



Picture: Trustees of the British Museum

Back on the west side of the High Street our next port of call is the home of **William Perfect** probably born in Bicester in 1737. His father became vicar of East Malling in 1742. From 1756 the family was resident in West Malling High Street.

William married three times and fathered ten children.



In November 1749 William Perfect became apprenticed to William Everred, a surgeon in London. He also studied under Colin McKenzie who was a strong advocate against the practice of wearing swords and cloaks at births! By 1757 he was practising in West Malling referring to himself as Surgeon, Apothecary and Man-Midwife. His studies and subsequent books show he was at the forefront of the new medical interest in Mid-Wifery.

He set up a private Lunatic asylum known as **West Malling Lunatic Asylum, High Street, West Malling**. His practice, also known as Dr Perfect's asylum, was also his home. Founded in the 1760s William Perfect, had a particular interest in treating people deemed to be insane. Patients would be invited to stay with him and, according to research, he advertised his services in newspapers.

It is understood he was nicknamed the 'Mad Doctor', something author Shirley Burgoyne Black seized upon for her book, *An 18th Century Mad-Doctor: William Perfect of West Malling*. She wrote that he became "a successful practitioner at a time when few men considered it possible to relieve the insane, nervous and hysterical patients".

Perfect was also a noteworthy poet of the period. His poetry was first published in *Martin's Magazine* 1755.

In 1765 Perfect became a Freemason despite the French Revolution creating public suspicion of the organisation. By Royal Patent of the Prince of Wales he was appointed in 1795 as Provincial Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Kent. His second child, Sarah, went on to marry Sylvester Harding, a well-known miniaturist painter at the time whose work is still famous today, and London's National Portrait Gallery once staged a retrospective exhibition of his work.

He died in 1809 but the asylum continued to be run by his son, George. When it failed financially, it changed hands and was moved to Malling Place and ceased taking patients in the late 1900s.

William Perfect was buried in the tomb he constructed in East Malling Churchyard. His triple oak and lead coffin was brought at midnight from West Malling by torchlight in a cortege drawn by black horses.

14. The Five-Pointed Star

A medieval house possibly dated 1380, the style and position suggest a farmhouse from which the occupants may have brewed ale for sale to traders and visitors to the High Street market at their doorstep.



15. The Beatles

Two doors down from the Pointed Star we visit the place where **The Beatles** Magical Mystery Tour started.



The Beatles are generally recognised as comprising John Lennon (1940 – 1980), Paul McCartney (1942 -), George Harrison (1943 – 2001) and Ringo Starr (Richard Starkey, 1940 -). The rock band was formed in 1960, although the individuals started playing skiffle in the late fifties.

The original line-up did not include Starr, who joined in 1962. The Beatles continued as one of the foremost rock bands in the world until their break up which started in 1970. During their existence they published 12 albums in the UK and the Magical Mystery Tour in America. In 1970 their song Let it be won an Oscar for the best original song score. Amongst their many other awards were 15 Ivor Novello awards.

As well as being an album, the *Magical Mystery Tour* was also released as a 52-minute film. It was first shown on BBC1 on 26 December 1967 and was largely filmed at West Malling airfield, at the time a de-commissioned RAF airfield and now Kings Hill. Shortly after the beginning of the film, Ringo Starr went into a newsagent and bought tickets for the *Magical Mystery Tour* for himself and his “Aunt Jessie” from John Lennon.

That newsagent was the Town Newsagency, then at 90 High Street, West Malling.

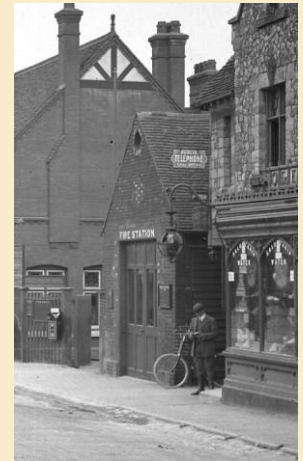
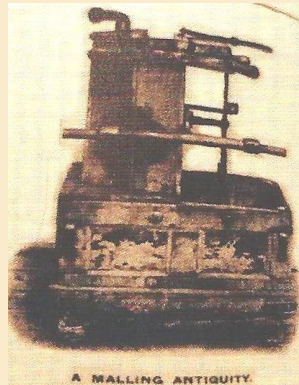
The Market

The wide High Street appears to have been designed to accommodate a market here from the beginning of the 12th century, when King Henry I granted the first license for a Saturday market in 1102. The Market Cross, which stood by the entrance to West Street until the 18th century, marked the southern end of the Green which extended to the top of Town Hill. By the 15th century much of the Green had been permanently settled by traders and became known as ‘Middle Row’, that is, the thin strip of land between King Street and the High Street.

The Fire Service

Where TESCO supermarket in the High Street is, was where the West Malling Fire Service had their building. They operated out of a very small building. Before 1938 and the introduction of the Fire Brigade Act, all service members were volunteers. Fires in the town were put out for free but those outside of the town would be charged.

This fire engine was from the 1700s. >>>>>>



When a shout was made for a fire, a boy would be called to go and rally all the volunteers to attend. He would race around to all the properties calling for them to come quickly. They would dress and get to the scene as quickly as possible and the horse and fire Service cart would be assembled and set off as quickly as they could.

Difficult times if we take into consideration that in those days most properties were built of wood but they did their best.



16. The Colonnade

Turning left into West Street on the right passing what was originally a malt loft (hence the pattern of first floor doors) providing shelter for produce and a wagon shed below. Above the rear part one sees the flues for a pair of drying kilns (oasts) linking into a medieval building adjacent.

