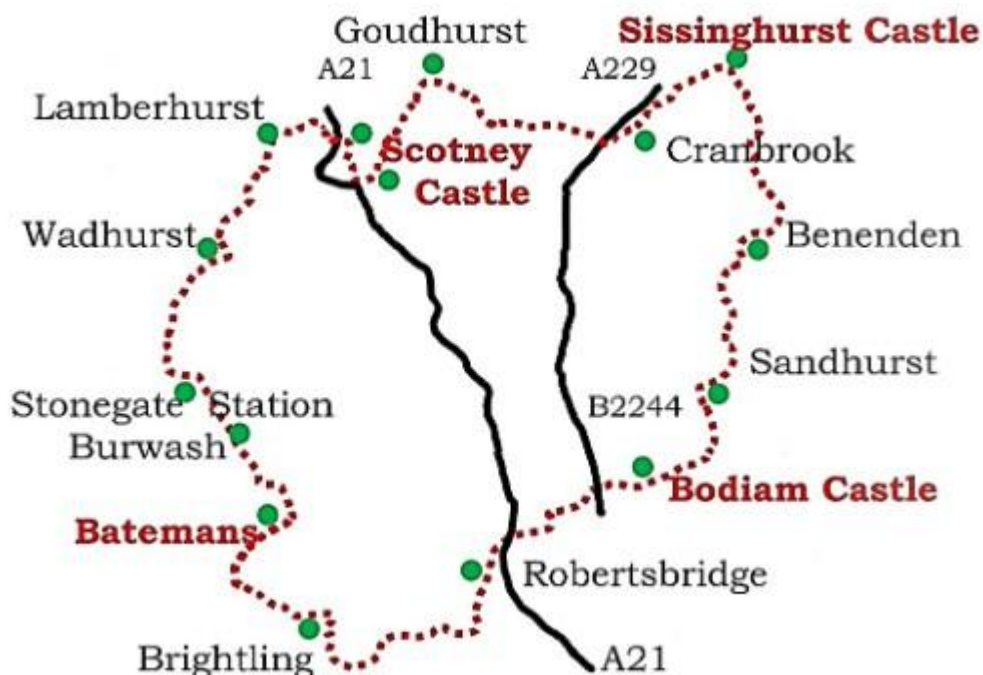


## Brenchley & Matfield Local History Society Talk;

### *Three Castles and an Ironmaster's House* by David Cooke

In November last year, the Brenchley & Matfield Local History Society were treated to a “step by step” guide to the historical walk *Three Castles and an Ironmaster's House* by the author David Cooke. David is a member of the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild and considers that his membership of CAMRA, The Inn Sign Society, The Ramblers and the Long-Distance Walkers Association to be a perfect match for walking.

The cornerstones of this 50-mile (80km) circular history walk are the four great National Trust properties of Bodiam Castle, Sissinghurst Castle, Scotney Castle and Bateman's, hence the title *Three Castles and an Ironmaster's House*.



The High Weald is a medieval landscape of wooded, rolling hills; studded with sandstone outcrops and a rich patchwork of small fields, scattered by farmsteads, oasthouses, vineyards and ancient routeways and sunken lanes. It is only by walking the High Weald that walkers can truly experience firsthand this National Landscape, formerly known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

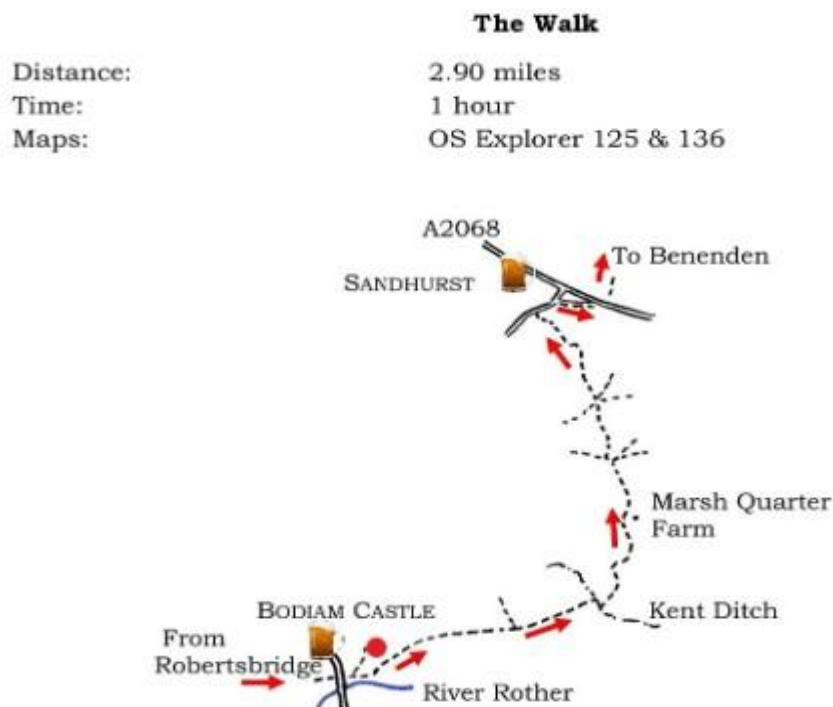
The ‘Weald’ means wilderness or forest, and the hills were once covered by the Forest of the Andreasweald, the most densely wooded area of England at the time of the Domesday Book in 1086. Today the High Weald covers 1460 acres and stretches over parts of Kent, Sussex, Kent and Surrey: it is the third largest of all the National Landscapes exceeded only by the Cotswolds and the North Wessex Downs.