Continue past the Colonnade and turn right into King Street.

17. King Street

Parallel to the north end of the High Street, King Street (sometimes known as Sole or Back Street), this may preserve the original route of an ancient drove road through West Malling.

Until recently medieval houses survived in a continuous line from the Colonnade down to Ryarsh Lane.

'Avicia Cottage' and the adjoining (recently restored) timber-framed and jettied cross-wing, together retain an original cross-passage and smoke-blackened roof timbers typical of the medieval 'open hall'

with a central hearth on the floor. The very deep concaved bressumer beam, which supports the front jetty to the cottage is a rare detail for this design of building and expresses high quality craftsmanship.

Between here and 'The Prior's House', another impressive timber-framed hall house with jettied cross-wing (illustrated), most of the houses on the west side of King Street conceal medieval timber framing behind 17th and 18th century brick facades.

The cross banding on the front of the next group of 3 cottages dates from the later 19th century, but this also hides a medieval structure with unusual scissor stairs and a fine early fireplace.



18. Hope



The figure of the running woman represents the present moment in time, caught for an instant in its ceaseless forward movement. The rich tapestry of West Malling's past is shown on the back of the cloak that billows out behind her. The future is still to happen, the dove has yet to take flight and when it does, it will carry with it all our "hopes and prayers for ourselves", our community and our world.



Commissioned and paid for by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council in June 2000, in consultation with West Malling Parish Council and the Malling Society, it was unveiled on Saturday 7 July 2001, it was designed and created by Sarah Cunningham.

The scenes depicted on the eight panels on the back of the cloak represent the following:

1. Today, West Malling is a thriving community with a rich tradition of community art. The sculpture of Hope provides another focal point within the town where people can meet.





2. West Malling Airfield and its Mosquito squadrons featured significantly in the Second World War.

3. West Malling was and to a great extent still is, the centre of a rich agricultural tradition of hop gardens and orchards.



4. In 1704 the first ever recorded game of cricket was played in West Malling.



5. For many hundreds of years, the town was the site of a thriving market under a charter from the Abbess and the market continued even after the dissolution of the Abbey by Henry VIII.



6. Wyatt's rebellion against Mary Tudor was crushed by troops loyal to the Queen, stationed at West Malling. Wyatt was then executed in 1554

7. Scenes from the time of the Black Death (1348-49), when West Malling was the site of mass graves or plague pits, where the dead from a wide area of North West Kent were buried. Of the inhabitants of the whole town and the Abbey only 15 remained alive. It is believed that the Plague Pits were in the area of Banky Meadow, London Road on the North end of Town Malling.





8. The founding of the community of Benedictine nuns by Bishop Gundulph in 1090. A centre of prayer for 5 centuries before the dissolution of the monasteries, the community was re-established at the start of the 20th century.



Opposite The Hope Statue is Abingdon House, the former home of Thomas Selby 1791 - C1860 Solicitor And Cricketer. Member of Ancient Kent Family Co-Founder of Town Malling Cricket Ground

19. Fuller Pilch – Cricketers Inn

If you turn left down Ryarsh Lane, about 60 yards on the left you will arrive at the house of **Fuller Pilch**, born in Horningtoft, Norfolk on 17 March 1803. He had two elder brothers who were professional cricketers. He started his own cricketing career at Lords in 1820 playing for Norfolk against Marylebone.

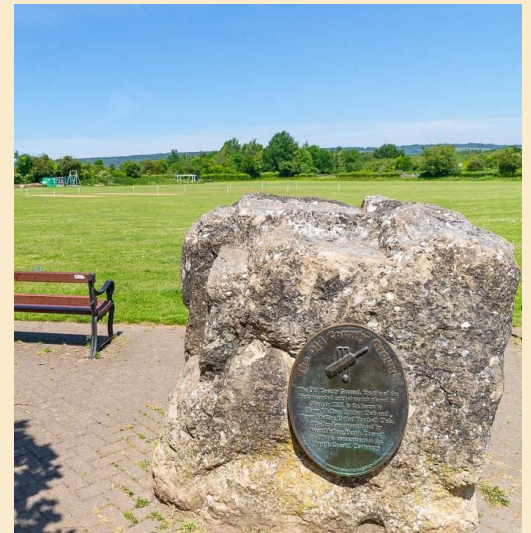


By the late 1820s he had become recognised as the best batsman England had produced, and that continued until the appearance of WG Grace in the 1860s. He developed a style of playing forward to the ball to rush the bowler. This shot became known as the “Pilch Poke”, and that term is still recognised today. In 1835 he transferred to the Town Malling team on a salary of £100 a year, and took over the Cricketers’ Inn which had a cricket field attached (Kent’s County ground at the time).

The Cricketers’ Inn later became a private house and is recorded as the last building in Ryarsh Lane. In 1842 the county ground moved to Canterbury, and so did Pilch - to play for Kent’s County side, where he remained until he retired in 1855, having played for Kent through 19 seasons. He amassed a total of 10 centuries - which was quite an accomplishment when you consider how poor some of the pitches were.



There is a plaque at the Old Cricket Ground, which is now accessed from Norman Road, which gives a brief history of cricket in West Malling and Pilch's starring role in it. Pilch never married, and died on 1st May 1870 of dropsy, aged 67. He is buried in St Gregory's Church in Canterbury, where there is a large monument to him.



20. Village Signs

Commissioned by the Malling Society. Designed and carved by local artists Andrew Protheroe and Victoria Pataky in 1986, the Sign depicts Bishop Gundulf overseeing the three Norman towers of St. Leonard's, St. Mary's Church and the Abbey, together with symbols of orchards, hops and the Battle of Britain.



The other side depicts the cricket match between Muggleton and Dingley Dell in Dickens' Pickwick Papers, believed to have been set in West Malling, the original home of the County ground. Records go back to 1715 and include such famous names as W. G. Grace. The Cricket ground is located in Norman Road, just 200 yards west of the High Street.

Old sign

Street.

New sign

21. The Bull Inn



The facade of The Bull (decorative tiles and brickwork of 1875) hides the original right-hand part of a large farmhouse, c.1400.

A photograph of the original building was taken before the railway came in 1870, when the rest of the building was demolished. A rare and complete stair tower with solid oak treads lies to the rear.

Crossing the bridge over the railway Malling House (also known as the Lantern House for its Lantern dome), dominates the northern approach to the Town. Although almost totally rebuilt in recent times, this is yet another 18th century mansion, built around a much earlier structure and subsequently owned by a branch of the famous Neville family of Birling.

22. Malling House and Town Hill

Nevills/Abergavenny

The Rev **William Nevill** 4th Earl of Abergavenny (1792-1868) bought Lantern House and Estate (now called Malling House) in 1866 from the Heirs of Valentine Phillips, one of whom was Phillips of the famous Bond Street Auction House. William succeeded to the title of 18th Lord of Abergavenny in 1845. Chaplain to King William IV, he was Vicar of Frant and Rector of Birling. With General Luck of the Hermitage, he let property in the High Street and Swan Street to finance four local schools.



He married **Caroline Leeke** and they had seven children. Five were living in 1866, Henrietta-Augusta,

Ralph Pelham, William (later the 5th Earl and 1st Marquis of Abergavenny) Isabel and Caroline. The daughter, The Lady Caroline Emily Nevill 1829-1887, was an exhibitor at The Royal Photographic Society and a founder member of The Photographic Exchange Club, producing a series of Architectural views of Kent 1855-1858.



A Waxed Paper Negative photograph of Allington Castle by Lady Caroline Neville. One of a series of Kentish Architectural studies exhibited at the London Royal Photographic Society 1855-1858.

Caroline was a pioneer of early waxed paper negative and luminous lint photography. Together with her two sisters (called "The Trio") she produced embroidered artworks. She spent her time fundraising and helping the poor of West Malling, living most of her life here. She died in London, her body being transported from West Malling Station at walking pace to Birling by Mr Viner, Funeral Director. All work and business stopped throughout the district for the duration of the funeral out of respect.

Ralph Pelham Nevill (1832-1914) High Sheriff of Kent (married Louisa Maclean (1833-1919) and had seven children. They lived in Lantern (Malling) House until 1873. Ralph was a keen, able sportsman, huntsman, dog and cattle breeder. For eight years he commanded a troop in the West Kent Yeomanry. The family gave the small Green, on which stands the Town Sign and the statue "Hope", to the Parish.



Percy Llewelyn Nevill enlarged the Lantern estate by buying property in Town Hill c.1900.

During World War I the house was used as a Voluntary Aid Detachment Hospital and the estate was eventually divided and partly built on. Malling House (Lantern House) is an ancient and commanding site. A 1986 survey showed it incorporated an early timber framed building with a gable end to the road with 17th, 18th and 19th century additions. In the 18th century it was a mansion owned by the Burt family. Mrs Burt wrote to Trollop's, the wallpaper company in London, for advice on wallpaper. Valentine Phillips owned it before Earl Abergavenny but there are gaps in the record.

This site commands views of the Medway Gap, a topographic feature. It was created when the prehistoric River Medway cut roughly south to north through the line of chalk hills the North Downs.



On the other side of the road a Blue Plaque dedicated to

23. The Rt. Hon. Charles Kenneth Dain C.B.E.



(centre of picture) and his wife bought 58 and 56 Town Hill in 1923, this being one property. It was their home until 1956. Before retirement he was Treasurer of Uganda at Entebbe, President of the Tender Board and Controller of Savings. He was awarded a C.B.E. in 1927. He was responsible for advising the British Government on all financial matters related to the British Protectorate of Uganda. After independence, Dictator Idi Amin expelled 60,000 Asians. Many thousands of people were killed in ethnic cleansing. West Malling housed many Ugandan Asians.



Town Hill Cottage 58 and Top Hill House 56, Town Hill are Grade 2 Listed Buildings. Town Hill Cottage (No 58) was originally a detached, 16th century half-hipped house, of earlier origin with considerable surrounding land and outbuildings. In the late 18th century Top Hill House (No 56) was built as an extension to No 58 by the Martin family. Circa 1900 the property was bought by the Nevill (Earl Abergavenny) family becoming part of their Lantern Estate opposite, with Lady Agnew in residence until c.1920.

24. Francis Tress and The Boys' School



Heading back to the High Street on the left we pass **The Boys' School** where one **Francis Tress**, founder and benefactor made provision so that children of West Malling could be educated. This carried on at this site for over three hundred years. The plaque in this photograph is in St Mary's Church. It states in 1623 Francis Tress, gentleman, gave £40 for building a Free School, 15 shillings and 4 pence for repairing it, two silver cups and 6 shillings and 8 pence yearly to the poor to be paid out of a piece of land called Coussin's Plat (sic) occupied by William Chapman a gentleman.



Little is known about Tress. His name could be a corruption of Tracey. There are ancient tombs attributed to the Tress family in Offham Churchyard. It is not known where Tress lived in West Malling. The house may stand today.