## Brenchley & Matfield Local History Society Talk; *Three Castles and an Ironmaster's House* by David Cooke

David's guide book follows man's ingenuity and progress observing the changing industries from agriculture to iron, to sheep, to the woollen trade, smuggling, hops and back to agriculture and wine making.

There is a soul to this walk; one that reflects the passions and industry of man and also the tensions of war and rebellion. It is now a very pastoral walk with only occasional reminders of the noise, smoke and fire of the iron industry. The ironmasters and the rich woollen trade are survived by their architecture at Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Burwash and Brightling. The derelict hop pickers cottages, next to the River Teise in Lamberhurst, provide a startling contrast to the rich and landed.

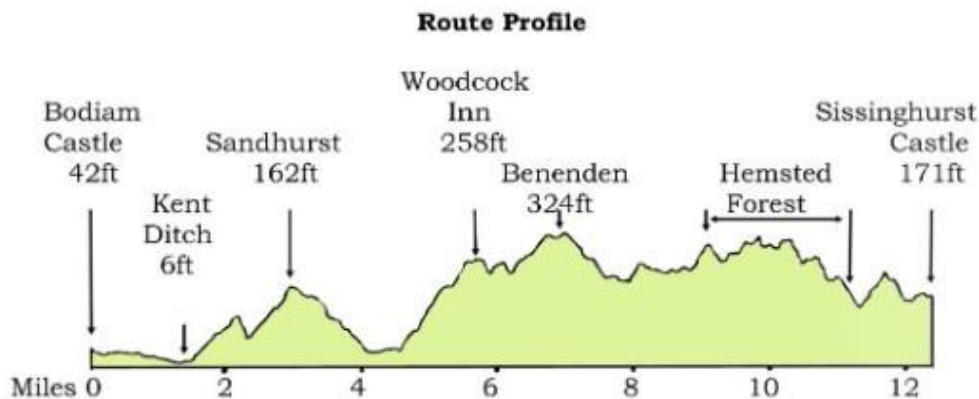
David retold a variety of tales about such characters as Mad Jack Fuller and Bloody Baker, Admiral 'Foulweather Jack' Norris, and Captain Swing. He also painted a vivid picture about the local smuggling and the Mechanical riots, Napoleon's horse, aliens in Robertsbridge and, remarkably, the tale of the 'vengeful dragon' in Angley Wood.



Despite being a circular walk, it can also, due to its length, be completed in sections. Using the four national landmark sites as starting and finishing points.

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David's book is packed with useful information about how to plan any of these walks. Starting at Bodiam Castle to Sissinghurst Castle for the first stretch followed by Sissinghurst to Scotney Castle, then Scotney Castle to Bateman's and finally Bateman's back to Bodiam Castle. The book even breaks each of these four routes between the four "Weald Cornerstones" into smaller walking sections depending on how far you want to explore. Each route includes QR codes for the correct OS Explorer maps to use, where to park, as well as links to public transport, places to stop for refreshments and places to stay enroute. He



even provides cross section route profiles so you are aware of the topography.

David described to us how, in his own words;

"This is a walk over chalk hills, across rivers and meadows and the still dark woods of what was once the Forest of the Andreasweald. This part of Kent and East Sussex still has an 'olden' feel to it, a rolling countryside with few houses and agriculture, which for the most is now the only industry. No season of the year is closed to walkers; enjoyment can be gained from walking on a bright crisp winter's morning, or on an 'Indian summer's day' in the autumn. Equally rewarding is a springtime walk when the countryside is full of new life and growth. This Wealden Walk takes it all in. There is a soul to this walk; one that reflects the passions and industry of man and also, the tensions of war and rebellion. It is now a very pastoral walk with only occasional reminders of the noise, smoke and fire of the iron industry. The Ironmasters and the rich woollen trade are survived by their architecture at Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Burwash and Brightling. The derelict hop-pickers cottages, next to the River Teise in Lamberhurst, provide a startling contrast to the rich and landed."

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All this and much more can be found in David's book which is readily available on Amazon and is great value at £12 in paperback.

*"Unless a man understands the Weald, he cannot write about the beginnings of England."* Hilaire Belloc

Ted Fisher

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