The Historian Edward Hasted in 1798 recorded that Tress also gave the land for the school and charged one of his houses here 13 shillings and 8 pence per annum for repairs. Four principal freeholders were appointed to administer the charity for ever which is vested in the Ministry. In 1798 it was being paid out of Robert Sutton's estate. The schoolhouse was occupied at 2 guineas per annum by the Master's widow. The Ordnance Survey Map of 1800 shows the building. The 1865 map notes it as a school for endowed boys. The school continued, and there are still residents living who attended as pupils.

In the mid twentieth century the school became private houses. The forty-ton stone inglenook fireplace was removed from the Master's house (no. 3) but the house still retains elements of Tress's original school. The school is an important part of local social history. Anyone who has information should contact West Malling Parish Council.

25. Assembly Rooms (Silvesters) 36 and 38 High Street.



The Assembly Rooms followed the 18th century fashion for creating places of entertainment: dancing in a grand ballroom upstairs, music and gambling at cards. Mr. Dudlow, who lived at Tudor House in 1750, demolished an earlier structure and built these rooms. Old trading papers show William Usmar, clockmaker was here in 1843.

Later, the ballroom was used as the Masonic temple, and later still as a Magistrates' court. A tavern to the rear, 'The King's Head', was joined to the Assembly Rooms to provide accommodation.

26. The Bakery The square head of a medieval Market Cross bearing a Holy Rood, other carvings can be seen in the adjoining wall of this 15th century building, now called 'Frank's Restaurant', is yet another 15th century house. Inside diners can see a magnificent inglenook fireplace whilst the frontage sports an unusual upstairs projection partly clad in mathematical tiles to give the appearance of brickwork. At pavement level, look for the curious carved stone figure in the wall — the only remaining fragment of the old Market Cross! Below the cellar trap door is hidden a magnificent stone arch. Don't forget to look at -



The Bakery

27. 65-67 High Street

The twin gables above **"The Hungry Guest"** and **"Costa Coffee"** mark one of the most important pre-Tudor buildings in the High Street.

At No. 65, The Hungry Guest, there is a fine stone fireplace upstairs and an ornate crown-post roof, both dating from the 15th century when the two premises formed part of an inn called 'The Bull' (later 'The Angel').

28. 1-3 Swan Street



This large medieval building was re-roofed in mansard shape and modernised with sash windows.

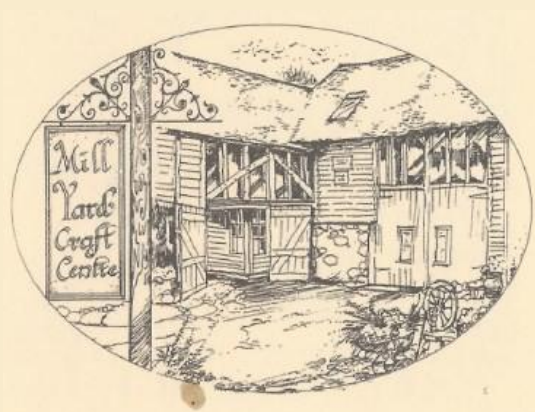
A mansard or mansard roof (also called a French roof or curb roof) is a four-sided gambrel-style hip roof characterised by two slopes on each of its sides with the lower slope, punctured by dormer windows, at a steeper angle than the upper.



Situated in a prominent position (on the corner of Swan Street) it counts amongst its former owners 6 Knights grooms to the Royal Bedchamber and Judge Twisden.

Turning left into Swan Street and on the right, is **Rose's Coffee & Juice** is on the corner as we enter -

29. Mill Yard with some quaint craft shops. At the entrance to The Mill Yard and Craft Centre which possibly originated about 1550, is the tall stone building once a warehouse for corn, hence the sack hoist over the top doors. Opposite is one of the most important Norman houses in Britain (c1160), with its original fireplace upstairs and triple crown post roof. (Rear of **65-67 High Street** showing the more ancient side of The Hungry Guest and Costa) and the Swan Mill. Possibly it was built to accommodate visiting dignitaries to the Abbey.



30. The Swan



This large medieval hall house originally faced west into what is now a back yard, but eventually became a Coaching Inn yard leading onto the High Street.

Towards the end of the 17th century the Inn was enlarged and remodeled to face onto Swan Street, with a later extension to accommodate a Magistrates' court. In the 19th century Mr. Luck, the carrier ran his 'fly vans' from Maidstone at 6.30am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, calling here at 9.00am before travelling on to London. This inn is identified by a contemporary author W R Hughs as the Blue Lion of Pickwick Papers fame.

Moving on further down Swan Street on the left is Police Station Road home of the former West Malling Police Station (now converted into flats), this was also the home of the Magistrates Court. If you continue down Police Station Road on the right, you will come to the home of **Freda Barton**.

31. Freda Barton



Born Ellen Esther HILL in 1867 and she later married Fred Barton in 1891. Living with his widowed mother in West Malling, Freda and her husband moved to Hadlow in 1893 and became interested in professional photography. In 1903 she became a firm friend of the notable London photographer, Henry Snowden WARD. An early member of the Royal Photographic Society, he was her mentor and instrumental in the improvement of her photography.



Between 1898-1905, Freda took many photographs of her family and friends, and in the Hadlow area. Being in demand and needing a larger property to work from, she moved, with her husband and three sons, to this house in 1905 which they rented. She set herself up as a commercial photographer under the name of Mrs Fred Barton until her husband died in 1927, then as Freda Barton Photographer until her death in 1940.

Her photographs include local gentry, their houses and a wide variety of subjects of exceptional quality in and around West Malling. The Freda Barton Collection is one of the very best portfolios of commercial

photographs between the late 1890's and late 1930's providing a record of the social history of West Malling for future generations.

The Malling Society are custodians of the Freda Barton Collection of photographs. In 1977 a member of the Maidstone Camera Club was asked by a work colleague for help in bleaching out images from some old glass photographic plates as he wished to build a greenhouse. Realising their importance, the 2000 plus plates were given to the Society. We have mounted many exhibitions of these photographs and the plates are lodged with Kent Archives, who have put them in digital format. Our total archive of photographs of the Malling area exceeds 5000 in number. Just a few of the Collection are shown on the website.

32. Malling Abbey (St Mary's Abbey)

Bishop Gundulf's foundation here dates from c. 1090, and must be one of the first post-Conquest nunneries in England. Following the dissolution in 1538, most of the church was dismantled, leaving only the West tower, the south wall of the nave, parts of the crossing tower and south transept, and parts of the cloister arcades.



On the far left of the gatehouse was a village lock up or goal.



Abbey Gate House



33. Gundulf was born in Normandy, now part of France. Four years after the conquest of England in 1066, while he was a monk of Caen, Gundulf was called to England to assist Lanfranc, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the administration of that diocese. Gundulf was appointed Bishop of Rochester in 1077. As a skilled architect he rebuilt the almost ruined Cathedral in the Norman style and founded a community of Benedictine monks to serve there.

In 1078 King William I appointed Gundulf to oversee the building of the White Tower of London. He was responsible for the building of St Leonard's Tower, here in West Malling, and many churches in the Medway Towns. In about 1090 Gundulf founded this Abbey (St. Mary's) for Benedictine nuns, one of the first post-conquest monasteries for women; it is the home of Benedictine nuns today. Gundulf was famous for his care of the poor and his devotion to prayer. He died on 8th March 1108 aged 85, and is still honoured as the patron of the Royal Engineers.



34. Aretas Akers, was born in October 1851, and spent his early childhood at St Mary's Abbey, West Malling, his grandmother's home. His father was the local parson.



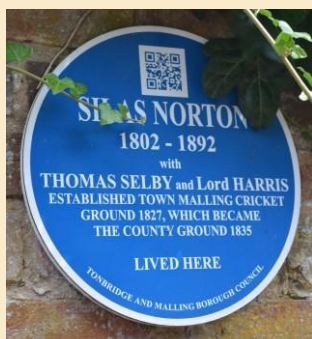
He was Home Secretary between 1905 and 1908, and was a Conservative MP for East Kent constituencies from 1880 until 1911. He was the Chief Whip in Conservative governments between 1885 to 1892, an era of party splits and high political tension over Irish Home Rule. In 1911 he was created 1st Viscount Chilston, taking the name from his country seat, Chilston Park, which he had inherited in 1875, along with the additional surname of Douglas.

Akers-Douglas was a significant figure in his party for over thirty years, an able administrator who is credited with improving party discipline from the 1880s onwards. He was a friend of Lord Randolph Churchill, and corresponded with Lord Salisbury and Queen Victoria, as well as writing the nightly parliamentary letter to Edward VII during Balfour's premiership.

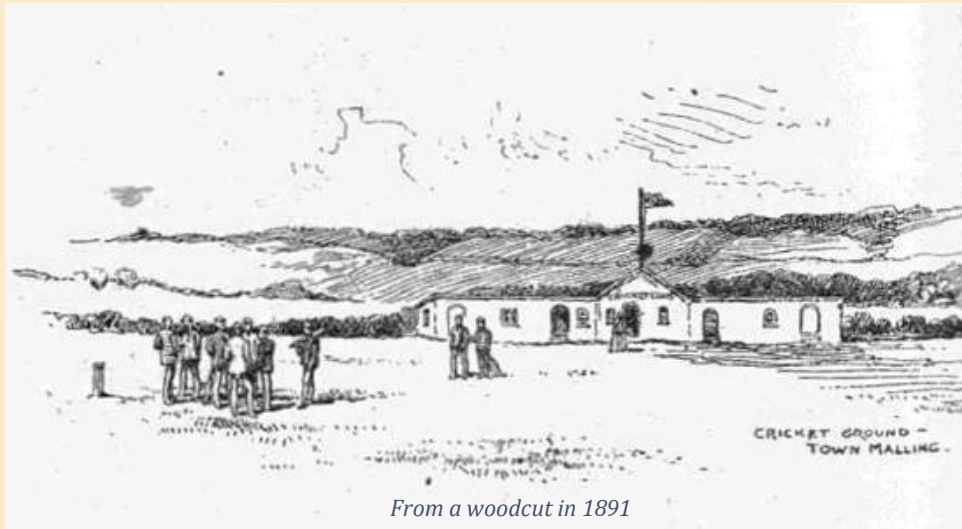
After 1911 he retired almost entirely from public life, and he died in London in 1926.

The surviving Abbey Gatehouse dates from the 15th and 16th centuries, adjoining the earlier Chapel of St. Thomas on the left. Note the gargoyle to the right of the left-hand chimney, and the Tudor oriel window on the left wall. Although occupied by an enclosed order of Anglican Benedictine nuns, and not usually accessible to the public, one can catch sight of the original West Tower of the Abbey from Swan Street. Tours are available on Heritage weekends in September.

Opposite the cascade, at **79 Swan Street, lived: Silas Norton and Thomas Selby.**



35. Silas Norton and his business partner **Thomas Selby** were solicitors and both from ancient Kentish families. Selby was part of a very ancient Kentish family of worldwide influence who had owned property in West Malling since at least the 15th century. The Bodleian Library holds documents relating to him. Norton was born and died in West Malling. He held his law licence almost until his death at the age of 90. He married Sarah Ann Bookham and they had six children. Cricket had been played in West Malling since at least 1705. Norton and Selby linked with William George 2nd Lord Harris (1782-1845) and formed Town Malling Cricket Club.



From a woodcut in 1891

The “New Ground” (or St Georges Field) was established, and the first match played in 1827. The well-known cricketer Fuller Pilch (mentioned earlier) was retained on a salary of £100 per year. Pilch’s house backs onto the Cricket Ground. His duties included being Landlord of the Cricketer’s Arms in Ryarsh Lane and cutting the grass! First Class cricket was first played in 1836 and attracted a “gate” of 8,000. The Lords Harris have since been enormously influential in the development of cricket in England and India.

Long thought to be the inspiration and setting for Charles Dickens’s famous “Muggleton” match in the *Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837), Charles Dicken’s son wrote “Muggleton is perhaps only a fancy sketch of a small country town but if anywhere Town Malling sat for it being a great place for cricket in Mr Pickwick’s time.” Another woodcut of the High Street in West Malling was included in the edition of *Pickwick Papers* which celebrated the jubilee of Queen Victoria.”

36. The Cascade

Although an attached stone marker above the arch suggests that the Cascade was built in 1810, it is mentioned in correspondence to Dr. Johnson in 1777 and painted by J.M.W. Turner in 1792.

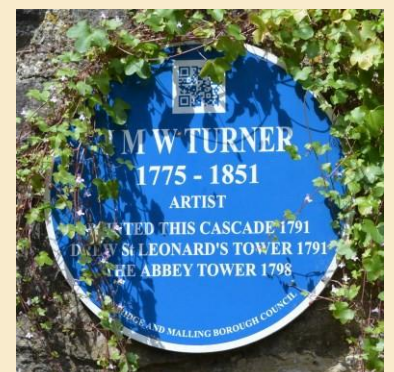
Recent research suggests that it was converted from a late medieval Abbey building on the same site in c. 1760.

The Cascade fed by a water leat from the springhead at St. Leonard’s Well and Spring is probably the site of the ancient water mill described in a remarkable marriage bond dated 1718 and held in the Centre for Kentish Studies Maidstone.



The Cascade today

37. Joseph William Mallord Turner was described by the leading nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin as the artist who could “most stirringly and truthfully measure the moods of nature”. Turner’s youthful genius as a landscape artist is captured in three surviving watercolour sketches of West Malling dated by art historian Andrew Wilton to 1791-2, when the artist was aged 15 or 16. These depict the cascade in Swan Street, Malling Abbey from the north-west, and St Leonard’s Tower under a stormy



sky (unfinished, but a foretaste of his dramatic landscapes of later years). Two further pencil sketches of Malling Abbey survive dated 1798.



Turner's West Malling sketches have also proved invaluable as historical documents, not least in showing that the cascade was in existence well before 1810 (the date inscribed above the arch) and in recording the condition of St Leonard's Tower in the late eighteenth century.

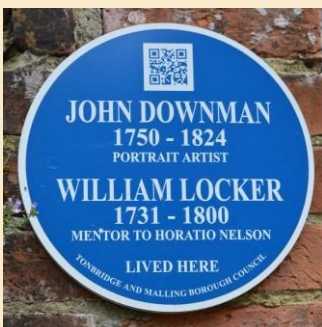
The circumstances of Turner's visits to West Malling are unrecorded, but he exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy from 1790 onwards and may well have been introduced to the picturesque 'antiquities' of West Malling by John Downman ARA, then a seasoned Royal Academy exhibitor who inherited Went House (opposite the cascade) following the death of his uncle in 1783.

38. Went House



This magnificent late Queen Anne house and fine railings have survived, with (as in other properties) some evidence of remodelling of an earlier structure. The brickwork remains one of the two finest examples in Kent, the other of similar date being Bradbourne House in East Malling. Went House is currently undergoing internal restoration.

Notable occupants of Went House were;



39. John Downman (1750 – 1824) was a minor but prolific painter, primarily of portraits, carried out in pastels or watercolours, or a combination of these. His portrait style, rapid, bright and light, is instantly recognisable and became very popular with the aristocracy.

Downman studied with Benjamin West after moving to London from Lancashire in 1767, and went to Italy with Wright of Derby and others in 1773/74, returning in 1775. He initially settled in Cambridge, where he was supported by the Mortlock family, local bankers, painting a series of portraits of the family. He was in London from 1778 to 1804 before moving to West Malling (which he refers to as "Town Malling"), where his brother, Lieut-Col Francis Downman was already living at Brome House.

At Went House he enjoyed time in the garden, producing sketches of toads and robins which he had apparently tamed, and painting local personalities, including members of the Douce family into which his niece, Jane, had married; and the Larking family of Clare House, East Malling. After two years in West Malling, he moved



to live in the West Country, then London, Chester and Wrexham where his only daughter married and where he died.

A list of his portraits reads like a Who's Who of the period including: Queen Charlotte; Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire; Sarah Siddons; Horatio Nelson; Frederick the Great of Prussia; Richard Brinsley Sheridan; 'Monk' Lewis and so on.

40. William Locker (1731-1800)

Locker lived in Went House, West Malling between 1783 and 1786. By the end of the Napoleonic wars, it was said that "[The British] are lords of the sea, and neither in this dominion nor in world trade have they any rivals left to fear", and for the first and last time in history a single navy possessed half the world's warships. Many factors contributed to this, including money, the provisioning of ships, seasoned timber and coppering. Alongside these, a hugely important factor was the professionalization of ship's crews - William Locker's career epitomised this professionalization. Coming from an academic and cultured family, he entered the Navy at the age of 15, serving on various ships during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48), then with the East India Company after post-war decommissioning (sailing to India and China). He re-joined the Navy just before the Seven Years' War (1757-63), and he was on board *HMS Sapphire* at the Battle of Quiberon Bay (1759). By 1777 he rose to command *HMS Lowestoffe*, sailing her to the West Indies. For a fifteen-month period during this command Horatio Nelson was one of his lieutenants, and this proved to be the start of a lifelong friendship.



Locker lived in Went House, West Malling between 1781 and 1786. He ended his career as Lieutenant-Governor of Greenwich Hospital and suggested the creation there of a national gallery of maritime art, subsequently realised by his son, Edward Hawke Locker.

There are a three other Blue Plaques we need to mention but they are a bit out of the town and involve more walking than this guide plans for, and all you will see are the Blue Plaques. They are as follows:

If you turn left out of Swan Street onto Lucks Hill and walk about 200 yards you will come across the Blue Plaque on the left side for -

41. Three Colonels Luck



There were three successive generations of the Luck Family who served in the British Army and rose to the rank of Colonel. They have memorials in St Mary's church, West Malling, at the top of the High Street. The Luck estate (including The Hermitage - the family home, the origins of which could be more ancient than the 1952 record show) was large and included the land on which now stands both the school and the Roman Catholic church to the East. The Luck coat of arms is shown in a window of a building on the old Luck estate, and in stone above a door.

The three colonels are:

Colonel Everard Thomas Luck JP, 1844 – 1916.

Colonel Brian John Michael Luck, CMG, DSO, JP, 1874 – 1948.

Colonel Richard Frederick Luck, OBE, 1907 – 1963.

Within the Luck family as well was **General Sir George Luck, GCB** a very significant figure in the Army.

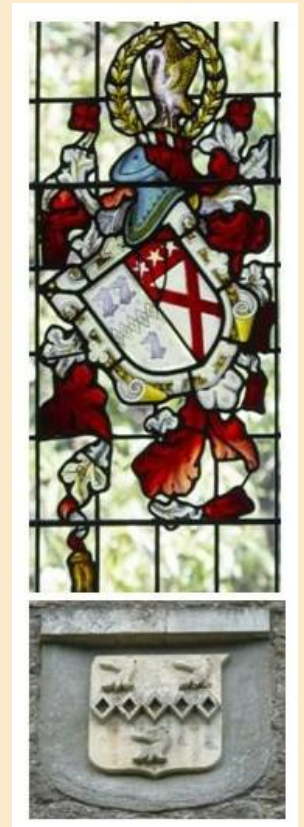


He was born in 1840 at Blackheath. During the second Anglo-Afghan War (1878 – 1880) he commanded the 15th Hussars. He was later posted to India where he became the Inspector-General of Cavalry. He then took on this post in the UK before returning to India in 1898, to become the C-in-C of the Bengal Command. He retired to Salisbury in 1903. Between 1905 and 1907 he was appointed Keeper of the Tower – a position in the British Royal Household and the most senior appointment at the Tower of London. He died in 1916. He and his wife Ellen Georgina (Adams) are entombed in the family vault in St Mary's Church, West Malling at the top of the High Street.

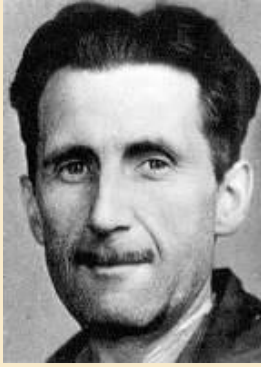
Ellen's father was Major General Frederick Adam, GCB, GCMG, a hero of Waterloo whose troops made a brilliant and decisive manoeuvre at the peak of the battle. He was later ADC to the Prince Regent and Governor of Madras. Together with the Nevill family, the Lucks let property in the High Street and Swan Street, and financed four local schools. The Luck family home was in West Malling at The Hermitage, Lucks Lane, where three other members of the family are commemorated.

The family has pedigree from the time of Henry II and the Coat of Arms was proved by the Herald in 1634 at Rotherfield, Sussex, where they appear to have been inter-alia ironmasters.

If you turn around 180° and walk-up Station Approach heading towards the railway station, you will come across another Blue Plaque on the external wall of the Booking Hall/Ticket Office entrance for -



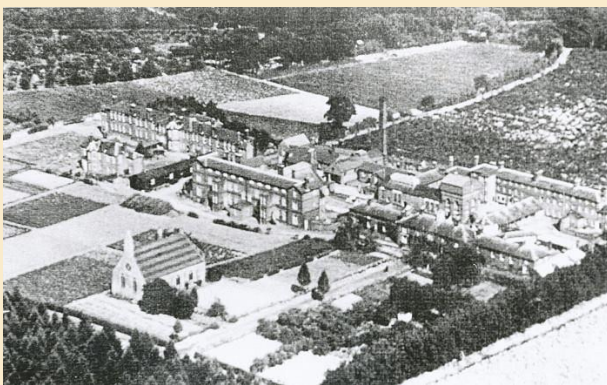
42. George Orwell



George Orwell was the pen name used by Eric Arthur Blair. He was born 25th June 1903 in Motihari in British India. His ancestral home there has been declared a National Monument. When he was one, his mother sent him to England with his older sister. They settled first at Henley on Thames. He was an English essayist, journalist, critic and novelist.



Famous novels include *1984* and *Animal Farm*. Acclaimed non-fiction works include *Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia* characterised by well researched social realism. His work concerning totalitarianism created words and phrases such as Big Brother, Thought Crime, Cold War, Thought Police and Room 101 - which have become part of our language. Eric Arthur Blair stayed at **West Malling Spike (workhouse)** in



1931 and describes the characters and places with blunt realism. In the *Hop Picking Diaries* he describes trying to obtain work at Kronk's Farm (Cronk's Farm, Newbarns, West Malling) and working at Blest's Farm (Best's Farm). He travelled by train with other pickers. The realism of these experiences is reflected in his novel *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and used extensively in his novel *The Clergyman's Daughter* (1935). West Accrington Station referred to in *The Clergyman's Daughter* is thought to be West

Malling. He died 21st January 1950 in London. *The Times* considered him second on a list of the 50 greatest British authors since 1945.

If you decided to turn right out of Swan Street, you can have a gentle stroll up hill on Lavenders Road, this has been designated a 'Quiet Lane'. Quiet Lanes are minor rural roads which are appropriate for shared use by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and motorised users. They should have low traffic flows travelling at low speeds!



The final Blue Plaque can be found by passing the gardens and grounds of the Abbey and the Pilsdon Community and walk for about a mile further on you will come to -

43. New Barns House and the home of Admiral Sir William Lowther Grant KCB (1864-1929) was born on 10th November 1864, the eldest boy in a family of six children. His father was a banker, and later a JP. They lived in the Portsmouth area, settling at Monckton House, Alverstoke in the 1870s.

Grant went to school at nearby Stubbington House, known as 'the cradle of the Navy', with close links to the training ship HMS Britannia, which he entered as a cadet in 1877. Although he had been placed twenty-third out of forty-six successful candidates in the Naval Cadetship examination, he was described as 'very promising', and progressed from midshipman in 1879, to sub-lieutenant in 1883 after serving in the Anglo-Egyptian War (1882), and lieutenant in 1884.





In 1896 he qualified in torpedo duties and commanded a torpedo boat for manoeuvres in 1887. By 1893 Grant was recommended for promotion, as he was said to be 'very trustworthy, and handles [the] flotilla with skill'. In 1896 he was commended again for his 'zeal and ability' in preparing a report on trials of a Howell Torpedo at Newport, Rhode Island, and in 1897 was promoted to Commander. From 1898 he worked at the Admiralty's Naval Ordnance Department.

In January 1900 he landed in Cape Colony, was mentioned in despatches, and became a Captain in October 1900, in recognition of his service in the Second Boer War, where his detachment was nicknamed 'Grant's Guns'. He was in command of *Monarch*, *Sutlej*, *Hawke* and *Cornwallis* during the early 1900s, and was Naval Advisor to the Inspector-

General of Fortifications. He acted as a Naval Aide-de-Camp to Edward VII in September 1908, and also became the Assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence in the same year, before being promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral in October 1909, shortly before his forty-fifth birthday.

From 1910 he was based at Sheerness (where he was stationed till November 1911), for special service with the Vice-Admiral Commanding the Third and Fourth Divisions of the Home Fleet. In King George V's Coronation Honours in 1911, Grant was appointed Companion in the Military Division of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, becoming a Knight Commander (K.C.B.) in 1917.

At the outbreak of the First World War, he initially commanded the Sixth Cruiser Squadron from HMS *Drake*, based at Scapa Flow, before he was promoted to Vice-Admiral in July 1915 and transferred abroad. He was then made Commander in Chief of the China Station in 1916, then Commander-in-Chief, North America and West Indies Station in 1918. By now Sir William Lowther Grant, he was promoted to the rank of Admiral on 1st September 1918. When he left the United States in 1919, the American Secretary of the Navy expressed his 'sincere regret' at the departure of 'this talented and gifted officer'. For his wartime service abroad, he was awarded the USA's Distinguished Service Medal, the Légion d'Honneur, the Japanese Order of the Rising Sun, and also the Chinese Order of the Striped Tiger.

Grant retired in March 1920 'at his own request to facilitate the promotion of younger officers', but at the United States' request led a delegation in May 1922, at his own expense. In 1920 and 1924 he was reported in the press as defending Admiral Jellicoe's decision to prioritise avoidance of the loss of ships at the Battle of Jutland in 1916.

William Lowther Grant married Mabel Emily Brodrick, the daughter of a clergyman, who conducted the ceremony, in 1892, and they had three children, Alan Lowther Grant born in 1897, Marjorie Harriet Grant born in 1898, and Richard Brodrick Grant, born circa 1901. During their married life the family moved around because of his naval career, but in the early 1920's they settled in West Malling, at New Barns, where he died, after a short illness, on 30th January 1929, at the age of sixty-four. His funeral was held in West Malling Church.



If you'd turned right into Water Lane rather than walking all the way to New Barns, carry on walking down the lane until you arrive at the 'Kissing Gate' - North entrance to Manor Park on your left, go through the gate and either continue forward onto the pathway towards the Café and Car Park, or turn right and follow the path by the lake.

The lake route is a more picturesque route, and there is an abundance of wildlife, re-join the upper path then continue walking to the Café and then a short walk back to the carpark where you started.

- Blue Plaque
- Place of Interest

